

Existentiality of Local Government in Nigeria an Answer to Grassroots Development, but for Unsolicited Socio-Political Factors

Toyin Cotties Adetiba¹

Abstract: As an administrative mechanism, LG is designed to facilitate development at the grassroots. The central thesis of this work is that an effective LG system is requisite for the realisations of Nigeria's vision of rural development. Through the 1979 and 1999 Nigeria constitutions, it was transformed to third tier government for effectiveness. This work recognises LG as a political/administrative therapy to sustaining rural development in Nigeria; but has failed owing to some socio-political factors. To make LG more fulfilling as the third tier of government, there is need for constitutional reforms separating its powers from the state/federal government, the paper suggests.

Keywords: constitution; development; local government; native authority; reforms

1. Introduction

Since its political independence in 1960, Nigeria has been faced with developmental glitches especially in rural areas. Local government is an extension of government from central to the local communities. Significantly, the instrumentality of local government to the sustainability of socio-political and economic development of a state is considered very important. Local government as the third tier of government debatably, is purposefully established to promote development owing to its closeness to the people at grass roots level, therefore, enhancing its ability to easily articulate and aggregate socio-political and economic demands of the people.

Observably, the presence of local government in a given local area is conceived from the fact that latent human and natural resources abundant at the grassroots are available for a productive and progressive transformation of such area. The need to promote sustainable development, maximise participation of citizen in

¹ Department of Politics and International Studies, University of Zululand, Address: Guldengracht st & East Arterial Road, Arboretum, Richards Bay 3900, South Africa, Tel.: +27 (0) 749412168 or +27 (0) 359026092, E-mail: toluwacotties_333@hotmail.co.za; AddetibaT@unizulu.ac.za.

developmental processes and stimulate government responsive service delivery necessitates the creation of local government argued Agagu (2004). Reinforcing this statement, Obiora (2012) advances that Local governments are expected to act as the hinge in the realization of developmental processes as the closest government to the people.

Across the globe and particularly democratic federal states like Nigeria; local government serves as a form of political and administrative structure that facilitate political and administrative decentralisation, thus enhancing efficient governance, integration mechanism while promoting a sense of belonging at grassroots level. Local government is therefore, a subordinate government, whose existence and power came from laws enacted by a superior government. (Adeyemo, 2005)

The local government system in Nigeria has undergone various transformations to make it more productive and responsive to the expectations of the people principally, at the grassroots. The first major step towards achieving this (making it more productive) was the execution of the 1976 local government reforms. Due to the perceived success recorded in 1976, Nigeria government upgraded the Local government system to a third tier of government through the 1979 and 1999 constitutions, thus making it more effective. (Agunyai, Ebirim & Odeyemi, 2013)

The existence of Local governments have been recognized as fundamental to rapid socio-political and economic transformation of localities where national and state governments may not be able to reach argued Ezeh & Muanya (2013). One of the major indexes of social change in Nigeria is rural development, hence, the creation of local government. Among scholars it is believed that no state can boast of having achieved development if a large chunk of her rural inhabitants are still deficient of all elements of development.

This paper examines the existentiality of local government in Nigeria as a universally accepted remedy to solving the problem of underdevelopment in rural areas. Literarily this does not mean that its existence is absolutely the solution but the position of this work is that the creation of local government constitutionally is hinged on sustainability of developmental purposes. Thus the basic rationale behind the creation of local government is to meet the socio-political and economic needs of the people at the grassroots.

2. Methods

This work used a triangulation method. In social sciences this method allows researchers to use multiple methods and measures of an empirical phenomenon in order to overcome problems of bias and validity. Therefore, when dealing with a particularly slippery and empirical phenomenon like local government administration in Nigeria; a lack of specifications can be exclusively worrisome, hence, triangulation method. It is a combination of an integrative research approach (one on one interaction with people, observation and in-depth literature studies on local government), in order to understand the fundamental issues highlighted in this paper.

