

## An Assessment of Challenges to Local Governments and their Autonomy in Nigeria

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### Abstract

Grappling with multi-dimensioned challenges, agitation and struggle for autonomy by the local government have been a recurring phenomenon in the political history of Nigeria for several decades. Despite the age long struggle however, the desired result is yet to be achieved. This paper assesses the nature of local governments, their challenges and issues of granting them autonomy in the Nigeria. It also assesses the implications of those challenges on local governments' administration. In this qualitative method of study, secondary sources of data are used. The paper found that that overcoming their challenges and the hope for autonomy for local governments is being impeded by several factors, including constitutional gaps, continuous political manipulation through the conduct of local elections, over-bearing interference and arbitrary control of the local governments' funds, especially by the states' governments and undue interferences in their local political, administrative, traditional and minor matters. These, have resulted in negative tendencies with direct negative implications on the local governments, the struggle to gain autonomy and effective and efficient operations. These hamper their drive to foster development through quality service delivery and relevant project execution within their areas of jurisdiction. The paper recommends strict constitutional laws relating to the local government, especially regarding their autonomy, avoidance of undue interference from the other levels of government, especially the states. Local governments should also be given the conducive atmosphere to perform independently with minimum control where necessary in terms sourcing and expending local revenues.

**Keywords:** Autonomy, challenges, constitution, Federal, Local government, States.

### Introduction

All over the world and especially in federal states, local governments have been a crucial mechanism for fostering grass root development, bringing local people closer to the government and accommodating heterogeneities. This is because as political unit, they deal with matters of governance, especially those which are local in their nature and hence, peculiar and central to the existence of a given population within a particular area of jurisdiction. In view of this significance, local governments in Nigeria from colonial era to independence and post-independence civilian democratic and military regimes have been of great importance and attention with numerous creation and reforms all in order to among others, achieve effective and efficient service delivery at different epochs of time in the political history of Nigeria.

The agitation and struggle for self-determination and preservation (autonomy) by the local governments' authorities has been a historical phenomenon in Nigeria. This was, however, more pronounced during 1976 Local Government Reforms when they got stipulated constitutional powers and roles presumably as an autonomous political level of government.

Since, since then, local government authorities have been struggling to translate this autonomy into reality, and in order to effectively foster grassroots' development, provide quality services and community projects, among others (Lawal, 2000). However, despite these strenuous efforts and struggle, local governments have continued to face serious challenges ranging from those of their existence as a constitutionally autonomous entity, their being politically manipulated by the other levels of government, and their financial vulnerability and dependency on the states and the centre (Federal Government). These tendencies constitute a clog in the wheel of local government existence, administration and sustainability. Hence, those result in spontaneous reactions in forms of continuous struggle and agitations for true local government autonomy by the major stakeholders in local government administration, their personnel as well as the local populace in general.

Over time and circumstances, however, as the local governments and other stakeholders carry on their struggle for autonomy on one hand, the other levels of Nigerian federalism (states and federal) device new and manoeuvred ways of undermining the autonomy on the other. The struggle, therefore intensifies for them to enjoy their full constitutional powers and functions. Political manipulation and interference coupled with arbitrary control by the states' government have also intensified. Hence, Babatope et al. (2016: 78) argues that events over the years have shown that the Nigerian local government, despite constitutional provisions aimed at realizing the autonomy have failed to galvanize the much-expected autonomy and instead, it has fuelled manipulated centralization of power and authority, thereby leaving local government at the whims and caprices of states and the central government. Consequently, these tendencies have direct negative bearing upon the local governments' existence, operations and sustainability.

### **Conceptualisation and Review of Related Literature**

There is no consensus on conceptions and or definitions of local government and the vast majority of such definitions/conceptions by scholars focus on perspectives, contexts and reasons for their establishment (Aderogba, 2023). According to the United Nations Organisation (UNO) (1959), Local Government is a small division of government that is created, exists by constitutional provisions, and operates within a locality with specifically given powers on local issues and affairs within specific purposes and limitations. Local Governments are indispensable means and establishments of achieving national growth and development via provision of certain and basic services as may be determined by the constitution, local interests and needs, peculiarities and circumstances of such local areas (Ekeukwu & Umah, 2021).

