

Local Government and Democratic Governance in Nigeria's Fourth Republic

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Abstract

Local government ensures that the basic needs of the citizens at the grassroots level are adequately provided for. It also provides a mechanism through which local, human, material, and economics resources are effectively utilized for development purposes. Hence, local government in Nigeria has not performed up to expectation owing to the act that resident population is denied the benefits of its existence. Therefore, this study examines the trajectory of local government operations in Nigeria with special emphasis on the fourth republic. The research method employed is qualitative technique of data collection through the content analysis of official record and a considerable review of related literatures. Therefore, the findings from the study reveals that, development and effective services provision have not thrived at the grassroots level due to the culture of corruption, financial incapability, undue interference of by state and among others. The study therefore recommends that, there is need to review the Constitution so as to make Local Government autonomous especially in the areas of fiscal power, functions and responsibilities.

Keywords: Local government, Development, Democracy, Corruption, Service-delivery

1. Introduction

Institutions of local governance over the world are usually established base on the need to achieve three broad and interrelated objectives. The first objective is the desire to involve the people in a particular locality in the management of their own affairs. The second objective which is closely tied to the first is to ensure that the basic needs of local citizens are met as speedily and sufficiently as possible. The third objective is to provide a framework within which local resources, both human, material and financial are effectively mobilized for developmental purposes (Erero, 1995). This notwithstanding, these objectives have not been achieved due to the fact that development and effective services provision has not thrived at the grassroots level as a result of the culture of corruption, lack of autonomy, financial incapability, and undue interference of the state and federal governments in the administration of local government in Nigeria.

Sadly, local government which is statutorily established to be the closest tier of government to the people is not performing up to expectation coupled with the fact that the grassroots population are denied the benefits of effective services delivery at this level of governance. The failure of the local governments in the area of services delivery has made the citizens to lose their trust in government as an institution. These problems of governance at local level have continued to be a recurring issue in history of Nigeria. In view of the foregoing background, this study examines Local government and democratic governance in Nigeria's fourth republic.

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2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

2.1 The Concept of Local Government

There are various definitions of local government as provided by scholars, practitioner or administrators. These scholars have in varying degree of specificity analysed the meaning and evolution of local government. They have provided the justification for the existence, functions and responsibilities of this arm of government within the political landscape. However, the starting point on the discourse focuses on the work of Abubakar (1993) which defines local Government as thus:

Some form of local government exists in each country the world-over. Even though they may differ in such distinguishing features as; constitutional status, historical experiences, structure and organisation, as well as in the scope of their statutory, delegated or devolved responsibilities and functions among others, local government are consensually regarded as governmental/administrative units closet to the people, or in more general parlance, the grassroots. Invariably, therefore, they act as veritable agents of local services delivery, mobilisers of community-based human and material resources, and organisers of local initiatives in responding to a wide variety of local needs and aspirations. Importantly also, local governments provide the basic structures and conditions for grassroots participation in the democratic process.

On this same premise, Shah (2006) defined local government as:

A specific institutions or entities created by national constitutions (Brazil, Denmark, France, India, Italy, Japan, Sweden), by state constitutions (Australia, the United States), by ordinary legislation of a higher level of central government (New Zealand, the United Kingdom, most countries), or by executive order (China) to deliver a range of specific services to a relatively small geo-graphically delineated area. Local governance is a broader concept and is defined as the formulation and execution of collective action at the local level. Thus, it encompasses the direct and indirect roles of formal institutions of local government and government hierarchies, as well as the roles of informal norms, networks, community organizations, and neighbourhood associations in pursuing collective action by defining the framework for citizen-citizen and citizen-state interactions, collective decision making, and delivery of local public services. Local governance, therefore, includes the diverse objectives of vibrant, living, working, and environmentally preserved self-governing communities.

