

Local Government Reforms and Grassroots Development in Nigeria

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Abstract

Local governments worldwide are concerned with the management of public affairs at the grassroots. In Nigeria, a series of reforms have been carried out on the local government system. Yet, the narrative shows that local governments have not been effective agents of grassroots governance and development. This study relied on data sourced from textbooks, journals, official publications and used a theory of localism to explain how the federal and state governments had incapacitated local governments. This paper argued that various reforms had attributed the perennial failure of the Nigerian local government system to the status of local government in the Nigerian federal arrangement. Nigerian Federal arrangement, particularly the relationship between local government and other government tiers, has continued to undermine the autonomy of the former to operate optimally. The study found that apart from poor implementation of recommendations of various committees, inconsistencies in the provisions of the constitutions, inadequate funding, and resistance by state governments have collectively undermined the effectiveness of local governments as the agents of grassroots governance and development in Nigeria. The study concluded that the effectiveness of Nigerian local governments would only improve considerably if the federal and state governments guarantee an atmosphere that would enable them to perform their statutory functions.

Keywords: Autonomy, Central-local relations, Grassroots development, Local Government, Reforms

INTRODUCTION

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In contemporary Nigeria, most citizens first identify themselves with their primary ethnic nationality before identifying themselves as members of the country. Therefore, it is not strange that both majority and minority ethnic nationalities are often quick to banish whoever underrates their ancestral identities. This attachment to primordial forces equally explains why ethnocentrism has remained a threat to national unity in Nigeria (Idada, 2007). The observation made at the Cambridge University Summer Conference on Local Government in 1961, cited in Aghayere (2008), presented African countries as various entities having minorities' syndrome threatening national unity. Local government is therefore seen as an appropriate institution to tame such syndrome. This is based on two reasons. First, there

is the belief that such threats can be reduced or entirely removed by initiating local governance institutions that can accommodate local interests. Secondly, it also contended that when local governments are appropriately organised, they serve as the veritable vehicles for accommodating the interests of minorities, and by so doing, such interests would be integrated into the general national development agenda of the country. It is, therefore, little wonder that over time, the existence of local institutions with functional responsibilities to address the needs of people at the locality has remained a central agenda of decentralisation worldwide.

Proponents of decentralisation are of the view that the more governmental authority and powers are devolved to local bodies, the better-informed, the government will be about the needs of the people (Nwosu, 1991). It is also believed that in a properly decentralised system, the government at the sub-national level would be strategically placed to draw support from the people and be more vulnerable to citizens' pressure as policies and programmes have the capacity of being tailored towards local preferences (Orewa, 1991). This aptly explains why local governance institutions are widely recognised as crucial instruments for meeting the political, administrative, and socio-economic needs of the people at the grassroots level.

In Nigeria, the underlying philosophy surrounding the existence of local government is not at variance with the universally amplified virtues of decentralisation. The 1976 nationwide local government reform vividly captured this. The reform, among other things, aimed to make available appropriate services and development activities to local wishes and initiatives by devolving them to local representative bodies (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1976). The existence of Local governments in Nigeria is therefore premised on the need to bring government closer to the people, to enhance administrative convenience, for effective resource mobilisation as well as the preservation of the heritage and common interest of the people. (Oviasuyi Idada & Isiraojie, 2010).

Although successive Nigerian Constitutions have accorded recognition to the local government as a distinct tier of government, local governments are still considered failed institutions for grassroots development (Olukotun, 2019). While the failure of the Nigerian local government system cannot be discussed in isolation of the apparent inability of the Nigerian State, this study examines why successive reforms have not transformed the local government into effective institutions for grassroots development.