For the Development Theorists, local governments systems are based on local sentiments, attachments, interests and values and thus, they (local governments) provide political integration and national cohesion in heterogeneous states and societies in order to achieve overall national unity and cohesion. All levels of government including local governments have five (5) areas of general management, including human resource management, financial management, infrastructural and capital management, information and communication technology, and performance management (Schoeman & Chakwizira, 2023; Ingraham, 2007). Inequities and related challenges among the smaller units of governments in all nations, especially the large, developed and heterogeneous ones are persistent and recurring (Onofrei, Bostan, Cigu & Vatamanu, 2023).

Those prompt the need for autonomy among them. The word 'autonomy' itself is derivative from Greek language and the words 'auto' and 'nomos' meaning 'self' and 'rule/law'

respectively (Adedeji, 2023). There is also a raging controversy over the meaning of autonomy as most scholars, politicians and federalists view it from different perspectives, backgrounds, interests and circumstances warranting its usage (Adedeji, 2023). Generally, autonomy with respect to local governments means consenting to other groups to have and exercise their unique identity in managing and controlling affairs related to them in their own local ways and at the same time keeping company (national unity) with a larger group or entity for the purpose of protecting and achieving certain and specific common interests and goals (Yash, 2000). Where however, autonomy involves granting self-government for concentrated minorities with unique and different national identities, it is territorial autonomy (Yash, 2000).

### **Local Governments: Background, Status and Functions**

Local government have despite challenges, served Nigeria for long and become indispensable part of its heterogeneous convenience, and this is despite their inefficiencies and ineffectiveness (Igbokwe-Ibeto, 2023). In Nigeria, although the system of local government is mainly associated with colonial rule, early independence, military rule and democratic evolutions (Gboyega, 1987), the system had traditionally been in existence right before the advent of colonialism (Awofeso, 2004). Various states and societies which lived around the Rivers of Niger and Benue had their distinct arrangements of local governance with all the due and established protocols of governance with their respective higher traditional and or religious based governments. In for example, the Emirate system of Northern Nigeria and Yoruba Kingdom, various forms of local governments and authorities existed and operated along with the centralised governments and administrations (Mohammed & Aisha, 2020; Mohammed, Aisha & Saidu, 2018; Mohammed & Aisha, 2018; Mohammed, 2018; Shehu & Buba, 2016; Mohammed, Abdullahi & Ameer, 2024).

Section 7(1) & 8 of the 1999 Constitution also states that ‘the government of every State shall, subject to Section 8 of this Constitution, ensure their existence under a law which provides for the establishment, structure composition, finance and functions of such, and their powers include construction and maintenances of the disabled/poor, cemeteries, local markets, drainages, refuse and sewage management and provision and maintenance of other local utilities and services Amos (Adedeji, 2023). Earlier, the 1976 Nigerian Local Government Reforms aimed at achieving separation with clarity of functions and powers of local governments, uniformity in staffing, functions, finances and financial allocations, and harmonious inter-governmental relations among all the local governments across the federation (Othman, Osman & Mohammed, 2019; Olika, 2023).

To that effect, all the 1979, 1989 and 1999 Constitutions of the Federal Republic of Nigeria provided for and guaranteed a democratic system and Councils of local government administration in the Federal Republic of Nigeria (Shehu, 2016). During the Second Republic of Executive President Shehu Shagari, the Nigerian Local Governments suffered in the hands of Governors and the central government through non-conduct and or conduct of shady elections into the local Councils, confiscation and hijacking of the local Councils funds by most states’ governors, and reduction in their statutory allocation to mere 8 percent from the earlier 10 percent of the national revenue generation (Ekumankama, 2023).

Effective functions and performances of local governments in Nigeria are hindered by ambiguities in the 1999 Constitution concerning their status; lack of autonomy, especially in finances; ineffective services delivery; corruption, local instability and insecurity;

unnecessary political interference by politicians, states governments, and other influential individuals and bodies in the local councils' local appointment, politics and administration; poor or no political education, socialisation, values and orientation; politics of patron-client relations, corruption, personnel, corruption, and loss/absence of true autonomy (Aderogba, 2023; Abah, 2023; Masters & Graycar, 2016; Muhtar, Winarna & Sutaryo, 2023; Schütte, 2016). Local Governments in the Federation of Nigeria derive their revenues from mainly three channels of the Federation Account's Statutory Allocations, the internal revenue relatively generated by each Local Government, and other non-statutory revenues/finances which come from diverse sources, including donations, grants, other projects grant from the states and the central (federal) government (Olika, 2023).

