

Nigerian Local Government System: Issues, Challenges and Prospects

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Abstract: The paper centers on Nigeria local government system, its challenges and prospects. This is against the backdrop that Nigeria is a country blessed with both human and material resources that is capable of transforming her present state of under development. The paper looked at the different structures of local government in Nigeria from before colonialism to date and the concomitant vicissitudes. The paper was anchored on the theory of structural-functionalism and adopted the descriptive research design. The paper shows that factors such as personnel problems, loss of autonomy, financial constraints, corruption, etc. constitute the bane to efficient and effective service delivery by local government in Nigeria. Thus, the paper recommends inter-alia that measures should be taken to make sure that staff recruitment, selection and placement are based on merit system and not politicized. Also, the local government autonomy bill recently signed into law by the president should be vigorously applied and local governments should strive to engage in activities that would enable her generate wholesome internal revenue by committing more to her constitutional functions as contained in the fourth schedule of the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

Keywords: Local Government, Local Administration, Local Government System, Nigeria

1. INTRODUCTION

Local government all over the world has been noted as a veritable tool for development as well as bringing governance nearer to the people. The structure of the Nigerian local government has over time undergone some vicissitudes and reforms since its origin which predates colonialism. These changes and reforms were aimed at obliterating all structural rigidities that hampered the smooth operations of the local government in attaining or fulfilling its responsibilities. In spite of this, the Nigerian local government is bedevilled by many challenges that stymie it from actively fulfilling its critical role of development as well as bringing governance close to the people.

Granted that no institution is insulated from problems and/or challenges as they constitute an integral part of any organization, at best they can only be minimized as its total elimination might quite be difficult. In other words, it can be rightly said that no group and/or organization is entirely harmonious, for it would be devoid of process, structure or form. Challenges therefore, rather than being dysfunctional, are essential ingredients of organizational structure as well as its continued existence. Thus, it can be submitted without any air of contradiction that challenges are phenomena that occurs in all human institutions, and of course in all nations including Nigeria, with her three levels of government viz. Local Government, State Government and Federal Government.

In the matter of Nigeria's local government, it appears challenges, rather than being functional is dysfunctional in nature thereby resulting into her being

endangered. Against this backdrop, this paper attempts to explain the nature of the Nigerian local government system, identify the challenges local governments in Nigeria face in actualizing its aims as well as proffer plausible solutions for the challenges.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Conceptual Exposition

Local Government has been variously defined by scholars, practitioners and administrators alike. And like many concepts in social sciences, local government is not amenable to one generally accepted definition, with the understanding and definition consequent upon the definer's milieu. Ugwu (2000, p.87) understands local government as "the third tier level government created for the purpose of efficient and effective administration of the localities." As one can see, Ugwu's definition is hinged on the Nigerian experience and does not take into cognizance that in other countries, local government may be the second or fourth tier of government.

Odenigwe (1984, p.15) conceives local government as "that part of government of a nation or state which deals mainly with matters of concern to the people of a particular place." Similarly, Okoli (2005:1) defines local government "as a unit of government established by act of law to administer the functions of government and see to the welfare and interest of the local dwellers under the local government system." Furthermore, Orewa and Adewumi (1992) conceptualized local government as a system of government in local communities and towns which are

organized to maintain law and order, provide some limited range of social services and cooperation of the inhabitants in joint endeavours towards the improvements of their conditions of living. They argue further that local government provides the community with formal organizational framework which enables them to conduct their affairs effectively with a view to regulating the actions of their members for general good. The above definitions tend to conceive local government as local administration and/or grass root government.

On his part, Oyediran (1988) asserts that local government as explained by some scholars as synonymous with local administration or grass root government is wrong as they have different connotations. Oyediran (1988) observes that:

local administration is the administration of local communities essentially by means of local agents appointed by and responsible to ... the central government, regional or national government. The key element of the above definition is the imposition of governing authority on local inhabitants without their consent or will. Thus, this is not local government (p.2).