Apart from this introductory section, the remainder of this study is divided into four parts. The first section is on conceptual and theoretical issues. The second section delves into methodology employed in the study while the third section focuses on findings and discussion. The fourth section contains the conclusion.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Local Government

The concept of local government can hardly be given a 'one-for-all' kind of definition. This definitional quagmire has been noted in the literature. For instance, Aransi (2017) advances the view that local government means different things to different people."(p.3). Despite the multiplicity of the definitions, one of the most articulated definitions of local government in Nigeria is the one given by the 1976 Local Government Reform Guidelines. The guidelines view local government as the "government at the local level exercised through representative councils established by law to exercise specific functions within the defined areas" (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1976). Olukotun (2019) avers that local government refers to 'public sector institutions at the lowest sub-national level of government, legally and constitutionally recognised, and mandated to carry out specific functions at the community level' (p.17). According to Awa (1976), local government is a political authority that is intended to decentralise political power. Iyoha, Ubhehin, and Aiya (2005) view local government as the management of local affairs by the people of a specific locality. Adamolekun (1983) defines local government as the bureaucracy that must perform the role of planning, coordinating, controlling, and directing the operation of local affairs.

While the preceding conceptions of local government broadly specify local government as a political and administrative institution having appropriate governance structures for running the affairs of people at the grassroots, it is important to say that not all political structures for the provision of governmental services at the grassroots level can be regarded as local government. Local governments must have the political status and power to govern within a given area. As argued by Asaju (2010)" a local government must be a legal entity distinct from the state and federal governments and administered by democratically elected officials". (p.102) He argued further that local government must have specific powers to perform a range of functions assigned it by law and enjoy substantial autonomy to perform an array of functions, plan, formulate

and execute its policies, programmes, projects and its own rules and regulations as deemed for its local needs.

Grassroots Development

There is a need to explain what is meant by grassroots development because it has been loosely defined in the literature. This has been rightly captured by Aroh (2002), who asserts that grassroots development has a deep foundation making it challenging to give a one-for-all kind of meaning. He avers that the term grassroots development symbolises a set of guidelines to improve the well-being of the rural dwellers that usually have a vast population in society. Grassroots development is often conflated with community or rural development and is generally used as a framework to measure the impact of community growth and expansion. Viewed in this context, particular attention is paid to development indicators such as organisational capacity, the tradition of the community, living standard, civic and social setting, skill, knowledge, and attitudes.

Despite the seeming ambiguity surrounding the meaning of grassroots development, this study relied on the definitions given by the World Bank, Gaventa and Lewis, and George Kennedy. The World Bank (1975) views grassroots development in terms of the methods and strategies designed to promote the well-being of a specified group of people, particularly those in the local areas. The definition given by Gaventa and Lewis (1989) is not at variance with that of the World Bank. They perceive grassroots development as an alternative to the trickle-down approaches to local development in poor communities. George (1988) advances the view that grassroots development denotes the approaches and initiatives and capacity-building initiatives aimed at empowering vulnerable communities to develop following their needs and values. Viewed in this sense, grassroots development focuses on mechanisms of development that deemphasise the trickledown method or the top-bottom approach but emphasise a bottom-up approach to development which stresses the participation of the local population in addressing local issues as well as promoting and protecting the interest of the local inhabitants.

Theoretical Framework

This study uses the theory of localism to explain the failure of local government to spur effective grassroots development in Nigeria. Various writers such as Jenkins (2004), Boyle (2009), Hartwich (2013) and, Ibietan and Ndukwe (2014), among others, have written extensively on localism, and the direction of their conceptions is in the realm of the strength of local institutions or government at sub-national levels in promoting grassroots development and governance. By emphasising the virtue of the participation of the local population in the decision-making process, the idea and practice of localism are antithetical to centralisation. As argued by Jenkins (2004), the virtues of localism can be gleaned from the principle of subsidiarity propagated by the Catholic Church which stresses local institutions carrying out local functions. Similarly, Ibietan and Ndukwe (2014) advanced the view that localism seeks to "create effective "subsidiaries" at the local level that can handle the responsibility of governance as well as the provision of social services" (p. 136)).

