

Local Government Autonomy in Nigeria: A Historical Perspective

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ABSTRACT Local governments are not sovereign unlike independent nation-states. It is a subordinate government, which derives its existence and power from law enacted by a superior government. The nature and structure of transactions or interactions between the three tiers of government determine the degree of autonomy. Local government in Nigeria is rooted on historical antecedents of reforms. This paper examines the contradictions in local government system and suggests that the sustainability of local government autonomy should anchor on improved revenue base adherence to constitutional provisions, political stability accountability and transparency in governance

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this paper is to examine the nature of the Local Government autonomy, its strength and inherent contradictions in achieving the objectives of local government system in Nigeria. In doing this, it will be relevant to engage in a bit of theorizing and conceptualization of the terms local government and autonomy from different view points. This will enable us generate a greater power of analysis, as we observe that most of the handed down tools, models, theories and approaches from the West are of little utility to the changing conditions of developing democracies.

This exercise will not in any way assume to have exhausted all the various definitions given by scholars and leading practitioners as to what local government and autonomy connote. But our choice of definition will be those that are of relevance to the contemporary Nigerian local government system.

At this point, it is conceived that any serious discussion on the present local government autonomy has to touch on our socio-economic and political circumstances. Thus our values, sentiments and prejudices could not escape intruding as we make the premise as well as suggest measures for transforming Nigerian local government system.

THEORY OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The term local government has been defined in different ways, depending on the orientation and experience of its users. For instance Awa

(1981) sees local government as “a political authority set up by a nation or state as a subordinate authority for the purpose of dispersing or decentralising political power”.

R. Wraith (1984) also defines local government as “the act of decentralizing power, which may take the form of deconcentration or devolution. Deconcentration involves delegation of authority to field units of the same department and devolution on the other hand refers to a transfer of authority to local government units or special statutory bodies such as school boards for instance. From this perceptive, one can see local government as a lesser power in the national polity. It is an administrative agency through which control and authority relates to the people at the grassroots or periphery.

Emezi (1984) on the other hand perceived local government as “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. It provides the community with formal organizational framework which enables them to conduct their affairs effectively for the general good”.

Deriving from the definitions given by Awa, Wraith and Emeki, the definitions have some colonial underpinnings. For instance, Emeki emphasized more on maintenance of law and order and provision of limited range of social services. In essence, the conceptual view of local government is basically a function of space and time factor. For example in colonial time, native administration was primarily established for

maintenance of law and order. With the emergence of independence, emphasis shifted from law enforcement to the provision of social services. Whallen (1976) views local government as a given territory and population, an institutional structure for legislative, executive or administrative purposes; a separate legal identity, a range of powers and functions authorized by delegation from the appropriate central or intermediate legislative and within the ambit of such delegation, autonomy including fiscal autonomy.

Gboyega (1987) on the other hand argues that there exists two basic classes of theories of local government. The first class attempts to justify the existence or need for local government on the basis of its being essential to a democratic regime or for practical administrative purposes like responsiveness, accountability and control. While the second class of theories opined that an effective local government system contradicts the purpose of a democratic regime. This position is justified on the ground that local government institutions are neither democratic in their internal operations nor admit a responsiveness, accountability and control.

The above position can also be amplified into different schools of thought with emphasizes on the functional responsibilities of local government.

According to Ola (1984) these schools of thought include

- (a) Democratic Participatory School
- (b) The Efficient-Service School
- (c) The Developmental School

Essentially, the democratic school of thought holds that local government function to bring about democracy and to afford opportunities for political participation to the citizen as well as to educate and socialize him politically. This view point have been corroborated by Keith-Lucas, David Bulfer and William Machenize. The efficiency school argued that what is central and important to local government is not the bringing about of democracy but rather that local government must be judged - by its success in providing services up to a standard measured by a national inspectorate. Jim Sharpe further opined that the efficient performance of these services is so compelling that, if local government did not exists, something else would be created in its place. The developmental school defer from the above two schools of thought

over its ethnocentric bias in favour of the developed Western democracies. It argues that from Alex-de- Tocqueville and J.S. Mill to James Bryce and to the contemporary theorists such as James, Sharpe, William Mackenzie and Hugh Whalen there was the emphasis on Western Europe and Northern American.