### **Local Government Autonomy**

Nwabueze (1983) defines the local government autonomy with reference to federal system of government to mean that each tier of government enjoys a separate existence and independence from the control of the other governments. The central issue in local government autonomy is on the exact and specific functions and or powers which are to be given to and exercised by the local governments and the willingness and commitment of the central (federal), states and or the regional governments to ensure that the local governments are given such powers and allowed to truly exercise same without interferences, ambiguities and uncertainties (Ata-Agboni, Okolo, Benjamin, Adama, Suleiman, Asiru & Omachi, 2023; Ata-Agboni, Aliyu, Usman, Ibrahim, Hamza, Wahab & Abdulkerim).

On the same note, the European Charter on Local Self-Government adopted by the Council of Europe, Strasbourg (cited in Sisk et al, 2001:25-27) refers to local government autonomy as local self-government which denotes the following: the right and the ability of local authorities, within the limits of the law, to regulate and manage a substantial share of public affairs under their own responsibility and in the interests of the local population; this right shall be exercised by councils or assemblies composed of members freely elected by secret ballot on the basis of direct, equal, universal suffrage, and which may possess executive organs responsible to them; local authorities shall be entitled to define appropriate forms of popular participation and civic engagement in decision-making and in fulfilment of their function of community leadership; local authorities shall be empowered to establish and develop partnerships with all actors of civil society, particularly non-governmental organizations and community-based organizations, and with the private sector and other interested stakeholders (Sisk et al., 2001:25-27).

Nigeria is one of the few federal states where the central government possesses and exercises enormous powers over the running the local governments. In most other federations, states control the local governments with substantial degrees of true autonomy (Ata-Agboni, Aliyu, Usman, Ibrahim, Hamza, Wahab & Abdulkerim, 2023; Mohammed & Aisha, 2020; Ata-Agboni, Okolo, Benjamin, Adama, Suleiman, Asiru & Omachi, 2023;). Although reliability and accuracy of public budgets and other financial engagements by public office holders are vital, most politicians, especially in developing countries and federations lack strong commitment to accept and implement transparent accountability and are deeply interested in and most likely to influence local financial decisions (Eckersley, Flynn, Ferry & Lakoma, 2023; Mancini & Tommasino, 2022).

In this view, local autonomy is seen to be associated with the establishment of a distinct operational, financial and legal status of local communities and authorities in relation to state administration or that of central government. Hence, the local body has financial and

management autonomy to decide and determine its own courses of actions. However, the central government should only monitor the activities of local authorities without intruding into their domain. Thus, Ofoeze (1997:12) maintains that what is critical in the issue of the local government autonomy which an elected council enjoys is in exercising its power to execute the functions allotted to it, as well as in its use of owned human and resources as well as financial control of its function.

Babatope et al. (2016:78) asserts that an autonomous and viable local government system should meet the following important elements: active participation of the citizen in the running of their own affairs; promote economic development from below- including infrastructural provision; promote political integration and nation building; Promote local freedom of action/autonomy; and enhance grassroots democracy. the local government should have the ability to formulate and execute its own policies and the right to recruit, promote, develop and discipline its own staff; the local government should have relative degree of autonomy over its finances, especially in terms of revenue generation and expenditure.

In essence, local government autonomy represents the independence capacity and capability of local governments to carry out their distinctive functions of administrative responsibilities and manage their own affairs within their areas of jurisdiction without undue interference from units of government. It is therefore, argued that local governments are viable political and administrative organs that exists to create mass development impetus to the grassroots transformation, and also facilitates decentralization, national integration, efficiency in governance and a sense of belonging at the grassroots levels (Fatile & Adejuwon, 2011:371-372).



**Figure 1** Full Constitutional and Political Autonomy for Local Governments in Nigeria.  
Source: Authors Compilations (2024); Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999 (As Amended).

