



Local Government Autonomy in Nigeria: Implications for Quality Service Delivery at the Grassroots Level

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Abstract

Local government (LG) is the third tier of government that is domesticated at the grassroots level outside the State and Federal governments. LGs are established to ensure effective governance at the local level. Nigeria adopted federal system that envisages autonomy for every level of government. Contrarily, there has been the issue of LG inability to ensure the provision of quality infrastructural and developmental projects, its inability to initiate, implement and execute projects at the localities according to constitutional provisions. All these are attributed to the state government dominance of the affairs of LGs. As such, this paper intends to x-ray the implications of local government autonomy to quality service delivery on the grassroots populace, especially in the areas of political, administrative and fiscal autonomy. We considered Systems theory as apt for this paper. Methodologically, qualitative approach was used. Extant literatures were conceptually and empirically reviewed. Conclusively, we observed significant low service delivery hugely linked to lack of LGs autonomy. To this extent we recommend that LGs should be granted autonomy in order to enhance effectiveness, efficiency and quality service delivery to the people at the grassroots.

Keywords: Local Government; Political Autonomy; Administrative Autonomy; Fiscal Autonomy.

Citation of article: Okorie, C. *et al* (2023). Local Government Autonomy in Nigeria: Implications for Quality Service Delivery at the Grassroots Level, *African Journal of Politics and Administrative Studies AJPAS*, 16(2): 293-312

Dated Submitted: 21/08/2023 **Date Accepted:** 19/09/2023 **Date Published:** December, 2023



Introduction

In recent times, issues of Local government autonomy (LGA) have generated debates among scholars (Hidayat, 2017; WHO, 2018). Significant contributors seem to favor complete autonomy to LGs given the volume of expected services and considering large population resident at the local government areas and their role in shaping government policies as well as a measure of democratic governance. The argument has been that lack of LG autonomy is directly responsible to poor services at the LG level. These services were contained in the 1999 Constitution of the federal republic of Nigeria, such as: political (Hidayat, 2017), bureaucratic (Kuhlmann, and Wayenberg, 2016) as well as financial (Kyriacou, et al., 2015 and Zareh, et al., 2015). Others have blamed poor services at the LG level on a number of other factors such as leadership (Uche, 2014) and constitutional interpretation. This paper is focused on the relationship between autonomy and service delivery at the LG in recent time.

Notably, the federal government has recently advocated the path of local government autonomy owing to the fact that the states of the federation have continued to infringe on the exclusive and allocated responsibilities of the local governments (The Guardian, 2021). Ideally, LG tends to be the third tier of government in every federating unit and consequently, all LGs are supposed to be self-reliant politically, administratively or bureaucratically and fiscally so as to ensure its efficiency and effectiveness. Local government is a level of government of a political system at the grassroots and is endowed with the powers to make local laws (byelaws) and policies (Ogunna, 1999). Contrarily, state governors have consistently refused to ascribe to this idea of autonomy, thereby imploring every possible measure to stampede the quest for full independence of the local councils to enable them take full control of local government finance. (Adeniyi, 2022). (Eneanya, 2009) posited that, there has been a high level of gradual erosion of power and autonomy at the local councils. There is no clear cut separation of powers as expected in the presidential system of government. The 1979 constitution vested state governments to endorse legislation safeguarding the formation, structure, composition, finance and functions of the local government. The interpretation to this is that LG remained a role of the state government, the position which was particularly presumed by the state governments as replicated in the uncharacteristic practice of appointing caretaker committees by state government.



There is no doubt that the constitution erroneously empowered the governors of control over local councils through the state and local government joint accounts which makes it impossible for the realization of full fiscal autonomy of the local governments thereby making development and good service delivery at the local level unrealizable. Funds allocated to local government through revenue sharing have consistently been hijacked by the various state governments through the idea of State Local Government Joint Account (SLGJA). To ascertain this claim, the Revenue Mobilization Allocation and Fiscal Commission (RMAFC) in 2019 posited that the state Governors are deserting their statutory responsibilities in respect of the state/local governments' joint account (Aliyu, Afolabi & Akinwande, 2013).

