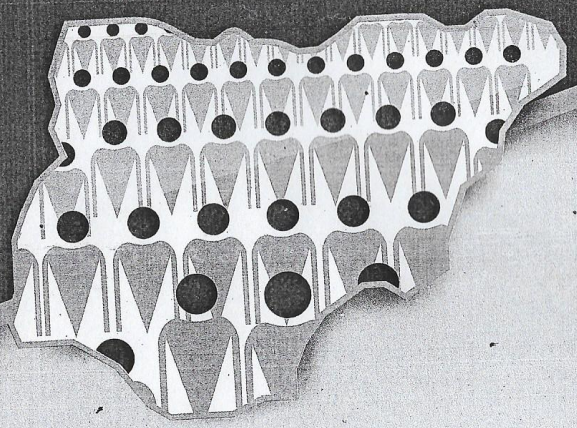
Contemporary Issues in the Nigerian Society



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Section A: Introduction

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Democracy, Local Government and Service Delivery in Nigeria Since 1999

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1.0 Introduction

The local government in Nigeria is strategically positioned to be an agent of social, economic and political transformation. Historically, local government in Nigeria has provided important services such as roads, health care services, water, education, sanitary services, and recreational facilities, among others to its citizens in rural and urban areas. The fundamental rational for entrusting the local government with the noble task of providing these essential services to the local communities was and is still viewed in line with the obvious fact that the local government is the closest tier of government to the people of Nigeria and touches their lives most intimately. Moreover, it is also generally acknowledged in Nigeria and everywhere in the world that real and authentic development of a nation would not be achieved unless development is pursued from the grassroots. This comes to the front-burner of the decentralisation strategy in Nigeria, which aims at delegating certain powers to the local government through devolution to undertake specific functions or activities that would complement the efforts of the federal and state governments in order to achieve overall rapid development of the country.

The local government system has been a major feature of the Nigerian government and politics since colonial rule though, over the years, there have been changes in name, structure, and composition, while the system was operated differently all over the country (Agagu, 2004). However, the 1976 reforms introduced a uniform system of local government administration throughout the country. The reform was a major departure from the previous practice of local government administration in Nigeria. The philosophical basis of

the reform lies in the conviction that a strong local authority with clearly defined functional responsibilities in a power-sharing relationship with the states is an institutional safeguard against tyranny. Following the 1976 reforms, local government became recognized as a tier of government entitled to a share of national revenue consequent on its constitutionally allocated functions (Imuetinyan, 2002).

Since these reforms, successive governments in Nigeria have made concerted efforts at strengthening the level of government to serve the rural population better. The motivation is to bring about a virile local government system that would harness both the human and other resources at the grassroots for upward realistic development of the entire country. Local government administration is established to affect citizens through the service delivery function (Aghayere, 1997). Regrettably, it should be stated unequivocally that despite the numerous reforms undertaken by successive regimes in Nigerian both military and civilian to reinvigorate the level of government for impressive performance, the role of local government in providing meaningful services in recent times has attracted unusual public concern. People have explicitly lost hope and trust in local government as an important institution of government in Nigeria owing to its failure to alleviate the sufferings of the grassroots. Indeed, the high level of poverty and the unattractive features of the local communities in Nigeria today are connected with the poor service delivery of the local government. The local government in Nigeria has failed to justify the rationale behind its creation and continued existence as an agent of social, political and economic change and the third-tier of government in the federal administrative arrangement of the country. The present performance of the local government in the current democratic dispensation is unarguably not better than the situation under the various military administrations experienced in Nigeria. In view of the above scenario, this paper, therefore critically examines the factors responsible for the poor performance of the Nigerian local government in providing the highly desired services to citizens at the grassroots. The paper also recommends measures for revamping the local government for maximum performance and good success in the long run.

2.0 Conceptual Clarification

The need to enhance the general understanding of the issue under consideration demands proper clarification and analysis of the following words: Democracy, Local Government and Public Service Delivery.