3. Literature Review (Theoretical Discussions)

In research, theoretical framework is understood to be an approach to analysing, interpreting, describing and perhaps predict issues under investigation. It is therefore incongruous to discuss and analyse concepts particularly in the field of social sciences without connecting them to some theoretical viewpoints, hence, the adoption of the theory of decentralization for this study. The theory of decentralization expounds the transfer of authority and responsibility from the central government to the subordinate government to function at the levels where the central government might not be able to reach on time. (Roindinelli, 1981; Heywood, 1997) It is on this ground that socio-political and economic functions and responsibilities are given to different institutions from the central government for efficient and effective performance in terms of service delivery which by extension translates to development.

Olowu (1995) identified two major forms of decentralization, to be precise; deconcentration and devolution. Deconcentration he says is a form of internal delegation of responsibilities to the subordinate government within the same administrative system. Devolution on the other hand involves the transfer of detailed responsibilities to communities usually represented by their elected officials. However, in the real sense of it, the two systems are not reciprocally exclusive when implementing decentralization programmes; rather a balance of these elements is usually required argued Adeyeye (2000).

Decentralization is therefore, conceived as a strategy for mobilizing local resources (human and materials) for sustainable national development. In Nigeria, local

government is generally recognized as a tool for rural development and political integration because of its closeness to the rural populace, hence, the justification of the need for local government on the basis of its being essential for practical administrative purposes.

4. Conceptual Analysis of Local Government

Depending on their scholarly experience or their political disposition, the term local government have been defined variously by scholars. It is therefore difficult to find a single and comprehensive conceptualisation of local government acceptable to both the developed and developing world. (Majekodunmi, 2012, p. 84) As theorised by Ojofeitimi (2000), the term local suggests that local councils are meant for local communities and the word government, implies that they have certain appearances of government. Though, with various names local government is found in virtually every modern political system. It is therefore, important to state that the legitimacy of local government lies in its official/political responsibilities to represent and protect the socio-political and economic interests of people at the grassroots as not all can be at the centre.

Sorka (1978), believe local government means the decentralization of authoritative decision making where by the authority to make decision is displaced downwards from remote points near the top administration or outward from geographical locations, thus bringing authority closer to the people affected by it. To this, Wraith (1984) sees local government as the act of decentralizing socio-political and economic power, which may take the form of devolution. It is in this view that Oyediran (1979, p. 171) conceive local government as the diffusion of political process on area basis.

Emezi (1984), however, perceived local government as a system of local administration under local communities organized to maintain law and order, provide some limited variety of social amenities, while encouraging formal organizational and democratic framework which enables the locals to conduct their affairs effectively for their general good or development. Debatably, one can conceive local government as a lesser governmental power within the national political entity and as an administrative organization through which control and authority relates to the people at grassroots level.

Irrespective of what scholars are saying a local government in any political system is expected to enjoy the following physiognomies; autonomy, separate legal identity, territory, population, localness, democratic representation, specificity of powers delegated from the central government, and uniformity of structure. (Williams, 1978, p. 39) As a tier of government subordinate to central government, its area of jurisdiction is delimited by the statute establishing it, it has administrative and judicial functions, and its council – as the case in Nigeria – is made up of elected representatives who are responsible to the electorate in the discharge of their duties. (Majekodunmi, 2000, p. 86) Within the limit of its constitutional power local government has the constitutional power to make and execute policies, make budget, collect taxes and hire its own staff.

In a departure from above, local government in Nigeria can be viewed fundamentally, as a function of space and time factor. During the colonial era, native administration under the supervision of the colonial government was principally established for maintenance of law and order. After independence, there was a shift from enforcement and maintenance of law and order to the provision of social services and as a training ground for future political leaders. Hence, local government as an institutional structure created for practical administrative purposes with a range of delegated constitutional powers and functions from the appropriate central government.

Fundamentally, there are three schools of thought in the functional conceptualisation of the local government. These include democratic participatory school, efficient service delivery school and developmental school. (Ola, 1984) Important to this work is the developmental school. The advocates of developmental school believe that at the heart of this theory is the believe that since the local government is very close to the people; well monitored development would be made possible owing to small population. Hence, the assertion that the proximity of the local government to the grassroots makes it especially suited to provide certain functions far more efficiently and in a more cost effective manner than the much more remote government at the higher level. (Majekodunmi, 2012, p. 87)