The states through the joint account continue to dictate projects and they disburse funds to the local councils of interest, and the outplay leads to uneven development. The officials who ought to have been elected by the people are rather imposed on the grassroots populace by the state governors. They are practically done in connivance with the officials of the state independent electoral commissions (SIECs) of the various states. With this interplay it becomes difficult and almost impossible for the emergence of leaders from opposition party at the local council level because the state government will ensure that its party sweeps all the elective positions through impositions. Most times the state governors are more comfortable with non-democratic leadership, than democratic ones (Adams, 2016). Local Autonomy is primarily concerned with the question of responsibilities, resources and discretion conferred on the local authorities (Davey, 1991). In Nigeria, there tend to be a vivid constitutional basis for local freedom but with heavy financial dependence on the center.

This study examines the implications of the three (3) key perspectives of local government autonomy as regards political, administrative or bureaucratic and fiscal components on quality service delivery. The broad objective is to examine the relationship between LG full autonomy and quality service delivery, while the specific objective is to examine the influence of LGA autonomy on quality service delivery. The paper tends to find answers to the following questions: How has local government autonomy impacted on the people at the grassroots? How autonomous is the local government system in Nigeria? To what extent has lack of full autonomy to local government influenced its quality service delivery? Indeed,



insightful but stunned literature exists on Nigeria's local government autonomy. Perspectives are as different as there are authors.

Conceptual Analysis

Local Government

Local government is a third tier of government at the grassroots level of administration "meant for meeting peculiar grassroots need of the people" (Agagu, 1997:18). It also implies "government by the popularly elected bodies charged with administrative and executive duties in matters concerning the inhabitants of a particular district or place" (Appadorai, 1975:287). Local government is a political authority set up by a nation or state as a subordinate authority for the purpose of dispersing or decentralizing political power (Awa, 1991). In a related view, Wraith (1984) puts local government as the act of decentralizing power, which may take the form of de-concentration or devolution. Emezi (1984) perceives LG as a system of local administration under local communities that are organized to maintain law and order, provide some limited range of social amenities, and encourage cooperation and participation of inhabitants towards the improvement of their conditions of living. Akpan & Ekanem (2013) identify LG as the breaking down of the country into smaller units or localities for the purpose of administration in which the inhabitants of different units or localities concerned play a direct and full part through their elected representatives who exercise powers and undertake functions under the general authority of the state or national government.

LGA is seen as "the freedom of the local government to recruit and manage its own staff, raise and manage its own finances, make bye-laws and policies, and discharge its functions as provided by law without interference from the higher governments (Ogunna, 1991:350, quoted in Okafor, 2010). Therefore, autonomy of the Local Government envisages the political, financial and administrative aspects of its existence. Financial autonomy of local government entails the freedom to impose local taxation, generate revenue within its assigned sources, allocate its financial and material resources, determine and authorize its annual budgets without external interference.

According to Blair (1977), LG is rather a resident population occupying a defined area that has a locally authorized and governing body; a separate legal entity, the power to provide



certain public or governmental services, and a substantial degree of autonomy adding legal or actual power to raise part of its revenue. LG according to (1976) guidelines on government reform depicts government at the local level, instituted by law to implement specific functions within distinct areas (and) to initiate, provision of services, determine and implement project, and to ensure that local initiative and response to local needs and conditions are maximized. Ogunna (1976), sees LG as a political authority which is purposely created by law or constitution for local communities by which they manage their local public affairs within the limits. William Robson in Mahal (2006), portrays LG as involving the conception of territorial, non-sovereign community possessing the legal right and the necessary organization to regulate its own affairs. Ademolekun & Rowland (1979:1) sees the LG as a tier of government with formal and unequivocal recognition of local government as constituting a distinct level of government with defined boundaries clearly stated functions and provision. In the words of McLean & McMillan (2009:213), local government is seen as a governing institution which has authority over a sub-national territorially defined area; in federal systems, a sub-state territorially defined area.

