



Local Government Performance under a Federal System: The Nigerian Experience

Chukwuma Chinedu Ukachukwu^{1*}

¹Checkpoint Consulting Limited, Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria.

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the local government practice under the federal system of government in Nigeria. It highlights the performance of local government system in Nigeria as a federal entity. It accounts for the circumstances which underline the performance of the local government system in Nigeria and the impact on its efficiency and effectiveness. The secondary method of collecting data has been adopted in this paper and data collected were subjected to further documentary analysis. David Easton's systems theory is employed as the theoretical framework. The findings reveal that because the practice of federalism in Nigeria has failed to take into account the heterogeneous composition of its peoples, it adopted a uniform system of local government which has failed to make impact on the people within their localities. The paper recommends enthronement of genuine and practical democratic federal cultures across the country and a fundamental review of the laws that created the Nigerian local government system with a view to evolving fewer but stronger local governments that are relatively independent, functional and adapted to meet peculiar local needs.

Keywords: Federal system; local government system; performance status; Nigeria.

1. INTRODUCTION

Shafritz JM [1] defines a local government as "any government entity that is not clearly state or

federal". This definition is incomplete. This is because the expression 'government entity' is not specific and could be interpreted to include other government establishments. Moreover, it

*Corresponding author: Email: Chukwumaukachukwu@gmail.com, cuchy4real@gmail.com;

did not specify if such entity can make laws or the extent of its powers and influence.

The United Nations Office for Public Administration defines a local government as a political sub-division of a nation or (in a federal system) state which is constituted by law and has substantial control of local affairs including the power to impose taxes or exact labour for prescribed purposes. The governing body of such entity is usually elected or otherwise selected [2]. By implication of this definition, a local government is a governing institution which has authority over a substantially, territorially defined area. [3] believes a local government implies “the breaking down of a country into small units or localities for the purpose of administration in which the inhabitants of the different units or localities concerned play a direct and full part through their elected representatives”. On his part, [4] defines Local Government as “the lowest unit of administration to whose laws and regulations communities who live in a defined geographical area and with common social and political ties are subject”. [5] is of the view that though these definitions may tend to vary, yet they expose features characteristic of Local Government, among which are that:

- i. Local Government is government at the local level
- ii. It has its autonomous existence and endowed with a legal status
- iii. Specific powers are reserved for it
- iv. It can impose taxes and incur expenses
- v. It exists within a defined territory
- vi. It is seen as a distinct tier of Government
- vii. It must provide authority over a given population
- viii. It must provide avenues for the promotion of the welfare of the members of the community.

A local government is therefore, that level of government instituted by law, constituted to carry out certain essential functions which involve the participation of the people within its area of influence. The existence of other levels of government in a country necessitates the need for the creation or existence of local governments. This need arises from the fact that local governments contribute directly to the development of the people of a locality. They also assist the other levels of government to realize their broad objectives as it relates to national interest.

Wilson OJ [6] states that “almost every nation of the world has local units of government of some kind, if for no other reason than to decentralize the administrative burdens of governing”. He went further to add that “these governments are not federal unless the local units exist independently of the preferences of the national governments and can make decisions on at least some matters without regards to those preferences”. This special protection that local governments are believed to enjoy in a federal system is a consequence of its stipulation in a constitution.

Swift N [7] opines that the description of the system of government in the United States of America as ‘federal’ refers to the fact that it is a system that involves the cooperation and agreement not only of various entities spread out horizontally, as it were, but also vertically, in the sense that power and responsibility are shared among the three levels of nation, state and municipality. Nigeria is a federal state. This means its constitution acknowledge the existence of local units of government that can make final decisions with respect to at least, some governmental activities and whose existence is specifically protected in the constitution. Yet, the actual practice of the local government system in Nigeria is significantly peculiar. This paper reviews the peculiarities in the practice of local government system in Nigeria. It also highlights the reasons why the local government system in Nigeria has remained largely associated with poor performance.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