5. Development

Subjectively, development is a value loaded concept where it is very difficult to think of a universally acceptable definition, the term is used differently by scholars and

policy makers as dictated by the context for which it is used. By implication, there is plethora of literature that exists in development studies hence, the difficulty in its conceptualisation. Over the years, development has been conceived by scholars as a process of economic and social changes with the aim of achieving better life. To Otoghile & Edigin (2011) only a handful of analysts have stopped to ask themselves if these changes could be for the worse for some sectors of society and better for others. Significantly, it is very important to maintain the positive value placed on the term development and see it as first; a means of the escape of man out of the conditions of exploitation, poverty and oppression and that it involves changes in the basic institution and structures of society. (Cockroft, 1970, p. 272)

Todaro & Smith (2011) agrees that the term development must be seen as representing the whole gamut of change by which an entire social system, turned to the diverse basic needs and evolving aspirations of individuals and groups within that system, moves away from condition of life widely perceived as unsatisfactory toward a condition of life regarded as socially, politically and economically better. In essence it is a means of unfolding something which is latent.

Apart from being a product of individual's perspective, development is also of the particular period in time when the word is being expressed. Contemporary scholars, economists, politicians, and others often use the term development and within, individually contested conceptualizations of development there is space for extensive and multiplicity of views, thus making differing schools of thought to overlap. (Adetiba, 2013, p. 480)

Development therefore can be couched as the actions taken to involve not only economic growth, but also some notion of equitable distribution and provision of social services all with a view to improving the quality of life of every individual and group. To this end Rodney (1972, p. 9) sees development in human society as many sided process. At the level of the individual it implies increased skill and capacity, greater freedom, creativity, self-discipline, responsibility and material wellbeing. At the level of social groups, development implies an increasing capacity to regulate both internal and external relationships. When applied to a political entity, like local government it connotes unfolding its developmental powers. Overtly, it implies a socio-political and economic change that is required.

To Gran (1983) development is a social and practical process which aims at liberating human potential so that people can acquire maximum socially feasible and practical control over all the available resources needed for the realization of basic

human needs and security. The bedrock of development conceptually, is the liberation of human potentials towards unconditional control over socio-economic and political resources to meet their needs. Notwithstanding the overall multiplicity of definitional debates on development the fact still remains that it involves constant transformation in a variety of aspects of human society involving socio-political and economic progress.

By implication there must be a mechanism for citizens' involvement in administration and the ability of the state to respond to new challenge and demand to adapt to changing needs. It is against this backdrop that this paper attempt to relate the existentiality of local government in Nigeria to development.

6. The Birth and Development of Local Government in Nigeria

Many scholars have credited the birth of local government in Nigeria to the British colonial government considering the fact that the modern day local government system developed during colonial era. Local government is therefore, considered to be one of man's oldest political institutions. The history of local government system in Nigeria could be traced back to the pre-colonial era when powerful empires existed in Nigeria. (Majekodunmi, 2012) Such empires include Borno Empire, Sokoto Caliphate, Oyo Empire among several others. These empires had other smaller districts, wards, towns and villages controlled by ward leaders appointed by the Emir or King who were directly under the authorities of these kingdoms; operating in a way suitable to their cultural and religious aspirations.

Under Indirect rule, the administration of local areas was carried out through the existing traditional institutions. Where there were no traditional institutions new ones were created. This was peculiar to the Eastern part of the country where there were no traditional rulers, hence, the establishment of Native Authority. The Native Ordinance of 1910 according to Asaju (2010) recognized the traditional rulers whose main function was to maintain law and order as Sole Authority.

Diejomah & Eboh (2012) went further that the Native Administration was charged with the responsibility of collecting taxes, maintenance of law and order, construction and maintenance of local roads and sanitary inspection. Till date these functions are still being performed by local government, hence, its significant position as a prominent feature of Nigeria's political system. Local government in Nigeria has experience several changes in name, structure and composition based on

the rising tide of socio-political and economic development in the country. Observably, local government have been severally restructured and reorganized in Nigeria depending on the regime in power, the nature and level of interest of such government in local government administration.

The 1976 local government reforms that introduced a multi-purpose single-tier local government system brought about uniformity in the administrative structure of local government system in Nigeria. (Ajayi, 2000) These reforms formed the basis for the present day local government system. Essentially, local government is created as a transformational political tool for the development of local areas. With the support of federal/state government local government is established to mobilize and harness local resources and ensure their effective utilization for productive development.