2.1 Democracy

Democracy as a form of political organization dates back to more than twenty-five hundred years and, it has since been a constant concern of political theory. Thus, it has undergone different periods of intellectual currents and, the process subjected to different definitional and typological analyses by thinkers, philosophers, and scholars of repute within the academia (Akindele, 1994). Schumpeter (1967:30) conceives the democratic method as the institutional arrangement which realize the common good by making the people itself decide issues through the election of individuals who are to assemble in order to carry out its will. Omoruyi (1994:196) subscribes to the school of thought that democracy is a means, albeit an ideal means for the attainment of the fullest measure of human freedom and self-determination. He adds that, if, therefore, democracy is an instrumental value, then it can be applied on any realm of life where "man is born free but everywhere in chains. In a similar manner, Igwe (1994:106) asserts that elections into the various public offices are considered the true tests of a democratic polity. Held periodically, its essence is to gauge the democratic pulse of the people. He further states that, in fact, for any society to be considered as democratic that society has to ensure that those who aspire to public office are freely chosen by the people. From the foregoing, it can be derived that central to democracy of any kind- direct or indirect is the people and their rights or freedom to shape their political destiny through collective decisions.

2.2 Local Government

Sady (cited in Olawuyi, 1999: 1-2) defines local government as political subdivision of a nation or (in federal systems) state which is constituted by law and has substantial control over local affairs, including the power to impose taxes, or to exact labour for prescribed purpose. The governing body of such entity is elected or otherwise locally selected. Similarly, Bello-Imam (1996:2) sees local government as that unit of administration with constitutionally defined territory

and power as well as administrative authority with relative autonomy. Such administrative authority could be but not always elected. The implication of the above definition of local government is that it is a unit of administration with well-defined powers and authority imbued with relative autonomy while its decision-making organ as well as its chief executive could be elected or nominated.

Awa (cited in Olawuyi, 1999:2) construes it as that system under which local communities are organized to maintain law and order, provide some limited range of social services and public amenities and encourage the cooperation and participation of the inhabitants towards the improvement of their condition of living. Thus, the simplest way to conceive of the local government is to view it as a means by which the local people govern themselves through a popularly elected representatives. It offers immense opportunity for localities to improve their living conditions by themselves through participation in decision making in government. Importantly, in its nature, the closeness between the governing body and the people provides unique platform for leaders to be easily held responsible for the outcome of the policy decisions they take. The above facts make the third tier of government exceptionally different from governments at higher levels.

2.3 Public Service Delivery

In the words of Fagbemi (2006:106), public services, refers to those activities of government institutions aimed at satisfying the needs and ensuring the well-being of society as well as enforcing laws, regulations and directives of the government. In a closely related manner, public services are those services provided by governments to the public. The need for services that no individual can or will pay for, but that benefit all by their presence, is one of the justifications for taxation. Examples of such services are sewage, trash disposal and street cleaning. On a larger scale, public education and public health services are also public services. Thus public service delivery is the implementation of those services and making sure they reach those people and places they are intended to. To this extent, therefore, public service delivery translates to fulfilling primary government duty or function of providing the basic necessities of life to the citizens.

The link between democracy, local government and service delivery therefore lies in the obvious fact that democracy affords local citizens the privilege to

participate in selecting a body of individuals (the council) to ensure the provision of the basic goods and services meant to improve their living standard, alleviate their hardships and make government more realistic and close to the grassroots. Nevertheless, to enjoy continuous delivery of these public goods and/or services by the local government, citizens of the localities have a duty to pay their taxes as and at when due to their local government councils. Regular payment of taxes by local citizens enables and places high sense of responsibility on the council units to, in turn, ensure steady supply of the services paid for, and to be held answerable in case of any failure in service delivery. Thus, both the local governments and their citizens have duties and obligations to perform in guaranteeing adequate and sustained service delivery at the grassroots.