The purpose for the creation of local governments is to bring governance down to local levels. This also aims to ensure that local needs are adequately met. In this vein, [8] posits that the effectiveness of local government is judged by the development it generates, social amenities it provides and the extent to which it contributes meaningfully to the welfare and wellbeing of those residing in the communities it has been established to serve. In the 60 years of Nigeria’s political history as an independent federal state, the poor performance of governance, particularly at the local level, has been a recurring decimal. The local government system appears burdened by lack of autonomy, inadequate planning, poor implementation of policies, inadequate revenue, prevailing corruption and mismanagement, lack of

accountability and lack of participation by the local people [9] unlike what is obtained in other federal systems.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

The objective of this paper is to carry out a review of the peculiarities that underline the poor performance of local government under federal system of government in Nigeria. Specifically, this paper aims to:

1. Assess the performance of the local government system in Nigeria as a federal state.
2. Highlight the factors responsible for the performance status of the local government practice in Nigeria.

2. METHODOLOGY

The secondary method of collecting data has been adopted in this paper and data collected were subjected to further documentary analysis. David Easton's systems theory is employed as the theoretical framework.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Theoretical and Conceptual Underpinnings

The systems theory was developed by Easton D [10]. According to Easton, all political systems perform essentially the same functions. These functions he listed as input and output functions of the political system. The input functions include interest articulation, aggregation and adjudication while the output functions include the policies and programmes that ensue from the political system. By dividing the input and output functions. Easton highlighted that a political systems, despite differences in complexity, strive to ensure systems coherence and survival at all costs. According to Onu G et al. [11], "the results of the outputs further determine what is fed back into the system. This is known as outcome...those changes brought about by the political systems output". When the political system functions as described above, it achieves stability. If the reverse is the case, the political system becomes dysfunctional. Once a political system cannot ensure its survival in terms of managing various interests and conflicts, then that political system eventually stagnates or dies. Easton's systems theory is all about unity in diversity.

Despite the fact that Nigeria has over 250 ethnic nationalities [12], the federal system it adopted remains an imposed system of government rather than a consequence of negotiation, bargaining and agreement among the federating nationalities. Therefore, the model of the federal and local government systems adopted did not suit the political culture of the areas and as such proved functionally unsatisfactory [13]. Each nationality within Nigeria is mainly concerned with ensuring its survival and dominance to the detriment of the other nationalities. This has made the political environment one tainted by ethno-parochial interests that are not favourable for interest articulation and aggregation. On this shaky foundation, the Nigerian political system finds it rather difficult to develop the required capacities to respond appropriately to disturbances in its environment. The intense competition among the federating units generates more demands than support input. As a consequence, it is very difficult for the political system to aggregate the peculiar inputs of the various interests and ensure generally acceptable outputs.

In addition, the conversion processes is fraught with irregularities which generates narrow outputs. This flawed input and outcome process also affects the feedback mechanism. Under this situation, the Nigerian political system remains disarticulate unlike the American political system which has over the decades developed systemic persistence or the regulatory capacity to preserve itself. This affects the ability of the Nigerian political system to create local governments systems and practices that adequately transforms the lives of the people at grassroots levels.

3.2 Peculiarities and Performance of the Local Government System under Nigeria's Federal Structure

"A federal government is a constitutional arrangement which divides law-making powers and functions of the state between two or more levels of government which are united in a defined territory" [14]. This makes power sharing the central issue in a federal state. Hence, local governments in Nigeria are expected to enjoy a degree of freedom from the federal government as stipulated in the constitution. This is to ensure that peculiar problems that exist within the various local entities are left for those residing in such locations to solve. What the federal government does is to control those other issues

which the nation shares in common such as currency, customs, defence, etc.

