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COMPLEXITIES OF LOCAL GOVERNANCE AND LOCAL ADMINISTRATION IN NIGERIA'S FOURTH REPUBLIC: AN ANALYSIS

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Abstract
Democratic governance is expected to be receptive to the needs of the people at the local level to enhance cooperative federalism. However, ensuing reality in Nigeria reek of domination of local government by other levels of government. The study examined the complexities of governance at the local level vis-à-vis operations of local government. Methodologically, it is a qualitative study that drew on the extant literature and data from the transcribed semi-structured recorded interview with local key informants purposefully drawn from the academia and political terrain. The study adopted vertical and horizontal decentralisation model as its framework of analysis. It contended that local government has been unjustifiably relegated to be an appendage of other levels of government, especially the State government, which have limited its capacity to achieve extant mandates. The study finds that the complexities of constitutional ambiguity, poor leadership, primordial interest and personal idiosyncrasies of leaders at the other levels of government remain the main challenges limiting the potentials of local government. This has perpetually subjected it to mere local administration. It concluded that inherent complexities of local government operations have adversely affected it and have put expected governance at the local level in abeyance. The study therefore recommends the amendment of relevant sections the constitution to clear ambiguity while vertical and horizontal decentralisation prescriptions should be followed to enhance the expected governance at the local level.
Keywords: *Administration, federalism, governance, local administration, local government*

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Introduction

The key roles of local government as a veritable tool of engendering local development and smooth running of governance at the local level has remained a consistent rhetoric in the Nigeria's troubled federation. In social discourse and community interaction, the simplest understanding of the word local government typifies governance at the local level. Attention to these local settlers is not only informed by their vulnerability to diseases, depression and hunger, they also constitute significant population power in political calculations. This was why Umebali (2000) argued that almost 70% of Nigeria population lives in shanties and other rural areas. Thus, the rural people, who supposedly exist within the confines of local government, do not enjoy the presence of governance as they so deserve. Local governance is used synonymously with local government in the context of this research, as a concept that binds the citizens with the structural political authority at the local level. Constitutionally, Nigeria comprises of federating units under a tripartite structure of government; federal, state and local; each having its spheres of responsibilities and limitations under exclusive, concurrent and residual arrangements as stated in the 1999 Constitution (Adedire, 2019).

However, Oyekanmi, Adebajo and Adenuga (2022) opined that the status of local government in the federal set up is characterised with seeming complexities. To overcome the challenges faced by the third tier as catalyst for local development and democratic governance, series of reforms had to be initiated, notable from which the 1976 local government reform came to the fore. Armed with the philosophy and fundamental objectives of providing grassroots governance, political awareness, civic orientation and bringing good governance nearer to the people at the local level, the 1976 local government reform granted autonomous recognition to local government as a third-tier level of government, assigned with specific responsibilities, primary of which is the need to affect the lives of the locals positively. More importantly, as a prove of its importance to the operational success of Nigeria's federalism, Nigeria operates 774 local governments as documented by the federal Constitution, while some states also established Local Council Development Areas, to cater and bridge the complexities of governance, accelerate rural development and mitigate the effect of over centralisation of power at the central level (Nwokobi, 2011).

Despite decades of these reforms on the autonomy, constitutional amendments on the status and roles of local government, governance at the local levels in Nigeria has failed to live up to expectations. Disconnection between the people and governments' program grow unabated, responsive leadership and fiscal accountability have been greatly eroded, while people at the local level appeared to have been left without government impacts (Ayodeji, 2008). This is because local governance has been characterised by primordial interests, executive recklessness and overbearing influence of state governors who have tied the operations of local governments to their apron strings through habitual ways of imposing loyal party men as council chairmen, caretaker committees and community leaders to garner unhindered control of public patrimony as against the choices of party supporters and the electorate (Oyekanmi et al, 2022; Oyekanmi, 2016). These among others have led to infrastructural decay, weakness of democratic institution and geometric poverty, thus making nonsense of the principle of federalism that strives to enhance the ability of the component units to develop at their own pace. It then becomes important to interrogate if what is in operation as third tier is worthy to be called local government or mere operational nomenclature. The study examines the complexities of governance at the local level vis-à-vis operations of local government.