3.0 Theoretical Framework

In order to investigate the role of local government in providing vital services to its citizens in both urban and rural areas in Nigeria, the paper adopts the decentralization theory to advance its arguments. Undeniably, however, other theories such as functional and system theories, can also be used to explain the relationship between democracy, local government and public service delivery but the obvious reason that democracy, through decentralisation of powers and functions empowers and brings government most closest to the grassroots for the purpose of engendering development makes a case for decentralization as the most appropriate theoretical model in this paper. Moreover, the main rationale behind the local government system is to encourage the participation of the local people in their own affairs by allowing them some measure of autonomy to govern themselves through elected representatives. Decentralization as a theoretical model is considered the opposite of centralization or concentration, and involves delegation of power or authority from central government to the periphery (Ayee, 2008:101). Rondinelli (1981) notes that it is the transfer of authority to plan, make decisions and manage public functions from a higher level of government to any individual, organisation or agency at a lower level. To Smith (1985:1), decentralisation means reversing the concentration of administration at a single centre and conferring powers on local government.

The common major variants or forms of decentralisation include: political decentralization or devolution, administrative decentralisation or de-concentration, fiscal decentralisation as well as economic decentralisation. The

first, political decentralisation or devolution, involves the transfer of specified responsibilities and resources from central government to local government units, or to a community, usually represented by their own elected officials. A local self-governing authority or government has five important attributes: its locality or smallness; its separate identity or corporate body; competence (responsibility for specific services and the ability to compel compliance); representativeness; and autonomy in a specified area, including resource mobilisation and management. The relationship between central government and the peripheral institutions is of partnership and cooperation, not of principal-agent or master-servant. The second, administrative decentralisation or de-concentration refers to the transfer of state responsibilities and resources from the central government ministries and agencies in the nation's capital to its peripheral institutions in the districts within the same administrative system (field administration). In other words, it is an internal form of delegation of responsibilities among officials of the same organization, and involves the strengthening of field administrative organizations within the public service of a country.

The third variant, fiscal decentralisation, involves the transfer of financial resources from central government to local government units, taking account of the responsibilities allocated to these institutions. The ceding of revenue to local government units by the central government, the mobilisation and management of resources by local government units, and revenue sharing formula, are indicative of fiscal decentralisation. The last variant, economic decentralisation on its own refers to opening up of an economy to competitive forces, as opposed to dominance by state institutions (state capital). It would include privatisation, deregulation, and a range of economic reforms. Under economic decentralisation, market-oriented policies are pursued, and the private sector is regarded as an engine of growth (Ayee, 2008:102-103). Basu (1994:195) argues that decentralisation should be distinguished from delegation. For him, decentralisation means the transfer of administrative authority from the centre to local agencies, who function autonomously in the field. It involves devolution of powers from the above, implying dispersal of powers among a number of subordinate officials or administrative units. He further points out that decentralising agencies can be of various types depending upon their legal status, responsibilities, authority and accountability. Delegation on the contrary, implies devolution of authority by a person to his agent or subordinate subject to his right

of supervision and control. As he put it, in brief, delegation is distribution of power or functions and not authority and responsibility, which is delegated only in decentralisation. Decentralisation may have different implications to different sets of people. To an economist it means dispersal of industries; to advocates of local authority it implies initiative, responsibility and discretion to local bodies, and to an administrator it means delegation of authority to regional and local officers (Sharan, 1981:437).

Ultimately, decentralization has been considered by many as one of the most important strategies in public sector reform. This is because donors and governments in Africa have considered decentralisation to be a strategy that would bring service delivery closer to consumers, improve the responsiveness of the central government to public demands, improve the efficiency and quality of public services, and empower lower units to feel more involved and in control. It is also meant to reduce overload and congestion at the centre, and speed up operational decision-making and implementation by minimising the bottlenecks associated with the over-centralisation of powers and functions at just one or two points in the hierarchy of a public service organisation or ministry. Consequently, decentralisation seeks to increase the operational autonomy of line managers and agencies, leaving only broad policy guidelines to be worked out at the centre (Smith, 1985; Rondinelli, 1989). As Rothchild (1994:1) also observed:

> *To many donor agencies and international financial institution such as the World Bank, decentralisation is seen as a means of creating on enabling environment for development and promoting accountability. For most African government, however, decentralization is now viewed as a strategy for mobilising local resources and initiative for national development, since it has become evident that government alone cannot guarantee development. It is also hoped that granting a measure of autonomy and thereby a level of self-determination to local groups through decentralisation, would advance their commitment to national stability and enhance state legitimacy. On the past of the broad mass of the people, decentralisation is seen as an important aspect of democratisation and a mass whereby they are allowed a role in the management of their own affairs.*

