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# Problems Of Decentralization Of Power To Local Government In Nigeria

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**ABSTRACT**
The essence of politics and by extension governance is the provision of essential services to the populace. Local government has emerged as a recurring and dominant factor of any system of government, be it unitary or federal. Decentralization presents an opportunity to serve better through sharing of governmental responsibilities and power. Local government being the closest tier of government to the people is at a more advantaged position to see to their plight and act appropriately on them. These paper x-rays the problems of local government administration in Nigeria, identifying; undue interference, corruption, lack of finance, absence of pressure/interest group, shortage of staff and lack of competent hands as the stumbling blocks. The paper also recommended; financial autonomy, merit based Recruitment, conduct of credible election, tackling corruption and Incentives for Inter-local cooperation as the possible panacea to these identified problems.
**Keywords**: Decentralization, Local government, Development, Effectiveness, Service Delivery.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The complexities that has characterised the administration of states in the modern era requires the need to share governmental powers and responsibilities in a way that will enhance effective performance and efficient utilization of resources. The significance of the creation of local government in any system revolves around the need to aid development at the grassroots level (Aleyomi, 2013). The local government serves as a form of political and administrative structure facilitating decentralisation, national integration, efficiency in governance and a sense of belonging at the grassroots. The local government is a unit of administration all over the world (Agagu, 2004).

Decentralization of social and developmental responsibilities is a backbone of economic reforms in countries around the world (Diejomaoh & Eboh, 2010), power sharing in recent times is no longer a sole attribute of federalism because government of unitary states have also seen the need to bring government closer to the people via decentralization.

Local government in any clime is the administration of people at the grassroot. Local government differ from polity to polity. In whatever form or basis it operates on, it is the tier of government that is the closest to the people. The degree of autonomy any local government unit enjoys depends on the system of government practiced and the enabling laws creating such local authority. Article 7 of the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria gives legal backing to the existence of local government, while the 4th schedule states their functions.

Coker & Adams (2012) argued that the theory and practise of fiscal federalism in Nigeria is more or less a political gimmick, this is because their poor performance records is glaring in the area of non-delivery of pubic goods and services (Ibok, 2014). Meanwhile local government as a principal agent of development is to utilize the resources made available to them by both Federal and State government and the internally

generated revenue (IGR) to improve on the livelihood and lives of the people at the grassroot within its area by orchestrating developmental protects (Adeyemi, 2013: 85), suffice to say that local governance has failed in its effective service delivery due to a number of reasons (Ibok, 2014).

Indeed, local government have the responsibility handing citizens opportunities for political participation, educating and socializing the local citizenry (Ola, 2007). Indeed, local governments exist to bring about democracy and to afford the citizens the opportunities for political participation, training in the art of self-government and for political education and socialization (Adeyemo, 2011). Local government serve as a training field for future leaders as it offers them an opportunity to serve which comes with less competition and room to make mistakes and learn from it. Tony (2011) argued that most loca government based politicians, target higher political roles using the local government as spring board. John and Rupak (2008) contend that the proper practice of democracy is maximized when people at the grassroots are empowered to elect their own representatives and are able to hold them accountable to them.

This paper explores the concept of decentralization and local government. It also put forward the various theories that seeks to justify the creation of local government, the problems encountered by local government in Nigeria as well as possible solution to these stumbling blocks that has continued to hinder effective performances.

## 2. RESEARCH METHODS

This work is a qualitative research that adopted the secondary sources of data to unravel the problems confronting the optimal performance of local government in the Nigerian state. These data were analyzed by content analysis.

## 3. CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

### 3.1 Decentralization

According to Anwar & Climis (2017) Decentralization is defined and interpreted in several ways. Sometimes it is considered as a term, sometimes a concept, a process, a theory, a methodology, or a policy, even a trend. A decentralized system is one where decisions are made by individuals, community organizations, and small local governments or administrations (Abdullah & Abdul Rahman, 2015).

Decentralization or decentralized governance refers to the restructuring or reorganization of authority so that there is a system of co-responsibility between institution of governance at the central, regional and local levels according to the principle of subsidiarity, while increasing the overall quality and effectiveness of the system of governance, whereas increasing the authority and capacities of sub-national levels (Hameed & Anwar, 2018). Decentralization denotes a process where some of the powers of actors/institutions is ceded to other component units (Diejomaoh & Eboh, 2010).

Chikulo (1981) sees decentralization as placing of an authority for program execution and decision at the levels closest to the clients consistent with effective and responsible performance. Decentralization connotes allowing local communities and regional entities to manage their own affairs, an through facilitating closer contact between central and local authorities, effective systems of local governance enable responses to people's needs and priorities to be heard, thereby ensuring that government interventions meet a variety of social needs (Anwar & Ghafoor, 2017).