In similar vein, Appadorai (1975) defines it as a government of the popular elected bodies charged with administrative and executive duties in matters concerning the inhabitants of a particular district or place. Contributing further to the discourse, the Nigeria 1976 Guideline for Local Government Reform define local government as:

Government at the local level exercised through representative council established by law to exercise powers within defined areas. These powers should give the council substantial control over local affairs (including staffing) and institutional and financial powers to initiate and to determine and implement projects so as to compliment the activities of the state and federal government in their areas, and ensure, through devolution of functions to those councils and through the active participation of the people and their traditional institutions, that local initiative and response to local needs and conditions are maximized (FGN, 1976).

Whatever may be their differences, these definitions are clearly useful to summarise the salient characteristics of what local government is and what it is expected to be. These are: (a) a given territory, population and constitutional body; (b) a range of powers and functions and (c) autonomy especially with respect to finance (Adeyeye, 2016; Feldman and Goldrick, 1974).

A glance at the above definition shows that local government is synonymous to the concept of devolution. Devolution presupposes the exercise of political authority by primarily elected council within a legally specified areas, usually, local units which are independent and clearly separate levels of government which central government exercise little or no direct control.

Local administration on the other hand refers to a mere shift of authority from the central government to the local subordinate units, In practice, local administration only exercise limited or restricted authority assigns by central government to its appointed agencies which could be a sole administrator or caretaker committee as the case may be at the local level to provide certain services. Therefore, local administration is synonymous with de-concentration of authority.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

This paper adopted the efficiency service school approach as a theoretical underpinning for this study. The main thrust of the efficiency service school of thought is that local government exist basically to provide essential services to the rural dwellers, According to them, local government exists to provide services and it must be judged by its success in providing services up to the standard measured by a national inspectorate (Ola, 2004). They further argued that, local government because of its closeness to an area can render certain services far more efficiently and effectively than the National government. J.S. Mill in Ola and Tonwe, (2009) provides a strong case for local government on the grounds that it was the most efficient agent for providing those services that are essentially local. It is on this note that Jim Sharpe has suggested that the efficient performance of those services is so compelling that if local government did not exist, something else would have to be created in its place (Ola and Tonwe, 2009). Thus, to this school of thought, the main role of local government is to perform local responsibilities effectively and efficiently. As a structure very close to the locally, local councils should serve as essential instrument for the performance of basic services, which could be best administered locally based on the intimate knowledge of needs, conditions, and peculiarities of the areas concerned. Among these are chieftaincy, marriage, markets, local schools, primary health care and refuse disposal (Our Reporter, 2014).

The efficiency school of thought locates the rationale for local government in the provision of special services and argues that while some services such as defence and external affairs need to be provided by central government for the purposes of maintaining common national standards or because they are of immediate or direct interest to ordinary citizen, and while regional planning for socio-economic development and similar services are best provided at the state level, some services such as local roads, housing, water supply, health services, education, agricultural services are better provided by local government (Fatile et al., 2013).

In Nigeria for example, the 1976 local government reform also acknowledged this service essence of local government administration. These recommendations are as follows:

1. To make appropriate services and development activities responsive to local wishes and initiatives by devolving or delegating them to local representative bodies.
2. To facilitates the exercise of democratic self-government close to the grassroots of our society and encourage initiatives and leadership potentials.
3. Mobilising of human material resources through the involvement of members of the public in their local development and
4. To provide a two-way channel of communication between local communities and government (both state and federal) (FGN, 1976).

Hence, Nigeria's experience in local government administration, whether during military regimes or in democratic era, has clearly shows that local government faces serious challenges in carrying out its mandate of promoting development and providing essential services to the rural dwellers. The failure of the local governments in the area of services delivery has made the citizens to lose their trust in this level of governance (Adeyemi, 2013).

This school of thought provide justification for the existence of the local government on the ground that it is an efficient institution for providing services that are local in nature. They argue that because of its closeness to an area, the local government can provide certain services far more efficiently than the central government. This school believes that the local government is a veritable instrument for efficient and effective service delivery at the grassroots.