Localism presupposes that government at the sub-national level should have powers to determine local affairs and engage on issues of local interest. In this context, localism becomes a farce where the patterns of central/state-local relations promote centralisation. In such a situation there is the tendency that the powers of local entities in making independent decisions would be threatened. Thus, in political climates where other tiers of governments carry out powers that ought to be conferred on local government, localism is eroded, and its utility becomes inconsequential.

Several writers have articulated the importance of local government as a political and administrative design most suitable for promoting the ideals of localism in governance and development. Ola (1984) presents three schools of thought to justify the existence of local government. These schools of thought which all have a bearing on the virtues of localism as a governance mechanism at the grassroots level have over the years been employed by various writers as an analytical framework in various studies on local government in Nigeria. The first school of thought justifies local government for political reasons. This perspective sees the local government as a veritable platform designed to promote and expand opportunities for participation in public affairs at the grassroots level. There is the belief that apart from helping to promote mass participation in government which is necessary for accountability and resource

mobilisation, the local government helps to train citizens on higher responsibilities at the national levels (Ola, 1984; Ibodje, 2000).

Furthermore, local government is seen as a means through which meaningful discussions and management of relevant national issues at the local levels can be carried out. In most countries characterised by complex plural societies; sectional sentiments are often more potent than other feelings of attachment to the nation. Such built-up tensions at the grassroots level can explode with severe consequences on national integration. Therefore; the existence of local government in such contexts is seen as having the capacity of preventing each tribal community from becoming growing tension centres that could scuttle national interest (Idada, 2007).

The promotion of administrative efficiency in governance at the grassroots level is the second justification for local government. The argument is anchored on the virtues of decentralisation. Firstly, decentralisation is seen as a template for decongestion. By this, local government reduces the burden of central agencies. Secondly, as the closest government to the people, local government is disposed to more information about problems confronting the people and how to manage the same well (Ola, 1984).

The need for the development of the grassroots is the third argument canvassed for the existence of local government. It is maintained that as a decentralised political institution, local government serves as a vehicle for building community and enduring national development and integration. In this context, local government immensely contributes to socio-economic development because of its capacity to facilitate resources mobilisation at the local level for development purposes (Ola, 1984).

The direction of argument canvassed in this paper is that on the one hand, government at the sub-national level would have the capacity to promote meaningful development and effective governance if, in terms of design and practice, the principle of localism is adhered to. On the other hand, effective governance and development at the grassroots would be undermined where there is little or no adherence to the principle of localism. In the Nigerian situation, the relationships between the local government and other tiers of government have undermined localism as the central pillar of grassroots governance and development. Simply put, local governments have been denied the requisite authority to act as the real agent of development at the grassroots

level. They are far from being institutions for grassroots development. Though successive Nigerian constitutions since 1979 recognise local government as a tier of government with functional responsibilities, they have not succeeded in devolving them. From all intents, local governments are seen as the extension of the state governments.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative research design. It relied on data sourced from official publications such as the 1976 Guidelines for Local Government Reform, the 1979 and 1999 Constitutions of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, textbooks, journals, and newspapers. These data were content analysed. The following questions guided this study.

- (i) What are the various reforms carried out in the Nigerian Local Government system?
- (ii) Why is it that the reforms have not transformed Local Governments into effective agents of grassroots governance and development in Nigeria?
- (iii) What measures can enhance the effectiveness of local governments as agents of grassroots governance and development in Nigeria?

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Annals of Local Government Reforms in Nigeria

Pre-1976 Local Government Reforms in Nigeria

Gboyega (1987) identified four phases the Nigerian local government system had passed through. He stated that each phase had a distinct set of philosophy on the purpose of local government. The first phase was the period of colonial rule when the Native Authority system was in vogue. The philosophy of this period was administrative patterns at the local level to achieve the goal of colonial rule. The second phase was the period between 1952 and 1966, which was characterised by a series of reforms designed to enhance the participation of the people in the affairs of the locality. It started in the Eastern and Western regions in the early part of the 1950s. The third phase was between 1966 and 1976, and it witnessed the reversal of some of the values

of participatory local government that started in the pre-independence era. In some states like the Mid-West, local government was designed as development administration and seen as an extension of the state. The fourth phase was the period the reforms of local government were undertaken by the federal government to have a uniform local government system. This was when the 1976 local government reform was carried out.

