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## **The Place of the Local Government in Nigeria's Federal Arrangement**

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### **Abstract**

Multi-level government arrangements-federal, state/provincial and local government-are common to all federal systems. However, the place and role of local government in those systems vary markedly. In some, local government is a constitutionally recognised sphere of government, while in others it is merely a competence of the state/provincial government, or an administrative unit of a higher order of government. In some federal systems where it is recognised, like Nigeria, the local governments are principally established for socio-economic and political development at the grassroots. Thus, local governance is the prerogative of the local governments in Nigeria. This tier of government established by Section 7 of the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended) has some of its functions detailed in the fourth schedule of the same constitution. The overall objective of this paper is the analysis of the current status of the local government within the Nigerian federal system, and a critical examination of what the future holds for the third tier of government in Nigeria. Using essentially secondary documentary method, with content and thematic analysis, the paper recommends incremental constitutional review (as against mega constitutional renewal), the need to enhance political and economic autonomy of local government through frequent elections, and adopting new strategies for generating internal revenues for the local government in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** Local Government; Federal System; Autonomy; The 1999 Constitution; Nigeria

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Multi-level government arrangements-federal, state/provincial and local government-are common to all federal systems. This becomes imperative given the fact that some federal systems, like the Nigerian state, is leviathan in size and conduct, requiring some forms of decentralisation for effective governance. The creation of lower tiers of government is thus justified on the grounds of near paralysis of government at the federal level due to the concentration of governing authority and resources at the centre. However, the place and role of local government in those systems vary markedly. In some, local government is a constitutionally recognised sphere of government, while in others it is merely a competence of the state/provincial government. In some federal systems where it is recognised, the local governments are principally established for socio-economic and political development at the grassroots. For instance, in the constitutions of Spain, Brazil, India, Nigeria and Switzerland, role and functions of the local government have been entrenched

Thus, local governance is the prerogative of the local governments in Nigeria. This tier of government established by Section 7 of the 1999 constitution (as amended) has some of its functions detailed in the fourth schedule of the same constitution. It is noteworthy that the local government as an entity did not have definitive constitutional recognition until it was enshrined in the 1979 constitution, which provided the legal framework to implement the 1976 reforms. The primary goal was to ensure that every state government should, by law, provide for the establishment, structure, composition, finance and functions of local councils (Diejomoah and Ebo 2010). This means that the degree of autonomy local councils enjoy in decision-making, strength and relevance is determined by their respective state governments, and the state governments

have always taken advantage of the lacuna created by this constitutional framework to dictate the financial and operational structures of local governments.

Following the reforms of 1976 and 1988/89, Nigeria operates a single-tier presidential system of local government with the constitution empowering the State governments to make laws providing for their structure. The 1979 constitution did spell out the functions and responsibilities of local government. These functions fall into three categories: areas for which local governments have full responsibility, areas where local government shares responsibility with higher levels of government, and areas of responsibility that the state or federal government may from time to time assign to local authorities (Oviasuyi and Idada, 2010). Additionally, the constitution guaranteed democratically elected government councils all over the country: "The system of local government by democratically elected government council is under this constitution guaranteed..." (Chapter 1, Part 2, Section 7(1), 1979 Constitution).

The 1979 constitution allowed for local government to receive federal allocations, and in Section 149 prescribed that states should provide funds for local governments in their areas (Bamidele 2013). The 1999 constitution takes almost the same position on local government as the 1979 constitution, with some modifications. In its fourth schedule, Section 7(2), of the 1999 constitution (as amended) sets out the functions of local government in Nigeria. In theory, therefore, local government is a unit of government with defined powers and authority, and relative autonomy. It is instructive to note that what exists in reality in Nigeria is at variance with this theoretical expectation. As will soon be shown the Nigerian local government confronts a number of challenges, including identity crises, lack of autonomous existence, and series of administrative and financial gridlocks.