Local Government Autonomy

LG autonomy is derived from the federalism operated in the Nigerian federation. Federalism is the transfer of functions, resources and authority to peripheral levels of government. It also relates to the disposition of tax powers, retention of revenue and methods adopted in sharing centrally collected revenue in accordance with the constitutional responsibilities of all levels of government (Osakwe, 1999:524). Local government autonomy as the relative discretion which local government enjoy in the regulation of their own affairs(Defunct Centre for Democratic Studies, CDS).Autonomy of the LG implies the extent to which local governments are free from the control of the state and federal government in the management of their local affairs (Adeyemo, 2005). Nwabueze (1983) sees the autonomy under the federal system as each tier of government enjoying a separate existence and independence from the control of the other governments. It is an autonomy which requires not just the legal and physical existence of an apparatus of government such as a legislative assembly, governor, court etc, but that each government must exist not as an adjunct of another government but as autonomous entity in the sense of being able to exercise its own will in the conduct of its affairs free from direction of another government. Local government autonomy implies the



liberty of independence in evidently distinct matter, area as well as separate legal identity from other levels of government.

Theoretical Framework

To facilitate full understanding of this research, the study adopted the Systems theory. Different scholars such as Almond (1960); Easton (1965); Adamolekun (1983) contributed immensely to the theory. A fusion of the descriptions of a system given by various writers can be stated as follows. It implies a phenomenon acknowledged as an organized whole with distinguishable, interconnected arrangements delimiting it from the setting in which it is positioned and interrelates, translating its inputs into outputs. The relationships between the parts themselves and the events they produce through their interaction become much more important, with the result system elements are rationally connected (Luhmann, 1990) towards a shared purpose (Golineli, 2009). The System theory postulated each system, including political system, as encapsulated with subsystems that frame up the entire system. Functions are assigned with the provision of enabling environment, including resources, suitable authority, etc. to enable effectiveness and efficiency in carrying out their responsibilities. There tend to be stability in the political system but, on the contrary, instability outplays in the political system and there tend to be ineffectiveness and inefficiency in subsystems and entire system.

The LG requires adequate inputs to contribute meaningfully to the Nigeria political system and to ensure stability of the system. It is apposite to highlight the significance of systems theory on issues of LGA in Nigeria. This means the apprehension of subsystem of LGs as integral fragment of the entire Nigerian political system. The LGs have their responsibilities assigned to them to ensure quality service is delivered to the people.

Methodology

This is a qualitative research paper anchored strictly on secondary sources of data which was obtained from the study of literatures in the form of books, journals, magazines as well as other works that provide scientific information relevant to the issue under study. The paper made use of ex-post facto research design, and content analysis as its method of data analysis.



Literature Review

Anayochukwu & Ani (2021) posited that in Nigeria, the recognition of local government as the third tier of government in 1976 reform placed the local government on the front burner for local peculiarities and problems and that Subsequent reforms like 1988 and 1991 lent credence to the autonomy of local government. These reforms introduced to the local government, the presidential system of government as it is at the federal and state levels. Felix & Okonette (2013) is of the view that in essence, the local government system and its autonomy in Nigeria is challenging. The problem expresses itself in the law establishing local government, its structure and the kind of autonomy both the federal and state governments' devolve to the local government as the third tier of government and that generally, the federal government cheats on the lower tiers of governments in the generation and distribution of national wealth which it controls in practical terms.