The 1976 Local Government Reforms

The 1976 reforms focused on the proper and broader definition of local government responsibilities and uniformity in staffing and financial resources. Other critical issues addressed by the reform included political, administrative, relationship with traditional rulers, inter-governmental relations on governance functions, and financial allocation sharing. For the first time in the annals of local government in Nigeria, the reform provided for multi-purpose single-tier local government councils. Consequently, they abolished the Divisional Local Administrative System practised in various parts of the federation. Besides, the reform made prescription of one hundred and fifty thousand (150,000) as a minimum population and eight hundred thousand (800,000) as the maximum population for each local government area. On the aspect of its political functionaries, the reform made provision for elected local council members. The reform also made provision for revenue grants from federal and state governments. Thus, the Federal and State Government were to give regular financial allocations to local government to be shared by twenty-five per cent (25%) equity and seventy-five per cent (75%) population (Oyewo, 1993).

Interestingly, elements of the 1976 reforms were enshrined in the 1979 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. The constitution in section 7 recognises local government as the third tier of government (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1979). Thus, the local government guaranteed to share statutory revenue allocation from the Federation Account with the federal and state governments as stipulated in section 149. The statutory functions of local government were entrenched in the Fourth Schedule of the Constitution. As a government closest to the people, precisely the third level of government in Nigeria, the law requested each local government area to prepare a yearly budget estimate to achieve its governance functions. Each state government was required to establish a unified local government service board and the Ministry of Local Government and Chieftaincy Affairs to perform community development functions besides other duties to be spelled out by the state government (Ola, 1984;

Idada, 2007). Although the 1979 Constitution gave recognition to local government as the third level of government in Nigeria, there was a seeming array of inconsistencies that subsumed it under the control of the other tiers of government.

The 1984 Local Government Reforms

The Shagari led civilian administration that came to power on October 1, 1979, was disturbed by the low performance of the Nigerian local government system. It, therefore, planned to reposition them. However, the reform proposal did not materialise because of the military's incursion into the political space on December 31, 1983. The military government led by Major-General Muhammadu Buhari quashed the new local government councils created in the Second Republic. It nevertheless retained those established in 1976. The Buhari-led military administration also recognised the need to reposition the local government system as proposed by the former civilian government. Consequently, it set up Local Government Reform Committee in 1984 with the Sultan of Sokoto, Alhaji Ibrahim Dasuki as chairman.

In its findings, the Committee blamed the poor performance of the third tier government on so many factors, which included local government defective structures; incompetent appointment and weak commitment of the council political functionaries; unhealthy meddling roles played by state governments on local government statutory affairs; the lukewarm of the state government disposition in the delay and partial release of local government statutory funds and the culture of transferring some of the functions of the local government to the state without a corresponding transfer of funds (Aransi, 2017). Some other salient findings included the different roles played by the Ministry of Local Government Affairs and the low skill of the councils' workforce and their weak commitment to their official duties (Iyoha, Ubhenin, & Aiya, 2005). The Committee's findings also indicted the state governors for exploiting the contradictions of the 1979 Constitution on the relations between the state and local governments to undermine the activities of the latter.

Commenting on the report of the Dasuki committee, Idada (2007) noted that the Committee made very striking recommendations to make the local government perform its functions well. These included the view that the creation of new local government areas should be undertaken on a ten-year interval, that the creation of new local government should be based on a population in the range of one hundred thousand

(100,000) and one hundred and fifty thousand (150,000) with the intended area to have a minimum tax-paying population of twenty thousand (20,000). Other recommendations included that the creation of a new local government and its administration should focus on geographical contiguity, administrative convenience and economic vibrancy of the area and that the creation of the new local government should be based on the wishes of traditional associations and it must be based on the community request.

