

Fluidity in democratic local governance: the Achilles' heel of Nigerian Local Government

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Democratic local governance emerged in Nigeria in the 1950s as a result of the granting of regional self-government status by the British colonial government. After more than sixty years of local democracy in the country, it is regrettable that while local government is of strategic importance in the national development process, its contribution has not been substantial. This is in spite of enormous resources that have been committed to ensuring that it contributes significantly to the national development process. Advancing the capacity of local governments to act effectively and accountably requires democratic local governance, relative autonomy and the political will of the local actors to engage in activities that significantly benefit the local populace. The argument of this paper is that, while these three factors are prerequisites for sound local government, the issue of democratic local governance is the key factor which when addressed will drive and strengthen the other two factors to put local government on a sound footing. Where democratic local governance advances and flourishes, decentralisation becomes more effective and local governments and the communities concerned gain the authority, resources, and skills to make responsive choices and to act on them effectively and accountably.

Keywords: Democratic local governance, local government, Nigeria.

Introduction

Local government is an ancient institution with an evolving conceptualisation. Politics which highlights the participation of the local citizenry in goal setting and decision making is central to the concept of local government. Government activities when conducted from a central point and far away from the people tend to become impersonal, and against this impersonality or abstract view there is perpetual rebellion. Localities are not simply areas and sites, but groups of people, living together as neighbours. They feel that they differ from the abstract average of humanity legislated for by the government and claim discretion to apply its uniform rules in a manner more closely fitting their real needs and their own ideas of themselves. At this point, the essence of local government takes form on the premise that it will check the danger of absolutism. Also important is the fact that, with the amount and the variety of work to be done country-wide by government, it is impossible for a single authority directly to undertake its performance. The government, too, does not have the requisite knowledge of all the diverse problems which are local in character. In this regard, Laski (1975:411) rightly observed that we cannot realise the full benefit of democratic government unless we begin with the admission that all problems in their incidence require decisions taken at the place, and by the persons by whom, the incidence is most deeply felt. Democracy at macro-level is nourished and takes a firm root when there is a local government that ensures participation of the local people in decision making to meet local needs. This paper contends that when there is disconnect that makes the participation of the local populace difficult or stunted, democratic local governance becomes a mirage and the very essence of local government a dream.

In effect, most countries have a system of local government for two reasons; the first reason is to institutionalise local democracy and the second is for it to serve as provider of local services. Using it as an instrument of local democracy, politicians elected to local councils make decisions on behalf of local communities, thus serving to safeguard against central government domination (Weeks 2009). The strengths of local government as a democratic instrument are its closeness to the population, its elected status, its accessibility and the opportunity it provides for public participation in the democratic process (Callanan & Keogan 2003).

Background and context of Nigerian Local Government

As is the case in several developing countries, the performance of local governments in Nigeria has been largely below expectation. The Political Bureau (1987:120) in its report admitted this when it averred that while local government is of strategic importance in the national development process, its contribution has not been substantial. This is despite enormous resources that have been committed to ensuring that it contributes significantly to the national development process. The third tier of government in Nigeria is still characterised by low revenue generation ability; inability to provide adequate services and amenities both in quantitative and qualitative terms; tendency to prepare ambitious budgets; and an inability to avail themselves of the benefits of development planning and to live up to the expectations of

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their clientele. For the citizenry at large, especially the illiterate and rural communities who form the bulk of the population of the local governments, there is a great deal of frustration arising from the poor performance of local governments in the country over the years (Ola & Tonwe 2005). This situation is not peculiar to Nigeria. A similar scenario is witnessed in other developing countries. The Nigerian case, however, provides us with facts which when analysed provide pathological clues to the maladies afflicting local governments in most less developed countries.

A basic constraint for the proper functioning of local governments is the under-developed nature of the localities. There seems to be a reciprocal cause and effect relationship between the degree of economic development and the degree of efficacy of local government. The more stagnant and economically poor a locality is, the fewer are the resources that can be taxed to generate revenue. Bleak income results in fiscal anaemia, which in turn is one of the causes for the general debility of local governments. The problem of limited resources has encouraged the politics of scarcity, in which dominant groups/elites manipulate and divert funds to nurse their constituencies with political motives. This results in unbalanced development. Unequal distribution of benefits creates hostilities, envy and frustration which make it difficult to achieve harmony between heterogeneous elements of the locality. Such features of government at the local level are antipathetic to the development of the localities and even the onerous task of national integration, which is intensely desired by resurgent nations but remains a pious wish due to harsh internal realities (Ola & Tonwe 2005).