With a view to enhance local government capacity for good governance, successive governments in Nigeria have executed several other reforms; this includes a uniform structure of an elected council with constitutional functions. Owing to the nature and the purpose for which local government was created and for the fact that government at the grassroots was still very far from people, the Babangida led administration increased the number of local governments from 301 in 1976 to 453 in 1989 and to 589 in 1991. The Abacha administration in 1996 increased the number to 774 local councils following the creation of additional six states. (Ajayi, 2000) The existentiality of local government in Nigeria no doubt is a means to an end when it comes to development at grassroots level but owing to some unsolicited socio-political factors the dream of using the platform of local government as a pedestal to development is yet to come to fruition.

7. The Case of Unsolicited Socio-Political Factors

Even though the various transformational reforms that have taken place in Nigeria local government administration was conceded out of passion for development but this was without its attendant's challenges. In essence the fact that measures as recommended by the 1976 local government reform was aimed at making local government the bedrock of grassroots development, arguably and in one piece affirms, local government still has some socio-political constrictions that have significantly hampered its role as a developmental agent at local level.

7.1. Constitutional Status of Local Government

One of the most serious problems currently militating against the developmental role of local government in Nigeria is its constitutional status. Observably, Nigeria seems to be the only federation in the whole world where the federal government decides how, where and when a local government council must run compare to colonial era when it enjoyed some sort of autonomy. During colonial era, each region made provision for the legal frame work that allowed it to oversee the activities of local government under its jurisdiction. These are the Eastern region local government ordinance of 1950, the Western region local government law of 1952 and the native authority law in Northern Nigeria, 1954. (Akpan & Ekanem, 2013) Relatively there was little or no interference in their activities by the federal government, thus given room for healthy and competitive developmental programmes.

In 1976 a major reform that unified local government administrative system in Nigeria was adopted; thereafter Local government officially became recognized as the third tier of government. The 1976 reform wholly eroded the autonomy of local government and laid the foundation for unconstitutional interference in the conduct of local affairs of local government by the military and civilian government thereafter; hence, the basis for the undemocratic nature of the local government and the erosion of local government autonomy. (Otive, 1999)

Comparatively, Nigeria federal system is tailored along the United States' federal system. In the US, (Ojoye, 2016) writes; the County, Municipal and Township Councils are independent and entirely legislated for by the 50 federating states and one territory. In Canada, the country's constitution (which is federal) recognises its 10 provinces as federating units, with exclusive power to make laws for the local governments. In India, the state government manage the affairs of self-governing municipal and village councils. In Malaysia the constitution (which is also federal) vests control over the local governments that came along with its 13 states and three federal territories with each adopting its own administrative model suits them (ironically, Nigeria, Malaysia, Canada, USA and India got their independent from Britain). However in Nigeria local governments are fully inserted into the constitution as if they were federating units. Perhaps, the reason for which local governments is directly allocated funds from the Consolidated Revenue Fund of the federation influenced by long Military rule.

It is germane to state that section 7 of the 1999 Constitution empowers the state legislature to make laws for the administrative operation of local government areas

and section 162 authorize the existence of a state and local governments Joint Account. These two provisions have become the political missiles used by states governments to undermine the developmental capabilities of local governments within their states.

Fundamentally, the inability of local government in Nigeria to function as provided by the constitution is a function of the political class at federal and state level who sees local government areas as their catchment area for votes during election and therefore use their offices; through constitutional instrument of state and local governments joint account system, to deny any local governments where they had little or no vote access to fund. As a result, these local areas are politically forced to vote for such political leader in the next election. The situation is worst if the ruling party in the local government is not the same as the party at state/federal level. Practically, the survival of such local government is tied to the apron string of the ruling party Emerald Ezuiji. (personal interview September 30, 2016)

This opinion is symmetrical with Akpan & Ekanem (2013) position that the struggle to control local government by state and federal governments is simply a matter of what each of them stands to benefit from such control, rather than how such control can deliver political dividends to the people at the local level. In a nut shell people see only what they would benefit rather than see what they would do to develop the grassroots.

