

# Rebranding Local Government Administration and Constitutional Responsibility in Nigeria

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## Abstract

The local government system is constitutionally created as the third tier and independent of the other two, the Federal and State Governments in Nigeria. The paper examined the reason for its creation i.e. to bring government nearer and dividend of government to the people and to serve as a platform for inclusive government at the grassroots level. Overtime, local governments in Nigeria has been battling with number of challenges hindering it from responding to the yearnings, demands and aspirations of the people which are expected to promote the good governance at the local level. Among these challenges are the issue of political accountability which has hindered it from fulfilling the reasons for its creation even in line with the provision of Local Government Reform in Nigeria. However, it is regrettable to see that local governments have fallen well short of expectations in the aforementioned area. This paper examined the nexus between local government administration and political accountability in Nigeria, and the factors militating against its attainment of political accountability which has hindered the provision of essential social services at the local level. The paper concluded by providing a number of policy recommendations among others, the ways forward is to enable local governments achieve more in concrete benefits to the people at the grassroots in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** Community Development, Local Government, Local Government Administration, Political Accountability, Good Governance

## Introduction

There is no doubt about the definition of local government given by the Nigerian Federal Government that it is mostly both theoretically sound and service oriented to the people. The main objective of local government is to bring government to the local community so that the local population can fully participate in the government process to provide essential local services and thus promote social, economic and political development (Ogunna, 1998). The principal aims of local government enshrined in Local government reform of 1976 further justify the above assertion.

Local Government doesn't have any precise definition, various definitions has been provided for the term "Local Government", though almost everybody knows what it means and portends. The

concept of local government administration involves a philosophical commitment to democratic participation in the governing process at the grassroots level. Local government councils are created by the Constitution in order to bring government closer to the people, which is why they are referred to as grassroots government. Despite the fact that local government councils are under the supervision of the state government, they should be allowed alone to manage their own business.

This indicates a higher level of government giving legal and administrative decentralization of authority, power, and personnel to a community with its own will, executing a specific function in accordance to the wants and expectations of the populace at the local level. A local government council is an organization whose mission is to meet

the needs, demands and aspirations of its constituents while also extending administrative and political control to the community (Wanjohi, 2003 cited in Shiyabade, 2017).

Unfortunately, in Nigeria over the years, inspite of 1976 reforms and other reforms of local government, local institutions still failed largely in their responsibilities and the citizens are yet to feel the impact of their administration at the grassroots level. Although Nigeria's local governments have financial autonomy and have provided the most resources with increased budget annually, but corruption and political lending continue to dominate politics and plunge people into poverty. Local government councils should have main responsibility for their communities and be allowed to exercise significant discretionary authority without being answerable to the state government that created them on a frequent basis.

In this regard, it was succinctly argued in Mbah (2007), that politicians in Nigeria are no longer accountable to voters. Therefore, the level of political corruption and indiscipline proves that tenants and principles of accountability have become like an illusion in Nigeria (Idike, 2016). However, the main objective of this paper is to examine the contending issues in local government administration and political accountability in Nigeria *vis-à-vis* grassroots development.

Recent studies have investigated the predictive strength of local government administration as an instrument for grassroots development in several or various states in African (Cooker & Adams, 2012; Shiyabade, 2017). In reference to the above, this paper interrogates the effects of local government administration on grassroots development in Nigeria with specific focus on selected Local Government Council in Southwestern States of Nigeria.

This article provides a link between the local government and their impact on rural development. It gives us insight on the achievement, failure, problem of Local Government in providing public services. It would also help other Local Government on how to improve on their performance in rural

development in their various area of jurisdiction. The findings of this study will be advantageous to the governments at various levels (Federal, State and Local Governments) by revealing how each level of government has negatively affected the quest to develop the grassroots across Nigeria.

### **Community Development**

A community may be defined as a group of people who live in, and/or are traceable to a particular geographical location, which may or may not be traceable to a common ancestry; who have identical cultural beliefs and traits developed over a long period of time as a result of their day-to-day interactions/communication as well as the multi-dimensional process that accelerates economic growth while reducing inequality and eradicating poverty. It also involves changes in structure, attitudes, and institutions.