Essentially, the objective of this paper is the analysis of the current status of the local government within the Nigerian federal system, and a critical examination of what the future holds for the third tier of government in Nigeria

## DISCUSSION

### **The Nigerian Local Government System: An Overview**

The Nigerian local government system is presently facing a number of challenges. First, existence and establishment of the local government confront serious legal encumbrances which have continued to affect its performances. For instance, while there are constitutional provisions which not only identify the local government as the third tier of government but also stipulate democratic methods for forming such government (section 7), yet there are other provisions in the same constitution which tend to suggest that the institution of local government does not exist at all (For instance, section 2 (2) of the 1999 constitution (as amended) states that "Nigeria shall be a federation consisting of states and a federal capital territory"). Again, the operation of the local government particularly under a democratic system of government is a far cry from the reality of an independent existence (Gboyega, 2003).

Arising from ambiguous constitutional provisions, the other two higher tiers have continued to treat the local government not as a distinct and independent entity but as their appendages. This also, partly, explains the prevalence of undemocratic political structures known as caretaker committees at the helm of affairs in most local governments in Nigeria. It would then appear that the local government system in Nigeria lacks strong and consistent theoretical base and this amongst other factors has engendered the cycle of confusion that has constituted lots of challenges to local government operation in Nigeria. Moreover, autonomy of the local

governments from states especially in terms of fiscal relations has been a mirage usually facilitated by structures known as State Joint Local Government Account (SJLGA). Although it is widely reported that it is the instrumentality of this account that many state governors have exploited to divert and manipulate local government funds, yet SJLGA has proved a useful mechanism in handling several logistics issues in many states of the federation.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that local government's non-performance in Nigeria is essentially due to its lack of financial and administrative autonomy. Indeed, the general argument is that local governments are not performing because they are not allowed to perform. Local government needs to be independent and allowed a freehand to operate. Therefore, financial and administrative autonomy is crucial for effective local government performance. Indeed, the issue of autonomy of the local government in Nigeria has a long historical pedigree. The extent of how autonomous the local government can be, or has been, is a function of the nature and structure of transactions or interactions among the three tiers of government. Paradoxically, local government enjoys better autonomous existence under military or autocratic regimes as virtually all the reforms on the tier have been affected under military rule.

For instance, the 1976 reforms, which is regarded as the harbinger of the greatest and most encompassing changes in local administration and governance occurred under the military regime. In the wisdom of General Ibrahim Babangida's administration, certain institutional encumbrances to the operation and performance of the local government were removed. First, was the scrapping of the State Ministries of Local Government, which was done to remove political and bureaucratic control of the local government in order for the third tier to have more freedom to perform its statutory

roles. In addition, apart from the local government elections that the administration conducted in December, 1987 to restore democracy to grassroots governance, it also approved improved scheme of service for local government employees following the recommendation of the Oyeyipo Committee report of March 1988.

Moreover, a direct disbursement of fund was made to the councils with increment in statutory allocation from 10 to 15 per cent in 1990 and from 15 to 20 per cent in 1992. It could therefore be argued that the onset of democratisation signified woes to the local government administration and operations in Nigeria. Rather than fortify it for better performance of its constitutional mandates, elected civilian administrations in Nigeria have consistently undermined the existence of local government for overt and covert political motives with the intension to make the institution prostrate and ineffectual, if its scrapping cannot be achieved immediately (Abass-Aleshinloye, 2014). A case in point was the Forum of the 36 Governors who met on June 17, 2003 and resolved to push for the constitutional amendment to empower state Governors to appoint council chairmen and councillors.

They later met with President Olusegun Obasanjo at the Council of State meeting where they decided to set up a Technical Committee on the Review of the Structure of Local Government Councils in Nigeria (Abass-Aleshinloye, 2014). Led by Alhaji Umaru Sanda Ndayako (Etsu Nupe) as Chairman, one of the terms of reference of the committee was "to review the performance of the local governments within the last four years and consider the desirability or otherwise of retaining the local government as the third tier of government. In that regard, consider, among other options, the adoption of a modified version of the pre-1976 local government system of government". It is quite unbelievable that state governors

could be considering "the desirability or otherwise of retaining the local government as a third tier of government" in Nigeria.