7.2. Corruption

In every society, there are certain unaccepted behaviours in the course of interpersonal relationships and group behaviour. These behaviours which have moral, ethical and legal implications are detested because they are inimical to proper and decent standards. The pattern of behaviour that encapsulates these detested attitudes is corruption. (Omoluabi, 2007, p. 3) Universally, there is a consensus that corruption is the abuse of entrusted power for private gain. It hurts everyone whose life, livelihood or happiness depends on the integrity of people in a position of authority. This corresponds with the position of Morris (1991) that corruption is the illegitimate use of [political] power to benefit a private interest.

Across the globe corruption is a household name because of its devastating effect on sustainable development. Nigeria debatably, is an example of a state where corruption seems to have eating deep into its fibre. In every transaction corruption is a recurrent phenomenon; in fact corrupt practices seems to be a celebrated pattern of life in the country, arguably, part of Nigeria's constitution that is not written down,

hence, its overwhelming effects on development particularly at local level. This position coincides with that of Etannibi (2002, p. 9) who sees corruption as the source of many socio-economic and political problems that have militated against the attainment of economic development, equity, social justice, political integration and stability as well as democracy in Nigeria.

In Nigeria, corruption has taught people that it is dangerous to be honest. If you claimed to be honest as a public officer there is possibility of becoming a public and endangered officer. By implication it does not mean how good or innovative you are if you are not part of them you may not likely succeed. Hence, the words of Achebe (cited in Fatile, 2012, p. 59) “anyone who can say that corruption in Nigeria has not yet become alarming is either a fool, a crook or else does not live in this country”. To Olaleye-Oruene (1998) Nigeria is globally perceived as the black hole of corruption. Any transaction involving a public official must involve a bribe from the corrupter to the corruptee. Nigeria was ranked high in corruption by Transparency International out of 176 countries and territories surveyed in the 2016 year index where Nigeria was ranked 136 on the table with Guatemala, Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, Myanmar, and Papua New Guinea. In essence, Nigeria and the aforementioned countries were ranked 40th most corrupt countries in the world in 2016. (Uzochuku, 2017) Corruption is a social ideology/phenomenon dictated by the gap between the rich and the poor, though the present Nigerian government is doing its best to control this monster or totally eradicate it. This has spread to everywhere to the extent that the younger generations believe that once you join politics; you will automatically become a millionaire Sylvester Ekezie. (personal interview September 25, 2016)

One major problem confronting Nigeria is essentially and fundamentally a failure of leadership, that tickle down from the centre to the government institution, the manifestation of which is corruption. The reason why these leaders engaged in corruption is because they have no concrete agenda for their local areas, hence, their inability to use their office to boost the development of these local government areas. Sometimes, they don't know what is expected of them, neither do they understand the plight of the people. People wants infrastructure but these are lacking because the leaders are very corrupt, Adeyelu Jonhson. (personal interview September 28, 2016)

According to Okafor (2017) in a statement credited to a first republic minister (Mbazuike Amaechi) of aviation and published by Punch Newspaper, he said “the society has been so demoralised. People have developed the knowledge of acquiring

money without much labour. Stealing in public places, embezzlement and corruption at any level have become ordinance". The victims of corruption (evidently) are the Nigerian public who have been unsympathetically affected by the deprivation which has resulted in underdevelopment of local government areas and continuous socio-political and economic slavery. (Olaleye-Oruene, 1998)

Driven by ethnic chauvinism, elections into local government political offices are laden with political corruption. Corruption is a tragedy that runs in the DNA of every political leader in Nigeria. Appointments into offices within the local government are on the basis of their affiliation to the local government chairperson's ethnic group. The bankrupt politicians considered to be "local champion" often evoke the ethnic card to convince the innocent electorates to vote for them during election but deny the locals necessary development, Daniel Baloyi. (personal interview September 24, 2016)

In many local governments across Zamfara state, officials only go to their offices on Fridays to share their loot. What makes it possible for them to carry out the act is hinged on the fact that some of the administrative staff is either relatives of the local government chair persons or close confidants; their supporters during elections whom they believe needed to be compensated for aiding their electoral success. One can categorically say that local government in Nigeria has been totally reduced to appendages of the state governors who use them to dole out patronage through which they tactically build and perfect their political games, Adenike Omooba. (personal interview October 10, 2016) The issue of corruption no doubt remains a big challenge to development at grassroots level, a noticeable feature of local government politics in Nigeria. Overtly, the poor management, misappropriation and misapplication of the funds accruable to local government have affected infrastructure delivery at the grassroots.