A cursory look at the concepts of 'community' and 'development' would reveal to some extent, the meaning of community development. However, for a functional definition and to provide guidance to practitioners and student in the field of community development, it is imperative to give some definitions of the concept such that illuminates not only its meaning but also its content, aims and objectives. Community development is a method of enhancing a geographically defined area's social, economic, political, and educational life, frequently through action, community education, and development education.

Social, political, educational, life, and geographically delineated territory are the crucial words. In order to enrich, one must improve the quality of people's lives in a variety of areas, including religion, attire, family life, social interactions, fostering peace, providing jobs, and raising people's income and productivity; improvement in the quality as well as selection of leadership through active involvement and participation by all the members of the group; scientific and technological development and utilization of good infrastructure and social amenities and all those things that make people live a happy and contented life. Where a community possesses all these or at least most of

them, it is said to be developed. This development must be facilitated by the people themselves or with active assistance and cooperation with diverse government and non-governmental agencies. Anyanwu (1991) as cited by Shiyanbade (2017) defines community development as a process of social action in which members of a given community band together to plan actions, identify their shared and individual needs, and address their issues. These plans are then carried out with the greatest possible reliance on available community resources, with the assistance of services and resources from government and non-governmental organizations when necessary.

Arising from the above, community development is a continuous process which combines both directive and non-directive approaches. It is a process that involves every stakeholder in the community. For community development objective to be achieved, a wide spectrum of community dwellers must be integrated because they understood their problems and best approaches towards solving these problems.

#### **Local Government and Political Accountability**

The International Encyclopedia of Social Sciences - IESS (1976) defines local Government as a political subdivision of a national or regional government which in most cases, its functions are derived from the statutory power of the national or regional government, but it has certain decision-making powers, and generally has certain taxation powers. For Political accountability, over the years, it has been conceived as the fundamental feature in any effective public administrative system. It is presumed that all governmental departments have to be efficient, well-organized and competent because they have to ensure value for tax payers' money. However, Okoli (2011) sees political accountability as an alternate to that of public accountability. To be accountable and answerable, public office holders must be able to responds to the yearning, demands and aspirations of the people which promote good governance.

In understanding political accountability, there is a functional approach to that which is the concept of sovereignty. Political Thinker agreed that

national sovereignty ultimately belongs to the people. (Osaretin, 2009). As national representatives, government exists as a product of Hobbes and Locke's social contract to protect and uphold the universal values of people. However, McCandles (2008), defines political accountability as the "duty of authorities to explain in a public, complete and fair manner before and after, in fact, how they carry out their responsibilities to influence the masses in a significant way. This analysis is clearly equivalent to responsibility and transparency which Omgwu (2006), defines as the disclosure, guidance or regulation of the decisions and actions of government officials. Accountability requires that those who hold positions of public trust publicly account for their achievements, not the elite. In this case, the people in the local government decide how to rule them and conduct free and fair elections that have never been imposed on them by the governor. Occurs above, they (Local Government Chairmen) will be held accountable to the local public and not to the governor.

#### **Local Government Creation in Nigeria**

There are several reasons why local government have evolved and been established in various government system. There are political, economic and social reasons for these rationales. Some of the reasons are listed below:

**1. To bring government closer to the people:** Local government was primarily created to bring government nearer to the people. The need to educate the local citizens politically and encourage them to participate in their government is the beauty of democracy. The inability to felt the impact of both the federal and the state government by the local citizens led to the neglect of government by the people. In an attempt to bring government activities and the type of government that will yield to yearning, aspiration and needs of the people at the grassroots level led to the establishment of local government (Aigbakoba & Ogbonna 2004).

**2. To ensure effective mobilization of resources:** It is arousing in the citizens the enthusiasm or will to contribute financially, materially and spiritually to the management of

local affairs. Local government is created bring meaningful development to the rural areas through efficient mobilization of resources. Local government use funds provided by the federal and state governments and the internal revenue they generate to improve the lives of people in their area of operation (Aghayere, 1997; Adediran, 2014; Shiyabade& Esan-Atanda, 2024).