Conceptual and Theoretical Issues

This section deals with the conceptualization of the basic concepts and theory that served as the fulcrum of the study. These concepts are local government, local administration, and governance.

Local Government

There are two perceptions to local government or governance at the local level: normative and institutional perceptions. The normative aspect deals with various definitions of local government or what governance at the local level mean, while the institutional aspect sees local governance as a form of decentralisation, arising from the sub-division of a state. The normative perception of local government deals with the legion of definitions that mainly see local governance as series of political responsibility from the lowest structural levels of government. Normative definitions of local government do not give priority to the structural workings of the concept. While the institutional definition of local government takes a holistic review of the operating political system or government structure that makes such third tier inevitable. The institutional definition hovers around some fundamental variables, such as autonomy, legitimacy and electoral fairness.

In a literary sense, local government is the government at the local level. Herein, it simply referred to local governance. Olowu (1988) and Awotokun (2016) distinguished local government depending on the political arrangement of the nation, i.e. unitary or federal system. Awotokun (2005) defines local government in the unitary state as non-sovereign community possessing the legal rights, but which are essentially administrative agents of the central government. Although, Adebajo and Oyekanmi (2020) strengthened the structural conception of local government through the assertion of it being the third pyramid of Federal -State relations designed to give sense of governance ownership to the people. On the other hand, the United Nations Office for Public Administration sees local government as a political subdivision of a nation or (in a federal system) state, which is constituted by law and has substantial control of local affairs including the powers to impose taxes or to exact labour for, prescribed purposes. Ebuku (1992) sees local government as a political authority set up by a nation or state as a subordinate authority for the purpose of dispersing or decentralising political power. Wraith (1972, p.12) posits local government to be the act of decentralising power, which may take the form of deconcentration or devolution. Deconcentration involves delegation of authority to field units of the same department and devolution on the other hand refers to a transfer of authority to local government units or special statutory bodies such as school boards for instance. From this perception, one can see local government as a lesser power in the national polity. It is the responses of the constituted authority to the needs of the local people at the grassroots (Okemeri, 2020; Wraith, 1972).

Emezi (2016) on the other hand sees local government as a system of administration under local communities, organised to maintain law and order, provide some limited range of social facilities, to ensuring that people and the needs of the rural dwellers are captured by the political decisions from the other levels of government. The local communities are encouraged to submit themselves to mutually organised authority as precursor to enjoying good governance and priorities for local needs. Emeze's definition seeks of the historical foundation of local government system in Nigeria, as it is traceable to the tact of British colonial master through the introduction of indirect rule system. Local government generally acts within the powers as derived from the constitution where distinctions between local government and states are also spelt out. In federal-states, local government is referred to the third tier of government, while under a unitary states arrangement local government is placed at the second layer of administrative structure (Oniyegun, 2009).

However, there is disparity between local government and local administration. The concepts, local government and local administration are used intermittently and interchangeably in social discussion and political circle. It is imperative however to state that such practice is an error that should not be allowed to fester into academic discussion, knowing that the two concepts are clearly different, when their operational relationship with rural people, inherent benefits and *locus standi* in Nigeria's constitutional firmament are called to question. The following are some of the differentiating factors between local government and local administration:

i. Election: In local government, the people's representatives such as the chairmen and councillors (which form the legislative arm) are duly elected via popular, free, fair and periodic elections. Whereas, local or sole administrators are mere political appointees, trusted with the management of local affairs by the state governors as obtainable in most of Nigerian states. Local administration is the process of aggregating, articulating and management of local interests by non-elected individuals who enjoy political patronage of politicians (Adewusi & Adenuga, 2020).