The spate of corruption has made the level of development at the grassroots to be reduced to its lowest ebb. The creation of local government is meant to develop the country from below; what Lawal (2014, p. 144) called "Bottom up" approach to development. One of the reasons why local governments have been constitutionally empowered to generate revenue internally apart from the allocation from the centre is to encourage developmental processes. But where corrupt practices is the order of the day, the importance of local government in the development process, solving of local socio-economic problems as well as provision of basic rural infrastructure will remain a pipe line dream.

7.3. Overbearing Powers of State Governments over Lgas

The fourth schedule of the 1999 constitution of Nigeria assigned some functions to local governments as in respect of the following matters, education, agricultural materials resources, healthcare and any other function assigned to it by the State House of Assembly in order for social services to reach rural areas across the country. Constitutionally, local governments in Nigeria have been empowered to provide essential social services as well as other developmental needs for the people at grassroots level. However the overbearing powers of state governments over local governments in the country has been its bane.

The provisions of the 1999 constitution, section 7 and 8 recognize the local government as a third tier of government with its own power. Contrariwise, the constitution gives the state the power to control the local government. Section 7 and 8 of the (1999) constitution jointly states that there shall be: The system of local government by democratically elected councils (which) is by this Constitution guaranteed and accordingly, the government of every State shall, subject to section 8 of this Constitution ensure their existence under a law which provides for the establishment; structure, composition, finance and functions of such councils. (Federal Government of Nigeria)

By implication local government would not be able to exercise its constitutional functions as stated in section 1 schedule 4 of the (1999) constitution until the State House of Assembly had passed a law. Contrary to the provisions in Sections 7 and 8 of the 1999 Constitution state governments have always engaged the political tradition of controlling the affairs of the third tier government.

According to Agunyai, Ebirim & Odeyemi (2013), this practice has been principally blamed for lack of sustainable development – a progression in which the set of desirable developmental index does not drop over time – at the grassroots level in the country. Put in another word developments have not trickled down to the grassroots level in Nigeria as a result of the way the leadership and resources of local governments are commandeered by the state governments. Davey (1991) contends that local governments in Nigeria are nothing but mere stooge of the state governments who use them to secure their future political ambitions.

Adeyemo (2005) observes that the usurpation of local government functions and revenue sources by State Government is another serious area of eroding the constitutional power of the local government. Similar revenue boards, through the states inadvertently usurp and erode the revenue yielding areas of the local

government such as market; motor parks, building plan approvals etc. thus depriving local government of enough funds for developmental purposes.

Nigeria is constitutionally considered to be a federal state (where there is division of powers between and among the tiers of governments in a country; with each tier having its own constitutional power and functions bequeathed to it by the constitution); a constitutional provision that has been eroded as a result of the disenchanting and misplaced of local government autonomy in the polity due to poor implementation of federal system as postulated in the constitution of the country. Debatably, this constitutional provision has not been adhered to in Nigeria, hence, the subjection of the powers of the local governments in Nigeria to the approval of the state. Observably, this is a constitutional issue and it requires urgent attention if the local government must function and perform the roles for which it was constitutionally established.

7.4. Geographic Distance

One of the five parameters by which local Government efficiency in developmental programme is determined is geographic distance. (Wright, 1995) At independence Nigerian government inherited a vast amalgamated expanse of land some of which are with or without any form of development. The 1976 reform no doubt is meant to bring development very close to the people but one factor though too difficult to notice as a result of the politics behind the creation of some of these local governments; is geographic distance between the local areas and the headquarters of these local governments.

