

ELITE CONSPIRACY IN THE MANAGEMENT OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The case of local government in developing political systems has carried the conceptual debates by consequently presenting local government practice as rocket science, obscured by elite greed and everyday predation. The local government system in Nigeria is immensely characterized by this obscurity, greed and hands-on predation. Local government is the bedrock for every political process in Nigeria; the administrative process will thrive if only the rural dwellers that form part and parcel of the grassroots are allowed to make inputs in rural governance. In Nigeria, local government has no interactive links with the community for which it is designed to take care of. Local government located at the grassroots is run by elites who are alienated from the culture of the people experience inadequate service delivery in their area. The argument reveals that the elites and actors in the corridor of power manipulate the legal basis of local level to the detriment of the people at the grassroots level. The paper suggests possible ways to resolve some attitudes meted by the elites which is inimical to the progress of local level in Nigeria. The paper made attempts to suggest alternatives to the predatory system of local government in Nigeria, whose aim of serving as vehicles for service delivery, is widely believed to have been largely defeated.

Keywords: local government, efficiency, council, rural areas, service delivery, development

Introduction

Local government administration refers to the administration of a community by a body which is not responsible to the local people but to those who appoint them to govern the community. Abba *et al* (2007:17) state that such officers are appointed by the central government, and are seen as representatives of central government. However, local government is seen as government by local inhabitants freely elected to carry out programmes to improve the wellbeing of the people at the grassroots level. Therefore, local government administration entails the whole process of decision making at the local

government level or selected persons by central or state governments to carry out certain functions for the benefit of the local inhabitants. The philosophy of local government indicates that it is the government at the door step of rural inhabitants; this is the best way to exercise good governance and engage people in governance (Abbas and Ahmad, 2012:98). In his observation, Okoli (2000:5-7) pointed out that “local government exists to fill a gap which the national government is too remote to fill”. “Local government implements the ideals, objectives, programmes and aspirations of the national government at the local level” “The ideology of national government determines to a large extent the structure and function of local government”. Local level is a platform to attain the needs of rural dwellers and provide services within the capability of the local area; a machinery for execution at the local level of regional or federal government policy; a mechanism for resolving conflicts of interest at the local level; and equally a training ground for political participation (Okoli, 2000). This implies that local governments in Nigeria render cutting edge services that will foster socio-economic development of the rural people if properly managed. Historically, local governments have been assigned different functions in colonial time, native authorities were primarily established to maintain law and order and with the emergence of independence, emphasis shifted from law enforcement to provision of social services (Adeyemo, 2005). The idea of localizing governance is the need to bring government closer to the people; to make governance more efficient with the majority view of the people (Barry and Goldman, 2000:122). After two decades of military repressive rule (1983-1999) Nigeria to democratic rule from up to date; the general presupposition is that incoming government will engender good governance to the people (Kolawole, 2003). Local government is an administrative structure for decentralization, national integration, efficiency in governance at the grassroots (Awasthi and Sanjay, 2002).

The elite in federal level should ensure that the third tier government is given its pride of place to ensure effective and

populist oriented governance at the grass roots level. Some states conducts grass root election to give all and sundry sense of belonging in rural governance (Governor Chime, Daily Independent, 2013).

In Nigeria, the elite utilize local level administration as instrument of oppression and wealth accumulation for undemocratic practice (Ozor, 2003, Kolawale, 2003). The 1976 reforms brought a watershed in local government system; the reform brings unified structure and makes local government a vehicle for socio-economic and political development at the local level (Agagu, 2004, and Ajayi, 2000). The 1999 constitution, like its predecessor the 1979 constitution, guarantees the existence of local government, but there was no constitutional provision for their term of office, although “Decree 36 of 1998” states three years tenure in the local government council, later the constitution was vitiated by section 7, by placing local government under the control of state government (FRN, 1999); the provisions empower state governors to run local government council with non-elected officials (Nkwocha, 2009, Jega, 2011). Consequently, the use of caretaker committee usually constituted by some state governments has hindered the performance of local governments in Nigeria. It becomes easy for the elites to manipulate local authorities for their personal gains:

Local government has turned a care-taker imposed by elite in higher level. In some cases care-takership is perpetuated through agreement of elections that are invariably postponed. The outright denial of democratic local government through care-taker committees demonstrate increase authoritarian holds of the councils by state governors, the case of those where elections manage to hold does not give cause for cheers (Musa, 2011:10).