ii. Legitimacy: Local government has legitimacy, as its official operate through electoral mandates. This confers status of constitutional recognition and peoples' acceptability on how they deal with local affairs. The elected local government chairmen and councillors are to be known, questionable and answerable to the people, having passed through electoral phases, campaign and election proper. This practice encourages political integration, inclusiveness and sense of belongingness. Whereas, local administration is not to be tied to electoral legitimacy, people do not see them as their own vice versa. The appointees take instructions and implement policies in line with the dictates of boss who appointed them. This political anathema can contradict the needs of the local people. In an interview granted by E. Ojo (personal communication, September 18, 2015) for knowledgeable discussion on local government and local administration distinction, he identified two categories of local government, the rural and urban. He posits that the needs of the settings differ, whereas the many times the governors who appoint the administrators dictate what project to implement in their various local areas. Dr. Ojo, an Associate Professor of Political Science, was contacted for knowledgeable discussion on local government complexities and had served as the Special Adviser to Oyo State Governor on Political Matters between 2011and 2015.

iii. Constitutionality and Sovereignty: the term "government" enjoys legal and constitutional protection and clear spheres of responsibilities, being the creation of the 'common will, for the protection of the general will. While the term administration does not. Administration is a mere institutional tool used to get things done. It is safe to say that local administration is an arm of local government systems through which the duties and responsibilities of local government is carried out at the local level.

Framework of Analysis

The study adopted the vertical and horizontal decentralisation model for effective local governance as articulated by Kauyza (2003) as its framework of analysis. According to Kauyza (2003) leveraging on the views of Rondinelli (1981) and others, understanding the effectiveness of decentralisation should approached from positions, the vertical and horizontal.

The vertical decentralisation as espoused by Kauyza (2003) represents the relocation of political power and authority from the central government to government at the sub-national level. As for the horizontal decentralisation, attention should be focused on evolving mechanisms allowing other actors in local governance such as community-based organisations, civil society organisation and the private sector to be involved in the governance process

(Kauyza, 2003). The model maintains that reform of the existing laws and the formation of a new political structure within the context of vertical decentralisation cannot be ruled out. Horizontal decentralisation leverages on the empowerment of grassroots communities to put them in a vantage position to determine, plan, administer and execute their socio-politico and economic development. It does not essentially call for the re-evaluation or promulgation of new laws. Instead, it requires determined mobilisation and organisation of local communities to participate fully in the planning and implementation of socio-economic activities that are aimed at strengthening their capacities to determine and enjoy their socio-economic livelihood (Kauzya, 2003, p.4).

This theoretical model is apt in giving an insight into how the challenges of local government can be overcome in Nigeria. It does not only suggest the proper transfer of political power and authority from the Federal government to government local governments, it also pontificates on creating strategies which pave ways for the involvement of other actors in local governance raging form such community-based entities to civil society organisations including the private sector in the governance process.

Thus, the model allows for proffering solutions that transcend the proffered conventional modes of overcoming the various challenges bedevilling local government arising from its complexities which adversely affect its governance. In essence, it puts forwards more achievable solution encompassing proper power and authority transfer to sub-national governments and the involvement of diverse actors and stakeholders. By implication, it is suggestive of the fact that the achievement or disintegration of decentralisation reforms should not be restricted to the potency or feebleness of local government. As an alternative, such elucidation should not ignore the make-up and actions of other actors such as non- public and non-profit organisations and how the collective models of vertical and horizontal decentralisation influence the living conditions of the grassroots populace.

Local Administration, Local Government and Local Governance in the Nigeria Context

No doubt, exploring into the past performance of local governments in Nigeria in line with local expectations and prioritised interests, show geometrical growth in poverty, illiteracy and lack of trust in democratic processes. The supposed local elected politicians have turned to swindlers and profiteers of the nation's common patrimony (Eligwu, 1983). Local administration is a collegiate of appointed individuals trusted with the mandate to implement certain government programmes and policies that relate with the management of local affairs and the actualisation community interests. Herein, the nomenclature of local administration lack legitimacy in the context of local government studies because of the non-elective status of those referred to as the trustees of local affairs. In clear terms, local administration involves activities such as policy formulation, implementation and performance review that takes place at the sub-division level of the state as driven by career civil servants and other professionals (Oniyegun, 2019).