The critical factors that have stultified the performance of the third tier of the government in the Nigerian political system emanate from the macro level. The state governments with their advantageous position, superior status and more qualified manpower pool have exhibited a tendency to eclipse local governments in development activities. Also important is the fact that despite recognition of local governments as partners in the national development process, the higher levels of government have not made serious efforts to draw them into the mainstream of national development.

The problems facing the Nigerian local government system are no doubt multifarious. These problems will fizzle away if three factors are positively achieved. They are:

1. local self-government which provides local people with the opportunity to participate in government through meaningful elections and to have access to public officials to express their opinions by organised and individual activity;
2. local governments with relative autonomy and discretionary authority to act without strict supervision and restriction from the macro government; and
3. the will and the authority of the local government as an institution to undertake activities that deeply affect the lives of people (Lockard 1968:451-9; Oyediran 2001:202-208).

The argument of this paper is that, while these three factors are pre-requisites for a sound local government system, the issue of local self government, i.e. democratic local governance, is the core factor which when addressed will drive and strengthen the other two factors to put local government on a sound footing. The assumption of leadership of regional legislatures by Nigerian politicians as a result of the granting of regional self-government status by the British colonial government led to the emergence of democratic local government in the 1950s; this marked the dwindling of authority of traditional rulers in favour of elected local government representatives. After more than sixty years of democratisation, it is regrettable that in systemic terms, the interaction between local government and the macro system in Nigeria has only led to fluid democratic local governance, which has negatively affected the consolidation of local autonomy and the political will to undertake projects that substantially affect the lives of the people.

Theoretical framework

The General Systems Theory (GST) which is considered appropriate for the present work was developed by Ludwig von Bertalanffy (1928). Several scholars have contributed in no small measure to its analysis and understanding. These writers include Almond (1960); Easton (1965); Kast and Rosenzweig (1970); Laslo (1972); Kauffman (1980); Adamolekun (1983); Offiong (1996); Capra (1999) and Cummings (2001). The general systems theory is a holistic, process-oriented model of the universe in which all parts are mutually affecting. It stands in sharp contrast to the traditional linear, mechanistic model in which the universe is reduced to an assemblage of unrelated entities operating in a manner in which there is only one discrete cause for every event. The systems theory states that everything is fundamentally interrelated; input into one aspect of a complex system will affect other aspects of that system, which will in turn affect other aspects of the system and so on and so forth. In effect, it is made up of subsystems which together make up the system. The subsystems are assigned specific functions and provided with the appropriate framework (inputs) to optimally discharge their responsibilities (outputs). The existence of appropriate inputs in the subsystems is a precondition for them to contribute optimally to the system as a whole. In contrast, distortions and instability are experienced in the system where the required inputs for the subsystems are lacking. Examination of the pull and push factors in the Nigerian political system

which is an organised whole with identifiable, interrelated structures (states and local governments) in the context of the supra system (environment) with which it interacts in the cause of processing the inputs into outputs is core to this paper. The General System Theory has therefore been used as an analytical framework to explain the factors involved in the fluidity of democratic local governance in Nigeria. Some of the key concerns of local government administration as it relates to assessing power and influence, understanding the dynamics of inter-group relationships, system balance (*homeostasis*), and considering the changes involved in planning development activities, can be understood and described using General Systems Theory.

Democratic local governance in Nigeria: the pull and push systemic factors

Nigeria is one of the very few countries that have given constitutional recognition to local government as a third tier of government. The various Constitutions of the Federal Republic of Nigeria since 1979 guaranteed a system of local government by democratically elected local government councils in the country. Section 7(1) of the 1999 Constitution in this regard specifically states that:

The system of local governments by democratically elected local government councils is under this constitution guaranteed, and accordingly, the Government of every State shall ensure their existence under law which provides for their establishment, structure, composition finance and functions of such council.

In spite of this constitutional provision, local government in the country since 1979 has been largely undemocratic. This development can be explained in systemic terms. Both the federal and state governments were responsible for stalling the materialisation of the system of local government by democratically elected local government councils guaranteed by the constitution.

October 1, 1979 witnessed the swearing in of democratically elected civilian governments at the State and Federal levels and the return of the military to the barracks. Between October 1, 1979 and December of the same year when the tenure of Local Government Councils was due to expire, dissolution of Local Government Councils by state governors across the country was prevalent. Only a few councils were allowed to complete their tenure before they were dissolved. Gradually, all the local Government Councils in Nigeria were dissolved by each state government and replaced with caretaker committees appointed on a partisan basis by state governors. This action of the state governors grossly undermined a system of local government by democratically elected local government councils guaranteed by the Constitution.