3. Methodology

Methodological approach in this study is informed by research objective. Therefore, this study examines the trajectory of local government operations in Nigeria with a special focus on the fourth republic.

The study employed a qualitative technique of data collection through the content analysis of official records, Central Bank of Nigeria Bulletin, Internet, 1999 Constitution and a considerable review of related literatures on Local government. Data was analysed using descriptive method

4. Discussion of Findings

4.1 Local Government Trajectory in Nigeria

Prior to amalgamation, the pre-colonial societies in Nigeria were made up of empires, a caliphate, kingdoms, chiefdoms, city states and villages with ruler that exercise absolute authority over them as in the case of empire in the northern region, the Oba in the West, whose power can be checkmated by constituted authority and the Igbo society in the East with its republic and egalitarian status (Adeyemi, 2018).

Local Government in Nigeria predated colonial administration. In pre-colonial era it revolved around the traditional rulers of each community and at local level the district heads were appointed by the traditional ruler and charged with the responsibility of governance at that level. It was acknowledged and respected. In the Northern Nigeria, the Hausa-Fulani Empire headed by an emir (Sultan) operates a well-developed and organized fiscal system, a definite code of land tenure, and outstanding grassroots governance through appointed district and village heads, as well as a trained judiciary which administered the Sharia Laws.

Under colonial administration, local government was known as Native administration system and this was a product of indirect rule; a system of governance through the traditional rulers. It must be emphasized, however, that the use of traditional rulers by the colonialist was not meant to identify with the culture of the natives or to preserves it as some school of thought had argued. But was actually meant to save the colonialist huge personnel cost that might have arisen by employing British officials. Put differently, the structure of local government under indirect rule was basically designed to serve colonial interest and facilitate the exploitation of the Nigerians and their resources.

At independence, the local government system in Nigeria was in precarious position. One of the features of the arrival of modern local government was that the functions of local governments in the country were wide ranging, comprising both developmental functions and non-developmental functions (Ola and Tonwe, 2009). These functions were so comprehensive that almost every functions being performed at the regional level had its parallel at the local level. Because of the comprehensiveness of these functions, the most buoyant of the local authorities could not carry out all these functions efficiently and effectively to the standard required, not to talk of the small and impoverished local councils. The regions seized the opportunity to take over quite a number of local government functions, some of which were backbone of the local governments in terms of their being lucrative (Ola and Tonwe, 2009).

Another important development in the post-independence phase which had adverse effect on the growth and development of local governments in country (particularly from 1967 up to 1975) was fashion amongst the state to abolish local governments and replace it with one form of de-concentrated state field administration or the other. In the Mid- West and the Western part of the country Sole Administratorship

system of administration was tried first in these two regions (Aborishade, 1983; Olasupo, 2001). Also, the desire to maximize the values of viability and effectiveness led to the adoption of the council-manager pattern in Western states in 1973 (Adeyeye, 2001). In the Eastern States, the new arrangement sought to coordinate the zeal of the local community for self-help development and reduce corruption in local governance by integrating the machinery of local administration and that of the state government (Awa 1992; Adeyeye 2001). In the East Central state, for instance, a two-tiered system, styled divisional administration, was established to actualise the new thinking. It consisted of community councils at the base and divisional council as the upper tier. Each community covered a traditional village and each was entitled to select a representative to the divisional council which was firmly controlled by a divisional officer appointed by the state government (Adeyeye, 2001).

The demoralising effect of the takeover of a number of important local government functions by the regional or state and federal governments in the country was immense that the future of local government as an institution in the country was threatened. It was a significant development, therefore, that a nation-wide reform was embarked upon in 1976 to remedy the bad state of affairs (Ola and Tonwe, 2009). With the inauguration of the 1976 Guideline for Local Government Reform, the issues of the establishment of local government system was resolved and a unified system of local government system was introduced throughout the country. The Reform also covered such area as structured, functions, finance, role of traditional authorities and state – local government relations. It was particularly phenomenal in making crystal clear what was required of local government and thus tackling the problem of erosion of sphere, functions and responsibilities and many a times suspension of local government institutions which had become persistent particularly during the self-governing period from 1952-1965 (Ola and Tonwe, 2009; Ola, 1984).