What is emerging from the foregoing is that the issue of autonomy of the local government has gone beyond its primary objective of making the institution effective. Autonomy now constitutes a serious political issue due largely to political interests of the higher tiers of government, namely the state and federal governments. In this conflict of political interests, the council simply becomes a pawn in the power game. In an interview, a Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Local Government and Chieftaincy Matters in Kaduna state (Interview with a Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Local Government and Chieftaincy Matters in Kaduna state on 16<sup>th</sup> July, 2014), it was revealed that most state governors see the elected local government chairmen as political rivals, whom many of them cannot tolerate. In his words, the PS said: "His Excellency considers the 23 LG Chairmen as political rivals and cannot tolerate dividing his authority in ruling the state with 23 others"

Unlike the practice in countries like the United States of America, France, Britain, and India, the Nigerian constitution (1979 and 1999) identifies a single tier structure which recognizes only one authority at the local level (Rondinelli et al, 1989). Thus, any other arrangement like area development authorities, districts, villages, wards, under local government is a matter of administrative convenience and varies from one state to another. The 1999 constitution (Section 7) establishes the local government as a tier of government in Nigeria stipulating its functions in the fourth schedule of the constitution (Section 1), making it a participant in the sharing of funds accruing to the federation account (Section 162, Sub-Section 3) as well authorising it to internally generate revenue through about 21 items. Thus, by May 29, 1999 when the first set of civilian

federal and state executives in the 4<sup>th</sup> republic were sworn into office, all local governments had elected chief executives and legislative councils (NISER, 2014).

However, since the reintroduction of civilian rule in 1999, divergent opinions have existed as to the real status of local governments in Nigeria especially in terms of its finance and autonomy. Albeit with a long history, the local government system in Nigeria has a record of abysmal performance and has failed to satisfy the yearnings of the populace (NISER, 2014). Some common explanations for this identified in literature include; lack of autonomy and stifling horizontal inter-governmental relations; poor finances, inadequate personnel, poor community relations, inefficient political leadership, corruption, lack of effective monitoring and evaluation mechanism etc. However, at the base of all these challenges is the crisis of identity which faces local governments in Nigeria. In more than 100 years of its existence, Nigerian constitutions especially since 1966 had exhibited series of weaknesses in respect to the country's local government system especially in terms of; specifying without ambiguities the political, structural and economic identity of local governments in Nigeria (Eme and Onuigbo, 2015).

Unfortunately, the 1999 constitution has proved inadequate in resolving the controversies surrounding the local governments and their associated problems (NISER, 2014). The Constitution has some contradictions which serve as the basis for the crisis of identity that negatively affect local governments. In other words, while certain aspects of the constitution make proclamations regarding the local government system, ambiguous and contradictory provisions still exist within the same legal document. For example, while a part of the constitution (section 7, subsection 1) places responsibility for the establishment, structure, composition, finance and

functions of local government councils with the state governments through the instrumentality of state Houses of Assembly (section 8, subsection 3), another part (section 7, subsection 6a), makes provision for statutory allocation of public revenue to local government councils from the Federation account and subjects state actions in terms of creation of local governments to ratification by the National Assembly (section 8, subsection 6).

Similarly, the existence of local governments under the 1999 constitution is uncertain as the autonomy and powers of local governments in relation to the state government are ambiguous. While Section 7 of the constitution empowers states to define functions of local governments, the fourth schedule of same constitution outlines some roles of local governments in the provision of critical basic services including primary education, health services and the development of agriculture. Moreover, while recognising the local government as a tier of government the constitution fails to make it autonomous through the provisions of section 162 (subsections 6 and 8) (NISER, 2014). Other major challenges of local governments in Nigeria as would be shown below are linked to these constitutional defects.