Granted that the various state local government laws in the country empower the governor of the state to order inquiries into the activities of local governments and to suspend any defaulting local government council, this power was used in a rather irresponsible manner by state governors during the Second Republic. This is evident from the fact that inquiries were not instituted by the state governors, which showed that the Local Government Councils faulted in the discharge of their functions in a manner not conducive to the welfare of the inhabitants of their areas of authority as required by law before the dissolution of the Councils.

An important constitutional decision is worth mentioning here. In a case brought before the Chief Judge of the defunct Bendel State (now Edo and Delta states) by six legislators of the then Bendel State House of Assembly against the State Government for dissolving all the local government councils in the State and replacing them with Caretaker Committees, he ruled that from the evidence before the court there was no proof that the Local Government Councils were charged with bad government, investigated and faulted before their dissolution was ordered by the State Governor (Ola 1983:148). This action of the State Governor, he contended, was inconsistent with the Bendel State Local Government Edict of 1976, which stipulated that an inquiry must be conducted before any local government can be dissolved and that such wholesale dissolution of the entire third tier of government was not in any way envisaged by the 1979 Constitution.

The 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria obviously does also not envisage a vacuum which caretaker committees would have to fill for a period spanning two years. While it is a fact that the mass dissolution of local government councils by the state governors grossly undermined a system of local government by democratically elected local government councils guaranteed by the constitution, the main issue here is the legality of the actions of the state governors in ordering the dissolution of the councils. The non-conducting of Local Government elections during the Second Republic (1979-1983) was a more serious issue, as it made a complete mockery of a system of local government by democratically elected local government councils guaranteed by the 1979 Constitution. What immediately comes to mind here is why it is that the state governments did not conduct local government elections between 1979 and 1983 after the dissolution of the Local Government Councils or after the expiration of the tenure of the Councils in December, 1979. To do justice to this issue, Gboyega (1987:175-187) has brilliantly attempted an examination of the relevant

provisions of the Constitution with regard to the regulation and conduct of local government elections and the part played by all the parties concerned.

The 1979 Constitution (Second Schedule, Part II, Item E-11) empowered the National Legislative Assembly to make laws for the registration of voters and the procedure for regulating local government elections in the country. The state Legislative Assemblies are also empowered to make laws with respect to local government elections in addition to, but not inconsistent with, any law made by the National Assembly (Item E-12). Further, the constitution empowered the Federal Electoral Commission to ensure that the register of voters is prepared and maintained in such a form as to facilitate its use for the purpose of elections to local government councils (Third Schedule Part I, Section 69). At the state level the Electoral Commission is empowered only to organise, undertake and supervise all elections to local government councils within that state (Part II, Section 79).

Gboyega's analysis of the various provisions relating to the conduct of local government elections clearly reveals that if local government elections were to be held, the Federal Authorities would have to play a leading role in the election process. Firstly, the National Assembly would have had to pass an Electoral Law to authorise the revision of the register of voters or the preparation of a fresh one. Secondly, the Federal Electoral Commission would have to prepare the voters' register in a manner which would make it suitable for the conduct of local government elections. Regrettably, the Electoral Act which would enable the Federal Electoral Commission to commence work on the revision of the voters' register suitable for the conduct of local government elections was not passed until August 1982. The revision of the voters' register was completed by the Federal Electoral Commission just before the general elections commenced in August, 1983.

The delay by the National Assembly in passing the Electoral Law to enable the Federal Electoral Commission to perform its functions in the country was a major hurdle in the way of operationalising the system of local government by democratically elected local government councils as guaranteed by the 1979 Constitution. As Gboyega (1987:177) rightly noted, this point is of fundamental importance because there is a general notion that the non-conducting of local government elections in the country was occasioned by the blatant refusal of the State, which was solely responsible for the failure of the system of local government by democratically elected local government councils guaranteed by the Constitution during the Second Republic. While it was obvious that the state governments were generally not enthusiastic about holding local government elections, it must be stressed that no state government would have been able to hold local government elections without the Federal Authorities first playing their part in the electoral process. Gboyega cited an important legal tussle in this regard to drive home this point. In a case filed against the Lagos State Government which attempted to hold elections to the Local Government Councils in the State, the trial judge held that from the evidence before the court there was no valid electoral register on the basis of which local government elections could be held. The Lagos State Government was thus prevented from conducting local government elections. It was obvious, therefore, that had other states attempted to hold local government elections, a similar court ruling would have restrained them from doing so.