It is for the reason above that a federal constitution stipulates the method of power sharing among the constituent levels of government. Hence, the constitution is specific on the powers the central, state and local governments can exercise and their limits. In his allusion to Nigeria, [15] asserts that "while the fourth schedule of the 1979 constitution spells out the functions of local government councils, the constitution leaves to the state houses of assembly the role of providing for the detailed arrangements and the provision of legal frameworks for the conduct of the system". Implied in the above therefore is that it is recognized in Nigeria, albeit theoretically, that local governments are the exclusive responsibility of the state governments within which they exist. Local government areas created were therefore created to reflect common community interests, traditions and associations making for convenient administration. Elections are prescribed to be conducted for certain offices and stipulated terms are tied to such offices. There is also delineation of local government units into smaller units known as wards, each ward to be represented by a councillor. Some degree of autonomy was permitted in the performance of their functions through power and authority devolved to them in the constitution.

Despite these constitutional provisions, the practice of the local government system Nigeria appears to deviate from what is obtained in other federal systems as is manifested essentially in the degree they are able to perform their duties and functions effectively and efficiently and, in the nature and extent of interference which the federal and state governments impose on the local governments. A careful unveiling of the local government system in Nigeria highlights its chequered history. Parochial, rather than viability, considerations appear to have largely informed the creation of the local government system being practiced. Thus, the 774 local governments in the country have uniform powers and functions irrespective of their differing local challenges and prospects. There also exists problems of autonomy despite constitutional provisions as state and central governments have, in many instances, interfered in the affairs of this level of government [16]. Despite the established fact that they are constitutionally under the supervision of the states, the states'

ubiquitous interference in the affairs of the local governments have attained a feverish peak in recent times and this disrupts that effectiveness of this third tier of governance.

With the above in mind, the local government system in Nigeria has become perennially synonymous with problem creation rather than otherwise. This is despite several reforms which aimed at making it a framework within which local human and material resources are harnessed and gainfully utilized. Nnamani C [17] vividly illustrates this in his insistence that:

Whereas the institutions at definition sought the establishment of government at local levels, the proper streamlining of the localities to fit into the designs were either muddled up or ignored for the impatience of the powers that be. At the end of the day, what you have are mere super-administrative posts in local areas where the local sensibilities of the natives are hardly considered in matters deserving of their contribution and local knowledge.

In short, the local people are distanced from their 'own government'. The sense of ownership that a local government is created to stimulate in the people within its territories is conspicuously absent. Grassroots development, local democracy cum local participation, economic development, etc have either been removed from the realities of the local environments or hamstrung by other inherent retrogressive factors. Local governments in Nigeria therefore, have not been allowed to operate on the basis of the society and as such are finding it rather difficult to impact positively on the local people.

The issue of revenue constitutes another major constraint on the performance of the local governments. The level of revenue accruing to a local government greatly determines its degree of autonomy, its rate and quality of successes and the level of failure it can be exposed to. To ensure the local governments' ability to survive and remain effective, federal systems of government, through the instrument that creates local governments also gives them their own sources of revenue. This appears nebulous closer home as the issue of revenue autonomy remains the bane of local governments in Nigeria. Ugoh SC [18] opine that:

At present, local government derives its revenue from two sources, internal and external. The internal source of revenue comprises several

miscellaneous items aggregated together to provide the required fund to finance the enormous functions ascribed to local government. These include rates, taxes, fines and fees, etc. Truly, the internal revenue is meant to be the most viable for any local body to discharge its constitutional functions. However, this is not the case in Nigeria. What we are saying here is that most local governments depend on the allocation grants from the federation account for survival.

Bello Imam, LB [19] posits that “in order to execute their functions, local governments must have adequate financial resources and enjoy a reasonable degree of discretion in both their functional performances and in the use of their financial resources”. Curiously, the Nigerian experience is one in which the sources of revenue accruing to local governments and the different types of expenditure they can authorize are those approved by the state or central government. This relatively translates to narrow autonomy for these local governments. This is coupled with the profligate embezzlement of available meagre funds by local government officials in concert with state officials, cronies, hangers-on and political thugs.