**3. To make Administrative convenience:** Local government is a channel for communicating and implementing state and federal government policies and plans. In fact, due to the great distance between the state and federal governments and the people, many functions are cumbersome for the state and federal governments. The functions include: (a) regulation and control of buildings; (b) control of traffic and parking (c) Collection of rates, radio and television licenses; (d) Registration of births, deaths and marriages registry etc. It was established as the intermediary between the state and federal governments and the local residents.

**4. To uphold the common interest of the people:** There are several ethnic groups in Nigeria today with different cultures and languages. These ethnic groups are divided by communities while the communities further form the territories of Nigeria's local government. Local government shape out among people in the same communities is use to maintain and promote the interests of the people involved. It was also a political unit to promote the interest and increase the participation in government projects.

#### **Decision-Making in Nigeria Local Government**

Decision-making at the Local Government level particularly under the parliamentary and the presidential systems of government were the responsibilities of the actors in decision-making. In the parliamentary system, such that exists in Britain (a model that Nigeria adopted at independence and maintained until the advent of military rule in 1966), governmental decision-making was the responsibility of the local political executive". The political executive in turn was responsible for his actions before parliament, which exercised sovereignty on behalf of the people. This was the position witnessed at the

federal and regional levels. The dominant actors in decision-making at the local level under parliamentary system included the temporary political executive and the local career officers. Other actors include the elite in the local community and the community people themselves.

Conversely, under the presidential system, the temporary political executive, political appointees, local career officers, judiciary and the legislature constitute the dominant actors while the elite in the local community and the community people constitute minor actors. The role of the dominant actors and other actors in decision-making cannot be under-estimated. The actors in decision-making are more relevant when there is participatory/elected local councils than the appointed ones. This study concludes that there is nothing wrong with any system of government but the operators of the system. Oluleye and Obi (2012) as quoted in Shiyabade (2020a) that corruption is said to be responsible largely for the undergrowth and underdevelopment in Nigeria, and that, the financial resources appropriated for development purposes are either diverted or misappropriated for self-aggrandizement with the consequence that those projects remain undone or uncompleted".

Similarly, World Bank (2004) opines that Service Delivery is that relationship of accountability between policymakers, providers, and users of the service. It is that visible framework that examines the relationships of accountability between policymakers, providers, and the citizens. The term accountability initiatives in service delivery is difficult to define, the clearest exposition of the concept being that by Schedler (1999) where public accountability comprises relationship between the account-provider demander. This implies that the power holder (account provider) accountable to the delegator so long as there is demand from them seeing that they hold power on behalf of the delegator (account- demander). However, the report (World Bank, 2004) emphasized accountability as a central thrust of the debates on service delivery identifying failures in service delivery as failures in accountability relationships. The report further revealed that

accountability could be in 'long and short route dimension'. Politicians or elected officers' failure to provide service delivery results from their failing the poor and less privileged and this refers to the 'long route' while the 'short route' is that direct accountability between the providers and users excludes politicians' role to providers. The World Bank argues in favor of strengthening the 'short route'-direct accountability between users and providers. Their work examined ways of strengthening the short route: from amplifying the voice of the users, increasing transparency, and enhancing accountability between the providers and users (Sirker & Cosic, 2007; McNeil & Mumvuma, 2006; Shiyabade & Esan-Atanda, 2024).

Bohlken, (2016) observes that transparency initiatives in service delivery are relatively easy to define compared to that of accountability. Any attempts (by states or citizens) to place information or processes that were previously unknown in public domain are clear indication of transparency. Moreover, accountability for service delivery can be demanded from a range of stakeholders such as politicians, public officials and providers. Accountability could be demanded from politicians when they refuse to adopt appropriate policy. Public officials could be held accountable when they refused to deliver according to the guides, while providers are held accountable when they refuse to maintain the quality of services delivered. Further initiatives to hold these multiple actors to account can be State-led or citizen-led (Bohlken, 2016).

VNG (2007) opines that Service delivery is an essential function in relating between government bodies and citizens. It is expedient that government, in general and Local Government in particular look at its activities in critical ways. This process of relation between the government and citizens is necessary based on the realization that citizens are customers to the governments and expect them to provide essential services.