Incidentally, when the Electoral Law was eventually passed by the National Assembly in August 1982, it provided that elections to all local government councils in the country be held on the same day and the date would be fixed by the Federal Electoral Commission. In this regard, the Chairman of the Federal Electoral Commission had stressed, hardly one month before the collapse of the Second Republic, that, come what may, local government elections were to be held throughout the country in January, 1984 in compliance with the Electoral Act. This further validates the contention that the responsibility for ensuring that local government elections were held in the country was primarily that of the Federal Authorities.

The new military regime appointed sole administrators for all the local government councils in the country in 1984. Elections were not held for local government councils in the country until the Transition of Civil Rule Programme of General Babangida began. It was in 1987 that another election for local government councils was held, the previous one having taken place in 1976. Another election was held in 1990 for the local government council members at the expiration of the tenure of those elected in 1987. These elected councils were dissolved in 1993. Caretaker committees mostly dominated by retired military officers were appointed to handle the affairs of local government level in the country. These were appointed by the Federal Military Government.

While the states were given an enhanced role in the conduct of local government elections in the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, the Federal Government is still required to play a significant role. At least, the revision of the voters' register is undertaken by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) set up by the Federal Government. The non-conducting of local government elections in the country until 2004 and the use of caretaker committees in Nigeria are traceable to the fact that the election that brought the former Local Government Councils into being was held under the provisions of the Local Government (Basic Constitutional and Transitional Provisions) Decree

No. 36 of 1998 under Abdulsalam Abubakar's administration. Section 7 of the said Decree prescribed a three-year tenure for all the Local Government Councils. This Decree was repealed through the Federal Republic of Nigeria (Certain Consequential Repeals) Decree No. 63 of 1999, which became effective on May 29, 1999. Because there was no broad and popular consensus on the 1999 Constitution, as well as the hush-hush manner in which the Constitution was released, adequate provision was not made for the tenure of the various local governments in the country.

The perceived ambiguity in the Constitution provided impetus for the National Assembly and the state houses of assembly to turn the local government councils into hunting grounds. The National Assembly in the exercise of its legislative powers promulgated the 2001 Electoral Act, which the President assented to on December 6, 2001. The Act sought among other things to increase or alter the tenure of office of elected officers of Local Government Councils in Nigeria. The attorneys general of the 36 states challenged this action and the Supreme Court ruled that the National Assembly cannot validly enact any law to increase or otherwise alter the tenure of elected officers either as Chairman and Councillors of Local Government Councils except in relation to the Federal Capital Territory alone. By this judgement, the Supreme Court placed the whole question of the control of Local Governments at the doorsteps of the various state governments and their houses of assembly.

The non-charitable state governments annexed the Local Government system in Nigeria since the judgement of the Supreme Court on the tenure and control of the Local Governments in March 2002. This continued until 2004 when local government elections were held across the country. The chronology of local government administration as painstakingly presented below by Aluko (2006) clearly shows the incessant default on the part of state authorities to conduct local government elections in Nigeria since 1976.

- i. 1976-1979: Elected council with election on personal merit (Zero party parliamentary system).
- ii. October-1979 December 1983: Hand-picked (i.e. selected) Local Government Chairmen and Councillors.
- iii. January 1984-August 1985: Sole administrators/Management Council.
- iv. August 1984-December 1987: Management Committee System with Sole Administrator (Civil Servant as chairmen).
- v. January 1988-July 1989: Elected Chairmen and Councillors with Supervisors all elected on personal merit/recognition.
- vi. August 1989-December 1990: Management Committees with Sole administrators (Civil Servant as chairmen).
- vii. January 1991-November 1993: Elected Local Government Councils on party basis (Social Democratic Party (SDP) and National Republican Convention (NRC),
- viii. November 1993-April 1994: Administration of Local Government by the Secretaries (Director of Personnel Management (DPM) under the Military Administrator's (MILAD) directive.
- ix. April 1994-1997: Selected Chairmen and 4 Supervisors (Indigenes) to run the affairs of the Councils.
- x. 1997-June 1998: Elected councils of the 5 registered political parties under Abacha Regime.
- xi. July 1998-May 1999, Sole Administrators (Civil servants) with 4 Indigenes selected as supervisors.
- xii. June 1999-June 2002: Elected council on political party basis (Return to civilian era 4th Republic) (Presidential system).
- xiii. June 2002-June 2003: Selected councils by state governors called Transition Committees.
- xiv. June 2003-26 March 2004: No uniform system initially; some states used Directors of Personnel Management of the Local Government; others used the state government party supporters to form new *transition committees*. All states later opted for the latter arrangement.
- xv. 27 March 2004-30 March, 2007: Councils elected on a party basis, second experiment under the 4th Republic.
- xvi. As at May 2012: 25 of the 36 states are yet to conduct elections. Selected party members by state governors called Transition Committees or Management Committees run local government affairs.