In line with Oyediran (1988), Appadorai (1975, p. 287) defines local government as a government "by the popular elected bodies charged with administrative and executive duties in matters concerning the inhabitants of a particular place or district." In agreement, Hill (1974) asserts that local government is a system of territorial units with defined boundaries, a legal identity, an institutional structure, power and duties laid down in general and specific statutes, a degree of financial autonomy and are democratically elected or selected. Corroborating his position, Abubakar (1993) contends that:

local government is a political sub-division of a nation (or in a federal system, a state) which is constituted by law and has substantial control of local affairs including the powers to impose taxes or to exact labour for prescribed purposes. The governing body of such an entity is elected or otherwise locally selected (p.4).

In conclusion, Kwenge (2013) maintains that no matter how differently the concept is defined, it focuses on the transfer of political powers to local areas by involving the inhabitants in the provision of basic needs in their respective communities. For the purpose of this work, we will adopt the meaning of Local government as aptly captured in the "Guidelines for a Reform of Local Government in Nigeria" (1976) cited in Ezeani (2004, p. 26). According to the "Guideline", Local Government is one:

Government at (the) Local level exercised through representative council established by law to exercise specific powers within defined areas.

These powers should give the councils substantial control over local affairs as well as the staff and institutional and financial powers to initiate and direct the provision of services and to determine and implement projects so as to complement the activities of the state and Federal Government in their areas, and to ensure, through active participation of the people and their traditional institutions that local initiatives and response to local needs are maximized (p. 1).

2.2 Historical Development of Local Government Structure in Nigeria

The structure of the Nigerian local government has over time undergone some vicissitudes and reforms since its origin which predates colonialism. These changes can be classified into three broad categories, namely;

- a) The Pre-Colonial Epoch
- b) The Colonial Epoch
- c) The Independence Epoch

2.2.1 Pre-Colonial Epoch

Nigeria is a conglomeration of diverse peoples dispersed all over its territorial landscape with more than two hundred and fifty ethnic groups, with the Hausa/Fulani, Igbo and Yoruba as the dominant groups (Okeke, Nduba & Akam 2019). Hitherto colonialism, these distinct ethnic groups existed as mini states and autonomous political entities with their own cultural values, religion, norms and well-structured political arrangements and a proven capacity for autochthonous development (Nduba, Nnamdi & Ofodu 2020). Before colonialism, there were different forms of local administration in Nigeria and they were highly influenced by the prevalent social forces and processes all aimed at regulating the social order in the different settlements (Okoli, 2005). In the Hausa/Fulani dominated Northern Nigeria and Yoruba dominated Western regions, the structure of local government was highly centralized, while it was decentralized in the acephalous system of the Eastern Nigeria and the Middle Belt.

As already noted, the structure of the local government was highly centralized in the Hausa/Fulani emirate system with functions, powers and authority centred/vested on the Emir. The Emir was the chief executive (and also holds legislative and judicial powers) and his decision making was absolute. According to Ola (1984, p.22), "the emirate structure of the Hausa/Fulani has a well-organized fiscal system, a code of land tenure, regular scheme of local rule through appointed district and village heads." Each emirate was divided into districts named by district head on delegation basis; the districts were further divided into villages headed by heads for Emir. Their major function was to collect taxes for the Emirs.

The Emirs enjoyed services of assistants such as Madawaki (army commander), Galadima (capital city administrator), Sarikin Fada (chief of staff), Maaji (secretary and treasurer), Sarikin Pawa (officer in charge of butchers), etc. These officers did not have decision-making powers of their own rather they assisted the Emir in the implementation of Emir's policies and decisions.

In the Yoruba dominated western region, the structure of local government was also centralized. The chief executive was the head of the kingdom called the Oba. Unlike its counterpart in the North, there existed a form of checks and balances in the centralized local government in the West. The checks and balances took the form of senior chiefs advising and monitoring the activities of the Oba, and when the Oba goes contrary to the laws of the land, he is mandated to commit suicide. The senior chiefs and Baales were part of the executive, legislative and judicial functions and their appointments were based on individual loyalty to the Oba.