A customer has the rights to demand services from the suppliers especially from those meeting their needs without delay. The government is seen as supplier of public services to the populace in a modest manner. The fact that products and

services of government are often times monopolistic in nature, requires seriousness and extra efforts in relating to their clients (citizens) efficiently, because good and affordable service would no doubt improve the government's image to the citizens.

The citizens' perspective of the government can also equally be measured in the way service is delivered. In assessing citizens' opinion on government activities, proximity and concerns for basic matters is important. Improving service delivery has similarities with improving relationship between citizens and administration. Today, citizens expect more from their suppliers i.e. the government. They expect full attention and this has consequences given the method of approach by Local Government. It equally applies to direct delivery as public action or authority (VNG, 2007; Shah, 2006a, 2006b & 2014).

Service delivery is a major task of the government, and the provision of guidance in relevant services such as public safety, infrastructure, and management of public roads. The concern for such provisions legitimizes government activities. As contained in constitutions and international treaties the government is responsible for services such as:

- a) Education and schooling for children
- b) public health services
- c) good road network
- d) Social security and basic provisions
- e) access to clean water
- f) Legal protection
- g) Housing for the less privileged
- h) clean environment and sanitation

The government must guarantee the citizens of the continuity of these services by making it accessible and affordable to all, irrespective of social and cultural backgrounds. Citizens' satisfaction should be the major task of government in providing essential services to the populace. Citizens' satisfaction in the interplay between government and citizens is the determining factor for government acceptance (Toonen, 2007).

### **Revenue Sources to Local and State Governments in Nigeria**

Contributing to the issue of revenue sources to Local and State governments in Nigeria, Shiyabade (2016) observed that revenue constitutes the lifeblood of Local and State Governments in Nigeria. It has been established that without adequate revenue Local and State Governments will not only lose their credibility and reputation but the fundamental basis for continuous growth and development will undoubtedly suffer an unprecedented setback. It is desirable for any tier of government to maintain its identity and be less independent of the other tier(s) of government. The contribution essentially examines the sources of revenue available to Local and State Governments in Nigeria. It is pertinent to note that today, the state governments in Nigeria have taken away, all the revenue yielding resources available to the Local Governments and consequently given to them, expenditure incurring responsibilities. This has rendered our Local Governments in Nigeria ineffective, (Shiyabade, 2016). It has affected growth and development in Nigeria.

This insufficient revenue is a basis of challenge of local governance and administration in Nigeria. These challenges no doubt could be escalated by other factors, not limited to poor revenue sources for local government, high rate of tax evasion by the citizen, establishment of dependent rural and urban centres, reliance on federal statutory allocation and failure of the local government authority to explore potential sources of income as well as restricted fiscal jurisdiction.

However, for the local council to depend less on other tiers of government, their role must match their taxing power and the ability to internally generate revenue. Also, the constitutional provision empowering such function must remain guaranteed and adequately protected. This measure and deliberate review of the revenue-sharing formula, allow local government to exercise its duties without fiscal stress.

In Nigeria, local government expenditure always surpasses generated revenue due to the wide margin between their needs and fiscal capacity. This has largely been caused by the incongruous nature of

their revenue rights and fiscal jurisdiction with the duties and functions constitutionally allocated to them. In other words, the nature and scope of Nigerian fiscal system or federalism with reference to tax jurisdiction and revenue allocation are progenies of the constitutional and political developments of the country. In Nigeria, the 'degree of decentralization of expenditure is higher than the degree of decentralization of revenue, hence an 'incredible disparity between income and practical commitments in the local councils' (Akindele & Olaopa, 2002). This implies there is an absence of the needed symmetry – hence, the problems of non-correspondence or vertical fiscal imbalance.

### **Challenge of Corporate Governance, Democracy and Personnel in Local Government**

Existing study (Ojo, Lamidi, Odewale, Shiyabade & Ihemeje, 2019) has observed that corporate governance, democracy and efficient personnel management and stability at the Local Government level can be guaranteed if there are good morale and good inter-personal relations among workers, motivation of workers by the employers, managing the employment relationship in work environment, developing people for the future, looking after employees' welfare and counseling services, ensuring fair pay and employee benefits and guarantee the law and the rights of the individual employee. The contribution observed that there is the need to monitor the employees from the recruitment stage to the retirement period. The achievement of the developmental objectives for setting up the Local Government as a third tier of government in Nigeria can be achieved if there is an efficient personnel management, (Shiyabade, 2017).