In Nigeria, each time a governor assumes office, his first port of call will be the dissolution of local government councils whether elected or appointed to secure grassroots support by hook or crook (The nation, 2012). Most local government chairmen always cry foul on funds allocated to them; this was orchestrated by the undue interference of the state and federal elite in the affairs of local level as enshrined in the 1999 constitution (Adeyemi,

2012). Some stakeholders state that this has made local governments orphans and appendages for the elite, subjected to all forms of abuses by the governors of various states. The 1999 constitution have reversed the gains and desire of local level with the exclusion of local government from the constitution. In 1976 to 1979, every local government council has an elected chairman; they got their fair fare of money ensured for the successful take-off in the local councils from the federation account, and this was the time a substantial amount of money was disbursed to local governments in Nigeria (News world Magazine, 2011, December 23). Local government elections in Nigeria was a mirage with all forms of electoral malpractices like snatching of ballot boxes, falsification of election results, multiple thumb print amongst others (Okafor and Orjinta, 2013, Ogundiya, 2007). However, if the yearnings and aspirations of the people in the grassroots must be attained in Nigeria legitimacy crises and elite conspiracy must be ignored. In view of the above, the Nigeria state created seven hundred and seventy-four (774) local councils across the six geo-political areas to ensure development at the grassroots level.

Conceptual Clarifications

Elite

Mosca, (1939) maintained that the elite are an organized minority; the ruling class is composed of the ruling elite and the sub-elite and as a result; he divided the world into the ruling class and the class that is ruled. The elites have intellectual, moral, and material superiority and they are highly esteemed and influential. Michels (1911) asserts that social and political organizations are run by few individuals, social organization and labour division are the keys. All organizations are elitist and the elite have three basic principles that help in the bureaucratic structure of political organization as follows: need for leaders, specialized staff and facilities, utilization of facilities by the leaders within their organization. Obiekezie, (2003:376), describes the elite as people of high class who have common interest. They are influential group of people that have element of power, control money, education and all sorts

of wealth; they control the entire economy of the nation. They believe in elite generation. The values of the elite may be very public regarding a sense of noblesse oblige' may permeate elite values and the welfare of the masses may be an important element in elite decision making. The responsibility for mass welfare rests upon the shoulders of the elite, not masses.

Local Government

The concept of local government administration depends on the political arrangement of a nation (unitary or federal system); Agagu, (2004) states that it is government at the grassroots level meant to serve the peculiar needs of the people. Adeyeye (2000) defines local government in a unitary state as non-sovereign community possessing the legal right which serves as administrative agents of the central government. Appadorai (1975) defined local government as government by the popularly elected bodies charged with administrative and executive duties in matters concerning the inhabitants of a particular district. In the words of Oloyede (2006:12), local government is a political and administrative structure facilitating decentralization, national integration, efficiency in governance and a sense of belonging at the grassroots (Awasthi and Sanjay, 2002, Agagu, 2004). Lawal (2000) defines local government as the tier of government closer to the people in the rural area, which is vested with certain powers to exercise control over the affairs of people in its domain. Olowu (1988) views local government as a political sub-division of a nation-state constituted by law to impose taxes for prescribed purposes. Arowolo (2006) interprets local government as a unit of administration with defined powers and authority imbued with relative autonomy in decision-making, elected or appointed. Similarly, Guideline Reform (FRN, 1976) states that local government is at the local level exercised through representative councils established by law to exercise specific powers in a defined area. Obi (2009:304), asserts that local government is the third tier of government nearest to the local people, set up to meet the needs and aspirations of the rural dwellers. In their own words, Olisa, Okoli and Nwabufu (1990:93) see local government as a unit of government below the central, regional or state

government, established to exercise political authority through a representative council within a defined area. Mill (1921) cited in Ajayi (2000:6), states that local government is one of the institutions that provide political education, a plank by which grassroots politics can be promoted, a vehicle for political training and leadership qualities fostered in young politicians at the local level. Lawal (2000) states that local government is the tier of government closest to the people and is vested with certain powers to exercise control over the affairs of people in its domain. It plays the role of promoting democratic ideals of society and coordinate development program at the local level for socio economic development in the locality. Local government council is an institution whose operations address the needs and aspirations of the citizenry and extends the administrative and political control to rural areas (Wanjohi, 2003).

The idea of creating local government makes people at the grassroots to participate in governance and generate local resources for development. Fajobi (2000) views local government as a political authority under the state to decentralize political power and delegate authority. Local governments decongest the burden of central and state government to provide services that are local in nature. Emezi (1984) views local government as a system of administration under local communities 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 living conditions. It provides the community with formal organizational framework which enables them to conduct their affairs effectively, for the general good. Chukwuemeka and Uche (2005:317) state that local government is a political sub-division of a state, which has a legal existence under the law and is run by elected representatives of the local people, with substantial autonomy in administrative and financial affairs. Venkatarangaiye and Pattabhirann (2005) assert local government as the administration of locality, village or town, city or area smaller than the state by a town representing the local inhabitants, possessing large amount of autonomy, raising at least part