In the submission of Biyi (2005), local administration is the running of local government businesses by non-elected public officials who owe no sense of accountability to the electorates. However, local government or governance in the true sense of its democratic qualities is wrongly being used in place of local administration. Oyekanmi (2016) strongly holds that the word government evokes the prism of electoral legitimacy, independence, respected legal status, autonomous resources and capacity for good governance. This was corroborated by Ayoade (2002) that the third-tier level in Nigeria is still referred to as local government by default, having lost the institutional capacity to affect good governance, characterised with waned autonomy and political tools in the hands of state governors. The

underpinning reality of Nigeria's local government reeks of the loss of the status as government, it is better to refer to it as local administration.

Borrowing from the forgoing, this study posits that local administration connotes a mere tool of policy formulation and implementation in the hands of others tiers of governments just as being witnessed in several states of the federation, where state governors appoint sole administrators, executive secretary, caretaker chairmen as the case may be, contrary to the conception of local government by the 1999 Constitution (as amended) that local government exist as a democratically constituted body.

Governance

The World Bank (1997) views governance as the way power is exercised in the management of a country's economic and social resources for development. It is a tradition or institutions by which authority in a country is exercised. Governance is commonly conceptualised as the exercise of power or authority of political leaders for the well-being of their country's citizens or subjects. It is the multifaceted course whereby many phases of the society exert power and enact and initiate public policies which that have effect on human and institutional interactions, without leaving out economic and social development (Imodi, 2015). The power exercised by the participating sectors of the society is always for common good and it is essential for demanding respect and cooperation from the citizens of the state. As such, the bedrock of good governance is the prudent usage of public fund to meet general will.

While local governance connotes the presence of government at the local levels through developmental programmes, such as protective and providential responsibilities, it remains a great worry that the local and rural areas have been well disconnected from the providential and protective programmes of other levels of government. The Nigeria local government *inter alia* reeks of executive rascality of the state governors, usurpation of local government roles and financial recklessness. While the attempts to address these problems grow at arithmetic rate, poverty, infrastructural decay and illiteracy move on geometric rate. Hence, since the deeper meaning of governance revolves around public welfare, social harmony and economic prosperity, it is unworthy to describe Nigeria as a country with local government or third tier. What is obtainable in Nigeria tilts more towards local administration than governance when weighed in conformity with the true meanings of both concepts?

Federalism and Trajectories of Local Government in Nigeria

Federalism is the method of dividing powers so that the central and regional governments are each, within a sphere, co-ordinate and independent (Wheare, 1963). According to Wheare, federal principles are the division of powers among levels of government, a written constitution showing this division of powers and coordinate not subordinate supremacy of the two levels of government with respect to their functions (Wheare, 1963, p.10). Federalism has its creation in the aged administrative practice of Britain who colonised Nigeria leading to the birth of governance at the local level. In the submission of Eze (1999) local administration was a mere trustee arrangement during colonialism, a practice that explored the innocence of the uninformed traditional leaders to carrying out the programmes and decisions of the imperial authorities. Ayoade (2002) from another dimension argues that the extant roles and popular responsibility of local government that is synonymous with governance at the local level have been well documented in the 1999 Constitution and well refined by the 1976 Local Government Reform in Nigeria. Referencing to the Fourth Schedule of the 1999 Constitution (as amended) wherein the functions of local government were enshrined, scholars including Awotokun (2015), and Anwuka and Chuka (2015) have noted