In line with Mahdi's view, Akinwumi, Mamman and Ukase (2012) argued that failure of rural electrification supply noted that despite the country's large and varied natural resources, the demand for energy in Nigeria far outstrips the supply, which is annoyingly intermittent. This situation is impeding the nation's development.

Pearce (2001) and Shiyabade, Adepoju & Ambali (2020) noted that from the colonial period, the system of providing medical treatment and

infrastructure, in particular, favored the urban population at the expense and disadvantage of the rural settlers. Thus, Shiyabade, (2020b) argued that this facility is created to treat basic health issues like snakebite and minor injuries, these medical centers were actually just mobile clinics that operated out of the dispensaries or outposts of the majority of towns.

Over the years in Nigeria, efforts have been made to entrench democracy, good governance and ensure that Local Government impacts on the people with a view to contributing to development. As a matter of fact, there are so many challenges militating against development in Nigeria. Some of the challenges include: over-centralization and top-down approach to governance, widespread absolute poverty among groups and geo-political zones, corruption, a rapid rate of population expansion, poor or inappropriate government policies and tactics, low levels of industrialisation, ineffective or unproductive agricultural practices, and a combination of these factors, constraint of inadequacy of finance, lack of continuity of governance resulting in disjointed development policies and programs; inability to articulate long-term development visions and plans, increasing inequitable distribution of income; rising unemployment and under-employment, inability to conduct accurate censuses for planning purposes, among others, (Shiyabade& Esan-Atanda, 2024).

The above observation confirms the position of Shiyabade (2020c) who identified some other challenges militating against development particularly at the Local Government level as the increasing dependence of local government on federal statutory allocation. Local Government's major source of finance is either through federation account or statutory allocation; and internally generated revenue. The other major challenge is the failure to hold elections at the appropriate time. The implication of this is that Local Government officials become agents of the State Government. Another challenge is that some Local Governments are very large (ranging from 150,000 to over a million population) and as such are not perceived by very many local communities

as local institutions with which they can identify. Furthermore, even though local councils have powers to appoint their officials, senior and middle-level Local Government personnel are recruited and deployed by a Local Government Service Commission which is responsible to the state rather than to the Local Government.

In addition to the challenges identified above, inadequate executive capacity constitutes another major challenge. There is a dearth of efficient, reliable and responsible executive capacity in term of training. Training of personnel has not resulted in expected improvement in the quality of governance at the local level. Specifically, the Federal Government of Nigeria established training institutions where the Personnel in the Local Government service should receive their trainings and instructions. Unfortunately, most of the States do not patronize the training institutions, (Shiyabade, 2020b; Shiyabade& Esan-Atanda, (2024).

The identified challenges confirm the contention of Aborisade (1985) cited by Shiyabade, (2020b) who highlighted significant numbers of finance and financial management problems facing Local Government. These include, The budget structure; Inadequate financial communication; The method of exercising external financial control over Local Government; The operation of internal control over Local Government finances; Controlling the cash flow position; Inadequate sources of locally raised revenue; inadequate medium and long term financial planning; Inadequate staff recruitment and staff development programs for the treasury; and Lack of better co-operative endeavor in the field of financial management.

Aside from the above, some other challenges affecting development at the Local Government level are: Abuse of power, Primitive accumulation of capital; Bad Leadership, and Bad government, Poverty, Unemployment, Inequality, Political instability, Lack of patriotism, Lack of understanding of the fundamental human rights, Lack of administrative power to act independently, Favoritism and nepotism, influences of local gladiators, Dearth of partisanship, State influences, Shortage of fund, and lack of financial independence, among others, (Olaiya, 2020).