Local Government Reforms under the Ibrahim Babangida Administration

The recommendations of the Dasuki Committee were not implemented before another regime of reforms of local government commenced under the Ibrahim Babangida administration. The reforms under the Babangida administration made a far positive impact on local government administration. They introduced the presidential system to the Nigerian local government system. Relying on section 5 (1) of the reform guidelines, the designation of local government chairman was changed to Chief Executive and Accounting Officer. The new rule precluded the Accounting Officer from signing vouchers and cheques while the guidelines directed Supervisory Councillors to be part of the executive arm of the local government. The Supervisory Councillors were to be appointed by the Executive Chairman and were to closely work with him through their intimate involvement in the management of their respective assigned departments. Besides, the Local Government Council made up of elected Councillors was recognised as the legislative arm of the local government with lawmaking functions (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1991).

In the history of local government in Nigeria, the guidelines created the separation of powers between the executive and the legislative arms. They specified the appointment procedures for the supervisors and election of a leader, among other things. They emphasised the relationship between the executive and legislative arms of local government to be synonymous with the constitutional requirement between the State House of Assembly, the Governor and the Commissioners. These reforms did not last long. They were reversed under the Abacha administration, thereby returning local government to their pre-1988 and 1992 reforms status.

Local Government Reforms in Nigeria's Fourth Republic

The poor performance of the Nigerian local government system sparked off another round of local government reform by the Obasanjo-led civilian administration. It started with the inauguration of a thirteen (13) member technical committee headed by the Etsu Nupe, Alhaji Usman Sanda Ndayako. Some of the core issues assigned to the committee for consideration included the review of the performance of local governments since 1999 and to advise on the desirability of retaining them as the third tier of government; an examination of the inefficiency and the high cost of governance and to provide an appropriate way out as well as the re-examination of the cost of electioneering campaigns during local government elections (Idada, 2007).

The committee found that the state and federal governments were meddling in local government affairs. Other significant findings included inadequate funding, the weak commitment of state government to local government issues, particularly the delay and partial release of funds meant for the local government. Thus, parts of the recommendations were to make the local government system autonomous and make direct disbursement of local funds as well as to scrap the Ministry of Local Government and Chieftaincy Affairs (Aransi, 2017; Aghayere, 2008). Notwithstanding the federal government's acceptance of the Committee reports, the goals set for the local government reform project were defeated as the federal government later suspended the election of local government political functionaries. It then established the State Independent Electoral Commission (SIEC) that conducted local government elections in March 2004.

What can be deduced from the preceding is that successive reforms of the Nigerian local government system have not yielded any significant improvement on grassroots governance (Agbodike, Igbokwe-Ibeto & Nkah, 2014). The relevance of the local government in Nigeria has continued to be questioned because they have deviated from their original mandate of promoting development at the grassroots (NISER cited in Olukotun, 2019).

Challenges of Local Government Reforms in Nigeria

This section discusses the reasons for the limited impact of reforms carried out in the Nigerian local government system.

Poor Implementation of Local Government Reforms

The poor implementation of the recommendations of the various committees on local government reform is one of the factors explaining the limited impact of local governments as agents of grassroots governance and development in Nigeria. This has continued to limit the effectiveness of the Nigerian local government system because most of the recommendations made by the various committees and accepted by the federal government remained unfulfilled. This is why the same problem detected by the reforms panel in 1976, 1984, 1988, and 2003 have continued to linger in the Nigerian local government system. This has turned the local government reforms in Nigeria into a rhetoric ritual that the federal government performed to draw attention and in spending public funds (Mabogunje, 2016; Aransi, 2017).