that the state governments continue to usurp these powers and functions of local government in great magnitude. They noted that Nigerian governors are idols, pillaging the local government resources, demonising democratic solidity and frustrating good governance at the local level. A cursory review of these noted contraptions has bifurcated political leadership at all levels, leading to years of neglect. Thus, the dream of the local people to have a good taste of life remains in doldrums.This is in line with the views of T. Oladunjoye (personal communication September 18, 2015), a politician, the former Chairman of Ijebu-East Local Government and former Publicity Secretary, Caretaker Committee of All Progressive Congress (APC) in Ogun State, expressed in an interview granted that local government chairmen, either elected or appointed are most times stooges of state governors, where and when the council bosses resist being imperilled to the whims of the governors, they face different sanctions and unimaginable ruination. A critical look at this position shows what has caused docility, bad governance and mistrust between local government councils and states. Hence, the renewed call for local government autonomy as a pathway to local development, and growth of democratic participation at the local level.

Across political systems, the local government system is the tier of government that is closest to the people and to ensuring good governance at the local level. This is a brainchild of structural arrangement of the third tier. Ostensibly, local government or local governance is predicated on the need for majority participation in the decisions that affects them. Oyekanmi, (2016) emphasises the immense role of governance at local level which helps to nurture democratic devolution of power in federating units and as a conduit through which good maternity centers, good roads, social welfare programs drinkable water and other essential services are linked to various towns and villages that are by geographical locations far from the satellite towns and urban hub of civilisation or remaining obsolete at the base of the structure of federalism. Section 14 (4) of the Nigeria 1999 Constitution states that:

> The composition of Government of a State, a Local Government Council, or any of the Agencies of such Government or Council, and the conduct of the affairs of the Government or Council or such Agencies shall be carried out in such manner as to recognise the diversity of the people within its area of authority and the need to promote a sense of belonging and loyalty among all the peoples of the Federation.

This Section of the Constitution has referred to by Ashiru (2014) as the "glowing values of local government" due to the popular mandate of bringing government nearer to the people. Governance cannot be felt by those who live in the remote's areas, as many of the laudable projects and social welfare packages of government are happening far from the local dwellers (Adeyemo, 2005). In recognition of the responsibility of local government, the Guidelines for Local Government Reform (FGN, 1976) highlighted four characteristics of local government which include legal entity, financial independence, delineated powers to perform specific functions and ritual of accountability.

It is undeniable that local government is the most visible among the three tiers in the federal structure. Hence, any reforms or restructuring of this tier of government should not exclude inputs from members of the public, non-public and non-profit organisations, most especially those at the local level. The proper utilisation and strengthening of Local Government Service Commission in every state will also be an expression of strong commitment to the needs of the locals, as it allows for advocacy for rural needs and protection of their interest. Though, the 1999 Constitution did not clearly express or grants independent to the third tier, most especially as it deals with finance. The various amendments to the financial autonomy of local government are still being expected to take effect. However, in 2019, Muhammadu Buhari administration, in a bid to navigate the pathways for local

government financial autonomy, issued some guidelines through the Nigerian Financial Intelligence Unit (NFIU) that barred state governors from interfering with statutory allocation accruing local councils from the Federation Account (Agbedo, 2020). This was vehemently opposed by the state governors through the Nigeria Governors Forum. Thus, it has been an unending wait for local government financial autonomy as state governors have circumvented the NFIU's directive (Agbedo, 2020). In spite of this, the situation can be remedied through clear legislation for local government autonomy, financial independence and other strong fiscal measures to put off other levels of government from exploiting the third tier (Lamidi & Fagbohun, 2013).

Governance, Local Administration and Local Government in Nigeria's Fourth Republic: Review of Complexities

The underlying raison dêtre of local government as a tier of government either in a mayoral, prefectorial or conciliar model is to link development from the table of policy makers to the local people. The expectations of the people in villages or rural areas from all structures of political authority are good governance, sense of devotion and accountability. The concept of local government is meaningless if devoid of good governance at the local level in such a way that the people express confidence and honest legitimacy to the closer constituted authority around. It must be said that creating harmony and general happiness for the people cannot be solely binding on the elected officials; accredited community leaders and experienced administrators are also to be reckoned with, to implement political decisions and programmes. This underscores the place of local administration as a veritable tool of getting things done through proper mobilisation of men and resources for general accomplishments (Gurlick & Urwick, 1987). The tripartite relationship amongst these concepts is inseparable.