The inaction of the Federal Authorities and the reluctance of the state governments in bringing to fruition the system of local government by democratically elected local government councils guaranteed by the Constitution was mainly a matter of political convenience. While the non-conducting of local government elections during the Second Republic was at the expense of the flowering of local governments, it suited the design of the political parties in the country during this period.

The 1979 general elections saw the National Party of Nigeria (which also won the presidential elections) clinching seven states, the Unity Party of Nigeria five, the Nigerian People Party three, the Great Nigeria Peoples Party two, and the People's Redemption Party two states in the gubernatorial elections in the country. Thus, all five political parties were in control of two or more elements of state government machinery. For the different political parties at the state level, the continuous use of caretaker committees appointed on a partisan basis by the state governors was a matter of political

convenience. The absolute control of all local government councils by state governors would not have been possible in most cases, had elections been conducted. It was also politically convenient to use the caretaker committees to step up their popularity at the local government level before contemplating the conducting of elections. It is worth mentioning here that, while the singularly unsuccessful move by the Lagos State Government to hold local government elections in 1981 must be commended, it must be emphasised that the state would not have been so enthusiastic about conducting the elections if the victory of the ruling party in all the Local Government Councils in the state had not been likely. This is obvious from the fact that Lagos State is one of the states in the country where all the State Legislative Assembly seats were won by one political party in the 1979 general elections.

In the case of the ruling party at the national level, its victory at the 1979 general elections could not be said to be a landslide. The delay by the Federal Authorities in taking the necessary steps to conduct local government elections may not be unconnected with the fact that the ruling party at the national level in the country was more interested in stepping up its nationwide popularity before holding the elections. This contention can be buttressed by the fact that efforts were geared up towards holding local government elections after the ruling party at the national level made gains in the 1983 general elections. The National Party of Nigeria, apart from winning the Presidency, captured ten states in the gubernatorial elections, leaving four to the Unity Party of Nigeria, two to the Nigerian Peoples Party, two to the Peoples Redemption Party, and one to the Great Nigeria Peoples Party. In the fourth republic, the political class has also exhibited the same tendencies. The Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) won the 2003 general elections overwhelmingly. Ironically, in spite of the resounding victory, the party was not in a hurry to conduct local government elections in the country. While the fortunes of the PDP dropped slightly in the 2003 and 2011 general elections, the attitude of the federal government to local government elections has not changed. As at June 2012, in twenty-five (25) states out of the thirty-six states in the country, local governments are still managed by Transition Committees. The system of local government by democratically elected local councils guaranteed by the constitution has not come to fruition because the higher levels of government used the third tier of government for the furtherance of their political goals.

Explaining the insensitivity of supra authorities

While fundamental changes aimed at placing the third tier of government on a sound footing have emerged in the process of the modernisation of the country's federal polity, these changes have not led to the flowering of local government. This is attributable to the fact that the federal and state governments, on whose shoulders rest the responsibility of ensuring that these changes are effected, have not been responsive and committed to playing their respective roles in the emergent arrangement in the country.

The federal Government did not take the appropriate steps to ensure the materialisation of the system of local government by democratically elected local government councils guaranteed by the constitution between 1979 and 1983 and between 2002 and 2004, because it suited the ruling elites at the federal level. Since 2007, some states are still nonchalant about holding local government elections. These lapses on the part of the federal government created an opportunity for the state governments to run the affairs of the local government councils through appointed caretaker committees. Thus, it may be said that the local government system in the country has continued to deteriorate because of the nonchalant attitude of politicians at the helms of affairs at the macro levels of the polity. Since 2007, the posture of state governments to conduct local government elections whenever they deem fit remains unchallenged. Such behavioural aspects of the federal and state governments only show that it is inappropriate to look into institutional and legislative prescriptions as reflecting a faithful picture of reality. The divergence between precept and practice and the resultant discontentment indicate the need for finding probable explanations for such developments. Some conceptualisations may be helpful in this regard.