The case for local government autonomy has been one of the most recurrent issues in the discourse of Nigeria's public administration (Odalonu, 2015). Proponents of this often hinge their argument on the fact that the local governments are meant to be a separate tier of government within the federal structure of Nigeria; thus, should be allowed to possess real authority and jurisdictional autonomy in the discharge of constitutionally assigned functions, especially in terms of determining its political leadership and managing her finances. In reality however, this has rarely been the case before and since Nigeria's fourth republic especially, after the

expiration of the tenure of the first elected local government officials of the republic on June 2, 2002 (Oyediran, 1987; NISER, 2014). In terms of political leadership, the common practice amongst governors is the appointment of the unconstitutional caretaker committees who are accountable to them and not the people.

The zeal to strengthen the political identity of local government has led to the formation of constitutionally unrecognised associations by public officials at this level such as the Association of Local Governments of Nigeria (ALGON) and the National Councillors' Forum (NCF). For example, under ALGON, local government councils have approached courts to challenge the suspension of local government chairmen by state Houses of Assembly (NISER, 2014). A consequence of the overbearing influence of the states on local governments is the existence of some sort of disconnect between the people and the local governments (NISER, 2014). The rapport between the people and the government becomes disjointed as sections of the populace are not participant in the activities of the government. Also, in relation to finances, the local governments have not fared any better.

The structure of the Nigerian federal system has made local governments to be continuously attached to the financial apron-strings of federal and state governments. Unlike what is obtainable in most developed societies, local governments in Nigeria are mainly dependent on exogenous sources of revenue such as allocation (presently 20.6% of national revenue) from the central government to perform its functions. This has induced a decline in local government internally-generated revenue (Roberts, 1997). This situation is further compounded with the poor revenue framework of local governments in Nigeria occasioned by the residual nature of its revenue sources like tenement rates, market and trading licence, motor park

duties, advertisement fees, entertainment tax, and radio/television licence (Oladeji, 2014). While the local governments have not been very efficient in generating funds from these sources, some other internal revenue sources such as sales tax/value added tax which could have been more generative are now centrally administered or completely hijacked by states (NISER, 2014).

Apart from markets and motor parks; community tax and collection of rates on shops, kiosk and business premises, very lucrative ones like radio and television licensing and property rating do not appear to be exploited. As a matter of fact, most local governments in rural area rely on markets as their major source of internal revenue (Bello-Imam, 1992).

Moreover, instruments like State Joint Local Government Accounts (SJLGA) where federal allocation to local governments are first deposited have further worsened the situation. Since local governments are junior partners in the management of the SLGJA, they oftentimes are made to benefit from the account as determined by the governor. In fact, there have been allegations that governors indulge in diverting council allocation through controversial deductions (Akaeze, 2012).

Eme (2014) revealed that majority of the corruption cases against former state governors before the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission and the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission are related to the management of the state/local government joint accounts. Unfortunately, attempts made to correct this anomaly by the President Goodluck Jonathan administration through separation of the SLGJA was met with stiff opposition from the states (Onuigbo and Eme, 2015). Thus, a tier of government with such a poor revenue framework has a heavy recurrent expenditure system which stalls the execution of developmental projects. This is worsened by sharp practices in collection of

local government funds as well the contracting of revenue collection of local government funds to political patrons (Roberts, 1997; NISER, 2014).

Indeed, massive corruption exists at local government levels involving essentially administrative officials. In essence, two factors have combined to undermine the performance of local government. They are: 1) Joint account with state government, and 2) committee put in place to monitor local government.

These factors dictate what happens to local government and have continued to affect the performance of their functions. In real fact, the hijack of money meant for local government constitutes real threat to the functioning of the local government. The fact that internally generated revenues for most local governments are still very low contributes to the problem. The state government that is mandated to contribute at least 10% to the funding of local governments have not been seen to do so. All of these are the factors responsible for non-performance of the local governments.