Akase (1987:111) seems to agree with the foregoing views, when he notes that democracy involves the decentralisation of power from the center to the periphery in any society. The decentralisation of power to the grassroots, so to say, is even more pertinent to underdeveloped third world countries whose majority of people lives at the grassroots of society-the rural areas. Bello-Iman and Uga (2004:454) advance the view that of the four approaches designed by nation states to promote development from below i.e., decentralisation by deconcentration, devolution, delegation and liberalisation that of devolution applies to Local Government.

Decentralisation by devolution is supported on the ground that centralisation inhibits the active participation of the citizens in the running of their own affairs and could by extension, lead to despotism. In other words, the local government equally exists to bridge the gap between the national or central government and the grassroots. As Ayoade (1995:27) observes, the local government in Nigeria has moved from the narrow confines of the traditional elites to that of mass concern. It is now generally agreed that local government is the primary government because its decisions touch the lives of more people than those of any other level of government.

Thus, the local government in Nigeria is known for its immense potentials to serve as a vehicle for national development. Traditionally, it serves as an agency of the federal and state governments in implementing development plans and extending appropriate social services to the local communities due to its closeness to the grassroots. It is in appreciation of these fundamental facts about the role of the local government that successive governments in Nigeria both military and civilian have made commendable efforts through reforms to reposition and strengthen the local government in order to make it real instrument for achieving meaningful national development. This background, therefore, stands to guide us to better understand and examine the nexus between democracy and service delivery at the local government level in Nigeria.

4.0 The Rationale for the Existence of the Local Government System in Nigeria

There exists a vast array of reasons for the existence of the local government system everywhere. Since there is no universal agreement regarding what

constitutes the structure, powers and roles of local government in the World, local government exists for different reasons in different political contexts. However, these reasons whether social, political or economic in nature can ideally be termed developmental purposes. In other words, the essence of the local government system is apparently universal in the World, irrespective of the structure, powers or functions and irrespective of whether the country is developed or underdeveloped. Nevertheless, in Nigeria, the central objective of the local government system is to drive the administrative wheels of the country to achieve the highly desired overall national development.

The local government constitutes the most critical level of government at which the momentum to sustain national development can be created. To some people, especially those in the Third-World, it is the only semblance of authority known beyond the traditional institution (Bello-Iman and Uga, 2004:465). Given the experiences in the operation of the Local Government System in Nigeria, the country fits the model of African States where the viability of local government is an essential instrument for authentic national development (Adediji, 1989:126, cited in Mead, 1995). Most fundamentally, it had been realized long before Nigeria's independence that the local government could serve as the basis for development and effective public administration. In a restatement of an aspect of this view on local government in Nigeria, Chief Obafemi Awolowo expressed the view that:

> *"Local government serves the dual purpose of being the foundation on which the State and Federal Government rest, and the agencies through which the State governments, and occasionally the federal government as well touch the lives of the people most intimately. Elsewhere, he regarded local government as; the most efficient agency by means of which government ministers to the basic needs, welfare and general well being of the citizens"(Okunade, 1993:83).*

The Guideline for Local Government Reforms of 1976 equally reveals that one of the principal aims of Local Governments in Nigeria is "to make appropriate services and development activities responsive to local wishes and initiatives by developing them to local representative bodies (Gboyega, 1991:63). The former Nigeria military ruler, President Ibrahim Babangida's 1988 Budget speech also

contains his administration's strong commitment to, and justification for granting autonomy to Local Governments in the country. According to the President in the "Charter of Local Government":

> *"Local Governments are no longer there to just pay salaries. They are there to ensure collective participation in governance, motivate physical and economic development, create the conditions for employment opportunities, and provide Social Services which can improve the well-being of our people ... (with) the necessary freedom and authority to operate ... not as mere adjuncts to the State but as a true Coordinate and effective level of government" (Babangida, 1988).*