Undoubtedly, the Anglo-American has been the chief advocate of the democratic participatory school. Whereas from the Western Europe side, especially the German School have tended to embrace the efficiency services school, particularly from Rudolf Von-Gueist to Georges Langrod.

Therefore, the developmental school really emphasized on how local government in the developing world can be an effective agent of a better life, an improved means of living, socially and economically, and a means to a better share in the national wealth. In sum, the above approaches can be categorized into two. The general and the developmental categories. The major functional items in the general category which sums up the ideas of the democratic-participatory and the efficiency-school are, Democratic ideals, political participation, protective services and infrastructural services. Under the developmental category are national integration, social and economic development, and manpower resources development. Arising from this definition, the government itself states the primary objectives of the local government as follows:

- (a) To make appropriate services and development activities responsive to local wishes and initiatives by devolving or delegating them to local representatives body;
- (b) To facilitate the exercise of democratic self government close to the local government levels of our society, and to encourage initiatives and leadership potential;
- (c) To mobilize human and material resources through the involvement of members of the public in their local development;
- (d) To provide a two way channel of communication between local communities and government (both state and federal) (Local Government Reform, 1976).

Arising from the guidelines, the primary aim of local government is even far beyond the conceptual views of the above scholars.

More importantly is the fact that the 1976 local government reforms, the 1979, 1989, and

1999. Constitutions sort to make local government the bedrock of national politics as implied in the second objectives above. In a much more relevant perceptive, to the present day local government arrangement. H. V. Akpan defines it as “the breaking down of a Country into smaller units or localities for the purpose of administration, in which the inhabitants of the different units or localities concerned play a direct and full part through their elected representatives, who exercises power or undertake functions under the general authority of the national government.

The above definition pre-supposes that local government exists in such a place where elections take place as at when due, to enable the people have a direct or indirect participation in the matters that concern them.

It also connotes decentralization of power or authority. There appears to be serious areas of departure between this definition and the one contained in the 1976 Local Government Reforms. The above appears more detailed and relevant to the present circumstances, as it sees local government as a representative government. It sorts to make local government autonomous. It advocates the cooperation of the people in their development projects and also stresses the need for local government to be relevant to the needs of the people.

Be that as it may, a summation of the definitions above points to the fact that local government involves the conception of a territorial non-sovereign community, possessing the legal right and the necessary organization to regulate its own affairs. Local governments are not sovereign unlike independent nation state. Local government per se is a subordinate government, which derives its existence and power from law enacted by a superior government (Awotokun and Adeyemo, 1999).

THE CONCEPT OF AUTONOMY

There is a good deal of confusion and misinterpretation as to what the term ‘autonomy’ connotes, despite its regular usage, yet the real understanding of the term leaves much to be desired. The numerous scholars and government functionaries who used the term assumed that their audience understands the concept. Furthermore, government reforms that is intended to

preserve or extend local government autonomy ends up short of their objectives because the full meaning of the term ‘autonomy’ has not been fully explained (Odunfa, 1991).

In view of these conflicting conceptual interpretations, the term “Local Government autonomy is perceived as local self government or grassroots democracy”. This grassroots democracy is primarily aimed at giving the vast majority of the people the fullest opportunity to participate in determining their own destiny. But it is obvious that we cannot have complete autonomy or complete local self-government within sovereign states. If local governments were completely autonomous they would be sovereign states.

Nwabueze (1983) defines the autonomy under a federal system to mean that “each government enjoys 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 like a legislative assembly, Governor, Court etc. but that each government must exist not as an appendage 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. According to Nwabueze, autonomy would only be meaningful in a situation whereby each level of government is not constitutionally bound to accept dictation or directive from another.

In the view of the defunct Centre for Democratic Studies, local government autonomy refers to “The relative discretion which Local Governments enjoy in regulating their own affairs”. The extent to which Local Government are free from the control of the State and Federal Governments in the management of local affairs.