The first phase, 1976-1979 witnessed the starting point of the new local government system under a military regime, 301 Local Government Councils were created and elections were conducted to the councils on the non- party- basis. But the period 1979-1983, which was a democratic dispensation in the country election, was not conducted at the local government level. Other fundamental problems also erupted; notable among these was the issue of hierarchical pattern of supervisory structure of federal and state governments over local governments. This apparently was a diversion from a system of local government administration that mandated the local governments to be a third tier of government (Adewale, 2008).

The period between 1983 to 1999 with the intervention of military in politics in December 1983 protected the local government system from total collapse. The military regimes had to brace up in order to save the local government from the deplorable state which the defunct civilian regime left it as the third tier of governance. Notwithstanding, the undemocratic system of Sole Administrator was instituted which fail to involve the local people in governance process. This arrangement however negates the objectives of the 1976 Local Government Reform Guideline which recognise the participation of rural dwellers in their governance at that level. As part of the transition programme from military regime to elected civilian government, local government elections were conducted in 1999 across the country for a three-year term. At the expiration of the tenure of Local Governments in 2002, it was expected that election would be conducted immediately, more so as the country was in a democratic dispensation. Unfortunately, it was not so. The consistent attempts by state governments to weaken local governments in the country continue till date.

4.2 Local Governance In Nigeria Fourth Republic: A Review

The birth of Fourth Republic started in Nigeria in 1999. The 1999 Constitution provided the legal framework for upon which the operation of the councils are guided. The 1999 constitution has many things in common with the 1979 constitution, especially, as it relate to the system of local governance, both constitutions provide for a presidential system at the grassroots level and recognised Nigeria as a federation of 774 local

government councils, specifying the names of each councils and their capital, the powers and functions of local government as enshrined in the Fourth Schedule of the 1999 Constitution. The constitution recognizes local government as the third tier of government. For instance, section 7 (1) of 1999 constitution stated that:

The system of local government by democratically elected local government councils is under this constitution guarantee, the Government of every state shall ensure their existence under a law which provides for the establishments, structure, composition, finance and functions of such councils (FGN, 1999).

The implication of the above is that a local government council cannot exercise the functions allocated to it in the fourth schedule until the state House of Assembly has passed a law, which empowers local government councils to perform those functions listed in the fourth schedule. Therefore, this provision implies that local government is a mere appendage of state government. It will be incorrect to see it as an independent third tier of government. Hence, the issue of autonomy of local government becomes a myth not reality

Furthermore, these councils are directly provided for in the federation account. Thus section 162 (3) of the 1999 constitution state that:

Any amount standing to the credit of the Federation Account shall be distributed among the federal and State governments, and Local government councils in each state, on such terms and in such manner as may be prescribed by the National Assembly (FGN, 1999).

Apart from statutory allocation from federation account, there are two other sources for local government; internally generated and non-statutory allocation, including project grants, from state government or donor agencies. These three revenue sources should make possible impact on the life of the people and the socio-economic development of the council.

It is clear therefore that local government chairmen have obligation at three levels: first, obligation arising from the constitution that clearly defines their functions as chairman and their responsibility to the people they govern. Second are obligations arising from the constitution of the political party that they belong to, its code of conduct, party platform or programme and expectations defines from screening process. Third are obligations arising from their campaigns through the promises they made to the elders, women, community organisations, party leaders, youth-groups, students etc. (Ihonvbere, 2009).