The local government system in the Igbo dominated Eastern region was quite different from what was obtainable in the other regions. It was acephalous, highly decentralized and democratic in nature. No single individual or body held absolute power in decision-making process, rather the decision-making powers were vested in a number of bodies which includes council of elders, village council, age grades, sacerdotal society among others. According to Okoli (2005), there were reasons for this decentralized structural framework in the localities. First, no individual or group of persons or bodies has absolute power in the area. Secondly, the structure was not differentiated irrespective of its decentralized nature since each segment of the society influenced the social order. Thirdly, the fundamental laws governing the land were orally transferred from generation to generation. And finally, it was highly democratic since all the organized institutions within it was relevant in translating the will and aspirations of the various institutions for the overall benefit of every citizen of the state. These make imposition of views difficult on any segment. Okoli (2005) captured the essence and mechanisms of the system thus:

The administration and decision-making start from the compounds through the lineage and down to the age grades/groups. The various lineage heads formed the council of elders. The oldest in a lineage was regarded as the head hence the word council of elders. At the lineage level, decisions were made and implemented. The different lineage heads formed the village council. The chairman of the council (village) was from the most senior lineage. Different villages formed the clan or village assemblies. The chairman of these assemblies were from the eldest villages (p. 23).

The highest decision-making body was the clan/village assembly. The village assemblies' members

constitute the representatives and spokesmen of other segments like lineage, age grades, etc. Another vital body in the decision-making process was the sacerdotal society, they came from the various groups but performed religious functions. The implementation of the decisions reached were mainly done by age grades, towns and sacerdotal society. The resources for such implementation were usually contributed by individuals in their respective villages

2.2.2 Colonial Epoch

The advent of colonialism marked the era of indirect rule system of local government administration in Nigeria. This was also known as colonial native authorities. The local administration was arranged in such a way that indigenous rulers, institutions and traditions were preserved and used by the colonial government to administer the local areas. Through the indirect rule system, the precolonial structure of local government was dismantled, the powers and authorities of indigenes were removed while colonial powers and authorities were imposed on them (Okoli, 2005). Through indirect rule system and native authorities, political relationship was established between the local authorities and colonial government. The purpose for adopting the indirect rule system by the colonialist was purely to gain local support for economic exploitation and political gains (Okeke, Nduba & Akam, 2019).

This system was first introduced in the northern Nigeria because of the enabling structural environment. It also survived because the northern pre-colonial administration was a highly centralized, tyrannical, single tier multi-purpose system of local government administration. It was later introduced in the other parts of the country with contrasting degrees of successes. In the Igbo dominated eastern region, native authority suffered some challenges and difficulty consequent upon the system perceived as alien and abuses by the warrant chiefs who operated on behalf of the colonial administration.

There were some reforms to this system in the 1930s and 1940s due to certain factors which includes increased political activism in Nigeria caused by World War II and the shortcomings of native authorities. This activism compelled the new government of Britain to alter her policies towards her colonies. As a result of these factors, the local government administration was reformed. Following this reform, sole administrator was introduced in the northern region with centralized administrative structure. The sole administrator exercised an overwhelming power over his subjects. He appointed his subordinates and was accountable to the resident of the province appointed by the colonial authority.

In the western region, the chief in council was introduced. The council was constituted of the chief and formal council which was advisory in nature, all set up by

the colonial government. The chief was free to consult his council but he was not obliged to abide by their advice.

For the acephalous state of eastern Nigeria and the middle belt, the chief and council were introduced. In this structure cum organization, decision-making powers was shared by the chief and a council. The chief is mandated to consult his council on crucial matters such as appointment of staff, allocation of lands and spending of public funds. Furthermore, the chief must accept their advice and opinions. The chief and council arrangement was provided in this region as it suited their social conditions.

Between 1950 and independence in 1960, there was another reform to the structure of local government administration in Nigeria. These reforms were initiated by Eastern region government. These reforms were necessitated or consequent upon three distinct factors, namely; the Aba women riot which spread to other areas, the inefficiency and waste associated with the small size and native authorities and the need to democratize and decentralize local government.