On its part, unable to fight the federal government, the state government preys on the weaker partner without restraint. This is the plight of the local government in Nigeria. The control is on political recruitment at the leadership level and at the subversion of local government financial rights. The encroachment of local finance and the level of interference by the other higher government as it relates to revenue sharing have continually remained issues in the front burner of the nation's polity by the state government. This has negatively affected the performance of local government in terms of its constitutional responsibilities. The situation is further deteriorating and getting worst by the day (Doho & Ahmed & Umar, 2018). It is in connection with the aforementioned rationale amongst others that several local government reforms have been initiated by successive governments to ensure that they are achieved (Olowu, 1984). In the words of Samson & Stanley (2015), the importance of local government or local self-government is more pronounced and relevant in developing countries than in developed nations. The reason being that local government or self-government would assist in quickening the provision of the much needed developmental facilities in human and material resources so as to enable the people at the local level feel the presence and existence of government in order to have a sense of belonging.

Fiscal Autonomy

Finance posed a major treat to LGs specifically in emerging nations like Nigeria. There tends to be uncertainty that the capacity of the LGs to accomplish their constitutionally assigned



roles is dependent on the funds attainable to them. Local Government fiscal autonomy is derived from the fiscal federalism as it is operated in the Nigerian federation. Fiscal federalism is the transfer of functions, resources and authority to peripheral levels of government. It also relates to the “disposition of tax powers,” retention of revenue and methods adopted in sharing centrally collected revenue in accordance with the constitutional responsibilities of all levels of government (Osakwe, 1999:524). Financial autonomy under a federal system of government is that each government enjoys a separate existence and financial independence from the control of the other governments. It is an autonomy which requires not just the legal and physical existence of an apparatus of government such as financial autonomy enjoyed by legislative assembly, Governor, court etc, (Adeyemo, 2005). Fiscal autonomy therefore undoubtedly denotes the liberty enjoyed by the LG to oversee their funds or financial resources without any interference from other tiers of government.

Administrative or Bureaucratic Autonomy

Bureaucracy is conceived as the rule of officials (Albrow, 1970). Weber conceptualized bureaucracy “as a rational organization controlled on the basis of rational management, hierarchical authority and technical knowledge aimed at maximum organizational efficiency” (Muozelis, 1967). An organization portrays to be self-governing when it has the capacity to employ or engage and disengage its employees. In line with this, (Okoli, 2005: 107) posited that LG should be autonomous having freedom to recruit and manage its own staff, raise and manage its own finances, make policies, laws and provide services within the limits of its resources and functions without interference, the local government system in Nigeria still have some constraints that have impeded its autonomy. This implies state whereby the local government has the full bureaucratic autonomy of hiring, managing, and servicing its human resources without the interference of the state government.

Political Autonomy

Section 7 of the 1999 constitution of the federal Republic of Nigeria empowers the LGs and provides that “the system of local government by democratically elected local government councils is under the constitution guaranteed; and accordingly, the government of every state shall subject to section 8 of the constitution, ensure their existence under a law which provides for the establishment, structure, composition, finance and functions of such councils (Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999:5). Political autonomy encourages a LG comprised of



elected members who drive it and is similarly identified as local involvement of individuals at the grassroots. It is of utmost importance for the individuals of the local area to participate in activities regarding functions of the LG. This denotes fairness at the grassroots. The issue of accountability should be reckoned on the local people at the grassroots by those representatives elected by the people. This will in returns ensure effectiveness and efficiency in performance. Political autonomy creates the opportunity for the elected representatives to dedicated and concerned in matters relating to the issues on the desires and hopes of the local people.