of its revenue through taxation and spending its income on services regarded as local, distinct from state and central services. The concept explains the meaning of local government because of the committee set up to reform Nigerian local government system in 1976. Local government is a political sub-division in a federal state constituted by law with substantial control of local affairs like powers to impose tax and exact labour for prescribed purposes; the structure of such entity is elected or selected (Awotokun, 1996, Ola and Tonwe 2009:4). However, local government is the breaking of a country into small units for the ultimate goals of convenient administration in which the inhabitants of the area play part in the election or appointment of their representatives who exercise power on their behalf based on the powers conferred on them by the central government.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this paper is “Decentralization theory” as propounded by notable theorists like Goode and Hat, (1952) Rondinelli (1981:1), Bonnal (1997), Heywod, (1997). Decentralization is an initiative to support the grassroots development; it is motivated by the need to improve service delivery to large population and put in place meaningful structures to provide good governance at the local level (Okuande, 1988). The theory of decentralization is the transfer of authority and responsibility for public functions from the central government to the subordinate or quasi-independent government organizations and the private sector. This concerned how functions and responsibilities are shared to different institutions from the central government for effective performance. The two major forms of decentralization are deconcentration and devolution (Olowu, 1995). Deconcentration is the transfer of state responsibilities and resources from the centre to the periphery within the same administrative system. This is an internal form of delegation of responsibilities among officials of the organization, while devolution entails the transfer of specific responsibilities and resources.

Adedeji (2000) argued that devolution and deconcentration are not exclusive, when implementing decentralization programmes a balance of these elements is sought. The decentralization strategy is to mobilize local resources and initiative for national development. It is imperative for the power, authority and responsibility to be transferred from the central, state to the local level for the purpose of enhancing development in the rural areas. It is believed that decentralization make local governments more competent in the management of their own affairs. It improves service delivery to large population and puts in place meaningful structures to provide good governance at the local level. Heywood (1997) argued that decentralization could be explained using these four variables: participation, responsiveness, legitimacy and liberty. Participation entails the sustainability and effectiveness of the local level to provide opportunities for citizens to participate in the political life of their community. The scope of political participation includes the fact that it helps to create a qualitative education and a more informed citizenry. Responsiveness is the closeness of peripheral institutions to the people and their sensitivity to people's needs. Legitimacy is the manner in which physical distance from government affects the acceptability of its decisions. Liberty is protected by decentralization through dispersion of government power to create a network for checks and balances. Peripheral bodies check the central government, as well as each other.

Local government in Nigeria is a form of devolution; local government involves the legal, conferring of powers to discharge specified residual functions upon formally constituted authorities, either in exclusive or concurrent capacity (Okunade, 1988). It is believed that local level of government is better placed to fulfill the above functions because of the proximity to the rural people, which enhances its ability to easily articulate and aggregate the demands of the people. The 1976 reform was aimed at the decentralizing of some significant functions of the state government at local levels in order to harness local resources for development. Decentralization is the dispersal of power from national

government to the subordinate units within the state (Wraith, 1946). No administrator can function effectively without proper delegation of duties of his subordinates. Decentralization disperses power on either area or functional basis. Area decentralization can take the form of deconcentration or devolution. In the same way functional decentralization can be predicated on either managerial or participatory calculations (Smith, 1985). However, decentralization in the context of the administration describes the relationship between an individual administration and his subordinates within an organization (Okoli, 2000).

ALTERNATIVES TO NIGERIA'S PREDATORY LOCAL GOVERNMENT SYSTEM

Local government is an ancient institution with an evolving conceptualization (Tonwe, 2012:75). The evolving conceptualizations necessitate the formulation of alternative local government paradigms. In Akinola (2004), local self-governance was proposed as the alternative to the predatory local government system in Nigeria. In this study, we move beyond the position of a singular alternative, to highlight the possibility of alternatives. Where Akinola (2004) provided an alternative paradigm, our propositions extend to alternative practices. In these postulations, it is specifically about an alternative structure. Predation is a negative systemic tendency. Our alternatives are offered as antidotes to the negative tendency of predation. The following alternatives are accordingly considered.

In the first place, we propose a local government system that relates directly with the central government, while retaining its local essence. According to Tonwe (2012:75), government activities when conducted from a central point and far away from the people tend to become impersonal, and against this impersonality or abstract view there is perpetual rebellion. Ipso facto, when government activities are conducted from neither the centre nor from the grassroots, there is perpetual predation. In the case of rebellion, attention may be elicited and reform may ensue. Predation is a more annihilate phenomenon. Hence, the need for appropriate reversal of action cannot be overemphasized. Punch Editorial (2012)

describes the government at the centre as an octopus, controlling the larger chunk of the nation's resources and dispensing corruption and white elephants in return. Meanwhile, the rest of us propose that the local governments should be granted autonomy and confined to the peripheries of the country, to perform the traditional market management responsibilities which in any case, the state governments have forcefully taken over from the local government councils.

The truth remains that the Nigerian federation is centre-dominated. Consequently, the socio-political, socio-economic, and the national bureaucratic environments are all centripetal. It hardly serves any purpose to position the local government system on a centrifugal foundation. Indeed, the contradictions inherent in the continuing attempts at doing so, in as much as they have been inadvertent, have largely contributed to the predatory nature of the local government system in Nigeria. Indeed, Nigeria's federation is replete with serious structural contradictions, which distort the intended functional outcomes of the existing structures of service delivery. Hence, according to Ikejiani-Clark (2004:234), since independence, the Nigerian federation has changed from having a weak centre to weak states. Ikejiani-Clark (2004:199) had earlier posited that the centre became more powerful than the states, which is the current cause of the socio-political and economic problems in the country. Abuja is where the economic spoils are distributed with the benefit of upwards of 2.5 million barrels of oil pumped daily (Kaplan and Schroeder, 2013:2). It is to the apron strings of these weak states that the local governments have been constitutionally tied, in the face of national expectations of magical performance from the local governments. As a matter of fact, when Nigerian scholars interrogate the local governance conundrum in the Nigerian state, they look up to the federal government for solution.