The aforementioned factors in 1950 propelled the eastern region government to pass a local government ordinance after British local government model with three tier system namely: county, district and local councils. Members into any of these councils were by democratic election. In this reform, functions, powers and responsibilities were shared among the tiers.

County councils for instance were responsible for the following functions: collection of income taxes, provision of roads, bridges and many other functions, they also had power to propose and implement their budgets and recruit senior staff. District councils were responsible for environmental sanitation within the districts, construction and maintenance of markets and dispensary. Local councils were to provide footpaths and environmental sanitations at the village level and handle customary matters.

Because of its democratic nature, this system was later adopted by the western and northern Nigeria. A bill was introduced in 1954 which abolished the sole administrator system and provided for uniformity in terms of staff recruitment, promotion and voting in the local government council. The bill adopted universality as a way of achieving this uniformity.

In the eastern region, further steps were taken to consolidate the system in the area of accountability, effectiveness and efficiency. To achieve this, administrative officers were appointed to take charge of various divisions. The administrative officers were designated commissioners. Their responsibilities include regular inspection of the performance of local government, auditing of appointments and major contracts awarded by local government.

Later in 1957 western Nigeria modified the structure by introducing governor-in-council with regulating powers over the council. The procedures for election and removal of nominated members were established while traditional rulers became ceremonial heads of council.

2.2.3 Independence Epoch

The advent of independence did not usher in structural reforms or changes to the existing local government system in the Nigeria. Instead, it retained the local government system of the 1950s with its concomitant reforms. This was to change in 1967 when the Nigeria civil war broke out. In 1967, the existing local government structure/system was abandoned when the military government led by Gen. Gowon created twelve states out of the federating regions. This development saw the introduction of various structures of local government administration in Nigeria. The differences in the structure of local government continued even after the war.

After the war in 1970, the eastern states realized that they suffered great loss of lives, property and infrastructures in the cause of the war and therefore needed an urgent and accelerated socio-economic development of the region. They then introduced unique centralized structural framework referred to as development administration. Each of the states (East Central state, Rivers state and South Eastern state) in the eastern region created many committees in order to facilitate socio-economic reconstruction of their various local committees. The objectives set up by the development administration according to Okoli (2005, p.29) includes the following:

- To foster self-help and community action in the local communities by delegating duties to local bodies.
- To facilitate the exercise of democratic self-government.
- To mobilize human and material resources through the involvement of the rural population in the development of the local communities.
- To establish a two-way communication link between the local communities and government in one hand, and between them and state government in the other hand.
- To alleviate the suffering of the masses mostly in war affected areas.

The development councils and area development committees had no legislative and functional powers, they performed advisory and consultative roles. They could not recruit their own staff since they were part of the various state government. The following designations were given to the field officers namely: residents, senior divisional development officers and divisional officers. They were

nominated by the development executives, who were also the chairmen of the divisional councils (Okoli, 2005).

The structure of the Nigerian local government was fundamentally changed in 1976. This period has been adjudged by scholars and practitioners as the beginning of modern local government system in Nigeria and popularly termed 'the 1976 local government reform'. The reforms were carried out by the federal military government led by Gen. Olusegun Obasanjo and focused on local government structure, composition and funding. The reform created 297 local governments across the country, it provided local government with constitutional and legal status and defined it as the third tier of government in Nigeria, yet local government still operate under the control of states hence local government can be seen to be practically semi-autonomous (Ezeani, 2004).

The 1976 local government reform introduced unified single-tier multi-purpose local government structure. The title of the local government was also changed to local authorities with local government having a fixed population (although later amended for flexibility purposes). In this case, the lower population limit was 150,000 while the upper population limit was 800,000. The government made clarification that in an effort to adhere to the limits, no town should be fractionalized, thereby, giving room for exceptional cases where population of local government could exceed the upper limit or be below the lower limit.