### Materials and Method

Based on this research topic and the contextual nature of the paper, this study is based on qualitative method of inquiry in social sciences with fluidity, diversity and narrative/explorative and stretchy characters and predispositions (Stake, 2005; Patton, 1990; Neuman, 2000; Morgan, 1998). The data were collected from secondary sources, including books, journal articles and periodicals, and Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria,

1999 (Mohammed & Ahmed, 2018; Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Kothari, 2004; Kim, 2015). The paper reviewed literature on local governments, their origin, autonomy, constitutional and other related issues in Nigerian context.

### **The Search for Autonomy and Local Governments Operations in Nigeria**

As earlier highlighted, the concept of autonomy and its application has been a subject of debate among scholars (Awortu, 2013; Obikeze & Obi, 2004; Obikeze & Nnamdi, 2010:58). Three contending perspectives have emerged on local government autonomy as: the perspective interprets local government autonomy to mean independence from the interference of state government in the activities of local government; the Second perspective perceives local government autonomy as the non-interference of the federal government in the activities of local governments; and the third perspective maintains that local government autonomy means independence from both state and federal governments interference in the activities of local councils (Akpan & Ekanem, 2013).

On the same note, Nchuchuwe (2014:13-18) observes that the connotations underpin of the term autonomy are a major source of confusion which scholars of local government administration have severally attempted to clarify. Just as Nwabueze (1983) opines that autonomy in a federal system means that each government enjoys a separate existence and independence from the control of another government. For clarity, local government autonomy means the supremacy of bye-laws made by a local body within a framework determined by the central and state government. The will of the local government as expressed by the bye-laws is supreme of national guideline. In line with the provision above, section 7(3) maintains that 'it shall be a duty of local government council within the state to participate in economic planning and development of the area referred to in subsection (2) of this Section and to this end an economic planning board shall be established by a law enacted by the House of Assembly of the State.'

The search for autonomy and the efforts of local governments to free themselves from different forms of undue control has been one of the major problems facing local government in Nigeria to date. There has been controversy over the years on the issue of autonomy and how it affects local governments in Nigeria. This struggle for autonomy by the local governments' dates back to the colonial period when local government administration was exclusively in the hands of the colonial administration. It was the issue of autonomy and control, which was seen as one of the greatest problems of local administration in Nigeria, which necessitated the various reforms carried out in Nigeria (Aworawo & Akpan, 2003). Throughout Nigeria's postcolonial political history, local governments never operated independent of both the state and federal governments, this is the crux of local government autonomy.

The search for this kind of local government system has been a mirage (Ali & Mohammed, 2018:115; Amah, 2018). In understanding local government autonomy there are three historical perspectives of: the first will be the period from 1950-1983; from 1983-1999; and from mid-1999 to date (2024). In the 1950's local government became a mere appendage of the three (North, East and West) and later four (East, West, North and the Mid-West from August, 1963) Regional Governments. Even though, the 1976 Local Government Reforms recognized local government as a separate tier of government in the country, local governments during this period were left to the whims and caprices of their respective states' governments. Earlier between 1950 and 1952, the Regional Governments, through their respective Houses of Assembly enacted the Local Government Ordinance, which formerly

abolished the hitherto antiquated Native Authority (NA) System and subsequently instituted a radically different local government system in the Regions.

The period between 1950 and 1983 witnessed the abandonment of the promotion of local autonomy. In the 1950s, local government recognized local governance as mere appendage of the central government. Though, local government used to exercise limitless powers over their budgets, expenditure and personnel. However, the Ministry of Local Governments enacted bye-laws to regulate and control their operations. Later, their relative autonomy was further eroded through the ruling party at the centre, which determines the membership composition of the councils. By 1966 when the military took over the reins of power, a more centralized (unitary) command structure characteristic of the military further worsened the struggles of local governments for autonomy until 1976 when the Reforms gave local governments a new lease of life. Precisely, between 1960 and 1975, local governments were mere administrative extensions of the central government (Oladoyin, 2008).

It was after the 1976 Local Government Reforms that some dominant issues in local government autonomy could be easily appreciated. These include the setting up of Representative Councils, determination of population size of local governments, and direct allocation of funds to local governments. As a result, local government became very prominent in political discourse of Nigeria since 1976. As noted by Bello-Imam and Uga (2004), two critical factors were responsible for this development. First, the 1976 nationwide Local Government Reforms unequivocally recognized the tier of government as a distinct level of government with defined boundaries, clearly stated functions and provisions for ensuring adequate human and financial resources and at the same time imposed a nation-wide uniformity for all the units of local government within practical limits.