Negation of Localism in the Nigerian Local Government System

The failure of local government as an agent for grassroots development in Nigeria can be attributed to the patterns of central-local relations over the years which have been negating the tenets of localism. However, there is the need to state that central-state-local relations, as used in this study, focus on the nature of the power relations between the local government and the other two tiers of government in Nigeria, the federal and state. It is about the constitutional, political, financial, judicial and administrative relationships between local government and other tiers of government.

It is regrettable to note that local governments in Nigeria are not appropriately placed to engender good governance at the grassroots level. There is plethora of issues undermining the effectiveness of the Nigerian local government system. Central among them is that of autonomy, which in turn explains the crisis of funds, administration, law, and leadership that are presenting bedevilling local government performance (Mabogunje, 2016). Local government autonomy has been a threat to grassroots

development in Nigeria (Aransi, 2017). It is therefore not strange that the need to enhance autonomy found expression in the series of administrative reforms such as the 1976, 1984, 1988, 1991, and 2003 local government reforms which were all tailored at strengthening grassroots governance.

For example, the worrisome encroachment on local government affairs by state governments was one of the issues intended to be addressed by the Alhaji Shehu Shagari civilian administration before a military coup sacked it on December 31, 1983. The military government led by Major –General Muhammadu Buhari also frowned at such encroachment and emplaced a reform in 1984. Similarly, the need to enhance the autonomy of local government was on the top of the agenda of the Ibrahim Babangida led administration. Former President Babangida was said to have declared among other things that his administration was committed to making local government a real third tier of government in practice with full autonomy (Aghayere, 2008).

Though successive reforms were at different times geared towards deepening localism in local governance, poor implementation as noted earlier and lack of commitment particularly by the various state governments have tended to undermine the effectiveness of such reforms. Consequently the Nigerian local government system remains more or less a residual item of the state governments.

The Inconsistencies in the Constitutions

One factor that has not allowed local government to function optimally as agents for grassroots development despite the series of reforms can be gleaned from the prevailing relations between local government and other tiers of government, particularly the state. These can be discerned from the provisions in the 1999 Constitution (as amended).

- (i) Section 7(1) of the 1999 Constitution (as amended) provides for a democratically elected local government council. The same section paradoxically states that the State House of Assembly shall make law for the establishment, structure, composition, functions and finance of local government. This provision implies that even though local governments are seen as the third tier level of government, the councils have no relevance concerning issues of local government structure, creation,

finance, and control. The power to create and direct the workings of local government rests on the shoulder of the State House of Assembly.

- (ii) Section 7(3) of the 1999 Constitution (as amended) requires the State Houses of Assembly to make a law establishing Economic Planning Board to facilitate the participation of local government in the economic activities of the state. Here, the Local Government council, which is the lawmaking organ of the local government, has no definite role.
- (iii) Local governments in Nigeria rely mainly on the revenue from the Federation Account. Section 162 (6) of the 1999 Constitution as amended stipulates that each state of the federation shall maintain a special account called “State Joint Local Government Account” into which all the allocations due to local governments of the state on the Federation Account and from the State Government shall be paid.

Suffice it to say that the local government chairman is not one of the signatories to the Account. This connotes diminution of local government autonomy and a defective arrangement in which the law is undermining the efficiency of local government in Nigeria. This explains why local governments do not get what is due to them from the state governments (Mabogunje, 2016).

- (iv) Section 197(1) (b) of the 1999 Constitution (as amended) provides for the State Independent Electoral Commission (SIEC); an agency of the state charged with the task of conducting elections into local government councils. (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999).

Apart from the above, other sharp practices have continued to undermine the autonomy of local government. These include:

- (i) The existence of the Ministry of Local Government and Chieftaincy Affairs charged with the task of supervising local governments within the state. Hence, the Chief Executive elected by the electorate at the grassroots level is being made to be accountable to the Commissioner for

Local Government and Chieftaincy Affairs appointed by the Governor probably and mostly in sympathy of his political party.