It is worthy to note the focus of the reform; to achieve faster socio-economic development of the local communities and effectiveness and efficiency in the administration of local governments. To achieve these, the government task took cognizance and role of the following and articulated in the reform guideline. They include, fixed population, definite geographic area of jurisdiction, historical, cultural and political factors. The 1976 local government reforms can be encapsulated as follows:

- **Finance:** the reform provided that the local government, should receive grants from both the federal and state government, 5% from the former retained revenue and 10% from the latter's annual revenue. The grants should be paid into the state government fund. The disbursement should be 75% on population and 25% on equality of all local governments in the state. The guidelines further mandated every state government to establish local government pension fund to enable local governments contribute an equivalent 20% of their annual personnel emoluments votes to enable them cater for retiring staff.
- **Composition of Council:** the reform provided for a council, but the membership underwent tremendous changes. This change affected the northern emirs who were very powerful. The membership into the

council were still by election or nomination. Thus, the council composed of 75% elected and 25% nominated members representing special interest in the council. The lowest number of the council should be 10 members and highest should be 30 members.

- **Committees:** A general purpose committee was established as the cabinet of the local government. The council was empowered to set up a number of standing committees like standing committees on health, education, agriculture, works. The committees function was advisory and to give support to local government on planning, development, revenue generation and other matters. The southern states went further to elect supervisory councillors among its members and were assigned specific departments. Hence, there were supervisory councillors for health, agriculture, education, and works. The total number should not exceed four; each of them oversees policy matters and general supervision of their respective departments and provides scope for the chief executive to coordinate the activities of the various heads of department. The removal of supervisory councillors is by simple majority votes, if found wanting or by the state government. The tenure of office is three years for both councillors and supervisory councillors.
- **Staffing/Personnel:** The 1976 local government structural framework provided a unified local government service board that will be in charge of staff recruitment, promotion and dismissal. There were two forms of recruitment arrangement: one strong and the other weak. The strong is by absolute recruitment by the local government services board without consultation with local governments, while the weak is recruitment of personnel in collaborations with respective local governments.
- **Functions:** The reform provided for two forms of functions namely: mandatory functions which is exclusive list to the local government and the permissive/concurrent function which local government can embarked upon side-by-side with state government. The mandatory functions include responsibilities for environmental sanitation, slaughter houses and slabs, public conveniences, burial grounds, licensing and regulation of bicycles, provision of motor parks, markets, collection of local taxes and rates, forestry, parking charges, etc. The concurrent/permissive functions include responsibilities for health care centres, dispensary, nursery, primary and adult education, public information enlightenment services, provision of scholarships and bursaries, rural water supply,

maintenance of rural roads and drainages, housing and fire services, etc.

- **Control Mechanism:** The central government controls the local governments in the area of policy-making. It made it mandatory for local government to implement the laws of the land irrespective of party affiliation or government in power. On socio-economic planning the federal government has a broad socio-economic policy to which local government must conform. The federal government had their priority areas for the local government which formed the fundamental base for their development programmes. Some administrative control was also adopted by both the state and federal governments. One, local government inspectors were appointed who report back to the higher tiers of governments on any performance. The second form of administrative control on local government is ministerial control. Local government are compelled to get approval from ministries which perform related services. They also communicate with these ministries for necessary information on specific issues. To enhance this control, the higher tiers of government conducted series of conferences, seminars and workshops for local government functionaries.

No meaningful reform or change took place in the Nigerian structure of local government system until 1989 under the military government of Gen. Ibrahim Babagida. Gen. Babangida amended the 1976 local government reforms in order to remedy the major inherent structural problems. The amendments were in the form of abolishing of state ministries of local governments, introduction of presidentialism in local government administration hitherto not practiced irrespective of its practice in the two higher tiers of government. The chairmen of local governments were still appointed and they appoint their supervisory councillors and secretaries to local governments.

Furthermore, through decree No. 3 of 1991, all councillors, chairmen, vice-chairmen and speaker of house of each council were to be democratically elected, while the power to make bye-laws rested on the council. The National Electoral Commission (NEC) was also empowered to conduct the local government elections. The statutory allocation to local government increased to 15% and such statutory allocation were routed directly to the local governments instead of through the state governments. The chairmen assumed the designation of executive chairmen and should by virtue of this be excluded from legislative areas of the council and should not sign the local government cheques. The tenure still remains three years for both chairmen and councillors. The reform did indeed grant full autonomy to local government.