Second and related to the above, by deciding to recognize local government as the third tier of government activity in the nation and allowing (at least theoretically) that local governments should do precisely what the word government implies - that is governing at the grass root or local level. The year 1976 became the first time in the history of Nigeria that local government units were regarded as separate unit of government with constitutional status, power and financial standing, irrespective of the fact that the state governments were to ensure their existence and provide for their structure, composition, finance and functions. In addition, the 1976 Local Government Reforms provided some dominant issues in local government autonomy, including setting up of Representative Councils, determination of population size of local governments, direct allocation of funds to local governments and review of personnel administration.

However, all the efforts in 1976 to practically recognize local government as a tier of government were futile; local governments' administration still practically remained appendages of states and federal governments. Despite the constitutional elasticity provided for local government system beginning with the 1979 Constitution and the subsequent ones that defined their functions and sources of funding, local governments have not been able to extricate themselves from the strings of state and federal governments in Nigeria (Osaghae cited in Nchuchuwe, 2014:13-18). The higher levels (states and the federal) of government interfere in their operations in ways that undermine their true autonomy. It is important to note that with the exception of the General Babangida's administration (1985-1993), all other Reforms were made with respect to local government system over the years consistently decreased local government autonomy and increased the interferences of both federal and state governments in their activities. The Babangida administration as earlier stated,

introduced direct federal allocation to local government, abolished the Ministry of local government and established executive and legislative arms in local government. Another area of interest in local government autonomy has to do with finances (Adedeji, 2023).

The Constitution empowers the states to scrutinise and approve local government budgets and expenditure through the States Houses of Assembly (Ogunnubi, 2016; Nwogwugwu & Olusesi, 2015). The issue of State Local government Joint Account has been a thorny issue in local government state relationship in the post 1999 political era. This situation also brought to the fore the question of whether the Nigerian local government are truly autonomous. The experience with many local governments was their starvation of funds from their statutory allocation by their respective states. Thus, denying them of rendering essential services as required (Asaju, 2010). The issue of autonomy has to do with the local government, beyond mere constitutional provision that would be organised as the third tier of government, with power to regulate, to spend and provide services.

However, experience and empirical evidences have shown that financial autonomy of local government is non-existent in Nigeria (Mohammed & Aisha, 2020; Amah, 2018; Ali & Mohammed, 2018; Asaju, 2010; Umezurike & Ogunnubi, 2016; Nwogwugwu & Olusesi, 2015). The practically non-autonomous status of the local government as a third tier of government is further buttressed by the fact there are no express constitutional provisions restricting the powers of the State House of Assembly to prescribe the organizational structure of a local government in terms of its functionaries to with respect to the Chairman, Deputy Chairman, Secretary, Treasurer and Supervisory Councillors, among others etc. These officers and their offices, qualifications and tenure are not established or prescribed by the Constitution, but are created and manipulated by the laws of the States Governments.

### **Challenges of Local Government Autonomy in Nigeria**

The history of local government administration has been characterized by so many negative developments that have become obstacles toward the smooth operation and indeed encroachment upon the constitutional status and functions as autonomous political entities. This, is succinctly captured Akani (2017:28) has opined that today, local councils are under the firm grip of the States. They are mostly squeezed, strangled and manipulated at the caprices of the Governor through the compromised State House of Assembly. A cursory look at the relationship between the local governments and the governors reveal that the latter, hiding under Section 7 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999 amend and manipulate the Local Government Edict to suit their political and other particularistic interests and purpose.

This include appointment, re-appointment and dissolution of Caretaker Committees to run the Councils, while elections and other democratic principles and provisions as enshrined in the Constitution are respectively postponed indefinitely and ignored. In some states where kangaroo elections are organized and conducted, the ruling party in such state wins all and all the opposition lose all even in the stronghold of the opposition parties. This necessitates the advocate that local government elections should be run by the Independent Electoral Commission (INEC), rather by the States Independent Electoral Commissions (SIEC). In that respect, Shehu (2016) also summarily notes issues of autonomy, inter-governmental relations and revenue generation and allocation as the main challenges of local governments in Nigeria.