In his contribution on the literature of autonomy, Davey (1991). opines that “Local autonomy is primary concerned with the question of responsibilities, resources and discretion conferred on the local authorities. As such discretion and responsibility are at the core of local government”. It presumes that local government must possess the power to take decisions independent of external control within the limits laid down by the law. It must garner efficient resources particularly of finance to meet their responsibilities, put differently, local autonomy is the freedom of independence in clearly defined issue,

areas, as well as separate legal identity from other levels of government.

We can argue that there can never be an absolute autonomy because of the interdependence of the three levels of government and this bring into focus the inter-governmental context of local government autonomy. The federal, state and local governments rule over the same population. If they are to achieve the purpose of their creation and not to waste the meagre resources at their disposal, there must be a definition of the boundaries or arena of operation of each of them.

In essence, when one talks of local government autonomy in Nigerian's polity, we refer to the relative independence of local government control by both the state and federal governments. Therefore, it is the nature and structure of transactions or interactions between the three levels of government that reveals the degree of local government autonomy.

THE QUEST FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT AUTONOMY

The struggle for local government autonomy in Nigeria has been a recurring issue. It is as old as the history of Nigeria colonial state. In the 1950s various reforms such as the Northern Nigeria local government law of 1954, the Western and Eastern Nigeria local government laws of 1954 respectively aimed at democratizing local government administration were initiated by the various regional governments. It was an era of participatory local government in Nigeria. Despite these attempts, yet the regions had strong grip of the control of local governments for varying political reasons.

This master-servant relationship did not change for the better until the 1976 local government reforms.

In recent times, the federal government changed its posture and championed the course of local government autonomy. In the forward of the guidelines for 1976 local government reforms, it was remarked that "the state government have continued to encroach upon what would have been the exclusive preserve of local government". With this reform, the federal government granted the local government the power of grassroots governance, thus became the third tiers of government in the Country. Undoubtedly, there has been improvement in

the degree of autonomy granted the local government since 1976, with more functions giving to it. To strengthen the philosophy of the government, it went further to guarantee the statutory nature of local government by embodying it in the 1979 constitution section 7(1) of the said constitution stated: "the system of democratically elected local government councils is under this constitution guaranteed". In spite of the inclusion of this in the constitution, the civilian administration between 1979-83 seriously bastardized the so-called autonomy.

It should be noted that successive military regimes have tried to give local government its rightful position through the revitalization and restructuring of local government system in Nigeria. The Babangida administration since 1985 made conscious efforts to strengthen local government system by enhancing its autonomy.

Certain measure of autonomy started coming the way of local governments in January 1988 with the scrapping of the State Ministries of local government throughout the Country. This was to remove the political control and bureaucratic redtapism created by the Ministries in the developmental performance of local government councils.

Apart from the above steps, there was the local government election in December 1987. It was an attempt to restore democracy to the grassroots since the last election to the local councils in 1976, whose life expired in December 1979. Other efforts geared towards local government autonomy were the approved scheme of service for local government employees, following the recommendation of the Oyeyipo committee report of March 1988.

To enhance financial autonomy and regular sources of revenue, there was the direct disbursement of funds to local governments, thus preventing the hijacking of the funds of local governments by the state governments.

In a similar direction, the federal government increased the statutory allocation to local governments; for instance it was increased from 10 – 15% in 1990 and from 15 – 20% in 1992. To further ensure the viability of the local governments, the federal allocation to local government increased from #1.177 billion in 1986 to #8.1 billion in 1991. The monthly allocation from the federal account moved from #675 million in 1991 to #1 billion since January 1992.

Apart from the direct allocation to the local governments, substantial amount of money was made annually as grants to training institutions such as Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, and the University of Nigeria Nsukka, for the purpose of training middle and upper level manpower for local governments. Series of seminars and workshops were organized by the federal government and institutions to improve the performance of local government officials.

In view of the importance of local governments, as the bedrock for democracy, there was the creation of 148 local governments in 1989 and 140 in 1991 and now totaling 774. These efforts were to bring the government much nearer to the grassroots.

The application of the 1988 civil service reforms in the local government service was another measure of enhancing the status of local government as the third tier of government. The measure was to professionalise the service of local governments and to strengthen accountability through the use of audit alarm system and the creation of the office of the Auditor General for the local government.

The federal government had made numerous reformations in 1989 constitution, which are designed to remove the inadequacies of local government system in its preparation for the Third Republic.