According to Oguonu (2004:30), local governments as the government at the grassroots level deserve serious attention from the federal government so as to be able to deliver essential services to the rural populace. Specifically, with regard to intergovernmental

fiscal arrangements, Obi (2004:105) posits that it behoves the federal government of Nigeria, to urgently review the intergovernmental fiscal arrangements to enable it build a strong, virile and stable nation. Furthermore, we consider highly appealing, the definition of local government by Oruonye (2013:12). Local government is a system of public administration at a local level, charged with the responsibility of bringing the people at the grassroots, closer to the government. Government must be understood in a generic context in this regard and not limited to government as located in the local government headquarters. In addition, Ogunna (1996:1) has powerfully posited that local government is a form of devolution of the political powers of the State. The implication of this position is that local government is not an autonomous state in the making. Nyewusira and Nweke (2012:169) have highlighted that it is the responsibility of the local government, to implement the ideals, objectives, programmes and aspirations of the national government at the local level. It is therefore erroneous to think there should be political and administrative chasm between the local government and the national government to fulfil the operational requirements of autonomy and localness. A highly insightful contribution of Uzuegbunam and Nwofia (2014) has identified local governments as relevant institutions in the control of ethno-communal conflicts in Nigeria.

Furthermore, in this regard, an organic framework of interaction among the local government areas in the country is required, for the purposes of diluting and minimizing ethno-communal conflicts and hostilities, borne out of bottled up prejudices and animosities. We propose in this regard, a constitutionally recognized forum of the 774 local government chairmen in the federation, chaired by the Minister for internal affairs. Nigerian leaders must begin to undertake truly rigorous but fundamentally functional responsibilities of strategic import. The principal responsibility of such a forum as suggested herein should be dispute resolution. If the state retains the responsibility for the overseeing of local governments, let the state governor who does not want to conduct local government elections, send his cronies to such a forum of serious-minded representatives, as spectators. It will not be valid to

suggest that such a forum would usually take the local government chairmen away from their primary duty posts at the local government headquarters because; they have never even been there.

Furthermore, on this proposition, there is interestingly already in existence in the Nigerian state, an important and popular national union of local government chairmen in the country; that goes by the appropriate name of Association of Local Governments of Nigeria (ALGON). The present ALGON is only a predatory instrumentation, in the hands of Nigerian local council leaders (elected or selected and the unelected), to garner further war booties, from the elite devastation of the Nigerian state. The ostensible importance of ALGON and their apparent popularity be converted into national profit, by constitutionally assigning a responsibility to the current pressure group.

This researcher has even subscribed elsewhere, to the viewpoint that a law should compel Nigerian local government chairmen to reside in the local government areas of their jurisdiction (Okeke and Udechukwu, 2008:16). It is specifically suggested in this study, that as part of the alternatives to the current predatory system, the local government chairmen should be made by legislation, to reside at the local government headquarters of their jurisdiction. The President of the Nigerian Federation resides officially at the Federal Capital Territory in Abuja. The various state governors of the component states reside officially in the various State Houses in the different states of the federation. It is however, only the local government chairman that may reside in any part of the federation that he chooses, including the Federal Capital Territory in Abuja and any of the state capital cities in the federation and from there, ostensibly administers the local government area, wherein he serves as chairman. This structural-functional lacuna, of course animates the greedily debilitating tendencies of the predatory chairman and his elite abettors. It alienates the local people from their supposed leaders and takes elite grandstanding to the very door steps of the common man. It contradicts the essence of local government and hoists on the system, a foreign element; as the chairman

“visits” the local government area on official duty and goes back to whence he comes. Tonwe (2012:75) argues that the essence of local government takes form on the premise that it will check the danger of absolutism. Invariably, predation and absolutism are no distant cousins.

An alternative is to fundamentally unmask the currently so-called local governments of all the pretences to being “governments” and constitutionally ascribe everything about their existence to the state governments, which would rather operate them as local administrations, with the state governments held responsible for developments in the various locations where the citizens reside. Although local government and local administration are sometimes used interchangeably, they do not mean the same thing. (Emeh, 2011: 253). Local administration arises where the local arrangement lacks substantial autonomy and does not have legal personality (Emeh, 2011:353). The existing arrangement in the Nigerian state is neither local government nor local administration, they lack substantial autonomy. This disqualifies them from categorization as local governments. The political will to recognize a spade by its proper name remains lacking and necessary constitutional amendment becomes anathema.