Importantly, one of the conclusions of the National Conference on Local Government and Social Services Administration in Nigeria held in 1980 was that Local Governments in Nigeria have been participating effectively in the area of Social Services Administration, which has been their traditional role (Olawuyi, 1999:173-174). The Public Service Review Commission (popularly referred to as Udoji Commission) equally noted in its main report (1974) that Local Governments in Nigeria have long been recognized as transcending the realm of being primary a law and order agency, to one engaged in local economic development, and that, the objective of local government in Nigeria can be defined:

> *"As comprising, bringing government closer to the people, involving the people at the grassroots in the progress of their areas in context of the overall development of the region to which they belonged" (Okunade, 1993:83).*

In the submission of Adeyemo (1995) the local government is essentially created as a viable political and administrative organ for the transformation of all communities and for delivery of essential services to the citizens. The primary purpose of the local government and the basis for its existence is to create a mass development impetus to the grassroots transformation. The foregoing rational ultimately underscores the existence of local government in Nigeria.

5.0 Causes of Poor Service Delivery by the Local Government in Nigeria

Although Local Government is said to be an indispensable institution for attaining social, political and economic transformation through efficient service delivery, the local government system in Nigeria is bedeviled by a myriad of problems which militate against its performance. Under this section of the paper, we shall therefore embark on proper examination of some of the causes or factors accounting for minimal performance of this tier of government in Nigeria.

To begin with, one of the most fundamental issues currently militating against local governments' performance is issue relating to the political structure of local government in the country. Though the constitution in Section 7(1) guarantees the existence of democratically-elected local government councils, and enjoins the state governments to ensure the existence of such, many state governments have converted this responsibility into a license to rape democracy by rigging elections at the local government level. Some state governors even arbitrarily dissolve the local government councils and dismiss the chairmen as if they are their domestic employees. In most cases, they are replaced with caretaker committees and interim management officers drawn from the political cronies of the state governor. It is believed that the Obasanjo administration deliberately empowered the state governors to impose these caretaker committees in order to capture and control grass-roots politics in favour of vested interests prior to 2003. As of today, only about 18 states have democratically elected local governments. Local government elections have not held, for instance, in Anambra State since 1998 (Igwe, 2013). The use of care-taker committee to run the local governments in the stead of a democratically elected representative council as the Constitution rightly provides is a total desecration of the rule of law and outright suffocation of democratic culture, which the local governing institution is meant to promote and preserve. Moreover, Section 3(6) of the 1999 Constitution specifies that, "There shall be 768 local government areas in Nigeria as shown in the second column of Part I of the first schedule of this constitution" (Igwe, 2013). Hence, the sudden increase in the number of local government units in the country to the tune of 774 is a breach of the constitution. This constitutional abuses as it apply to the local government do not only raise serious controversies about the rationale for the level of government in the country, it also hinders its capacity to operate smoothly and adequately contribute its own

quota to meeting the development needs of the country through the institutionalization of effective service delivery mechanism.

Another factor militating against local governments' performance has to do with the recruitment of persons who do not possess the requisite leadership and managerial skills to deliver the gains of governance to the people. The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria makes provision that the qualification for election into offices of the Chairman and the Councillors shall be the same as that of the election into the House of Assembly of a state. Section 106 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria puts the minimum educational qualification for election into the House of Assembly of a state as post primary school certificate. This entails that the average political office holder in the local government is not expected to be a technocrat or one vested in any discipline. The above scenario has made the local government councils dumping ground for semi-literates or a starting point for political toddlers (Chizea and Ubehnin, 2009).

The unbridled culture of corruption and related sharp practices in our local governments remain cogent issues in explaining the undesirable performance of the level of government in delivering needed services to the grassroots. As in all levels and institutions of government in Nigeria, corruption is predominantly wide spread, undiluted and unambiguous in the local government. It is a statement of fact that in the local government system, corruption has become all pervading, unabashed, uncontrolled and persistent. This perhaps explains the inefficiency and ineffectiveness in local government administration in Nigeria. The system has virtually become superfluous and redundant. Some of the areas where corruption thrives in local government include the following: (a) Inflation of prices of bought items; (b) Over-estimation of cost of projects; (c) The ghost workers syndrome; (d) Award of contracts and subsequent abandonment; and (e) Outright payment of huge sums of money to political godfathers, etc. It is important to state at this point that the high rate of corrupt practices in the local government cannot be overemphasized, as it has over the years rendered the local government administration inactive and devoid of concrete developmental activities (Aghayere, 1997). The local government system is arguably the most corrupt level of government and the reasons for its establishment have been compromised (Igwe, 2013).