Other provisions of the 1989 constitution which give powers for the removal of the chairman of local government are contained in section 292 and those of the electorate to "recall" any member of a local government council including the chairman and vice-chairman's specified in section 304, section 7(8), same constitution guarantees the local government a steady and assured sources of income. By virtue of these provisions the local government system is increasingly becoming autonomous and recognized as third tiers of government.

In the aborted third republic, the federal government in obedience to ensuring a meaningful grassroots democracy, took further steps to guarantee local autonomy, so as to facilitate the development of democratic culture at the grassroots. In December 1990 there were elections into the councils.

According to the guidelines on Application of the Presidential System and its Logic to Local Government 1991 and in accordance with the

Implementation of its Basic Constitutional and Transitional Provision (Amendment) Decree 1992, the local government council which constitute the legislative and the executive arms were charged with some functions.

THE 1991 REFORMS

The 1991 reforms introduced to the local government the presidential system of government as it used to be at the federal and state levels. The development was regarded as a test tube for the nation's grassroots democracy. The major highlights of the reforms in accordance with the Implementation of the Basic Constitutional and Transitional Provision (Amendment) Decree 1991 are as follows:

- (1) The Executive chairman ceases to be a member of the council.
- (2) Councillors were to form the legislature.
- (3) Chairman to appoint supervisors from within or outside the council, (but if within the council such a councillor immediately loses his seat).
- (4) Councillors to elect a leader who will act as council speaker.
- (5) Council clerk now to head the Personnel Management department.
- (6) Executive arm of the council to consist of Chairman, Vice-chairman, Secretary and the Supervisors.
- (7) Council Secretaries now become Chief Executive Officer / Adviser to the Executive arm.

Under that arrangement, the local government council which constitutes the Legislative arm was charged with these functions:

- (8) Law-making, debating and passing local government legislation.
- (9) Debating, approving and possibly amending local government yearly budgets, subject to the chairman's vote, which could be ever ridden by a two third majority of the councillors.
- (10) Vetting and monitoring the implementation of projects and programmes in the council's yearly budget.
- (11) Examining and debating monthly statement of income and expenditure rendered to it by the executive arm.
- (12) Impeaching the council chairman who has committed an impeachable offence in

accordance with the constitution.

- (13) Advising, consulting and liaising with the chairman who is the head of the executive arm of the local council; and
- (14) Performing such other functions as may be assigned by the House of Assembly of the state in which it is situated.

In the same vein, the executive authority was conferred on the local government Chairman or the Vice-chairman, Secretary and Supervisors or officers in the service of the councils to perform as follows:

- (a) To function as the Chief Executive and Accounting Officer of the local government provided his role as Accounting Officer shall exclude signing of cheques and vouchers;
- (b) Assign to any supervisor of the local government responsibility for any business of the local government including the administration of any department of the local government.
- (c) Hold regular meetings with the vice-chairman and all supervisors for the purpose of:
 - (i) Determining the general directions of the policies of the local government
 - (ii) Co-ordinating the activities of the local government and
 - (iii) General discharging the executive functions of the local government.
- (d) Set performance target for each local government employees.
- (e) Observe and comply fully with the checks and balances spelt out in existing guidelines and financial regulations governing receipts and disbursement of public funds and other assets entrusted to his care and shall be liable for any breach thereof;
- (f) Adhere fully to the Finance Control and Management Act 1959 and its amendment.

It is essential to note that other innovations introduced during Babangida

Administration's transition programme include, the popular participation and political control of the grassroots, injection of new breed, into the nations body politics, introduction of two grassroots based political parties, creation of more local governments, presidentiasizing the local government and the introduction of open voting system. These changes are conscious attempts to give local governments throughout the Country some degree of autonomy in achieving the basic objectives of their creation. These objectives are contained in the 1976

guidelines for local governments' reform and further amplified in the fourth schedule of 1979 and 1989 constitutions of the federal republic of Nigeria.

We wish to add further that the local government council (legislative arm) can make bye-laws to be assented to by the chairman of the local government. However, after 30 days, if the chairman fails to assent to a bye-law duly passed, by the two third majorities and such a bye-law will then become law even without the assent of the chairman. This is a novel procedure, which introduces a system of checks and balances between local government chairman and the council.