According to Awofeso (2011), regrettably, responsibility and accountability in the grassroots governance have become vague words only in theory but not in practice. In random survey conducted by researcher in one of the local government areas in Lagos state with a view to assessing the performance of the outgoing chairman of that local government, the reply of one of the respondents may have summarised the attitudinal dispositions of some local government elected representatives who perceived governance as an opportunity to plunder with reckless abandon and without accountability. According to him, "the chairman had neither a vehicle nor a house when he assumed office. Less than two years he has three vehicles and two houses. I do not believe that the salary he earned during the period was sufficient to cover the acquisition of these items. I leave you to draw your conclusion" (Awofeso, 2011). In similar vein, Ihonvbere (2009) depicts that, evidence abound show that politicians generally do not care about their obligations to the people they govern because they see politics as a game that has no rules or principles. He further said:

When politician fail to acknowledge their obligation to the state (local government), the constitution and the people, they becomes politically careless and reckless. Political rascality becomes the other of the day and the rules of politics and principle of governance are compromised and contaminated. In fact, politics becomes normless as political forces engage each other in a 'do-or-die' duel all to the detriment of the collective good. Rules are rewritten and people take position on the political canvass to articulate the best war strategy. In all of the meetings that political forces hold day and night but mostly at night, development is not discussed. Unemployment, deteriorating health services and dilapidated infrastructure are not discussed. Democracy takes a back seat and dies slowly.

Local government is often seen to be synonymous with the provision of services to the grassroots people. In effect, a local government may only be said to have performed well, if a substantial proportion of the people being served are satisfied with its performances. The Nigeria position according to Ola and Tonwe (2009), show that there is a wide gap between the expectations of people vis-à-vis what the local government are able to offer. Many communities in Nigeria do not really feel the impact of local government institution in terms services delivery. Instead of discharging the function, it has become an avenue for corrupt political leaders to embezzle state funds.

Also, along this line, Arowolo (2008) argues that, hard earned and limited resources accrued to and raised by local government are always mismanaged. Priorities are misplaced; projects are done not according to or as demanded by the people but regrettable in tune with the selfish end and aggrandizement of the political leadership in collaboration with senior bureaucrats at the local government level of administration. Generally, wide-scale embezzlement by officials of the grassroots has made the needed development of grassroots a tall dream and has rendered them financially incapable to discharge their constitutionally assigned responsibility. Farida Waziri the former EFCC boss in (Adeyemi, 2012) lamented that:

...waste of government resources at the council level had reached monumental proportions. The local government council in the country could not explain the mismanagement of over N3.313 trillion allocated to them in the last eight years. ...a whopping sum of N3,313,554,856,541.79 was allocated to local government across the country. Unfortunately, local government officials have not left their hand unsoiled in this regard. It is with regret that I am forced to observe that the local governments of the good old days have become a mere memory of times gone by. The paralysis (corruption) that pervades local governments today is widespread. Local government, have become so far removed from the lives of the people to a point where some Chief Executives of local council no longer reside in the domains they were elected to administer. They drive to the council headquarters in their jeeps from the state capitals or the Federal Capital Territory, pay salaries and share other monies and disappear until it is time to share the next subvention.

Waziri further to emphasize that the disconnection between the government of the people and the grassroots was happening at a time huge volumes of public funds were allocated to local government councils. According to her, the old argument that services cannot be delivered to the grassroots because of shortage of funds does not hold water anymore, in the face of so much subvention from centre (Adeyemi, 2012).

Table 1 Summary of Resources Allocated from Federation Account Allocation Committee (FAAC) to Local Government
2001 – 2019

Year	Amount (N Billion)
2001	324.23
2002	360.23
2003	396.80
2004	507.87
2005	622.10
2006	744.81
2007	815.32
2008	1,151.53
2009	992.28
2010	548.55
2011	1,459.39
2012	1,583.01
2013	1,708.58
2014	1,563.15
2015	1,205.19