Another critical consideration is democratic representation, where a democratically elected state government, effectively oversees the affairs of local communities, through local administrations, and efficiently provides service delivery in the process; is in the opinion of this paper preferable to a predatory system, whereby neither the state government nor the local government, provides critically needed services. In fact, according to Elekwa (2004:52), there are three essential features of government character that identify a unit of local government. For our present purposes, we only highlight the first, which relates to its office holders and requires them either to be elected by the citizenry of the unit or to be appointed by other officials who were popularly elected. The issue at stake in the mismanagement of local government opportunities in Nigeria, which finds blatant expressions in predation, is not local government autonomy in an abstract dimension. In effect, in his highly influential

intervention, Ogunna (1996) advises that local government autonomy, in theory and practice is never absolute; that like the doctrine of separation of powers which is limited by checks and balances, local government autonomy is limited by local governments' relations with the higher levels of government. The more critical issues have to do with the legitimacy of the higher authorities to which the local governments are constitutionally affiliated. In the current dispensation in Nigeria, the ostensible local governments are only representative of the elite interests and the greed of other predatory officials at the state level. Moreover, they are not usually, popularly elected.

The Nigerian state has continued to treat the local government entities, as replicas of the departments of antiquities. The huge allocations made from the Federation Account for local government functions are ipso facto conceived as largesse from the state for some predators, whose equivalents in the real departments of antiquities are known as curators. The real curator may decide to spend his entire allocation on repatriation from the Lugard family in Europe, the ball point pen used by Lord Lugard, as the colonial administrator of Nigeria. We would not question him. The local government allocations have over the years also been used for projects that bear resemblance to mirage. In a way, we tend to sympathize with him by concluding that he is being prevented from being efficient, by a meddlesome state governor, whereas in the strict sense of it. Local government is a level of government which is supposed to have its greatest impact on the people of the grassroots (Agagu, 1997; cited in Lawal and Oladunjoye, 2010). This must not be conceptualized to mean that the areas of impact have to be limited to inconsequential matters, while the local government predator, with access to mammoth financial resources, logically ignores the inconsequential matters and freely enjoys the proceeds of his predation with mere murmurings from the rest of us. According to Akam (2013:2), with governance reduced to sharing bags of rice to widows, taking rural children to state parties like 'Father Christmas Show,' hosting the wife of the state chief executive, our local governments now spell disgust. In the meantime, part of the main

functions of a local government council, according to the fourth schedule of the 1999 Constitution, is to construct and maintain roads, streets, street lightings, markets, toilets, drains, parks and gardens. Our local governments do not bother about these things. They don't worry about providing qualitative education and health care for their people. What an average local government does is to pay salaries and allowances. Whatever is remaining is either siphoned into private pockets or frittered away on frivolous ventures. In many advanced countries, local governments build and maintain roads, create jobs and bring government closer to the people (Punch editorial, 2012). The local governments should constitutionally be assigned functions.

In the Nigerian state, it has come to be constitutionally and generally accepted that local governments may only construct toilets, build drainages, give names to streets and pay the salaries of their workers, whenever they can. And thereafter, wait for the next monthly allocation from the federation account, as may be released to the local government councils by the state governor, after obtaining the monthly flow of funds from the centre. Indeed, 21st century local governments must assume responsibilities that are more profound than these constant matters, particularly in states like Nigeria, with immense growth and developmental challenges. For instance, every local government in Nigeria should be able to own and run a polytechnic of 500 students; convert a majority of the underemployed local government workers into the Polytechnic staff, and give to each a local hue, aimed at building a technological base for each of the 774 local government areas in the country. It is not any outsider that would run the polytechnics but the same set of people that loot the resources of the local government areas, that would sit down and run on productive basis, their own institution and use the technological education platform to transform the local government areas and indeed, the Nigerian state into a 774 units of involved productive linkages, that no other state in the world can deride. Any of the current contraptions that go by the nomenclature of local government area, that cannot run such a school on sustainable basis,

had no claim in the first place of being a local government area in Nigeria. Their inclusion among the 774 LGAs might have been one of those stealthy creations of the ruling elite, to bestow dubious advantages on certain areas of the country, to the disadvantage of the rest of their fellow citizens. That there may be such caricatures of local government councils does not stop the ones who can undertake such endeavours as running polytechnics, from embarking on such ventures. Nigerian local government councils must be freed from the mentality of being toilet facility agencies and liquor license vendors.

The financial Paucity of Local Government in Nigeria Fourth Republic

The financial paucity in local government system could be blamed on what Suberu (2004:16) views as cost of distributive federalism in a federal system dominated by redistribution of the central collected revenue. The situation is compounded by the local level administrators to explore internal sources of revenue generation. Most local governments in Nigeria are contented with federal or state financial allocation to them; thereby becoming a distribution outlet for federal and state generated revenue (Oladoyin, and Agboola, 2004). The 1976 local government reform reveals that local government has produced exactly the opposite of their original objectives. Instead of bringing development closer to the people, they bent on producing absentee chairmen who were seen only at the council headquarters when the monthly “Abuja allocation” arrives and vamoosed with their standby jeeps and mobile police escorts after super-intending over the sharing of the national cake among the relevant stakeholders (Obasanjo, 2003). Most governors exploit constitutional provision to establish joint state and local government account to control council funds; they hijack the nomination and subsequent election for their acolytes as council chairmen. The former President Obasanjo in a meeting with 774 local government council chairmen in Nigeria acknowledged diversion of local government revenue by some state governments (Aborisade, 1994). The proposed technical committee would look into the matter through local

government state joint account; some states arbitrarily deduct funds from local government account and forced them to embark on some ridiculous projects that are not in congruence with the needs of the local people under the pretext of uniformity in development (Radio Nigeria, 2004). The aspirants that emerge victorious after rigorous process paid political dues to the elite by accepting deductions made from the state and local government joint account.