Furthermore, local governments in Nigeria do not possess the required skill and zeal necessary to harness or generate the larger part of their revenue internally. The implication is the prevailing acute dependence on federal and state statutory allocations but while the federal allocation is mandatory, the states allocation cannot be said to be mandatory. Burdened by such dependence, it is not surprising that these local governments become subjected to further unconstitutional witting down of their powers. State governments, through various means and guises, encroach upon what ordinarily should have been the exclusive preserve of the local governments in the region of finance. It is in this frame of mind that [19] states that “the state governments cashed in on this to take away, without consultations, some basic functions of local governments such as markets, motor parks, etc thus reducing their revenue base”. He adds further that “sometimes, this took the form of the creation of specialized agencies both multifunctional metropolitan and urban development authorities and single purpose functional bodies having sectoral jurisdiction for such services as water supply, housing and environmental sanitation”. This stifles the local

governments certain vital functions of planning and implementation of development schemes.

Added to the above is the ubiquity of the occurrence of blatant embezzlement, and misappropriation of local government funds. Directors of audit and internal local government auditors are deeply caught up in this haze of corruption. They are influenced financially to cover up sharp financial practices and this they do with proficiency. Lips service is paid to strict adherence to laid-down administrative practices and procedures. State inspectorate divisions, which inspect and supervises the activities of local governments, are caught up in the voraciously high rates of corruption in the local government councils. In most cases, these local governments do not comply with laid down administrative practices and procedures. In some not-so-rare occasions, they have transgressed the powers and authority allocated to them.

Furthermore, a diversified and highly functional local government system is assumed to be a panacea to conflicts usually inherent in heterogeneous societies. It is this consideration for the heterogeneity of the Nigerian sphere that the 1976 reforms negated to put into consideration. The reform in giving local governments in Nigeria a uniform structure neglected the subsisting primordial diversities that make up the country. These diversities exist even within the emasculated sphere of influence of the local governments. Consequently, strife, communal crises, intra and inter communal clashes and power struggles, both within and sometimes between specific local governments has been experienced especially in situations where revenue or attractive positions are on the stake. It does not end there. Individuals also connive with government officials to destabilize, hitherto, peacefully coexisting communities. This is unlike the business-like attitude which local governments are expected to display. As such, few people become involved in the governance of their locality and the council's business is treated as ‘not my business’. Therefore, the purpose for which local governments are created to serve, and which [20] vividly captured in his assertion that “it is in the context of the institutions of local government that people can come to terms with the difficulties and hazards of taking collective action, and so develop a deeper appreciation for how their independent interests affect their quality of life” remains a mirage.

With regards to Nigeria, [17] assert thus:

The imperfections of the constitution with regards to these local governments appeared to have left a gap for the final definition of such reforms as headship and administration invariably got sucked up into the political whirlwind occasioned by endless agitations for more local governments and more powers thereto... Consequently, with existing powers to boot, the local government chairman who has in addition elected councillors as legislators had the system enmeshed in interlocking political centres which were [and still largely remain] in competition and contention for power with the state.

All the above point to the fact that voluntarism and local leadership, premium on diversity, creativity and the ability of free people to invent different ways of solving problems which underlines local governments under federal systems [21] are subverted by a seeming Nigerian inclination for bad governance especially at the local level. Local governments in Nigeria have failed in providing the context by which people can come to terms with the difficulties and hazards of taking collective action and develop deeper appreciation for how their interdependent interests affect their quality of life as espoused by [20]. This has diminished their ability to mobilize the total available potential resources within their areas of influence for popular involvement in local development. What is usually obtainable in its place are various levels of deleterious inadequacies in the promotion of economic development and provision of critical infrastructure like public health, good roads, refuse disposal, etc which improve the realities of the local peoples' daily experiences. When little improvements are gained, such gains are used as instruments of political propaganda as dictated by the convenience of loquacious politicians.