Empirical Review

Anayochukwu & Ani (2021) conducted a study on Local Government Autonomy in Nigeria: Its Problems and Prospects. The study adopted a quantitative research approach to discover and explain the existence of constitutional ambiguities or inconsistency that tends to provide the drive for the unethical state of officials to nurse the inordinate desire for hedging in the local government left, right and center. However, the findings revealed that the area of jurisdictional rivalry between the state and local governments are mainly the beneficial ones, like rate collection, distribution of fertilizers, and other farm inputs like pesticides. The study concluded that legal and constitutional requirements, no matter how full proof they may be, cannot guarantee true autonomy for the local government as a tier, unless the political will exists on the part of a statesman to streamline and stabilize this very critical level of government. The study recommended that local Government autonomy is fastened on an improved revenue base, adherence to constitutional provisions, political stability, accountability, and transparency in governance. And that to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the local government system, there is an urgent need to review the constitution and delimit areas of inter-governmental frictions especially in electoral matters, creation of local governments, tenure of councils, and finance. The council elections should be conducted as and when due, to avoid a democratic vacuum that is dangerous to the local government system.

Felix & Okonette (2013) conducted a study on; the politics of local government Autonomy in Nigeria reloaded. The study adopted a qualitative research approach and thematic analysis to discover and explain that in Nigeria, the federal and state governments mostly transfer the kind of autonomy shaped by ethnic considerations to the LG. Also, that the blockage and



blockage of local government autonomy is further evident at the fiscal and management employment stages than in any other areas of intergovernmental dealings. The study concludes that local government is a distinctive political arrangement and the degree of autonomy it enjoys from federal or regional or state government corresponds with the politics of the state. The study recommended that the federal and state governments should take charge of roles suitable for them and entrust other roles to the local government with sufficient fiscal aid.

Doho & Ahmed & Umar (2018) researched on; Local Government Autonomy in Nigeria: Struggles and Challenges. The study adopted a qualitative research approach to discover and explain that the LG as the third tier system of government in Nigeria is confronted with constitutional hitches. They concluded that the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria generated major flaws, practices and uncertainty often subjugated to devastate the LG and afterward made them adjuncts to the State Governments, and consequent upon this, the LG in some states function as meager extensions of the State Ministry. The study recommended that section 7 (1) of the 1999 constitution of Federal Republic of Nigeria as amended should be erased and that structure, finance, establishment, composition and function of the LG councils should not be vested in the constitution rather than State house of Assembly.

Imhanlanhi & Ikeanyi (2009) conducted a study on; Local Government Autonomy and Development of Localities in Nigeria: Issues, Problems and Suggestions. The study adopted a qualitative research approach to discover and explain that insufficient treatment of practically all the issues concerning autonomy which include; LG representation, its revenue and personnel has posed some challenges for LGs' developmental exertions in the local areas. The study concluded that local areas are disparagingly in need of developmental ventures and improved existence such as construction of roads, provision of health facilities, and pipe borne water from the Local Government and also established that LG only contribute marginally in the localities. The study recommended that LGs should intensify efforts towards ensuring its autonomy through an improved internal revenue generation and clear development influence in the localities, so as to ensure proper democratic consolidation and reduced corruption.



Samson & Stanley (2015) carried out a research on; State Governors as Albatross to Democracy and Local Self-Government in Nigeria” the study adopted historical and content analysis method to discover that since the year 1999 and emergence of the fourth republic, not less than seven state governors have dismissed or dissolved LG councils in the country. The study further revealed that despite dismissal of elected local government officials, state governors deny local government access to statutory allocations or deny them of their full responsibilities. The study recommends a full autonomy to LGs disregarding the meddling of state governors and that the people at the grassroots should be empowered to sack their representatives either through recall or by denying them the opportunity for another term of office through the ballot.

Osakede, Ijimakinwa & Adesanya (2016) researched on; an empirical analysis on the local government financial autonomy in Nigeria. The study revealed that local government lack fiscal autonomy in Nigeria and that it thwarts effective and efficient service delivery at the grassroots. The study discovered that excessive interference of state government in their local affairs, corruption among local government officials, unfavourably affected the delivery of effective services to the rural dwellers. The study recommended that full financial autonomy should be granted to local councils on matter statutorily assigned to LGs, the state/local government joint account should be rescinded and transparent officials should be put at the helm of affairs of the local councils. From empirical evidence in extant literature, the rationale behind the declaration of local government as the third tier government as included in the 1979 constitution, principally, was to bring government closer to the people and effective service delivery to the rural areas.