The table below shows the financial summary of statutory allocations from federation account to three tiers of government between 1999-2007

Year	Fed. Govt	36 States & FCT	LG &FCT	Total
	=N=	=N=	=N=	=N=
1999	154,633,681,769.66	89,719,045,266.37	41,936,047,771.85	131,655,093,038.22
2000	531,612,593,116.78	348,291,513,603.64	167,160,070,675.78	515,451,584,279.42
2001	723,920,377,511.08	465,401,088,573.90	197,546,513,263.92	662,947,601,837.82
2002	782,930,627,493.69	441,784,920,342.94	321,324,219,934.25	763,109,140,277.18
2003	739,208,155,737.65	557,887,744,033.25	396,799,689,065.92	954,687,433,099.16
2004	967,234,322,035.71	808,724,985,148.80	515,717,202,778.67	1,324,442,187,927.47
2005	1,229,871,999,841.18	1,087,280,283,065.75	617,927,219,631.91	1,705,207,502,697.66
2006	1,575,681,126,615.67	1,350,456,073,192.49	744,240,741,122.21	2,094,696,814,304.70
2007	685,596,067,620.30	593,358,190,086.20	310,883,152,307.30	904,241,342,393.50
Total	7,390,688,951,768.72	5,742,903,843,313.33	3,313,534,856,541.79	9,056,438,699,855.13

Source: *Revenue Mobilization and Fiscal Commission 1999-2007*

The budgetary allocation from 1999 to 2007 in 36 states and Abuja, with 774 local government council reveals that local level received ₦3,313,534,541.80 from the federation account within the periods of 1999 to 2007 for service delivery to the grassroots, their performance remained poor (RMAFC, 2007). Social services have been characterized with frivolous activities, leaving little for essential services. The provision of services is available mostly in affluent areas, or the abode of the elite and in other areas such services are poor.

Most local government workers exhibit poor attitude to work like absenteeism, indiscipline, laziness, non-commitment and lateness to work (Ogunrin and Erhijakpor, 2009). This may be linked to poor remuneration, lack of equity and stagnation on the job and this compels workers to seek extra income from private firm (Maduabum, 1990). Local government councils have not succeeded in retaining skilled personnel in the system; the local politicians see local government as a place where they can easily put their children,

wards, cronies and party members even when their services are not required. Many local governments have redundant workers who receive huge salaries and wages. This development has weakened local government financially in pursuit of their tenets (Aborisade, 1994). The problem is compounded when state government creates unnecessary political offices at the local level and authorizes payment of salaries to the wives of local government councilors, and special assistants, special advisers are not left out in this scenario. The council officials, ranging from chairman to messengers is found wanting in their place of work. This is virtually why all the 774 local government areas in Nigeria are desert of under-development (Abdulhameed, 2013).

Corruption and abuse of office is perpetrated by both local government bureaucrats and political office-holders. These categories of local government administrators are neck deep in inflating contracts, outright embezzlement of funds, kickback and non-execution of contracts among others (Oladunjoye, 2010, Onwuemenyi, 2008). The inability of local governments to provide quality governance to the people is linked to the corruption virus among local government officials. Most state governors explore this undue advantage to divert part of the allocation to frivolous projects, robbing local level the capacity to live up to expectation (*National Mail*, Issue 12, Vanguard Newspaper, 2011, May 11).

Leadership Problem among rural dwellers reveals that local governments are citadels for sharing national cake. The experience in the first twelve years of democratic government produced either no election at all or pseudo election, due to the greed of the state governors who control local government councils for obvious reasons (Aiyede, 2005, Ushie, 2005). They appoint transition committee chairmen to local council areas when rigging is impossible because of formidable opposition parties. Most states organized their election if the state independent electoral commission (SIEC) is strong to rig the elections (Abdulhameed, 2013). The operations have come under serious and severe criticisms with some persons calling for the scrapping of local government. The 2003 re-election of President Obasanjo threatened the

aspiration of council chairmen, councilors and patrons who were worried that the third tier of government was about to be scrapped. The flag bearers of various political parties at huge financial costs were at alert when President Obasanjo pronounced indefinite postponement of local government elections in 2003 pending the reform of local government thus:

What we are witnessing is abysmal failure of local government administration. It is on record that no time in the history of the country has there been the current level of funding accruing to local governments from the federation account, yet the hope for rapid development has been a mirage as successive councils grossly underperformed in almost all the areas of their mandate (Obasanjo, 2003 broadcast).