Another major problem in local government administration in Nigeria is the lack of continuity by succeeding governments. This has become a major problem plaguing local government administration in Nigeria, as succeeding government fails to continue with the programmes and projects that are left behind by a past administration. This has over the years led to economic and financial wastage as well as the retrogression of development (Oviasuyi et al., 2010). Apart from constituting a source of huge drain on the limited financial resources available to the local government, inconsistency or lack of continuity in policies or programmes also leads to erosion of public trust and confidence in government on the part of local citizens, who are often the most affected whenever any government programmes that have been of immense benefit to them are aborted or proscribed due to change in administration.

There is also the problem of constitutional inadequacies, confusion and complexities, such as that which statutorily see local authorities as an appendage of the state and further that of the federal government (Oviasuyi et al., 2010). Indeed, 1976 was the first time in the history of Nigeria that local government units were collectively regarded as a separate arm of government with constitutional status, power and financial standing. Irrespective of this, the state governments were to ensure their existence and provide for their structure, composition, finances and functions (Bello-Imam and Uga, 2004:453). The present 1999 Nigeria Constitution also recognises the local government as the third tier system of government. Section 7*(5b) of the constitution provides that each State House of Assembly shall make provisions for statutory allocation of public revenue to local government councils within the state (FRN, 1999). Section 16.2(b) mandates each state to maintain a special State Joint Local Government Account, and the State Government to the Local Government councils of the State (FRN, 1999). Similarly Section 162 (8) empowers the State House of Assembly to decide the formula for allocating funds from the State Joint Local Government Account to the Local Government (FRN, 1999).

Therefore, despite the fact that local government is to derive its financial allocation from the Federation Account as a way of ensuring financial freedom, the higher levels of government, especially the State Government is to moderate the entire process. All these constitutional provisions virtually strengthen the State Government over local governments both at the institutional and

operational levels (Odoh, 2004). Dependent for subventions on higher levels of government ultimately reduces the administrative and financial autonomy of local governments in Nigeria (Mead, 1995). According to Onah (1992) (cited in Mead, 1995), "When a central source gives money, it also controls. In the foreseeable future, I don't see much independent of local governments". Undisputedly, nearly all the local governments in Nigeria are either crippled by the force of the state or wilfully not performing to people's expectation in the country. Moreover, Nigerians are aware of the recent local government Acts which set out a positive direction for the regulation of the local governments in Nigeria, but there is a school of thought who argues that in delivering the ambitions which the Federal government has set out, it faces significant risks and challenges which need to be addressed if the aspirations of the rural people are to be met through the local government as most rural people are yet to benefit much from the dividends of present democratisation in the country (Ogbebulu, 2013).

While it is known that higher levels of government exercise undue over-bearing influence over the local government, it should also be stated that party affiliations further retard progress at the local government level. Since the local government is the closest to the people, top party members at the grassroots easily have their ways to the local government Chairmen from their political parties and make some undemocratic decisions that are often imposed on the local governments. This often propels the administrative wheels of local governments in the wrong direction thereby incapacitating their ability to embark on programs that would ensure that dividends of democracy are properly delivered to the local communities.

The issue of lack of direct and active involvement of the local citizens in the administrative process has also not only contributed to the generally acknowledged decline in public service delivery at the level of government but further defeats vital democratic values of transparency and accountability in local government administration. The absence of an all-inclusive or people oriented approach to local government administration denies rural citizens the opportunity to participate in taking decisions on a wide range of issues that affect them most intimately and the avenues to hold local government administrators accountable for certain policy outcomes. Thus the personal whims and caprices of the Chairmen appear to represent the views of the generality of the local population.