Due to crisis of identity, it has also been difficult to determine the style of political leadership that is appropriate for the local government system in Nigeria. thus since 1976 various management systems ranging from democratic local government councils, caretaker committees, sole-administrator system, interim caretaker committees, local advisory committees or even the presidential system under Babangida where elected councillors constituted the legislative arm and chairman chief executive and accounting officer-crises between the legislature and executive have been adopted (Roberts, 1997). However, none of these systems have been able to solve the political leadership problem of the local governments. Most of the leaders are not even on ground in their supposed local governments. Oftentimes they only come to the council headquarters to receive

monthly statutory allocations or for political meetings.

The result is that they do not take the issue of planning serious and since most of them are protégées of state governors, they do not adopt a bottom-up approach to democracy and development. Ironically, Nigeria's federal structure does not make local government accountable to the people at the grassroots rather to politicians at the state or the central level of government (NISER, 2014). Moreover, instability in terms of local government leadership further compounds the problem as the political head of the council often sees his period in power as his own opportunity to amass wealth (Adejo, 2007). Poor quality of personnel is not only visible within the political circle of local government but in the bureaucracy. The issue of inadequacy of personnel has been a perennial challenge of local governments in Nigeria. Attempts have been made through series of reforms beginning with 1976 to address this yet, the situation is seldom different.

It has been observed that even when quality staffs are available, they are more often in the administrative departments than operational or specialist departments thus, it is rare to find engineers, doctors, statisticians and other experts as local government staff (Adejo, 2007). Moreover, quality personnel are rarely attracted to the local governments partly because of rural drudgery, lack of respect and power for local government; as merely increasing the salary of local government staff has not salvaged the situation. Furthermore, state policies and issues of poor management of staff by the state-managed Local Government Service Commission who even politicise certain issues like recruitment, supervision and firing of staffs further aggravate the issue (Roberts, 1997).

### **Plights of the Nigerian Local Government Councils**

Given the foregoing discussion, it is safe to assert that the plights of the Nigerian

local government councils are as follows, namely:

1. A victim of the lopsided federal arrangement: Despite the reforms introduced by successive administrations, the 1999 Constitution still provides ambiguous structure, unlike what obtains India and Brazil. Thus, it appears that the local governments are local agencies of the state government for mere administration convenience.
2. Challenge of lack of autonomy: Local government councils are often dissolved at will. Indeed, an additional problem is that states often determine the tenure of elected members of local government councils. Wilson (2013, p. 142) observes that "On several occasions, the states of Edo, Imo, Ondo and Rivers truncated the tenure of the democratically elected councils and replaced them with members of the ruling political party in the state, as caretaker committees. In most cases, the state governments decided not to conduct elections for the [local] councils, as in the case of Anambra State which ran a caretaker system for over six years. This practice is an assault on the principle of popular participation in grassroots democracy. In 2016, Deputy Senate President, Ike Ekweremadu, called for the upgrading of the council into the third tier, based on the clamour for council autonomy by some stakeholders. Pro-federalism crusaders however opposed the suggestion, saying that only two tiers, a central government and states, which are coordinate with the central government as component units, constitute the making of a true federation. In February 2018, the prospects of autonomous local government system in Nigeria suffered another serious setback with only nine out of thirty-six state assemblies voting in support of council autonomy in the constitutional revision exercise coordinated by the national assembly. This is a far cry from the twenty-four states required for amendment of this section. The nine states in support of council autonomy in Nigeria are: 4 in North central (Kwara, Benue, Niger, Plateau), 1 in North east (Bauchi), 2 in south south (Cross River and Bayelsa) and 2 in south west (Ogun and Ondo).
3. Characterised by instability: There was furore over the reduction of the tenure of the elected local government from three to two years by some governors. In some states, governors even indicated that they would appoint supervisors, advisers and other aides for new council chairmen.
4. Unstable channels for funds disbursement: The channels for disbursing council funds have also become a bone of contention. The money is allocated to the councils; it does not go directly to the councils. It is deposited in the State/Local Government Joint Accounts (SLGJA). At the JAC Committee meeting, the council is a junior partner. There are allegations by local government workers that governors indulge in diverting council allocation through controversial deductions. The illegal deduction compelled President Goodluck Jonathan to suggest the separation of the State and Local Government Accounts. The move was however criticized by some state governors.
5. Continuous interference with council operations-In the February 2018 constitutional revision, majority of the state assemblies voted against abrogation of the State-Local Government Joint Account (SLGJA). This suggests that state executive will continue to interfere with statutory funds allocated to the 774 local government councils in Nigeria. This becomes worrisome given that many of the states are run on the basis of