The external intrusion in the affairs of local government needs re-evaluation and this subverts democratic process and good governance at the grassroots (Ogbe, 2013). It is unconstitutional for states to interfere on funds meant for local council. The suspension of elected council officials and outright refusal to conduct local government elections without cogent reasons forms the basis of unconstitutionality. The illegal dissolution of elected officers by state governors without proper investigations on spurious allegations is not conducive for the future of local government in Nigeria (Odoh, 2004). The inherent nature of independent financial power in the affairs of local government incapacitates local government from effective functioning on one hand, and alienated service delivery expected from the grassroots on the other hand (Eme and Onyishi, 2012).

The Practice of Legitimacy Crises and Elite Conspiracy in Nigeria Local Government

Predation in this paper refers to where offices of the state are competed for or captured by other means and then utilized for the personal benefit of office holders, as well as their reference or support group (Emeh and Onyisi, 2011:236). Predation in the local government system in Nigeria is a multi-faceted phenomenon. At one end of the incapacitating trend, it is perpetrated by a triumvirate of the ruling political party at the local

level (ruling party at the state level), the local area “kingmakers” (political elite) and the incumbent Chairman of the Local Government Council. In this regard, Moyo and Taiwo (2011:1) narrate: Local councils in Nigeria represent the third layer of government after the federal government and state governments. Federal and state government allocations to local councils are deposited into special “state joint local government accounts. Through these accounts, local governments are supposed to finance primary, adult and vocational education; agriculture and natural resource development, as well as health services. Unfortunately, the existing joint account framework has been particularly vulnerable to abuse.

Local council chairmen are typically nominated by political party “kingmakers” who help to finance their election campaigns. Because politicking in the country is quite expensive, federal allocations to local councils have become the means of paying back “kingmakers” for supporting their election campaigns. Keeping the political party happy is often at the forefront of councilmen’s agenda and addressing the needs of the local constituents - who have very little say in who stands for election - comes second. By the time the political party elites receive their share of the funds and the council chairmen remove their entitlement, there is very little left for local council development programs. Local council leaders are beholden to the entrenched interests of their political parties and those who refuse to share federal government allocations are often not nominated for re-election. Some devastating consequences of this misuse are demonstrated in the country’s high infant mortality and low literacy rates (Moyo and Taiwo, 2011:1). Considered from another dimension, State-level officials put trusted lieutenants or lackeys into local governments, who tailor their opinions and operations to suit their political godfathers, those who do not obey lose out on unmonitored government money, while those who follow orders end up with sports utility vehicles (Gambrell, 2011:2).

Fundamentally, the predatory idiosyncrasy is not a wholly local governance tendency in Nigeria. For too many Nigerians, life is a Hobbesian, zero-sum game that adds up to an

aggressive, predatory system of survival of the fittest. Nigeria is a place where life is too often a matter of who can intimidate whom. Indeed, war, crime and thuggery are the province of young males, and Nigeria's population is composed of many of them. This predatory national character plays out politically in a country that is not wholly a country, Nigeria is an assemblage of several British ruled territories. Nigerian politics at the highest levels is as predatory as life on the street (Kaplan and Schroeder, 2013). Politics in Nigeria is widely seen as a means of becoming affluent (Lawal and Oladunjoye, 2010:232). The Nigerian society is largely predatory. A predatory society presupposes the phenomenon of a captured state, a captured economy, a callous society (Okeke, 2010:6). These characterizations are all related to the elite dominance of the Nigerian worldview.

There is internally perpetrated predation, within the local government setting. In this regard, Saharareporters.com (2013) reveals that an audit in Nigeria's Delta State revealed startling details of billions of naira misappropriated and embezzled by local government chairmen and heads of personnel management (HPMs) across the state's 25 local government areas. The audit covered the period from 2009 to 2011 when elected council chairmen and heads of personnel management committed the fraud. The audit report was done by the auditor general in charge of local governments. Saharareporters.com correspondent obtained a classified document entitled "review report of the auditor general (local governments) on the Accounts of the 25 local government councils for the year ended 31st December 2009, 2010 And 2011 by the house committee on public accounts of the Delta State House of Assembly, Asaba. The document was signed by the chairman of the legislative committee, Olorogun Dennis Omovie, as well as its members, including Mr. Joseph Oshevire, Ms. Omawunmi Udoh, and Mr. Oboro Preyor. The report revealed that billions of naira was siphoned into private pockets by corrupt council chairmen and the HPMs during the review period. In Ebonyi state, local government chief executives and development centre

coordinators own most of the biggest mansions in the state capital, Abakaliki, with state of the art facilities (Okam, 2013).