6.0 How to Reposition the Nigerian Local Government for Improved Service Delivery

The local government in Nigeria has the potentials to complement the efforts of the federal and state governments in providing services that would facilitate the rapid growth and overall development of the country. Thus, in order to strengthen the level of governments for better service delivery, the paper puts forth the following recommendations. To start with, local governments in Nigeria need to be saved from the cruelty of the state governments or governors. There is the need for a constitutional amendment in order to protect and liberate the local government so that they can fulfill their constitutional roles to the nation at large and in the interest of the rural people in particular. The most potent approach to achieving this is to hand over elections into the local councils to the national electoral body (INEC), so as not only to achieve uniformity of tenure in all the whole of 774 local government units in Nigeria but also to put an end to the on-going trend by state governors, who desecrate the democratic values of the local government by appointing care-taker committees to administer the local government instead of adhering to the constitutional provision that mandate local governments to be run by a set of democratically elected representatives chosen by the local people themselves. The constitution should be amended to discourage this scenario in order to maintain the democratic values and structure of the local governments.

While it is true that local government cannot overcome some of its problems without the help of both federal and state governments, the local government should be given freedom to discharge some of its responsibilities without direct intervention by these higher levels of governments. The state governments should refrain from saddling the local governments with functions other than the ones specified in the constitution in order for them to be at their best in using the little resources at their disposal to deliver essential services to the rural population they are meant to serve. The working relationships between the Federal, state and local government should be transparent, accountable and complement each other for the benefit of the people they serve. The running of joint accounts between state governments and local councils should be abrogated as it has messed up the much needed pace of development which it was expected to hasten at the rural level.

The constitution clearly guarantees both the financial and political autonomy of the local government. Effort thus should be made to ensure the implementation of these laws so that the local government would cease to exist in favour of other tiers of government and to curtail the deepened corruption that has greatly compromised development at the grass-roots level. To overcome the problem of funding, new mechanism should be adopted in maximizing local governments own sources of revenues, and local governments should be given the freedom to increase local taxes in order to enable them to fund local services. And best practices in budget preparation and implementation and control should be adopted in order to match local service delivery competencies with adequate funding so as to achieve the highly desired results.

Genuine developments at the local council will be possible when an all-inclusive citizens' participatory approach to local government administration is adopted. The proper integration of the local people in the administrative process, whereby they would have the opportunity to meaningfully participate in making decisions on important issues that affect them as would help to create a sense of belonging in them. Accountability and transparency must also be encouraged and promoted in the local government system if the needed good governance for effective development at the grassroots level must be attained.

Importantly, local government officials should be made to acquire sound education and training so as to sharpen their decision-making skills and make them better administrators for improved service delivery in the interest of the local masses. And to curb the unbearable high level corruption, local government officials caught in corrupt practices should adequately be punished in order to serve as deterrence to others, and there should be branches of EFCC in all the local government units across the states of the federation. This will constitute the roadmap to progress and good achievements in the area of service delivery for the third tier of government in Nigeria.

7.0 Conclusion

All over the world, the basic rationale for the existence of the local government in the political administrative framework of countries is that it promotes and facilitates quick achievement of real and authentic national development from the grassroots. Consequently, the local government system in Nigeria has innate huge

potentialities to serve as an indispensable instrument for the attainment of the country's development goals and objectives through effective delivery of essential services to the people at the grassroots. However, the attitude of the level of government in performing this important role has been quite unsatisfactory due to a number of factors. Some of these include: the inconsistent political structure of the local government, lack of required leadership and management skills on the part of local government personnel, predominance of corruption and related sharp practices in the system, lack of continuity, constitutional lapses, interference by higher level of government, lack of citizens active participation in local government administrative process, among others. As highlighted in the main body of the paper, the above mentioned factors are the remote causes of the widely perceived decline on the part of the Nigerian local government in meeting the expectations of the local electorates in terms of providing the desired services that would help to make life more meaningful to them as a means of facilitating the actualization of the country's national development needs. Notwithstanding, if the strategies recommended by the paper are adequately adopted, the barriers would be eliminated and the local government would be strengthened and repositioned for better and improved performance with regards to public service delivery.

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