- caretaker arrangement (As at April, 2018, as many as fifteen states are being run by caretaker arrangements in Nigeria).
6. Subjected to realpolitik-council chairmen whose names have appeared in the black book of the governors forfeited their offices through the dissolution of the councils, in active connivance with the Houses of Assembly (Oladesu, 2014). In Ibarapa local government are of Oyo state, former Governor Rashidi Ladoja delayed the swearing-in of the Alliance for Democracy (AD) council chairman, who defeated the candidate of his party, the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), at the poll. In fact, in some states in the South-east, South-south, South-west, and North-central, governors have resisted attempts to hold council elections, to the consternation of anxious aspirants (Eme, 2011).
  7. The 1999 Constitution also created friction between the federal and state governments over the control of the local governments. The federal government insisted that states lacked the power to create more councils belong to it, claiming that all the councils have already been listed in the constitution. Former Katsina State Governor Umaru Yar'Adua, who later became President of Nigeria, had to retrace his steps by axing the newly created councils in the state, out of fear.
  8. Actually, the power to create councils in section 8(3) is vested in the House of Assembly. But section 8(6) gives the power to ratify the creation and list newly created councils to the National Assembly.

The local government has emerged as one of the key institutions in the study of public administration especially in Nigeria. A major consensus in literature is that the local government remains a veritable agent that could facilitate development at the grassroots (NISER, 2014; Otoghile and Edigin, 2011). Moreover, within the context

of growing pluralism and the diverse nature of human societies, local governments are considered potential agents of promoting national cohesion while attending to local needs (Onuigbo and Eme, 2015). Thus, there has been increased appreciation of the local government not only as, an administrative institution but a major institution for new perspective planning and development (Roberts, 1997). Despite all this Oladosu (1986) cited in NISER, 2014) noted that the position of local governments in Nigeria is still largely unclear as claims, as the third tier of government is nothing more than an "illusive chimera".

The situation is worsened by the fact that local governments in Nigeria are increasingly finding it difficult to carry out their constitutional responsibilities (NISER, 2014). One of the most contentious issues in the Nigerian local government system is the structure of the local governments. Arguments against the uniform structure of local government introduced by the 1976 reforms and strengthened by Dasuki reform committee exist in literature. Proponents argue that it contradicted the localist justification of local government in the sense that it negates the practice in developed countries like the United States, where diversity characterises, local government allowing each local government to culturally evolve from people of a locality with common interests and led by their elected representatives (Roberts, 1997).

They noted that some local governments in Nigeria fall short when assessed against the backdrop of criteria like, financial soundness and administrative efficiency; taxable population, traditional relationship among the people; the geography of the area; transport and communication facilities; and willingness of the majority of the people to be together (Roberts, 1997). They therefore propose that the creation of local governments should be the responsibility

of the states in consonance with the local people and not the current practice whereby local governments emerged by pronouncements from the centre. Similar to democracy, development whether social, political or economic becomes meaningful and real only when it is approached using a bottom-top approach starting from the lowest society level (Sikander, 2015).