As a factor in Local Government development, geographic distance has to do with the situation where there are tens and hundreds of kilometres between the local governments headquarters and the neighbouring towns and villages that constitute the Local Government. (Olasupo, 2013) This no doubt limits effective communication system and where there isn't such accountability on the part of the officials of such local governments becomes deficient. Most of the local government in the Northern part of the country falls under this state of affairs. This position coincides with that of Mumeh in Olasupo (2013) who explain that up to 1980, Kachia local government in Kaduna state which stretches from the border of Kaduna state to that of Suleja in Niger state was the largest in Nigeria. To create room for development the local government has to be divided.

One factor that coincides with the geographical distance of local government is their population. In the Southern part of the country, some of the local governments'

populations are very big as a result of which the resources are not enough to cater for the needs of its populace. But, with the creation of additional six states in 1996, some of these local governments were further broken down to smaller units. For example the old Ekiti South local government was politically sliced into Ikere, Emure and Ise/Orun local government. Perhaps this tally with the recommendation of Dasuki Committee report on local government that a population of between 25,000 and 50,000 within a Local Government should qualify for a Development Area Office. Therefore, where the problem of geographic distance is not appropriately addressed it could lead to lack of quick and effective socio-political and economic development.

Over the years local government administration in Nigeria has been characterized largely by ineffectiveness and inefficiency owing to non-incorporation of people at this level of governance. One of the reasons for which local government was created as third tier government was to promote citizen's participation in the management of local affairs Ola (1984). What this implies is that at local government level, people's involvement particularly on issues and policies that will enhance service delivery is highly important. Overtly, participation must be informed, institutionalized and inclusive; political acts that will ensure that disadvantaged group are not excluded from the delivery of vital socio-political and economic services. In other words, people's participation regenerates and restores high standards of patriotism; apart from monitoring and fighting corrupt practices.

7.5. Political Instability

One inhibiting factor to the performance of local government though seems invisible to the people at grassroots level is the factor of political instability. The inability of local government to facilitate rural development can also be blamed on the incessant changes in policies and structures of local government in Nigeria. This situation is in contrast to what is obtainable in many developed countries. The institution has been subjected to perpetual learning of new rules with little or no opportunity to fully exploit, let alone improve upon existing rules opined Agagu (2004). In essence, the frequency change of leadership, selection and types of management affects policies and programme implementation.

Between 1979 and 1983, the civilian governors rather than allow to choose their leaders democratically choose to appoint their party loyalists as committee members to manage the affairs of local government across the country. Between 1984 and 1987, local governments were abolished by the military government and

administered by sole administrators. By the time late Abacha came into government local government administration in Nigeria came under another political assault when in 1994, the elected local government council were disbanded by the military government and replaced with caretaker committees. Lawal (2014) asserts that elections that were held into the local governments during General Abacha's regime were based on subjective criteria where candidates who did not share his political aspirations and his cohorts were disqualified from contesting elections.

In 2010, for example, Kayode Fayemi after assuming office as governor of Ekiti state through governors' fiat dissolved all the local government councils (16) in the state and summarily placed them under care taker committee who were his nominees; contrary to section 7 subsection 1 of 1999 Nigeria Constitution, which states that "The system of local government by democratically elected local government councils is under this Constitution guaranteed; and accordingly, the Government of every State shall, ensure their existence under a Law which provides for the establishment, structure, composition, finance and functions of such councils". (Federal government of Nigeria)

According to Ojoye (2016), local government in Nigeria for almost 15 years has been rendered virtually useless as drivers of rural development as a result of its abusive control by the governors. We have had different local government chairpersons apart from several care takers since its creation, all with different socio-political and economic policies. Each chairperson came with different policies; there has never been continuity in the system as a result of which the local government cannot boast of progressive development Akintola Sunday. (personal interview September 20, 2016)

Socio-political and economic policies as well as projects of predecessors are often jettisoned as new set of leaders want to impress and satisfy their supporters by starting new projects rather than given room for continuity. According to Lawal (2014) there have been over fifteen elected and non-elected chairpersons that have been in charge of each local government in Nigeria since 1988.

8. Conclusion

This study has shown that the establishment of Local government in Nigeria is significant to arousing socio-political and economic development at the grassroots level. Though the power to function as the third tier government was fully enshrined

in the constitutions of Nigeria, however, the political power/authority to perform these roles has been significantly eroded by some socio-political factors.