Furthermore, other challenges include denial of resources by respective central governments; effective subordination of Local Government to the State Government rather than the public; lack of financial autonomy of the Local Government, Local Government administrative guidelines by the State government are not always in tandem with the philosophy of Local Government creation, disconnect between the felt needs of the local communities and the projects provided by the Local Governments; duplication of Local Government revenue sources by the State Government, Low educational background and exposure of politicians, mistrust between the Executive and Legislative arms of government which is inimical to development, flawed process of recruitment of staff due to the overbearing influence of politicians; deliberate tampering with Local Government federal allocation by the State Government who always accuse Local Government of ineffectiveness, Non-payment of staff salaries as and when due; among others, (Olaiya, 2020).

For Local Governments to be able to contribute meaningfully and play their roles effectively, impact positively on the people and contribute to development, there is the need to address the challenges and reduce them to the barest minimum. If these are done, they will undoubtedly enhance the prospects of Local Government for helping to deepen and consolidate democracy and good governance and above all, contribute to development in Nigeria.

### **Methodology**

The study employed exploratory research design using relevant books, reputable journals and other literatures in the field of public sector, local government administration, finance and Constitution of Federal Republic of Nigeria. These were reviewed, conclusion drawn with appropriate recommendations for purpose of increasing the frontiers of knowledge.

### **Conclusion**

The paper examined local government and political accountability in Nigeria. It is on this note that Local Government Councils in Nigeria are actually facing accountability problems. This

accountability problem is militating against the proper functioning of the local government council. Local government is machinery that drive development at the grassroots level as argued in this paper. It is weightiness in supplying services that have great bearing on public development that cannot be over-emphasized as it has a great bearing on other important sectors of the country. Therefore, this paper further suggested that people at the local level should be allowed to decide who governed them at the poll through local government election. The state governors and other elites should be warned to disassociate themselves from the affairs of local government through legislations. If this can be achieved, local government areas in Nigeria will experience remarkable progress.

### **Policy Recommendations**

As the unit of government closest to grassroots people, local governments are expected to play an important role in providing essential services to people. It is very regrettable that this does not make sense to the elites that determine who and how the activities of local government are conducted. There is also a general feeling that local government officials are diverting development funds into their private pockets. Thus all these corroded accountabilities at the grassroots. However, following suggestions would improve local government administration and accountability in ensuring proper transparency and accountability in the Nigerian Local Government.

1. It is necessary to abolish the state independent electoral commissions and its functions and powers need to be transferred to the independent national electoral commission. Many people have expressed their negative perception about the performance of the body which is seen as a rigging instrument of the incumbent state governors and the ruling parties. Unfortunately, since 2004 to date, local government elections in many federal states tend to foster the negative perceptions against the state independent electoral commissions. One of the negative perceptions is that in most states where local government elections are held, candidates from ruling parties win almost all seats.



Thus, these results do not often reflect voting patterns in federal elections.

2. Constitutional reforms are another measure. Constitutional reforms are required to ensure that local governments have complete autonomy. The goal of these reforms is to provide state governments more financial and spending autonomy while reducing the obstacles and control they face. The steep barrier erected by state governors should be removed, allowing council heads to govern and manage their natural pockets using proper planning norms and room to design appropriate programs and schemes suited to specific areas, as well as the preservation of communities' artistic heritage at the local level.

3. For local government to be accountable, it must prudently and efficiently handle living resources. As a result, it should focus on conducting thorough feasibility assessments of worthwhile endeavors that could provide a return on investment for the council and investing in those endeavors. It should also be laboriously concerned with the generation of its internal return, hiring new competent hands in the art of return collecting in an attempt to fully discover regions that have been left uncovered.

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## **DECLARATIONS**

**Informed consent and ethical approval.** The participants selected in the study gave informed consent and voluntarily participated in the study. There was no harm to the participants and also the Local Government Areas selected were given fictional names in order to ensure confidentiality and anonymity of the participants in Nigeria.

**Conflict of Interest.** The paper is co-authorship, the authors state that there is no conflict of interest in any form, the participants selected within the study areas participated voluntarily, the local government selected were given fictional names for ethical reason, and there are data availability for this study.

## **Disclosure Statement**

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

## **Ethical considerations**

This article followed all ethical standards for research without direct contact with human or animal subjects.

## **Disclaimer**

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