The challenges against the autonomy can be categorized as follows: (I) Constitutional Ambiguity - the Second Schedule (Part I, paragraph 22 of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria reflects the constitutional contradiction in the Exclusive Legislative Lists item (22) which provides that ‘elections to the offices of the President and Vice President, or Governor and Deputy Governor or any other office to which a person may be elected under this Constitution, excluding election to a Local Government, or any office in such Council’ (Idoko & Obidinma, 2020).

The double standard of the Constitution made it difficult for local governments to operate as an autonomous tier of government (Awortu, 2013). The Constitution recognized local government as a third tier of government but gives the state the autonomy to control local government. Section 7 and 8 of the constitution provide that there shall be system of local government by democratically elected councils which by this constitution guaranteed and accordingly, the government of every state shall subject to Section 8 of this constitution ensure their existence under a law which is provided for the establishment; structure, composition, finance and functions of the councils. The implication of the above constitutional provisions is that local government in Nigeria cannot exercise the functions assigned to it in Section 1 schedule 4 of the constitution until the state House of Assembly had passed a law (Asaju, 2010).

Full local government autonomy will forestall the current scenario in which local governments grapple with poor or lack of self-determination (Nchuchuwe, 2014:13-18). Similarly, autonomy would only be impactful where each level of government is not constitutionally bound to accept dictation or directive from another. Precisely, no level of government must arrogate to itself a superior status or power to control or regulate the official conduct of the other beyond constitutional provisions. Continuous domineering and crippling influence of the state governments against the local governments now existing and operating only as appendage of the states’ governments, makes the local governments both ineffective and undemocratic, especially at the grassroots level (2014:22); (II) political manipulation by State Governments - states governments under the current dispensation with local governments having no true autonomy.

Most states governors now stand down on the laws establishing the local governments’ councils, single-handedly and personally control their funds, make use of their States Houses of Assembly to enact laws and deduct local governments’ funds. The local Government Councils remain un-elected. Caretaker Committees are mostly appointed by states governors, and where election has been held, they are usually manipulated and abused by Governors. Thus, popular will is always subverted at the local level of governance, thereby leading to undemocratic practices, poor service delivery and inefficient administration (Human Development Initiative, 2022); (III) political corruption - as one of the major economic cankers that has ravaged the Nigerian political system. The Local Government officials has adversely undermined development in their areas and reduced the faith the Federal government has on it. The staff of the Local government has seen this institution as avenue to enrich themselves as it brings the “national cake” closer to them. Equally neglected are the ethics of service and compromised standards thereby making themselves agents of destruction and conduit pipe to siphon public fund. Indiscipline, truancy and kickback has not only taken over the activities of the government but has is now regarded as a culture.

Projects which are of benefit to the people are poorly executed because a large chunk of the money has been taken as kickback by government officials and the Contractor is left with

little fund to execute the contract. Recruitment exercise is no longer advertised, rather applicants are hand-picked, favour dispensed to acolytes with thoughtless abandon, settle party loyalist, girlfriends and make money through it thus sacrificing merit and competence on the altar of mediocrity. All these challenges form part of the things that have stalled development at the Local government in Nigeria (Ugochukwu, 2018: 276-277); (IV) over-dependence on statutory allocation - Odo (2014:109) argues that essentially, the autonomy of local governments is closely related to their financial viability; (V) shortage of funds - the 1999 Constitution empowers the local government to source fund through tax, rates, fines and fees, among others within their jurisdictions. However, most states governments have taken over such collections thereby denying the local councils the right and access to such funds, including multiple taxation.



**Figure 2** Major Challenges to Local Governments in Nigeria

Source: Authors' Compilation and Construct, 2024; Newswatch Magazine, August 1, 1988, p. 22-24.