The reality of the complexity of local government in Nigeria is as revealed by *This Day* (2015, p.1) when it fumed that:

> in Nigeria, local government today is plagued by series of reinforcing ailment, ranging from lack of capacity through low viability, elite capture, limited legitimacy, and mind-boggling corruption to low level accountability. Among others, Local government are run as private fiefdoms of governors who in most instances appoint their loyalist as sole administrators, glaringly manipulate elections to favour their supporters and arbitrarily determine the tenure of elected local officials.

From the foregoing and based on the submission of various local government scholars such as Ola (2004), Gboyega (1987), Bello-Imam (1992), among others various problems of local government remain unresolved in Nigeria. However, for purpose of this study the major ones are identified for the purpose of critical interrogation. These range from constitutional ambiguity, poor leadership, personal idiosyncrasies of leaders of the other levels of government, overbearing primordial interest to lack of fiscal autonomy and responsibility.

Constitutional Ambiguity

Imuetinyan (2002) posits that the first clear recognition of the third-tier status of local government in Nigeria was offered by the Local Government Reform of the 1979 which inadvertently reels out clear duties and responsibilities, as well as its place in the federating units. This was followed with the proper gazette of issues of local government concerns as expressed in the 1976 reforms into the 1979 Federal Constitution. With the foregoing, Section 7 (1) of the 1999 Constitution has it that "the government of every state shall ensure their existence under a law which provides for the establishment, structure, composition, finance and functions of such councils. This shows that local authorities are creatures of the state

governments, and their relevance, strength and degree of autonomy were subject to the state governments (Iyoha, 2001). This power as vested in the hands of many overbearing State governors, over local authorities have been abused and deployed to weaken elected and participatory governance and development at the grassroots.

The operation of local government councils under the 1999 Constitution is also very ambiguous and confusing generating many imploding crises. In a different way, while the 1999 Constitution guarantees the operation of a democratically elected local government system, many state governors in states like Anambra, Osun, Ondo, Oyo, Imo, Abia, Enugu had at one time or the other abandoned the need to conduct elections into various local governments in defiance of the mandates of the Constitution. States like Ogun, Lagos, and Rivers elected council members who operated in accordance with the wishes of the governors (Awotokun, 2016). In Nigeria, very significantly in the South-West, appointments of Caretaker Council Members have become perverting political norms, an abuse of power and mockery of democratic creeds. These governors hide behind the constitutional misrepresentation of section 7 (1) that states that the government of every state shall ensure the existence of local government under the law, whereas the law provides for a democratically elected council. The issue of having a democratically elected local council cannot be over emphasised as it is the hallmark of the local government system.

A second major problem is the failure to provide expressly for the state government, the power to create new local government councils. S. Atolagbe (personal communication, September 15, 2015), a legal practitioner and former Special Adviser on Legal Matters, Kwara State, in the granted interview notes that in the 1999 Constitution, local government is to be created by states subject to the approval of the National Assembly for its operation); this clause has been described by (Okafor, 2012) as double standard. The situation had once created tension between federal and state governments. For example, is the face-off between the Lagos state government under Bola Ahmed Tinubu administration and federal government of Nigeria under Olusegun Obasanjo administration in 2004 over the creation of new local government area, the latter ordered the stoppage of statutory allocation to Lagos state.