The local Government (LG) system therefore could play a critical role in ensuring development and consolidating democracy. However, the general failure of this institution to act effectively in such capacity in has been engendered by its crisis of identity as well as other factors noted in this paper. This has been of great concern to policy makers and analysts alike because, the failure of the local government in the area of service delivery and development begs the question of its relevance as an institution of governance (Onuigbo and Eme, 2015). Hardly can one cite meaningful developmental projects initiated and completed by local governments in Nigeria. In fact, local governments are even ignoring certain important functions such as maintenance of cemeteries; provision of parks, gardens and open spaces; provision of fire protection; sewage and refuse disposal; provision of homes for destitute and the infirm etc to concentrate on concurrent functions such as agriculture, health, and education where the tendency for expenditure is higher and their capacity to perform optimally is low (Roberts, 1997).

Some forms of local government exist in every country of the world. Although there may be differences in the essential features of local government: constitutional status, historical structure, level of autonomy, etc; local government is generally seen as veritable agent of development and grassroots participation in the democratic process. Local government has been perceived as a panacea for the diverse problems of the diverse people with diverse culture. As

important as this tier of government has been, there seems to be some impediments that have been infringing on its performance and functions in recent time. These impediments range from political and undue interference of the higher levels of government, that is, federal and state governments, bribery and corruption to embezzlement and gross inadequacy of well-trained and qualified personnel to mention a few.

The 2005 National Political Reform Conference also reaffirmed the three levels of government in the constitution, but did not address the fractured constitutional arrangements which have rendered local government administration more or less unworkable. The most protracted debates on the system of local government were at the 2014 National Conference. Unlike previous conferences, this provided ample opportunity for participants to discuss a wide range of political and constitutional issues, encouraged by the spirit of democracy and freedom of expression made possible by then 15 continuous years of democratic rule. Perhaps in an effort to resolve the issue of local government funding, the conference recommended scrapping the SJLGA and replacing this with a state Revenue Mobilization, Allocation and Fiscal Commission (RMAFC) with representatives from all local government councils in a state and a chair nominated by the state governor. However, it also recommended a two-tier government structure-federal and state-with states able to create as many local governments as they wish (National Conference, 2014).

Empirical survey documented by NISER (2014) shows that regardless of its perceived failures, Nigerians still believe in the relevance of the local government. Thus, it is acknowledged that the system is a work in progress. The paper recommends that first; the ambiguities within the constitution that surround the identity of local governments must be clarified. Preferably, the local governments should

become part of state governments with no affiliations to the federal government. But recognising the political intrigues that could delay such implementation the following measures could also be taken to improve the Nigerian local government system: 1) Incremental constitutional review (as against mega constitutional reform) to enhance the political and economic autonomy of local government; 2) promoting political accountability at the local government level through frequent elections; 3) funding state electoral commissions directly from the consolidated revenue account to increase their independence; 4) adopt new strategies for generating internal revenues for the local governments; 5) establish strong oversight institutions at the local government level; 6) improve the capacity of the existing local government staff through practical training as well as improve their welfare to attract qualified personnel; 7) improve relations between the local community and local government; and reduce the cost of running local governments by ensuring that they focus on basic services that each locality considers most important.

## CONCLUSION

Local government is widely acknowledged as a viable instrument for rural transformation and for delivery of social services to the people. It is strategically located to fulfil the above functions because of its physical and psychological distant between officials of the other tiers of government responsiveness, and simplicity of operations. However, despite the strategic importance of the local government to the national development process, its contribution has been minimal. Some observers in the past attempted to provide reasons for the ineffectiveness of local government in the development process. While others agree that the ineffectiveness of local government derives primarily from

the Constitution and excessive government control. Admittedly, states have undermined the financial viability of local government by diverting statutorily allocated grants for local governments as well as encroaching on their revenue yielding functions like markets, Motor Parks, tenement rates, Liquor licensing. Obviously, the current campaign by the President, the Senate and the National Union of Local Government Employees" (NULGE) and fears shown by teachers against the Local government autonomy are result of behaviour and attitudes of the persons who operated the system, and treated local governments as a super ordinate and subordinate tier of government.

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