Gap in Literature Review

Most of the literature reviewed did not link political, administrative or bureaucratic and fiscal indices of autonomy to LG system in Nigeria, the nature of LG autonomy, its implications and instabilities to LG in Nigeria nor did they discuss the domineering relationship between the state and local government as it concerns its constitutional role. The study is of the view that it is obvious in Nigeria that the state governors have commandeered democracy at the grass root level and by extension local self-government. The gap particularly exists in most of the literature on LG autonomy and its implication to the development of the local authorities.



It is the gap identified in the literature that motivated me to embark on the study with a view to filling it.

Implications of LG Autonomy: the Nigerian Practice

Nigeria has experienced various applications of LG administration prior and after independence. Ige (1996) posited that Nigeria is the only federation in the whole world where the federal government decides how, where and when a local government council must run”. In all other countries, it is the state or regional government that legislates on local government. As a matter of fact, we are not surprised because, this is evident in the kind of federalism the military instituted in Nigeria, Nnoli (2011) & Elaigwu (1979). The issue of intergovernmental relations between the levels of government in Nigeria therefore calls for deliberations and forms of restructuring.

In the colonial era, LG appreciated extensive variety of fiscal and bureaucratic autonomy. The LG system was derivative of the British Whitehall prototype. The colonial government endorsed each region to administer the activities of LG within its jurisdiction. The implication is that legal framework was provided for local government by each region such as the Eastern region local government ordinance of 1950, the Western region local government law of 1952 and Northern native authority law of 1954. During this period, the councils were given a wide range of functions including primary education, health, police and judiciary etc (Otive, 1999). The councils also experienced a certain degree of financial, personnel and general administration autonomy. The LG in the country perceived a weakening in both the financial and administrative autonomy during post-colonial era between 1960 through 1965 as exerted during colonial era. There was degeneration in the tasks apportioned to LGs in the existing regions. This continued until a fore most restructuring of the LG system was carried out in the country in 1976. This was a period when Nigeria adopted a unified system of LG administration and LG system was acknowledged as a third tier system of government with stipulated purposes. In the words of Otive (1999), the 1976 reform completely eroded the local government autonomy and laid the basis for interference in the conduct of local affairs by the military and civilian government thereafter.



The principle of autonomy is an important issue for local governments because it cannot function efficiently without appreciable elements of autonomy. Nigeria is a federating unit, no doubt. Federalism according to K.C Wheare, is the method of dividing powers so that central and regional governments are each within a sphere, coordinate and independent. He postulated that the characteristics of the federal principle are the division of powers among levels of government, a written constitution showing the division of powers and coordinate not sub-coordinate supremacy of the two levels of government with respect to their functions. In the views of (Wheare, 1953:10). Local government is a product of federalism owing to the fact that federalism centers on division of power among the central and component units. LG tends to be a component in a federal system it is acknowledged as the third tier system of government charged with the responsibility at the grassroots. The LG executes certain roles allocated to it by the constitution and the LG is to be self-governing to carry out all its tasks without any form of meddling from the central government (Nkwede, Udeuhele, & Obona, 2020).

In Nigeria the idea of autonomy is lacking owing to the fact that LG Councils are incorporated in the control of the state executive. As a matter of fact, joint account is one of the biggest evils because it gives the authority to local government ministries in the state and funds allocated to the councils are hijacked at the level and appropriated to the whims of the powers that be, Alao, (2016a:24). The 1999 constitution of the federal republic of Nigeria also stipulated the legislative power over public funds, especially on SJLGA, in section 162 (18). Specifically, section 58 of the constitution states: The amount standing to the credit of local government councils in the federation account shall also be allocated to the states for the benefits of their local government councils on such terms and in such manner as may be prescribed by the national assembly. Each state shall maintain a specific account to be called “state joint local government account” to which shall be paid all allocations to the local government councils of the state from the federation account and from the government of the state. Each state shall pay to the local government councils in its area of jurisdiction such proportion of its total revenue on such terms and in such manner as may be prescribed by the national assembly. The amount standing to the credit of local government councils of a state shall be distributed among the local government councils of the state on such terms and in such manner as may be prescribed by the house of assembly of the state.