Poor Leadership

The Nigerian state is in short supply of leaders with democratic credentials while few that profess democratic ideas are dominated by autocratic personality as a catalyst for wrong democratic anathema, daily affecting good governance at the local level. The existence of local government as the third tier of government has suffered serious threat of extinction because of its non-performance occasioned by the leadership of other levels of government from federal to state government. A good number of the state governors in Nigeria are not democratic enough to allow the institution of local government flourish for the good of the rural dwellers, while it also remains a verifiable fact that their campaign rhetoric is laced with utopian democracy (Awotokun, 2016; Chuka, 2015). According to B. Onuoha (personal communication, August 31, 2015), a renowned Professor of Political Science, was also contacted for a knowledgeable discussion on the poor leadership deficit affecting the mandate of local government in Nigeria. He asserts that many state governors lack democratic temperament that enables the local government councils to function optimally as institutions in a federal setting. More worrisome is the fact many state governors deliberately serve as impediments to various chairmen of local government councils in order keep them subservient politically (B. Onuoha, personal communication, August 31, 2015). Anwuka and Chuka (2015) posit that performing local government chairmen are considered politically dangerous by their state governors as it portends tortuous succession battle. It is evident from the foregoing

discussion that the local government is the most vilified of the three tiers of government in Nigeria. It has come under very serious obloquy for adducible reasons vis-à-vis not meeting up with its responsibilities as enshrined in the Fourth Schedule of the 1999 Constitution. Admittedly, majority of the local government councils have not also given Nigerians the cause to appreciate its nearness to the people and to bridge the gap between the governed and other tiers of government.

Overbearing Primordial Interest

The recruitment process at local level has been identified as a serious challenge of the government at grassroots. The recruitment has been popularly seen as basically on primordial interest. The spill over of which has crept into the operation and performances of Local Government as it relates to the welfare of the urban dwellers. As espoused by Oyekanmi (2016), 60 percent of local government projects in Nigeria are not approved based on the needs of the areas or wards they are sited, but rather influenced by particularised contacts and primordial interest. Even the choice of candidates for the local government election is characterised by rotational arrangement, appeasement of high-ranking politicians. This among other contentious pluralist nature of Nigeria federalism is seriously manifesting as a spoke in the wheel of local government performance.

Personal Idiosyncrasies of Leaders of the other Levels of Government

In the interview conducted for the purpose of this study and granted by D. Oke (personal communication, October 15, 2019), a political actor on the field and formal Senior Legislative Officer, National Assembly Service Commission, Federal Capital Territory, notes that majority of the state governors, in collusion with the Houses of Assembly, have remained unswerving in the pursuit of a surreptitious agendum to continually armpit the local government as a pun on their chess boards. The governors are in the habit of misused the noticeable blank gap in the 1999 Constitution. They have consciously and covertly converted local government councils to one of their parastatals, departments or agencies because of the lacuna created in sections 7 and 162 of the 1999 Constitution. The council's umbilical cord has been tied to the state governments who confer a nomenclature of an appendage or field office on them and leave the councils at the beggarly existence of the state. The captivity of the local government councils by the state government is a cankerworm that has undermined the functionality of the councils. In similar vein, E. Ojo (personal communication, September 18, 2015), states that many governors complain of maltreatment by the federal might whereas their dealings with the local government show clearly their poor understanding on how a federation should operate. There is no doubt that many of them need education on what federalism is all about. This situation has in great measure impoverished in all ramifications the operations and successes of local government councils.

Lack of Fiscal Autonomy and Responsibility

The hijack of local government resources by state government and corruption at local level is another serious area which has undermined governance at the local level. According to Ayodeji (2008), it has been an unaccountable galore in local government councils under the current democratic dispensation by the state governors and the chairmen. Thus, usually, Joint Account Committee (JAC) has been identified has instrument of controlling, usurping, embezzling and eroding the autonomy of local government by the state governments (Awotokun, 2016). This was evident in T. Oladunjoye's petition to Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) that Otunba Gbenga Daniel, the former governor of Ogun state