The provisions above are geared towards unfettered development and the sustenance of democracy in the third republic. It should also be noted, that these developments brought presidentialism to the grassroots where there exist a clear cut separation of power between the legislative and executive arms of the local government.

On this note, we may add that there are various forms of autonomy, ranging from political, legal, fiscal, administrative etc. Politically, to develop local government certain provisional decrees and even the 1989 constitution had already spelt over the means for political changes in local government. Autonomy to popularly elect chairman and councillors is contained in chapter 8 part 1 section 283 - 307 of the 1989 constitution. Financially, the spending limit of local councils had been abolished. As a result, local government would no longer seek approval from the state governments before embarking on any project so far as it is contained in their estimate. Approval of annual estimate or budget is presently done by the local government councils instead of the states department of local government. This presumably will enhance the effective performance and thus prevent the unnecessary delay in the execution of capital projects.

The administrative dimension of autonomy of the local councils is given to the chairman to appoint staffers up to G.L.06 whereas the 1976 local government reforms, the 1979 constitution and chapter 8 section 308 of 1989 charged the Local Government Service Commission with the responsibility for employment, posting, promotion, discipline and training of members of staff from G.L.07 and above.

On the other hand, the councils enjoy the social autonomy of providing certain social services to the community for instance the local government has been vested with the responsibility of health services delivery with the transfer of primary health care to the council, thus enhancing grassroots health care delivery system.

It is worthwhile to note at this juncture, the salient provisions in the 1999 constitution that relates to the local government autonomy and control. The 1999 constitution provides by section 7(1) thereof, 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, subject to section 8 of this constitution, ensure their existence under a law which provides for the establishment, structure, composition and finances of such councils”. With this provision, the 1999 constitution has made local governments a creation of the state government.

Other provisions that justify the control of local councils by the state governments have to do with the creation of new local government areas and Boundary adjustments. According to section 8(3)(4) of the 1999 constitution provides as thus:

- (3) A bill for a Law of a House of Assembly for the purpose of creating a new local government area shall only be passed if
 - (a) a request supported by at least two-thirds majority of members (representing the area demanding the creation of the new local government area in each of the following, namely
 - (i) the House of Assembly in respect of the area, and
 - (ii) the local government councils in respect of the area, is received by the House of Assembly;
 - (b) a proposal for the creation of the local government area is thereafter approved in a referendum by at least two-thirds majority of the people of the local government area where the demand for the proposed local government area originated;
 - (c) the result of the referendum is then approved by a simple majority of the members in each local government council in a majority of all the local government councils in the state; and
 - (d) the result of the referendum is approved by

a resolution passed by two-thirds majority of members of the House of Assembly.

- (4) A bill for a Law of a House of Assembly for the purpose of boundary adjustment of any existing local government area shall only be passed if:
 - (a) a request for the boundary adjustment is supported by two-thirds majority of members (representing the area demanding and the area affected by the boundary adjustment) in each of the following, namely:
 - (i) the House of Assembly in respect of the area, and
 - (ii) the local government council in respect of the area, is received by the House of Assembly; and
 - (b) a proposal for the boundary adjustment is approved by a simple majority of members of the House of Assembly in respect of the area concerned.

It is assumed that these provisions will prevent the manipulations of local government boundaries and the unwarranted proliferation of local government areas for purely partisan political reasons. This tendency undoubtedly undermined the democratic process at the local government level in the defunct Second Republic.

LIMITATIONS OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT AUTONOMY

Whatever might be our conceptual view of the notion autonomy, yet it is believed that it cannot be absolute. Even sovereign nations are not autonomous since they are bounded by inter-national co-operation, commitment, laws and treaties. Also, within the domestic political environment, governments are guided by some bodies of organic laws, norms and convention etc. which regulates their relations / interaction with the polity.

It is however important to note that there exist some hindrances that limits the achievement of local government objectives. For instance, Section 7(10) of the 1989 constitution, as well as section (110) of Decree No. 15 of 1989 specifically provides as follows: “subject to the provision of chapter viii of this Constitution the House of Assembly of a State shall enact a law providing for the structure, composition, revenue and expenditure and other financial matters, staff, meeting and other relevant matters for the local

government in the state.