### 3.2 Local Government

Scholars have tried to distinguish the concept of local government depending on the political arrangement of the nation (i.e., whether unitary or federal system). For Adeyeye (2005), local government in the unitary state can be described as "non-sovereign community possessing the legal right but which are essentially administrative agents of the central government". On the other hand, the United Nations Office for Public Administration (2002) sees Local Government as: A political subdivision of a nation (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. The governing body of such an entity is elected.

According to Ojofeitimi (2000) the word "local" connotes that councils are meant for small communities and the word "government" means that they have certain attributes of a government. McLean and McMillan (2009) defined local government as 'a governing institution which has authority over a sub-national territorially defined area; in federal systems, a sub-state territorially defined area'.The authors added that local government authority springs from its elected basis.

In the view of Ogwu (2005), "the local governments in Nigeria are expected to constitute the grassroots organ that should stimulate and mobilize the rural communities for an integrated development to solve the problems of poverty; unemployment, ignorance, and inequality. From his position, local government areas are supposed to be potential engines of national development. A quiet rural community grows into a lively city, and the local leader makes this possible. However, in developed societies, when people are tired of living in the cities they relocate to rural communities".

Fajobi (2007) view local government as a political authority under the state to decentralise political power and delegate authority. Thus, going by his definition, Local governments decongest the burden of central and state government to provide services that are local in nature. Makinde, Hassan & Olaiya (2016) identified the features of local governments identified the following features of local government:

i. Local Government exists at the local level;
ii. In a federal system, it operates as a distinct tier of government;
iii. It is a creation of the law and has a degree of autonomy;
iv. It has a legal status, it can sue and be sued;
v. It enjoys specific powers reserved for its functioning;
vi. It exists within a defined territory with authority over a given population;
vii. It can generate incomes and incur expenses;
viii. It provides avenues for the promotion of the welfare of the members of the community; and
x. It is administered by elected officials.

## 4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The efficient service delivery theory and the developmental theory guided the conduct of this study, this is because the prospects of local government are best established within the framework of these theoretical justification for the creation of local government which has been propounded over the years.

The Efficient-Service Delivery theory explained that considering their nearness to the people, local government is in a pivotal position to solve local problems especially those with peculiarity to a certain locality. Kafle and Karkee (2003) noted that the core argument of the efficient-service delivery school is that local government exists to help to ensure efficient-service delivery.

Chukwuemeka, Ugwuanyi, Ndubuisi-Okolo & Onuoha (2014) argued that In essence, local government allows for autonomous self-governance of smaller constituent units of government directly and democratically responsible for their own electorates. Indeed, to a very large extent, the proximity of the citizens to the elected representatives as it obtains in local government makes it easier for the former to call the latter to account for their stewardship.

Nico (2008) stated that by the nature of local government, it brings government closer to the people, making translation of community preference into responsive policy and programs more likely. Local government is more likely to know the inimitable characteristics of each locality and adjust the administration accordingly (Sharpe 1970)

Developmental Theory argued that local government should engage each other in a sort of healthy rivalry or competition in the quest of national development. Each locality possess human and material resources that can be brought to the table of national development if well managed.

Blair (1977) argued that, local governments are what basic tissues are to human body and without them government system would have no vitality. Local governments serve as veritable partners with the states and national government in national development issues as units of development by which national development efforts, resources and benefits percolate to the grassroots (Olowu 1991).

The development functions of the local government include nation building, social, economic and manpower resource development. For one thing, the local government transforms centrally generated revenue allocated to them into infrastructural development. Such infrastructures will in turn assist in the mobilization of the local people to do more for themselves and for their communities (Chukwuemeka et al, 2014).

The combining these theories points to the importance of Local government in any governmental system in areas of development and quality service delivery.

## 5. PROBLEMS OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATION IN NIGERIA

Local government in Nigeria are faced by numerous challenges. These challenges includes but are not limited to the following:

•Undue Interference: The local government in Nigeria, are often seen as an avenue to reward political loyalty. This is why most State Governors either influence the State Independent Electoral Commission to act in favour of their party or dissolve a constitutionally elected council to appoint their loyalists as sole administrators. Olaniyi (2017) posited that the definitions of local government by scholars over the years negates the current practice of caretaker system in Nigeria.

Most local government administration receive instructions from above to run the affairs of the council. Adamolekun & Ayo (1989) noted that the constitutional provision regarding joint participation of state and local government in the fields of education, health, agriculture was, and continues to be, interpreted to mean that a state government can dictate to what local governments are to do.