Also, in the case of the local government, it is the state government that sets up the local government service commission and appoints its members. The Local Government Service commission is charged with the responsibility of hiring, managing and promotion of senior officers of salary grade level 06 and above in the local government.

Also sections 29 to 33 provided for the existence and functions of a local government service commission. The main functions of the commission included the following:

- (i) To set up general and uniform guidelines for appointments, promotions, and discipline, and uniformly adhered to, and
- (ii) To serve as a review body for all petitions from local governments in respect of appointments, promotions, and discipline.
- (iii) To monitor the activities of each local government to ensure that the guidelines are strictly adhered to.

Additional significant personnel problem of LGs is the area to workforce training and development; it is observable that most staff sent for training were hand-picked by members of the local government service commission (LGSC) deprived of any training basic valuation. The politicians hand-picked their acquaintances and ensure they benefit from the training that the local government does not require. This also is applicable to workshops and seminars at the LG.

It is obvious that LGs in Nigeria challenged with numerous personnel hitches, which hinders the operative and effective performance of their roles. Such problem includes the politicization of employment, selection, and placement. The LG has been recognized as a third tier of government but functions and activities of the local government service commission choke the operative service delivery of LG. Despite LG being a tier of government nearest to the people, there have been prevailing gaps in the running of elections by the state Independent Electoral Commissions (SIECs) and the domineering influence of state executives on LGs.

From the assertions of this constitution, LG councils cannot proclaim autonomy, specifically in the space of funding. Personnel problems posed a challenge to ensuring LG autonomy in Nigeria, which militates against effective performance of their responsibilities and this is due to the fact that politicians control bureaucratic settings of the LG thereby influencing employment, development, training and development, promotions to inculcate bureaucracies



with clear commitments to the partisan goals of the existing government. Recruitment practices based on backing, have posed challenges of redundancy in LG where there is an existence of non-contemplation of actions like termination of appointments and suspension of staff.

There is no gain saying the fact that the LG system in Nigeria lacks political, administrative or bureaucratic and fiscal autonomy and this made the duplicity of decentralization and intergovernmental relations in Nigerian federalism not in tandem with the assertions of Kenneth Wheare regarding federal structure. The role of local government service commission is not in conformity with bureaucratic autonomy of the LG. The state appoints the commissioner for LGSC who is a member of the state executive council and the members are appointed by the state government. The bureaucrats at the LG are concerned about protecting the interest of the state government. There is no room for bureaucrats to effectively carry out their roles and responsibilities.

LGs in Nigeria exist at the compassion of state governments. And this appears to be as a result of the transmission of LG statutory allocations by the central government through the state governments, hence the interference of the state governments in the matters of LG in the country. Also, the state government politically decides who are to emerge into elective positions in LG. Typifying example is the assertion of Ugborgu (2012) that a similar scenario played out itself in Imo State where the governor dissolved all the 27 LG administration on 6th June, 2011. The major influence of the dissolution was for political reasons as the governor and the 27 LG chairmen and councilors belong to different political parties. This action is typical of Nigeria politics. In spite of the order of the court of Appeal which directed the governor to reinstate the local government chairmen and councilors, the governor disobeyed the ruling as the local government chairmen met empty premises when they wanted to return to their offices (Ugborgu, 2012).