2016	1,011.04
2017	1,263.39
2018	1,667.25
2019	1,636.76
Total	19,561.48

Source: CBN (2020) <https://www.cbn.gov.ng/documents/stabulletin.asp>

Despite these huge financial resources accrued to this tier of governance, local government since fourth republic has performed below expectation. Obasanjo further observes that; the state governor remained the greatest obstacles to having a virile council because they steal council funds under the pretexts that they have done something on their behalf. As soon as the allocation are released from the Federal allocation, the State Governors simply deduct from the source, whatever amount they claimed were spent on behalf of the local government, thereby rendering them ineffective in performance of their statutory functions (Ashytime, 2016). This same view was also corroborated by Khaleel quoted in John (2012) when he observed thus:

There is no state of the federation of Nigeria where one form of illegality or the other is not committed with funds of local government, through over deduction of primary school teacher's salary, spurious state/local government joint account project, sponsoring of elections, taking over the statutory functions of local government and handling them over to cronies and consultants, non-payments of pensioners and non-utilization of training fund despite the mandatory deduction of stipulated percentages for these purposes... nine states out of the 36 states of the federation have elected representatives running the affairs of their local governments. This is central to the whole problem because it is by planting stooges called caretaker committee, who neither have the mandate of the people nor the moral strength to resist the excruciating control of the state government that perpetuates the rot... In Imo State, local government workers embark on series of industrial actions to get their accumulated salaries paid, while their five years arrears of all statutory allowances are fast becoming bad debt. The drive to maximally control the local government councils is taking another dimension now, with senior officers in the councils, who are Directors of Administration, Finance and others, being removed or deployed while lesser officers who are not qualified for such positions are appointed to replace them... In Lagos State all manners of gazette, policies and laws are being produced on daily basis with intention of taking over the collection of revenue from council's staff. In Plateau State, staff of local government are being deployed and restricted to serve only in the local government of their origin.

In similar vein, Adeyemi (2012) observes that manpower development and capacity building in contemporary local government in Nigeria has diminished. The chief executive (Chairman) of local government does not see the need to train the staff rather how to steal the money meant for manpower development and capacity building into his own pocket. The situation has made local governments to perform below expectation in the area of service delivery.

Another notable challenge since the emergence of the Fourth Republic in 1999 is the domineering influences of the higher levels of government. For instance, Local government received their statutory allocation from the federal government through state governments. What happened however was that most state governors not only refused to remit to local governments their statutory allocations, they also did not give to local government the 10% of their internally generated revenue which is the constitutional right of the local governments. This undue interference has incapacitated local governments from effective functioning on the other hand and alienated grassroots people from enjoying social services delivery expected of local government to local communities.

Also, the essence of local government is to bring about democracy and give opportunity for political participation, educating and socializing the local citizenry (Ola, 2004). In line with Ola view, Awotokun

(2008:14) also noted that local representation can only be fostered by building grassroots democracy. Hence, grassroots democracy becomes a sine qua non for the management of public affairs in an ethnically diverse country like Nigeria. Local government in Nigeria has not been given it proper pride of place. The democratic principle that is, the idea of bringing government nearer to the people and the idea of no alienation over the years has been more theoretical but less practical. The state government all over the country are not interested in conducting election in the Local Councils across the country because the non-conduct of election gave them the absolute control over Local Government machinery in their respective states. It is sad that the state government have failed to appreciate the fact that Local Government is fundamentally an integral part of democracy. They have undermined Section 7(1) of 1999 constitution which guarantees democratically elected Local Government council across the country, only few states had witness election since 1999 till date. Throughout the four years first term of Governor Fayemi as the Governor of Ekiti-State between 2011 to 2014, local council elections were not conducted. Also, the eight years of Olusegun Mimiko as governor of Ondo State between 2008 to 20015, local government elections were not conducted. The diagram below shows states where election has been conducted from 1999 to 2020.