3.3 Other Factors Responsible for the Performance Status of the Local Government System in Nigeria

The local government system in Nigeria encounters numerous problems which manifests in its blatant incapacity to achieve its *raison d'être* [22]. This to an extent could be attributed to the colonial experience. By imposing a uniform structure, colonialism only succeeded in eroding the creation of general conditions of peace and improved communication that would have enabled the people of every locality to harness

their resources. It neglected the variety of peoples and cultures, and the over-arching desires of these peoples and cultures to apply their local methods to move from one stage to another. It failed to put into consideration the injunction which stipulates that all local administrations should cultivate the local sensitivities, evolve acceptable attitudes to segments of development and native leadership patterns. Colonialism thus set the stage for the imperfections and the attendant manipulation of the nation's political system to pervert the entire values for the benefit of the centre. It created a national political environment in which the changes around the political system negated the basic tenets of democracy and federalism which it subsumed under autocracy and unitarism. The systemic process involving discussions, negotiations and bargaining were not adequately allowed to develop or become internalised by the indigenous politicians. Rather, in its place existed imposition of laws and policy choices on the various units which cumulatively led to unfavourable outcomes.

Overtime, the neglect of this critical process in political systems culminated in the situation where the political factions that were training to assume powers from the colonial masters after independence developed more centrifugal than centripetal tendencies. This they transferred into governance immediately after independence. Politics became primarily centred on whom and which ethnic nationality could appropriate the most revenue from the federal government. Local governments were indiscriminately created but without the hindsight of viability or the benefit of exhaustive political consultations'. Consequently, this has made it difficult for local governments in Nigeria to inculcate in the people a sense of belongingness and a feeling that the local government is their own which could have translated into greater participation and promotion of grassroots democracy.

In 1976, the military government introduced uniform reforms across the country which aimed at instituting strong representative local government systems. The aim of these reforms was basically to strengthen the local government system in Nigeria. It therefore entrusted political responsibility to the people at the grass root level and "sought the social and economic development of and the effective delivery of service to the respective local population scattered all over the country" [23].

Unfortunately, the overbearing attitude of the federal and state governments were maintained rather than diminished. This significantly diminished efficiency and effectiveness in policy making and implementation in the local councils. The resulting centralization of power and resources in the federal government in a multi-ethnic and deeply divided society like Nigeria had serious implications for development at the grassroots and other parts of the country [16,24,25].

In addition, the period 1987 to 1996 witnessed the height of the creation of administrative entities at both the state and local levels under the military. It marked the period when local government creation in Nigeria appeared to be mainly for the purpose of extending ethno-regional political plans in the country. Nigeria was balkanized into electoral fiefdoms which further increased the demand on the political system. Local governments became nothing more than beggarly recipients of federal allocation who had little more than their council secretariats to show for their existence. Continuous dependence on allocations or grants-in-aid from the other levels of government also affected local governments' willingness to explore and exploit those sources of revenue in their various localities. Along these lines, [26] asserts that "the central and state governments ruthlessly manipulate local governments at their pleasure and not at the pleasure of the communities. The abysmal performance and inertia of local governments is, inter alia, contingent upon these distortions and perversities".

When the above paragraph is assessed in relation to the Cook County in Illinois, USA, one begins to appreciate the extent of the balkanization in Nigeria. According to the [27], the Cook County has an estimated population of about 5,217,080. It covers an estimated area of about 1635 square miles. Several states in Nigeria can boast of far less than this population but have as many as thirty local government areas within their territories. Hence, the Nigerian local government system is burdened, as articulated by [19] by:

1. Inadequate financial capacity.
2. Erosion of functions particularly in the revenue yielding areas within inter-government context
3. Administrative problems, and
4. Lack of community participation.

The electoral processes by which individuals are elected members of local councils also leave much to be desired. Like other electoral processes in Nigeria, they are mired in criminal subterfuge, ominous large-scale rigging, blatant selection (in place of election) by political godfathers both in party primaries and local government elections and various other unconstitutional means that do not put the choices and aspiration of the local people into consideration. The outcome is that those who emerge are bereft of the basic knowledge of governance. Their achievements are seen only on the pages of newspapers and on large bill boards that compete for space with those of churches and telecoms service providers. At the point of election (or more appropriately, selection) or appointment as chairman of a caretaker committee, [28] pointedly observes that:

The local government chairman immediately surrounds himself with useless protocols and the paraphernalia of his office would embarrass even the Mayor of New York City... He becomes brash, arrogant, suave, solicitous and shockingly crude. One trait of character that is ever present though, is his well-horned capacity to detect the minutest opportunity for fraud and diversion of public funds. His word is law. He knows everything, except the concept of public and local government administration.