On the other hand, according to Onah (2004:195), local government functionaries both through personal interviews and seminar forums, have affirmed the fact that state governments use up part of the local government share of federal allocation, without consultation with the latter. This of course is a classic predatory design to make more funds available to elite needs at the state government level. Critically, the predatory problem of the local government system in Nigeria is masterminded by the Nigerian political elite. Though the local government is located at the local level, it is run by the elite who are alienated from the culture of the people (Akinola 2006, cited in Oruonye, 2013:13). The local governments in Nigeria are generally believed to be non-independent, non-autonomous, foisted (forced) on the people by the political elite, and therefore unaccountable and inefficient in the performance of their democratic and political duties (Ikeji, et al, 2013:1).

The predatory tendencies of the local government chairmen in the country need to be particularly highlighted; as chronic mismanagement by local government chairmen has left a number of councils irrelevant in the lives of the citizens (punch editorial, 2012). A culture of waste runs through most of the nation's 774 councils. Many local government chairmen have been accused of misappropriating council funds under the pretext of security votes. Most council chairmen start their period in office with the purchase of Sports Utility Vehicles. They move in a convoy of these SUVs, with the full complement of bodyguards and police orderlies. Some of the councils have filthy premises, overgrown with weeds. Some breed thugs who harass and extort money from motorists and other vehicle users in the name of asking for radio licenses and some other levies. They also kill small businesses with taxes because they need more money to satisfy their profligacy (punch editorial, 2012). Paradoxically, therefore, instead of formulating policies that would encourage vertical and

horizontal dimensions in the growth of small businesses, the predator local government chairmen, support policies that end up killing such businesses.

The state and local government joint account set the elite in the federal and state level on a collision course as both tiers take a different stand on the matter, the complex relationships have adverse development in the grass-root with consequences on socio-political development (Afonne and Onokpegu, 2011). In some states local government level cannot embark on any project without the approval of state government. The case of project imposition and contract approval has been delayed or denied because of disagreement with state level (Agbu, 1995, Pryor, 2003). In 2002, the Governors of 36 states of the federation dissolved the 774 local government chairmen and councilors sworn into office in 1999, and appointed transition committee chairmen (TMC).

The political trend in Nigeria's fourth republic is the clean sweep of any political party in power each time there is council elections. The outcome was predicted long before the elections, this is because no opposition candidate has ever won elections in Nigeria since the return of democratic dispensation in 1999. The party in power has always taken everything leaving nothing to opposition (source, magazine 2009).

Local government position is an institution that lifts a job-seeker from hunger and poverty and constitutes a substitute labour market for unemployed. The pulse for serving people and stimulating community development for local government creation do not count (Jakpa, 2004). Most grassroots elections in Nigeria are won by the party in power, and the violence that characterizes these elections discouraged responsible people from participating in grass-root elections, the backbone of state independent electoral commission (SIEC) gave the party in power an edge over opposition parties (*PM News*, 2010; *Vanguard Online*, 2010).

Local government accounts are not accessible to the citizens; the elected representatives with the constitutional mandate of the local level has no plan to account for stewardship, and this practice has bred corruption and non-accountability in the system; many believed that local government accounts are shrouded in secrecy. Each time revenue

allocations accruing to local government are published in national dailies, prominent persons are usually not comfortable with the development. The continued monthly publication of revenue accruing directly to local government councils is to enable the citizens know the amount of money allocated to their council from the federation accounts; and this has exposed the amount deducted from source by state level without the knowledge of council chairmen (Guardian Newspaper, December 3, 2009). The problem of accountability encouraged corrupt practices at the local level, and the Chairman Independent Corrupt practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) describe local government administration as “bastion of corruption” because 12 out of 54 criminal cases pending in the court involved council chairmen and their officials (Achile, 2007:11, ICPC News).

Conclusion

This research on legitimacy crises and management of local government administration in Nigeria explored the concept of legitimacy, local government administration and evolution of local government administration in Nigeria from the pre-colonial era to independent Nigeria. The paper highlighted local government reforms in Nigeria and evaluated the problems of local government in Nigeria where emphasis was placed on lack of autonomy which leads to undue interference by state government making local council as appendage of state government, unskilled staff and indiscipline among other things. The paper argued that, if local government is autonomous and its allocation comes directly, local councils would have been conducive place that give job satisfaction and attract skilled labour which in turn can improve performing. The paper suggested ways of putting local government administration in Nigeria in the right path for efficiency and productivity.

Recommendations

Local government functions as agent of development and positive change for rural dwellers. Every community and their people should imbibe the culture of electing into offices

people who are competent in managing the resources devoid of impostor to achieve success. Popular participation is a tool towards sustainable democratic principles; this implies that the elected must view the mandate as an imperative to promote the welfare of the masses.

The state joint local government account (SJLGA) has placed the local government councils in a political bondage. The paper advocates the abolition of the state joint local government account in order put an end to the political slavery associated with it. The elite in local government should ensure that needs rather than patronage inform most appointments, while party loyalists may be offered appointments, recruitment should be based on availability of vacancies and needs. Local government has come a long way in Nigeria. Most of the local government administrations are ineffective and inefficient. There is still yearning for service delivery at the local government level and it appears that good governance at local level can only be guaranteed if the attitudinal change on the part of political elite and rural dwellers through unceasing structural changes called reforms are put in place.

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