Table 2 States' Records of Election into Local Government Councils since the Inception of 4th Republic (1999)

State	Years Elections Were Conducted	No. of Times Elections were Conducted
Anambra	2013, 2017	2
Ebonyi	2004, 2010, *2013, 2017, 2020	5
Oyo	2004, 2007, 2018	3
Osun	2004, 2007, 2018	3
Ondo	2004, *2007, 2016, 2018, 2020	5
Ekiti	2004, 2009, 2015, 2018	4
Ogun	2004, 2007, 2012, 2016	4
Kwara	2004, 2007, 2012, 2017	4
Lagos	2004, 2008, 2012, 2017	4
Akwa Ibom	2004, 2008, 2012, 2017	4
Cross River	2004, 2010, 2013, 2017, 2020	5
Edo	2004, *2007, 2013, 2018	4
Abia	2004, 2008, 2016	3
Bayelsa	2004, *2010, 2017, 2019	4
Rivers	2004, 2011, 2015, 2018	4
Delta	2004, *2008, 2014, 2018	4
Imo	2004, *2008, 2018	3
Benue	2004, 2007, 2012, 2017, 2020	5
Enugu	2004, 2007, 2011, 2013, 2017	5
Nasarawa	2004, 2009, 2014, 2018	4
Kano	2004, 2007, 2009, 2014, 2018	5
Kastina	2004, 2010, 2018	3
Sokoto	2004, 2008, 2011, 2016	4
Kebbi	2004, 2008, 2012, 2017	4
Kogi	2004, 2008, 2013	3
Taraba	2004, 2007, 2012, 2017, 2020	5
Zamfara	2004, 2012, 2016, 2019	4
Bauchi	2004, 2008, 2018	3
Yobe	2004, 2009, 2013, 2017	4
Borno	2004, 2007	2

Plateau	2004, 2008, 2014, 2018	4
Kaduna	2004, 2012, 2018	3
Jigawa	2004, 2011, 2014, 2017, 2019	5
Niger	2004, 2008, 2011, 2016, 2019	5
Adamawa	2004, 2008, 2012, 2016	4
Gombe	2004, 2013, 2017	3
Abuja	2004, 2007, 2010, 2013, 2016, 2019	6

*Years in which LG elections were held but councils later dissolved or elections nullified

Source: Adeyemi (2019)

Table 2 lends credence to the inconsistency in the councils' electoral system. The cause of this is not far-fetched; the state governments exerted undue control over the councils against the provision of section 7 (1) and 8 of the Constitution, authorizing state to run the affairs with unelected committees in interim while putting in place appropriate arrangements for the conduct of fresh poll. This control further reflects in states intermittent dissolution of the council at will even before the three-year tenure recognised by Decree 36 of 1998 Electoral Law (the Basic Constitutional and Transitional Provision) lapses (Adeyeye, 2016).

Other problems confronting this level of governance are the instances of political crisis and incessant injunction arising from court cases over council elections and contestations over the conduct of State Independent Electoral Commissions (SIECs) and; the general boycotting of election by especially major opposition political parties in the state. The State Independent Electoral Commission in most cases do the bidding of the state governor by making sure that the party in power win in most cases all the chairmanship and councillorships seat. For instance, in December 2016, the ruling party, People Democratic Party (PDP) won all the 17 chairmanship and 292 councillorship seats the local government election conducted by the Abia State Independent Electoral Commission. The same scenario occurred in Akwa Ibom, in December 2016, where the ruling party PDP won all the 31 chairmanship and 329 councillorship seats. In Adamawa State the ruling party, People Democratic Party (PDP) won all the 21 chairmanship and 226 councillorship seats the local government election conducted. In April 2017, the ruling party PDP won all the 13 chairmanship and 171 councillorship seats in the local government election conducted in Ebonyi State. In Ekiti State the ruling party PDP in 2017, won all the 16 chairmanship and 177 councillorship seats in the local government election held in December 2017. In Gombe State the ruling party PDP won all the 11 chairmanship and 114 councillorship positions in February 2017 local government election. In December 2019, in Edo State the ruling party All People Congress (APC) won all the 18 chairmanship and 192 councillorship seats in the local government election conducted in March 2018. In Imo state, in August 2018, the ruling party won all the 27 chairmanship and 636 out of the 645 councillorship positions. The ruling party APC also won all the 27 chairmanship and 286 councillorship seats in Jigawa State local government election conducted in June 2019. These are just few examples; the same scenario is replicated in virtually all the state in Nigeria since the birth of fourth republic. One obvious thing is that national and state politics would continue to determine the direction of development at the local government level. This can only be stopped if adequate autonomy that is backed by law and recognised in the Constitution is granted to this level of governance (Adeyemi, 2019). Therefore, local government in Nigerian fourth republic have been bastardised, battered and encroached upon badly, contrary to the vision and mission of 1976 Local Government Reform.