Another most paramount debilitating feature of the local government system in Nigeria in recent times has been the recurring dissolution and replacement of elected officials by appointees of governors as 'Sole Administrators', 'Transitional Chairmen' and 'Caretaker Committees'. Local government councils have become "avenues for rewarding political allies. Appointments are made to the councils on partisan patronage thereby instituting corrupt and unqualified personnel to man the affairs of local governments" [13]. Equally paramount is the speed with which these dissolutions and replacements are carried out without recourse to constitutional stipulations which insist that there should be a local government council made up of elected members. Almost every, if not all, states in Nigeria have perfected this unconstitutional means of destabilizing what they perceive as sources of opposition at the local levels. The appointees swear complete allegiance to their benefactors, usually the state governors and become handy tools by which the state governors pursue their parochial political and

personal objectives. A recent ruling by the Supreme Court in Nigeria in favour of elected local government officials are currently being resisted by state governments.

There is also the problem of indiscriminate looting of local government coffers. From the chairman down to the councillors, treasurers, directors, cashiers and other positions, local government apparatuses in Nigeria today have become veritable sources of unbridled theft of public resources. Treasurers and cashiers, employed as custodians of local government funds, help themselves gluttonously from the public purse. This they achieve by exploiting the inherent weaknesses inherent in the archaic accounting systems still in use in most local government areas. A closer look suggests that these treasurers and cashiers are probably more powerful than the local government chairman since they are more or less, permanent employees' of the council unlike the elected members that come and go. Being permanent staff, they become the institutional memories of councils. They know where every kobo is and have perfected elaborate schemes by which these monies are embezzled.

Also, every receipt of the monthly federal allocation, or what remains of it after balkanization by the state governments becomes a new season of the orgy financial impropriety. [28], with regards to above statement laments that:

After paying staff salaries every month, the party begins. Bogus contracts are awarded and re-awarded at grossly inflated rates, but never executed. Salaries are paid to hundreds and thousands of non-existing ghost workers. Unnecessary workshops and conferences (including to the UK to learn local government administration) are embarked on. Irrelevant consultancy and feasibility studies are commissioned, paid for and immediately dumped. Boreholes with no water are inaugurated. Classrooms that will be blown away by the next rains are inaugurated. Motorcycles and generators are distributed to 'area boys' in the name of dividends of democracy and poverty alleviation. By the time the orgy is over, allocations for another month would have arrived.

In conclusion, [28] asks "is it any wonder therefore, that local government areas, for all intents and purposes have become local problems".

In the majority of cases, monies meant for public projects are appropriated for personal uses. Public accountability is weak, accounting and audit systems have been compromised. The public is generally disinterested, the looting goes on and the local areas become figuratively comatose. Boreholes that are supposed to provide people with potable water usually stop running immediately the water that was filled in the dead hours of the morning by water tankers becomes exhausted. Many people, (men, women and children) who live alongside mountains of refuse and clogged drainages, die from preventable diseases like malaria, typhoid, cholera, dysentery, and meningitis. Social amenities and other local infrastructures are concentrated only in the communities in which the local government council is located. The other communities within the local government area receive less even when the revenue is for the even development of all the communities.

In addition, the fact that local governments in Nigeria operate joint accounts with the state governments creates its own problems for the local governments too. Under this arrangement, the state houses of assembly are empowered to regulate the activities of the local governments. With such powers, the state appropriates the funds of the local governments especially funds that accrue from the federation account. This becomes easier considering the fact that most of the local governments are run by the un-elected and illegal transitional bodies and caretaker committees set up by the state governments. These state governments claim they are using the confiscated funds to execute development 'contracts' even when such 'contracts' have nothing to do with the local governments whose funds have been wrongfully appropriated. This has given local governments in Nigeria the semblance of a parasitic tier of government which has continuously failed in promoting social, economic and political cum democratic competition and development in local areas.