- (ii) There are agencies such as the Local Government Service Commission charged with the task of recruiting, training, posting, promotion and disciplining of local government staff, which is in the direct control of the state government.
- (iii) The practice of refusing to conduct elections into the Local government councils. Rather than holding elections, state governments have imbibed the culture of appointing caretaker or management committees to run the affairs of the councils. Most members of such committees owed their allegiance to the governors that appointed them rather than the local people they ought to represent, and they are times not familiar with the terrain they presided over or even not from the vicinity or community. They got appointed as a reward for patronage to the political party.

Resistance to Local Government Autonomy by State Governments

In clear terms, since the commencement of the Fourth Republic on May 29, 1999, the fortunes of local governments have not improved. Instead, the patterns of central-local relations have continued to undermine the principles of localism in the Nigerian local government system. More than ever before, local governments are now seen as a mere extension of the state, thereby lacking the powers to function without taking directives and instructions from the state government. The state governors have continued to rely on section 7(1) of the constitution (as amended) to manipulate local government affairs. For instance, the former Osun State Governor, Mr Rauf Aregbesola frantically and unconstitutionally changed the established coat of arms of the local governments in Osun State to a symbol of “Omonluabi,” which is unknown to the constitution. He went further to change the constitutional designation of “Executive Chairman” to “Executive Secretary.” Thus, in his eight years administration in Osun State, Local Government was operated as a unit under his watch. There was no local election conducted for his eight years tenure (2010 November 18 to 2018 November, 18) in the State. The acclaimed Executive Secretaries of the Local Governments were not even made to report directly to the Governor. Instead, they were answerable to the Commissioner for the Ministry of Local Government and Chieftaincy (Jannah, 2017).

The narratives on the encroachment of the powers of a typical local government in Nigeria and the relegation of its values in governance are almost the same in most states of the federation. More worrisome is the attitude of many state governments over the issue of autonomy of local government in Nigeria. Even though the proposed amendments, if completed, can put local governments on the proper pedestal that would enable them to drive grassroots development; the reaction of the majority of the states in the federation to local government autonomy has been unusual and questionable. The legislative houses of many states of the federation are yet to pass the bill, granting relative autonomy to Nigerian local governments. For instance, as of December 2018, only ten of the thirty-six states had given their support to the issue of local government autonomy. Ever since then, local governments in Nigeria have continued to exist under the tutelage of each state government of the federation.

Enhancing the Effectiveness of Local Governments in Nigeria

Section 7 (2) (i) of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended) stipulates that Local Governments are to protect the common interest of the community in their areas of jurisdiction. In doing this, local governments are to embark on community projects that have the capacity of improving the wellbeing of the people. Section 7 (3) of the same constitution corroborates this. It states that it shall be the duty of a Local Government Council within the state to participate in economic planning and development in its area of jurisdiction. The 1999 Constitution equally spells out the functions of Local Government Councils in the Fourth Schedule. The functions are expressly directed at making the Nigerian local government system as effective agent of grassroots governance and development.

However, as noted earlier in this study, the narratives on the Nigerian local government system show that it has been that of continuous reforms with minimal results. The reasons for this have been attributed to arrays of factors, which include the distorted central-local relations that have undermined the tenets of localism, lack of autonomy, inadequate funding, and poor implementation of recommendations for reforms among others. In the light of the foregoing, the rain of constitutional inconsistencies, poor implementation of reforms, alienation of citizens from participation in the governance of their local area and meddling of State Governments into Local Government Council affairs, which have been identified to be associated

with the aforesaid challenges of the Nigerian Local government system require urgent redress through reforms.