mismanaged and misappropriated local government fund via JAC (personal communication, September 18, 2015). Also, the arrested and prosecution of the former governor of Enugu state, Chimaroke Nnamani by the EFCC over the allegation of diversion of local governments funds is evident (Nnamani & Anikwe, 2013). It was on this note that Mallam El-Rufai abolished JAC in Kaduna State on assumption of office as Governor in 2015, with promise to always remit all dues belonging to Councils (Odunsi, 2015). The decision has been widely applauded by stakeholders especially the Association of Local Government of Nigeria (ALGON) who are usually mainly affected by the menace. ALGON stated that to guarantee speedy development at the grassroots, the abolition of JAC was necessary to ensure a healthy local government (Koni, 2016). On how to ensure a healthy local government, Akindele and Olaopa (2002) state that:

> for financially healthy local governments to exist, responsibilities and functions must be allocated in accordance with their taxing power and ability to generate funds internally. The constitutional provision that recognises local governments' power in this regard must give them full freedom to operate and this must be well guaranteed and adequately protected. These measures, coupled with a review of the revenue-sharing formula, the granting of fiscal autonomy and fiscal discipline as well as making local government responsive, responsible and accountable to the people will set Local Governments free from the fiscal stress promoted and strengthened by the 1999 Constitution.

The assertion emphasises the need to cut local government off the apron strings of state governments and make them truly independent tier of government answerable only to the people. It has been argued that the section that provided for joint state/local government accounts should be amended and local council should have direct allocation from the federation account. This view was also shared by S. Durotolu (2015) (personal communication, September 18, 2015), former Chairman, Ila Local Government, Osun state and A. Adewale (personal communication, November 15, 2015), former Chairman, Amuwo-Odofin Local Government, Lagos State in the conducted interview for this study that a higher degree of autonomy for local government councils will improve their performance.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Local government is constitutionally designated as the third tier of government for good governance at the local level for the betterment of the people at the grassroots. However, local government has been unjustifiably subsumed under other levels of government, especially the state governments, in ways that have limited its capacity to achieve its mandate. This has often raised the question of whether what currently operates is a proper local government or mere local administration. The study concluded that inherent complexities arising from the operations of local government in Nigeria have adversely affected it and have put expected governance at the local level in abeyance.

In line with the prescriptions of the vertical and horizontal decentralisation model which serves as the framework of this study, there should be relocation of political power and authority from the federal government to government at local governments and radically amend the 1999 Constitution with an unadulterated intent and purpose to erase contradiction and clauses that inhibit the existence and operations of the local government.

Secondly, it also essential that other actors such civil society groups, human rights groups, the Nigeria Union of Local Government Employees (NULGE) and all other major stakeholders should be allowed to be involved in the local governance process so as to determine, plan, manage and implement their socio-politico and economic development at the

grassroots. The study recommends that states should be allowed to create local government councils as convenient and as dictated by local needs. Thus, local government allocation should be made equal for all states of the federation, irrespective of the number of local governments that is in place. Consequently, local government councils will cease to be one of the instruments of revenue sharing in the federation.

It also recommends that local government elections should also be taken over by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) with the involvement of all stakeholders at the local level. The INEC should be empowered to see into the tenure of elected officials and conduct elections as prescribed by law. This study believes that the taking over of elections at grassroots by INEC and the serious involvement of civil society organisations and other critical stakeholders will ensure periodic elections as against the appointment of caretaker or sole administrators and promote grassroots democracy and reduce the level of imposition by state governors of local council candidates.

Lastly, there is a need for continuous re-orientation and education of political actors and operators of Nigeria's federal system. The orientation must emphasise that no superior government exists in a federation as such relations should be complimentary. In some federal settings, president is not superior to the governors neither is governor superior to a local government chairman. Hence, operators of local government system should be educated on their status as heads of a government who enjoy same degree of autonomy like other tiers of government in a federation that recognises local government as a third-tier government. Therefore, there is a need for the political class to depoliticise their actions in office and operate more as statesmen rather than self-serving politicians.

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