### **Implications of the Challenges**

In more than one way, the 1999 Constitution cripples the autonomy it sets out to vest on the local governments thereby obstructing the rule of law and democracy in the country's federal system and arrangement by making the local governments unduly tied to the dictates of the state governments as contained in Section 7. This provision has far-reaching implications. First, the laws that will guide the conduct of local governments in a state are to be made by the States Governments through the States Houses of Assembly. Clearly, with nature of Nigerian politics, under which the majority party usually returns governor a state as well as the majority of members of the House of Assembly, proceedings in the Houses of Assembly are usually under the substantial influence and dictates of the state governor and uses that to determine which way the governor desires any legislative wind to blow. Secondly, the Section vests the function on the State Government to determine the financial fate of the local government and by virtue of the Section, it is the function of the State Government to provide for the finance of the local governments under them (Momodu, Tijani & Erhaze, 2016). Thirdly, to further make the local government subservient to the whims and caprices of the

States Governments, the 1999 Constitution (Section 162) makes the States Governments the purse where its local governments' funds are deposited before the latter receive disbursements from the former.

The implication of the above is that the local governments have to depend on the discretion of the governor for it to have access to its fund. More often than not, local governments' funds are held back indiscriminately by the state government for long periods. Many state governors in Nigeria have been diverting local government funds. Fourthly, many state governments have hidden under the provision of Section 7 of the Constitution to delay the conduct of local councils' elections in their states. The implication of this is that they keep receiving local government allocations, yet such monies are not expended on their statutory and intended purposes. Many of the States Governors completely dissolve local government councils and replace it with caretaker committee to run the affairs of the state at their pleasure (Momodu, et al., 2016).

The primary purpose of local governments is development of rural communities as well as active grass root participation in governance. However, with the current constitutional arrangement and gaps wherein local governments heavily depend on the state governments, these are far from being actualised (Beatrice, 2013). This is more so as all the appointments and elections into local councils are at the pleasure and instances of the States Governors and their benevolence. These are irrespective of Section 7(3) which empowers the local government Council to participate in economic planning and development is abandoned. (Akani, 2017:29). In view of this, Adedeji and Ayo (2000:56) argue that Nigerian local governments today are deprived of their representative institutions and are being clipped of their functions amidst declining in manpower and fiscal resources. Another basic challenge is the subordinate location of the local government within the chaotic Nigerian intergovernmental system, which has made the level in Nigeria over-dependent for both its policies funding, on either the state or federal government or both. All these are in addition to a context where policies and structures of local governments in Nigeria have witnessed incessant changes and transformations (Fatile & Adejuwon, 2011:373).

### **Conclusion**

Local governments have been a corner stone of grass root development, especially in developing states like the Federal Republic of Nigeria. However, in essence, the way and manner by which their operations are being dictated and manipulated by the other levels of government, especially the states governments have been making direct negative impacts on the local governments, their functions, autonomy and development. These hamper their constitutional and political essence of establishment of among others, fostering development through quality service delivery, grassroots participation, and relatively relevant and required projects execution within their areas of jurisdiction.

Many things are lacking as far as effective and efficient establishment functioning of local governments in Nigeria is concerned. Key to those is granting true and realistic/practical autonomy which will enable the local governments to determine their local affairs within their constitutional jurisdictions without hindrances as currently manifested in the present circumstances and contexts. This autonomy cannot, however, be actualised until and unless strong and effective mechanisms are employed, all constitutional ambiguities cleared and the political class, especially the States Governors and their Legislators have genuine concern, political will and commitment to see to the autonomy. Otherwise, all the efforts, constitutional provisions and amendments will all be in vain for the fact that no matter how

clear and appropriate constitutional provisions are made and the enabling environment created, if those to work for and with have no interest and or commitment, and there are no enforced laws to check their excesses, establishment, functions and sustainability of local governments in Nigeria will continue to remain an illusion.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the above findings and discussions, there should be strict enforcement of local government laws relating to autonomy, effective and efficient delivery of services without undue interference from any other level of the federation; Constitutional ambiguities should be cleared to ensure a clear establishment and operations of the local governments; the Constitution should review, establish and guarantee the exact tenure of elected councils of the local governments; the extent to which politicians make and share with local governments and their resources should be checked, especially through political socialisation, orientation and development of political values appropriate to the local environments; rather than fully concentrating on western and other foreign local government arrangements, Nigeria and Nigerians should gradually and from experience, evolve local political and administrative arrangements that reflect localities and real contexts of the local people and their socio-cultural and environmental peculiarities and contexts.

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