Consequently, there is the need for the Federal Government to genuinely superintend the repositioning of the Local Government system in Nigeria. This should entail measures aimed at enhancing the much needed autonomy of the Nigerian local government system. To achieve this, efforts should be made to reduce the paternalistic control of local governments by the state governments and should entail the return to the practice under the Babangida-led administration when local governments were receiving their monthly statutory allocation directly from the Federation Account.

Similarly, there is the need to amend Section 162 (6) of the 1999 Constitution with the view to abolishing the Joint State Local Government Account which over the years has been used by various state governments to starve Local Government of funds needed for development. This will enhance the financial autonomy of local governments. In the same vein, there is the need to scrap some agencies of the State governments that are being used to control local governments such as the Ministry of Local Government and Chieftaincy Affairs and the Local Government Service Commission.

Furthermore, the effectiveness of the Nigerian local government system can be enhanced through the active participation of the people at the grassroots. Consequently, there is the need to promote local democracy through the election of political office holders at the local government level. This will guard against the use of Caretaker or Management committees to run the affairs of local councils.

Discussion in this section of the study aptly showed that measures that can make local governments purposeful and effective agents of grassroots governance and development in Nigeria are diverse and many. However, the effectiveness of the aforementioned measures to enhance the effectiveness of the Nigerian local government system depends on strong political will of political leaders in Nigeria to carry out the much needed reforms at the local government level. Simply put, strengthening the Nigerian local government system requires a purposeful political leadership committed to the promotion of good governance and development at the grassroots in Nigeria.

CONCLUSION

Discussions in the preceding sections aptly show that the patterns of power relations between local government and other tiers of government have not allowed the former to drive grassroots governance and development in Nigeria. The implication of the foregoing is that over the years, the tenets of localism have been absent in the administration of local government in Nigeria. Many state governments since 1979 have not allowed for elected local government councils. What prevails in most states of the federation is that of caretaker or management committees made up of party faithful who are not familiar with the locality but being appointed to run the affairs of the local government. Hence, the attachment of those who run local government affairs to the people at the grassroots level is absent. Consequently, their commitment is not to the community but to the governor that appointed them. This is a negation of the tenets of localism.

As contained in the various local government reforms reports, the master-servant relations between local government and other tiers of government that promote central-local hierarchical ties have continued to undermine the autonomy of local government. The overbearing nature particularly of the state government is paralysing the activities of the local government (Alao, Osadeke & Owolabi, 2015) Under the Babangida administration; efforts were made to address the paternalistic dependence of the local government on the state government. The expected successes were not allowed to manifest due to a series of inconsistent policies. At a point, the Ministry of Local Government and Chieftaincy Affairs and the Local Government Service Commission were scrapped; the allocations to the government were paid directly to the local government but were later reversed. In the on-going Fourth Republic that came into being in 1999, one would have expected that the return to civilian rule would strengthen the Nigerian local government system. Ironically most of the efforts made under the military, especially the Babangida military administration in promoting the autonomy of local government have been rubbished and jettisoned. Local governments in nearly all the states of the federation have therefore continued to exist as an appendage of the state governments.

Notwithstanding the gloomy picture of the Nigerian local government system that has been painted over the years, local governments still have vital roles to play in Nigeria's social, economic, and political development. This was rightly observed in the

findings of the 1976, 1984, 1988, and 2003 reforms. Therefore, for local governments in Nigeria to serve as the agents of grassroots development, the federal and state governments should provide an atmosphere conducive for each single-tier of government in Nigeria especially the local government to perform its functions effectively. At least, the atmosphere that will enable local governments to perform their functions must guarantee autonomy. Besides, such an atmosphere must guarantee restriction of state governments to their constitutional roles, incorruptible good leadership, adequate funding, judicious implementation of local government reforms, and reorientation of Nigerian leadership and promotion of goodwill in Nigerian public service (Aransi, 2014; Gboyega; 1987; and Mabogunje, 2016).

To drive grassroots governance and development in Nigeria, local governments must be granted the required autonomy, which entails the need to revisit the power relations between local government and the other tiers of government.

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