4. CONCLUSION

The local government system in Nigeria shares similarities with the local government system in other federal systems in terms of power devolved to it from the federal systems under which they operate and their *raison d'être* which is to care for local needs especially in heterogeneous political systems. It ends there as has been emphasized in this study. This is in the sense that where the political systems in other federal systems are

conducive for viable and functional local governments, the Nigerian experience describes a lack of same. The history of local government in Nigeria remains the history of controversies and inefficiency. They remain a source of national embarrassment and democratic failure despite various efforts to reposition them. Such efforts have at best been ineffective or lost in the controversies lining the pages of the military constitution of 1999. Hence, as a tier of government, local governments have not recorded any remarkable achievement in Nigeria. They remain the most neglected, abused, politicised and marginalized in the federal arrangement in Nigeria. Local governments remain highly ineffective, unnoticed and have made little or no impact in the lives of the people [13].

The poor performances associated with the local government practice in Nigeria, as variously highlighted in this paper, lie rooted in the larger Nigerian political system and the flaws in her federal practice. Failure to essentially reform the larger Nigerian federal system to reflect even the most minimal expectations of the various nationalities in its make-up ultimately translates to inability to institute a political system that is responsive. The resulting competition among the various ethnic, political and other interests places such pressure on the political system in the form of conflicting and varied demands. In other words, and relying on [10] assumptions, the support input being experienced within the local governments in Nigeria is infinitesimal in comparison to the demand input they receive. This distorts the conversion process and ultimately generates unreliable outputs which fundamentally affect every aspect of the practice of the local government system under a federal structure like Nigeria.

5. RECOMMENDATION

Despite all its shortcomings in Nigeria these past years, the local government system remains the best means of collecting and aggregating the priorities, needs and preferences of the various localities that make up the Nigerian federal political system. To reverse this present trend in which it languishes demands tremendous effort from the collective of the federal, state and local power cleavages. The following are therefore recommended:

- The terms of federating should be made acceptable by a large majority of the

federating units. Such terms should be seen to derive from the units in place of the present situation where it is being construed as an imposition by several constituent parts.

- Decentralization of power should be seen to be implemented just as greater autonomy in terms of finance should become the norm of local governance. The clamour for this is gaining traction in Nigeria presently and is manifest in the various calls for restructuring.
- Existing contiguous local governments should be merged to reduce not only the number of local governments but also their expenditure on salaries, etc to ensure effectiveness and efficiency.
- Elections, rather than selections which undermine the spirit of democratic practice, should become the major means of choosing the local government councils' chairmen and members.
- Relevant processes and structures relevant to the prosecution and punishment of local government council members and staff that embezzle or misappropriate local government funds should be strengthened. The judiciary must be made to realize the critical role it occupies here.
- Equally important is that although it has been suggested in several quarters that the local governments be scrapped, the reality is that this will primarily serve to exacerbate the dysfunctional status of the Nigerian political system. What is primarily required is the enthronement of genuine and practical democratic federal cultures across the country. Good governance, transparency and accountability should be viscusly pursued in Nigeria's local government system.
- The uniform structure of local government, as is obtained in Nigeria, is a veritable limiting variable on the successes available to them as it did not consider the diverse peoples and cultures with its federating territories. This heterogeneity of their populations, through the adopted system of local governance, should be designed to serve the various but differing needs of its heterogeneous populace. In effect, different but coordinated forms of governance for different localities. Different localities should be enabled to adopt their system of local government which they believe could at best promote the interests of their locals and contribute to the federation in general.

The democratic space ought to be enlarged to incorporate local differences and sensibilities.

Until these are done, the local government system under Nigeria's peculiar federal practice will continue to be a reference point for failure of governance.

DISCLAIMER

The products used for this research are commonly and predominantly use products in our area of research and country. There is absolutely no conflict of interest between the authors and producers of the products because we do not intend to use these products as an avenue for any litigation but for the advancement of knowledge. Also, the research was not funded by the producing company rather it was funded by personal efforts of the authors.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Author has declared that no competing interests exist.

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