From the above the affair of local government is determined by the central government thus eroding its constitutional status. This has made the Nigeria's local government autonomy more of theory than in the real practices of it, hence its impediment to development at grassroots level. This can be summarized as continued influence of both federal and state government over the most important functions allocated to local government in the guidelines and as stipulated in the fourth schedule of 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

That corruption is a serious menace to effective sustainable development in Nigeria as whole and its third tier of government is an understatement. Given the situation, this tier cannot carry out her developmental responsibilities, not to mention geographical distances which sometimes give credence to corrupt practices. In some rural areas, there are no banks where the little revenue collected could be lodged and the local government headquarter is far from the area; as a result of which revenue collectors take such money home only to return part of it to the local office the following day Adenike. (personal interview, December 10, 2015)

Similarly, the incessant political instability in the country has completely rendered the local governments ineffective as changes in leadership means changes in policies. Relatively there seems to be political stability in the country but there are some states in the federation where elections are inconclusive; politicians are still fighting over who the winner of election is and where the survival of local government is tied to the apron string of state and federal government it means development will continue to elude the rural areas and making it absolutely impossible for the goals of the 1976 Local government reforms to be achieved.

9. Recommendations

Constitutionally, there are 774 recognized local government areas in Nigeria. It is however surprising that unsolicited socio-political and economic situation has left most of them beggarly and unviable socio-economic and political centres with accompanying clienteles. (Ezeh & Muanya, 2013) What this portends to mean is that there is need to reduce the level of local government over dependent on the states so as to make them more viable and capable of performing their developmental functions.

Moreover, the controversy surrounding the position of the local government in the 1999 Constitution should be resolved otherwise; the autonomy and development efforts at the grassroots will be in jeopardy. It therefore means that there must be a constitutional review that will clearly and constitutionally specify the borderline of each level of government as well as state the nature of their constitutional relationships. By implication, to resolve the challenges facing local government Nigeria is to resolve the constitutional loopholes that tie the survival and development of rural areas to the apron string of the state's governments.

One major inhibiting factor that has deprived local government in Nigeria of its developmental power is the States/Local government joint account system which has for a long time given the states unrestrained access to local government funds. In Nigeria, the States' share of the Federation Account is 26.72% while that of local government is 20.6%. But the unfortunate thing is that with the joint account system, the states without any form of accountability uses local government funds, thus denying people access to development at local level. What this portends is that local government accounts should be constitutionally separated from that of the state if development must take place at the grass roots.

For effective development to take place at the grassroots level, accountability must be promoted. Corruption must be discouraged and where official are found guilty of corrupt practices they must be punished to serve as deterrent to others. The political elites needs to change their values and orientation to politics as some of them believe that once you occupy a political office you automatically become a millionaire. By law, elected officials should realize they are constitutionally mandated to serve and to work for the development of their local government areas.

Above all in order to facilitate the operations of local governments in Nigeria as agent of development, local government in Nigeria needs autonomy. This as a matter of fact must be accorded local governments in areas such as revenue generation, expenditure as well as personnel administration and matters relating to development. It is a statement of fact that if there is an institutionalized electoral process for local government representatives where elections are timely conducted without any form of interference from the centre, sustainable socio-political and economic development will in doubt be facilitated as local government is considered to be a channel through which systemic development flows from the federal government to the rural areas.

10. Acknowledgments

I, wish to express my sincere gratitude to Dr (Mrs) Bisi Olaoye of the Department of English, University of the Free State, South Africa, who edited this work.

Notes

1. Adenike Omooba had her compulsory one year service (Nigeria Youth Service Corps) in Gusau local government area, hence, her first-hand knowledge of some corrupt cases in Zamfara state.
2. Adeyelu Johnson works as a teacher in one of the schools in Ejigbo local government area of Lagos state where he teaches government (an aspect of political science at high school level).
3. Akintola Sunday has been a resident of Ikere Ekiti since 1988 and has worked within the local government for some small organizations and now owns a bookshop.
4. Daniel Baloyi is an engineer and a contractor. He resides in Degema (Bonny local government area) Rivers state.
5. Emerald Ezuiji is a resident of Owerri (Owerri West local government area) of Imo state where she works as company secretary.
6. Sylvester Ekezie is a business man and resides in Kaduna (Kaduna South local government area).

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