The stark reality of competitive democratic politics is that a government, irrespective of its level, depends for its effectiveness on a decision-making apparatus that is concerned with ultimate political power (Riggs 1964:313). Mostly, the national/state elites are interested in the substance rather than the desirable form of politics. Motivated by the logic of pragmatic politics, they perceive and use government at the local level to serve their specific political interests. The ruling political parties endeavour to capture local government machinery to consolidate their position and have a firm grip over the grassroots support. Similarly, the non-ruling political parties are found to show an unusual interest in capturing local government machinery, because a network of control over local bodies is perceived by them as useful in battering against the ruling political parties which are entrenched at the state and federal levels of the polity. The interests of the third tier of government have been, time and again, sacrificed by macro governments (federal as well as states) to suit their convenience and subserve their narrow partisan ends. In the light of the above it is easy to comprehend reasons for:

- i. Federal lapse in causing voters' lists to be prepared in the Second Republic and now again in the Fourth Republic.

ii. Wanton disregard for law by state governments in dissolving and creating more local government councils

In view of the fact that such behaviours of governments and political parties are a peculiarity of modernising (in contrast to modernised) polities, the issue needs to be further classified. Riggs has tried to explain such inter-governmental behavioural peculiarities in terms of the compatibility of interests among different levels of government. His (Riggs 1964:313) hypothesis is that:

the strength of local self government within a national union varies directly with the compatibility of interests and needs of the external and internal clientele of local government. The more developed a society, the more compatible these interests tend to become, hence the easier it is for an external (central) government to permit devolution of power to local authorities and the more attractive it becomes for internal (local) groups to seek more autonomy. The more prismatic a system is, the greater the incompatibility of internal and external clientele demands.

The incompatibility of interests between state and local governments leads to another abnormality. This pertains to the concentration of power and centralisation of authority at the state headquarters. Such a phenomenon is specifically found in countries characterised by negative development. Although the higher level ruling elites are aware of the demerits of centralisation, still they are reluctant to liberalise control due to their apprehension of incompatibility of interests, although the *alibi* used by them is the immaturity and incapability of local government. The more the state governments tighten their control over localities, the more it angers and alienates the local elites. Consequently, discord and discontent are intensified, triggering the demand for more strengthening of minority rights. To counteract such trends, the usual remedy sought is sweeping legal reforms to strengthen local self-government. The approach, however, rebounds; instead of removing it aggravates prevailing tensions in the system if the basis of modernisation for such transformation is not created.

Often, state governments are unmindful of the essential elements of political modernisation. Worse still, they are not in a position to fully appreciate the adverse implications of their actions for political modernisation and socio-economic development. This contention is substantiated by the way state governments dissolved the democratically elected local government councils and replaced them with nominated management committees. It served their transient political purpose of having compliant and obedient local agencies. But it weakened the process of political modernisation at the local level. The nominated caretaker/management committees blocked the operationalisation of key elements in the political modernisation syndrome; viz. equality, capacity and diffusion. The nominated committees by their inherent nature were unable to protest or resist the act of malfeasance and misappropriation on the part of the state government of local government constitutionally allotted revenue. Nominated committees cannot exercise genuine democratic control over local government personnel. The local civil service which is independent of the local government councils to a significant extent is not required even to be responsible to democratically elected local government councils in a number of instances. This would only enhance bureaucracy at the local government level.

Conclusion

The inconsistency and incongruent working of the country's modernising federal polity has caused distortions in the political system in general and created moribund conditions for the third tier of government in particular. Nigeria presents a paradox in which macro-democratic governments have throttled grassroots democracy, whereas a non-democratic military had to step in to remedy the distorted political system and resuscitate grassroots democracy. In contrast, where democratic local governance advances and flourishes, decentralisation becomes more effective and local governments and the communities concerned gain the authority, resources, and skills to make responsive choices and to act on them effectively and accountably. Advancing the capacity of local governments to act effectively and accountably requires promoting the desire and capacity of individual citizens and civil society organisations to take responsibility for their communities, participate in local priority-setting, assist in the implementation of those decisions, and then monitor their effectiveness. In all of these, democratic local governance is core. This study therefore argues that unless democratic local governance overcomes its fluid state in Nigeria, decentralisation to local authorities will remain ineffective and local authorities will not have the push to engage in activities that will deeply affect the lives of the local populace positively.

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