The channels for distributing council funds have also become a bone of contention. According to the 1999 constitution under the Distributable Pool Account, section 162 (6 &8):

Each state shall maintain a special account to be called State Joint Local Government Account into which shall be paid all allocations to the local government councils of the state from federation Account and from the Government of the State. The amount standing to credit of local government councils shall be

distributed among the local government councils of that state on such terms and in such a manner as may be prescribed by the House of Assembly of the State (FGN, 1999).

The SJLGA, has become a potent weapon in the hands of the state governor to control the resources of local government. When money is allocated to the councils, it does not go directly to the councils. It is deposited in the State/Local Government Joint Account (JAC). At the JAC Committee meeting, the council is a junior partner. There are allegations by local government workers that governors indulge in diverting council allocation through controversial deductions (Our Reporter, 2014). Along this line Nwosu (1989) depicts thus:

The relationship that existed between the state and local government resembles that of the partnership of the horse and the rider, in which the state government propels the local government to any direction they desire. The local governments are not encouraged to use their initiative to harness local human and material resources for the provision of high quality services for millions of Nigerians who live in rural communities.

The implication of this is that, local government under Fourth Republic have suffered the greatest assault since the introduction of Local Government Reform in 1976. The council has become more incapacitated, ineffective and inefficient.

5. Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

The local government otherwise known as the grassroots government has a peculiar nature of administration and governance. It plays a catalytic role in bringing State and Federal service delivery to local communities. Its primary function is to plan, design and execute policies of government for the socio-economic and political development of the people within its areas of jurisdiction. In carrying out this catalytic role, Local Governments are expected to commit some public resources (including human, financial and materials) for which they are held responsible by the people (CMD, 2012). It is therefore imperative that the Local Government resources at the disposal of their functionaries must be effectively, efficiently and economically utilized to achieve desired goals. The leadership and management of local governments must be equipped with the right knowledge, skills and attitude to translate government policies into actions and carry out effective planning, commitment and utilization of available resources (CMD, 2012).

To address the challenges confronting Local Government system in Nigeria, there is need to review the Constitution in order make Local Government autonomous especially on the issues of fiscal power, functions and responsibilities. Therefore, the Federal and State government should stop their undue interference on the programmes and activities of local government council. The issue of State/Local Government Joint Account should be scrapped. Rather than advocating for total removal of local government from the constitution, the constitution should be reviewed to strengthen and guarantee democratic participatory council at the grassroots level in Nigeria by conducting regular election at this level of government.

Also the current allocation formula needs to be reviewed. Local government allocation should be increased so as to provide service effectively and efficiently to the people at the grassroots. There is need also to develop financial management skills for greater accountability and transparency. This can be achieved through capacity building after the official swearing-in, in the same way as at the federal level. Donor agencies have been very active and should extend such capacity building to the states and local governments. This kind of capacity building has helped equip elected officials at the federal level (Amakon, 2009).

There must be aggressive anti-corruption campaign and other related campaigns by the electorate and member of civil society. The leaders at the local level must be made accountable to the people. The people should see good governance as their right. Therefore there is need for civil society to demand for transparency and accountability from local council officials. Any incidence of misappropriation of funds by the official of council must be reported to appropriate anti-corruption agency for prosecution (Adeyemi and

Oyeleye, 2014). Probity and accountability should be promoted in local government system across the country by issuing sanctions against corrupt; and other unethical practices in local government system.

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