Furthermore, Decree No. 23 of 1991, section 4; 221 has provided that: "The executive powers of local government shall be exercised by the chairman of the local government subject to the provision of any Edict or law of the state within which the local government is situated. Section 34 of the "Local Government (Basic Constitutional and Transitional provisions) Decree" (Decree No. 15) of 1989 empowers the President, Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces to "if he is satisfied that the affairs of a local government are not being managed in the best interest of the community or in a way to strengthen the unity of the people of Nigeria or for any good cause".

- (a) Remove the chairman, vice-chairman of the local government council from office or
- (b) Dissolve the local government council and appoint an Administrator to manage the affairs of the local government until an election to the offices of chairman, vice-chairman and councillors for the local government council has been held.

Moreover, section 4(5) (3) (b) of the 1989 constitution provides that the local government chairman's... executive power shall be so exercised as not to impede or prejudice the exercise of the executive powers of the federation or of state in which the local government area concerned is situated or to endanger the asset or investment of the government of the federation or of the state government in the local government area.

Although, a large measure of autonomy was granted to local government to enable it sustain itself as an effective third tier of government in Nigeria and also to bring a meaningful development throughout the Country starting from the grassroots. In spite of this, however, the following levels of interaction can be identified:

- (a) Federal – State
- (b) Federal – State – Local
- (c) Federal – Local
- (d) State – State
- (e) State – Local
- (f) Local – Local relation;
- (g) Local – Extra governmental bodies.

The network of inter-governmental relation's transactional pattern in a state is varied and complex. Taking into consideration the vertical and lateral patterns or levels of interaction in Nigeria Federal state. Intergovernmental relation

is a product of federalism, whatever model or combination of interactions that manifest and its effectiveness to a great extent depends on the mental disposition of the political actors. The following levels of interaction which in some cases may act as impediments to local government autonomy still manifest. In most cases, this pattern of interaction becomes indispensable and more often responds to and in obedience to the degree of conflict and consensus, negotiations, bargaining and co-operation that exist over space and time (Adeyemo, 1992).

The federal government still exercise both constitutional and statutory responsibility over the following matters in relation to local government administration.

- (a) Creating new local governments through the normal process of constitutional amendment;
- (b) Making provisions for statutory allocation of public revenue to the governments of the federation;
- (c) Establishment of National Electoral Commission for the purpose of organizing democratic elections at all levels, including local government elections;
- (d) Establishing the code of conduct bureau for all public officers, including local government functionaries, to declare their assets;
- (e) Exercising through the National Assembly unfettered powers to make laws for the federation or any part thereof including any local government area.

The state governments are also constitutionally responsible to relate with the local governments on the following:

- (1) Administering on the oath of allegiance and the oath of office on the newly elected chairman, through the governor of the state.
- (2) Allocating 10% of the state's internally generated revenue to the local governments within the state;
- (3) Enacting an edict law to create, for any local government area within the state up to seven development area;
- (4) Establishing a joint planning board through a law enacted by the State House of Assembly to require each local government within a particular state to participate in economic planning and development of the local government area.

- (5) Establishment of the office of the Audit-General for local governments for the purpose of auditing the accounts of the local governments within a state, enacting, through the State House of Assembly "a law providing for the structure, composition, revenue, expenditure and other financial matters, staff, meeting and other relevant matters for the local government in the state". Subject to the provisions of chapter viii of the 1989 constitution and parts I to IV of Decree No. 15 1989.
- (6) Offering advice, guidance and supervision through the office of the deputy governor of the state

Be that as it may, the state governments under the 1999 constitution have the right to control, dissolve, dismiss and institute inquiry into the general administration of any local government in their states.

Problems of Sustaining Local Government Autonomy

It has been difficult to practice an enduring autonomy in Nigerian Local Government. Even, though various institutional structures have been put in place since the 1976 Local Government reform, so as to concretize certain degree of autonomy, yet an amalgam of bottlenecks have been put on the ways of an emergent autonomous Local Government. These are constitutional provisions, political instability in the polity, financial/fiscal problems.