•Lack of Finance: In the absence of funds to pursue policies and programs the local government becomes toothless bulldogs because plans which are beautiful on papers becomes impossible to implement. The federal structure of Nigeria inhibit local government's ability to mobilize and use revenue to meet their obligation in sustainable manner (Adeyemo, 2005), resources deprive most local government the capacity to fulfill the aspirations of their communities (Adeyemi, 2013).

The local government is been denied resources which are constitutionally and legally theirs. This is possible through the State-Local government joint account.

•Corruption:- Eigen (2001) sees corruption as a daunting obstacle to sustainable development, corruption has been identified as one of the greatest bane of local government administration in Nigeria (Adeyemi, 2012). Just like in other tiers of government, elected and appointed local government officials also see public office as a generational chance to liberate themselves and their families from eternal poverty. The little resources available, that should serve infrastructural purpose are often channeled to private pockets and these officials get away with it especially when they are members of the state ruling party.

•Absence of Pressure/Interest Group: Most of the pressure/interest group activity in Nigeria is focused on the federal government and in some instances the State governments. Hardly will one see a demonstration or protest borne out of the actions and inactions of a local government council.

The elected officials at the local level often neglect their responsibilities without any consequences unlike their counterparts in other tiers of government that have to watch their backs at all times.

•Shortage of Staff: Government will run efficiently with officials that assist in carrying out its daily activities. Most local government are flooded with political loyalists who often come and go with changes in administration but lacking in staffs that can help implement short, medium and long term objectives.

•Lack of competent hands: In situation where local government possess the required quantity of staffs, the quality is mostly absent. The innovative ideas and capacity to implement policies are lacking in most officials, most employees secured employment based on political consideration and not competency. Aleyomi (2013) noted that the low image of local government in the mind of the professionals contribute to these low quality. Human capital development and capacity building are often stalled (Adeyemi, 2012)

## 6. POSSIBLE PANECEA TO THE IDENTIFIED PROBLEMS

•Financial autonomy: Local government will function effectively when they have more resources to carry out their constitutional functions. Osakede, Ijimakinwa & Adesanya (2016) argued that several reasons have been advocated for local government financial autonomy in Nigeria. The essence is to pave the local government specific powers to perform a range of financial functions assigned it by law to implement its functions, plan, formulate and execute its own policies, programmes and projects, and its own rules and regulations as deemed for its local needs.

•Merit based Recruitment: The recruitment of officials in to the local government council must be based on competency and not patronage. The best hands should be hired to do the job. Employees should not be retained because of their political learnings to the detriment of the well being of the locality.

•Fight against corruption: The corruption fighting agencies like the EFCC & ICPC should be made to operate at the local level. The finances of local government should be given attention. Any officer found wanting of embezzling public funds should be charged appropriately to serve as deterrence for others.

•Incentives for Inter-local cooperation: Alot can be achieved if different local governments can come together to pursue similar goals in a complementary manner. Local Government should be encouraged to pull financial and human resources to accomplish monumental strides which can be difficult for one local government to achieve alone. Grants and soft loans should be set aside for this.

•Credible Elections: Local government elections must be conducted in a way and manner that will ensure that the will of the people prevail in order to make officials more accountable to the people and not few godfathers. Oluwasuji & Okajare (2021) highlighted five ways in which local government election in Nigeria can become credible,

a. State Independent Electoral Commissions (SIECs) should be scrapped. In its place, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) should be constitutionally empowered to conduct local government elections preferably at the time when both federal and state elections are conducted. This is because as long as the SIECs continue to be in charge of council elections; it will continue to be an instrument in the hands of the state governor to manipulate the electoral processes. More importantly, this will bring regularity to the electioneering process at the local government level.

b. Local governments should be granted full autonomy to be extricated from the apron of the state governments. By implication, this will put an end to the willful dissolutions of elected local government councils by the governors and their situational replacement with caretaker committees.

c. The 1999 Constitution of Nigeria should be amended to accommodate the tenure of political officers at the local government level.

d. The Nigerian 1999 constitution (specifically section 7 and section 162 subsections 5, 6, 7& 8) should be amended to grant the local government the control of its staff, finance, and ensure its independence as a third tier of government.

e. Local councils‟ elections should precede state and federal elections.

## CONCLUSION

The role of Local government in any polity is highly germane, this can be attributed to factors that goes beyond their proximity to the people. The people often take pride in identifying with their locality and preserving their local identities especially in a heterogeneous society like Nigeria. The efficient performance of local government will go along way in addressing certain issues confronting the society. Where local government is incapacitated to act, the fabrics that holds the society together faces the huge threat of been thorn apart.

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