In Ekiti state, on the 29th October 2010, 16 local government chairmen were sacked by the governor, exactly 19 days that they assumed office. Before the sack, Justice Cornelius Akintayo of Ado Ekiti High Court, held that the State Independent Electoral Commission (SIEC), which organized the election was not properly constituted. He therefore dismissed their application. But a judgment by the court of appeal held that Justice Akintayo erred as



what he ruled on was not the case before the court (Maduabuchi, Akinsuyi & Opesetan, 2014). The state authorities interfere with the affairs of local governments by usurping their allocations from the federation Account and making nonsense of the financial autonomy (Eneanya, 2009). The vision to reinforce the self-rule and viewpoint of government at the grassroots level pushed the Central government drive towards a definite constitutional landscape of local government as contained in 1979 constitution. The section 7 (1) of the said constitution depicts “the system of democratically elected local government councils is under this constitution guaranteed”.

Autonomy simply refers to freedom, independent, free from external and remote control but in Nigeria, the reverse is the case, Local Government are totally dependent, they are managed by the federal and state government who dominate over the local government administration through the state government offices of local government affairs, the ministry of local government and the local government service commission. All these government agencies are denying the autonomy of self-dependent administration of Local Government in Nigeria (Bolatito & Ibrahim, 2014). For a federal system that is dominated by the redistribution of centrally collected revenue, it is hardly surprising that the revenue generation and allocation issue has remained particularly contentious and intractable in Nigeria (Agbdike, Igbokwe-Ibeto & Nkah, 2014).

Conclusion

The Nigerian federal system has three tier structures at its forefront which empowers each level of government with clearly spelt out responsibilities. It is depressing to note that the local councils do not enjoy absolute political, administrative and fiscal autonomy. Inadequate local government autonomy, inadequate finances, weak intergovernmental relations, fledgling democracy and grand corruption are found to be the challenges facing the local council (Imhanlahimi & Ikeanyibe (2009). These must be adequately tackled for LGs to make more positive impact in the localities. The local government, if given full autonomy as required, will solely make and implement policies and decisions, plan and execute projects, identify the needs of the people in its locality and ensure the provision of basic services such as health, education, infrastructure and social amenities without interference of any form from other tiers of government. The local government will become more efficient to deliver



services for the betterment of the people within its territorial jurisdiction. Thus, autonomy therefore is a precondition for quality service distribution. It has been upheld that there exists a correlation amongst LG full autonomy and quality service delivery. There has not been smooth and successful devolution in Nigeria LG system. Autonomy has therefore been critically evaded by state government officials. Political, financial and administrative institutional measures for such performance have played into the shores of state governments.

Consequent upon the state government empowerment by the constitution to control the financing, and display superior governmental role in the relationship, leadership at the local level has not been able to transform political decentralization into palpable benefits. For LG autonomy to be valued, state infringement should be erased completely to allow the achievement of grass root development as a predetermined objective for the creation of LG. The study revealed that lack of full autonomy to local governments has negative implications on the quality of service delivery in LG system in Nigeria. It is of note, that despite several government reforms on local government, including its autonomy all seems not to be well with the local authorities in ensuring provision of basic amenities, developmental projects and democratic benefits to the people at the locality.

Recommendations

- The abolition of state joint LG account from the constitution to ensure allocation of funds directly to the LGs. The implication of state government meddling on the funds of the LG is that despite improved statutory allocation to LG in Nigeria most of the LGs tend to be left with little money to perform projects that benefits the lives of the people of its locality.
- The constitution should have a clearly spelt out roles of the Chairman and Councilors at the local government to make each of them relevant in the arrangement and so as to ensure checks and balances.
- There is a need for the instituting of LG electoral commission in the constitution with the responsibilities of conducting elections into various positions at the LG as against the state independence electoral commission.
- The local Government should be allowed to oversee the local level by granting them full autonomy and liberty to employ and manage its own workforce, source and



manage its own funds, make policies, laws and render services based on its own resource and functions without interference.

- Periodic review on the LG accounts by external auditors should emphasize on proper accountability.

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