It is an irony of fate that the military induced reforms in the Nigerian Local Government has its attendant contradictions, since the military structure is essentially hierarchical thus the operation of Local Government can not be isolated from such contradictions that characterized military hegemony. Adeyeye (1996) opined that the Nigerian Federalism remains a formidable problem is evident in the various contradictions of military rule and the decrees they have spurned. Similarly, the continuous overbearing role has been exercise by the states poses a tremendous threat to the autonomy of Local Government. These can be seen within the realm of various contradictory rule, instructions, supervisory powers passed down to the local councils, some of which are outside the constitutional jurisdictions of the Local Governments.

Moreover, political instability that strongly manifested in the polity is among the militating factors against autonomy of the Local Government. This is due to the changing and swinging of political pendulum that oscillates between Sole-Administratorship to Caretaker Committee System and the elected government. This was however scuttled in quick succession arising from the fact that there was no stable political system that could endure political socialization and actualization to germinate, and nurture the orientation for global acceptance. The most favored system was the Sole-Administratorship that further ceded the Local Government to state control and erode its autonomy (Oyelakin, 1992).

The usurpation of Local Government functions and revenue sources by State Government is another serious areas of eroding the autonomy of the Local Government. Moreoften than not, parallel revenue boards, through the states unwittingly usurps and erode the revenue yielding areas of the Local Government. It is not uncommon to see such Boards to include market, motor parks, building plan approvals and forest royalty collection fund etc.

Furthermore it is appreciated that finance is the bedrock of any meaningful development. A balance sheet of the comparative performance of Nigerian Local Governments is nothing to write home about. Most of the Local Governments exist only for payment of salaries, as they depended on the federal allocation, which in most cases are deducted from sources for the payment of Primary School Teachers Salaries. Even the mandatory 10percent Internally Generated Revenue of the State to Local Governments are not forthcoming.

All said and done, other contradictions that tend to erode local government autonomy include the inability of the local governments to meet the finances of their constitutional responsibilities. Similarly, the heavy cost of implementing the separation of power poses yet another threat to local government autonomy.

It was also not uncommon for most of the local governments to embark on unbudgeted expenses (as imposed on them by higher levels of government) especially on National Orientation Agency, National Electoral Commission, National Population Commission, Security Agencies, Poverty Alleviation Programme and so on. Political instability and policy inconsis-

tencies are yet another problem. All these additional responsibilities constitute financial burden on most local governments.

The downtrend in the national economy together with the ever-increasing wage bills has its effect on the local governments and the so-called autonomy.

CONCLUSION

The quest for autonomy therefore should be related to financial viability. However, local government autonomy should not be seen as making the local government a sovereign entity, or the chairman a 'local governor' thus comparing himself with the state governors. But local government autonomy should be enjoyed by the citizens at the grassroots. The autonomy should not be a privilege of the chairman and councillors. Omoruyi opined that "local communities can only be meaningfully autonomous when popular structures, organizations and supportive values have been created to sustain, propagate and perpetuate fair representation, constant dialogue, openness of policy making, public accountability and collective self-defense. Existing structure and association and new ones should be identified and formed as the focus of grassroots democracy. Governmental powers have to be shared by these grassroots bodies in order to give life to the principle of local self-autonomy and participatory democracy.

It is suggested that the present unhealthy condition of the Local Government should be rescued. The State and Federal Governments should ensure that they do not infringe on the revenue yielding areas of Local Government. They should also put a stop to the persist deduction from the monthly allocation of Local Governments. In the same vein, States should henceforth remit the constitutional 10% of their internally generated revenue to the Local Councils. Local Governments also needs to increase their internal revenue based rather than relying on the federal allocation. Similarly, Local Governments should re-order their priorities and block all avenues of wastage and leakage's.

The controversy surrounding the position of the Local Government in the 1999 constitution should without delay be resolved otherwise the autonomy and developmental efforts at the grassroots will be in jeopardy.

Finally, whatever the degree of autonomy vested on the local government in the amended 1999 constitution and other local government laws of the state, the political actors should be more diligent in exercising such autonomy or power. Irrespective of the type of constitution, conflicts are bound to ensue among the operatives, the ability to amicably resolve such conflicts will give room for an enduring democracy where the value of autonomy would be better appreciated.

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