2.3 Theoretical Rationale of Local Government

The essence or rationale behind the existence and functioning of local government has dominated discussions on local government by scholars, practitioners, etc. There have come under some broad schools of thought namely; Democratic Participatory, Efficiency Services, Developmental, State and Marxist, etc.

2.3.1 The Democratic-Participatory School

The main proposition of this school of thought is hinged on the concept that local government exists to bring about real democracy to the people as well as to educate, socialize and afford them opportunities for political participation and representation. They maintain that local government is superior to the other higher levels of government since it is only at the level of local government that the individual can really participate in governance and so truly democratic. Accordingly, Mill (1912) in Ezeani (2004) notes that:

I have dwelt in strong language hardly any language is strong enough to express the strength of my conviction on the importance of free institution which may be called the public education of the citizen. Now, of this operation, the local administrative institutions are the chief instrument (p. 365).

The democratic-participatory school contend that local government is a hand maiden of democracy. It does this by creating opportunities for political education, providing training for democracy cum acting as an essential element for establishing a stable and harmonious national state (Ezeani, 2004).

2.3.2 The Efficiency-Services School

The central theme of the Efficiency-Services school is that the existence of local government is justified on the ground that it is an efficient agent for providing services that are local in character. They argue that because of its proximity to an area, local government can provide certain services far more efficiently than the other higher tiers of government. In buttressing the fundamental need for local government as a tool for efficient services, Sharpe (1970) posits that if local government did not exist, something else would have to be created in its place. Mackenzie (1954) argues that since local government exists to provide services, it then must be judged by its success in providing services up to a standard measured by a national inspectorate. The Efficiency-Services school contend that local government is a veritable instrument for efficient service delivery at the grassroots.

2.3.3 The Development School

This school of thought maintain that the basic idea behind the existence of local government is to create a government to fast track development at the grass root level. One of the major worries of the less developed states of the globe is how best to achieve a reasonable level of technological, economic and social development as well as political integration in societies that are culturally plural and diffused. Local government is therefore seen by this school as a veritable instrument for development, national integration, national evolution and national consciousness. The development school also argues that local government in less developed states should have the function of helping reduce the congestion at the centre (Okeke, Ofodu & Nduba, 2020).

2.3.4 The State and Marxist School

The basic assumption cum thrust of this school of thought is that local government is an instrument of the state and is therefore, either a direct means of security legitimacy for the ruling elite or securing compliance from the masses through repression. It holds that local government has a major role in the welfare state and therefore, serves capital as a means of securing the replication of labour. The State and Marxist school of thought contend that local authority is obliged by the nature of capital to suppress agitation for more egalitarian policies.

2.3 Functions of Local Government

The Nigerian local government is a legal entity and its status is enshrined in the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. The 1999 constitution provides for certain functions to be performed by the local government in the country, and is divided into two main categories, *viz.* the Exclusive list and the Concurrent list. The Exclusive list consists of those functions that are solely performed by the local government, while the concurrent list represents those functions the local governments perform in collaboration with the other tiers of government. According to the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria as amended, the functions of local government in Nigeria as contained in the Fourth Schedule of the constitution is stated thus:

1. The main functions of a local government council are as follows:

- (a) the consideration and the making of recommendations to a State commission on economic planning or any similar body on-
- (i) the economic development of the State, particularly in so far as the areas of authority of the council and of the state are affected; and
- (ii) proposals made by the said commission or body;
- (b) collection of rates, radio and television licenses;

(c) establishment and maintenance of cemeteries, burial grounds and home for the destitute or infirm;

(d) licensing of bicycles, trucks (other than mechanically propelled trucks), canoes, wheel barrows and carts;

(e) establishment, maintenance and regulation of slaughter houses, slaughter slabs, markets, motor parks and public conveniences;

(f) construction and maintenance of roads, streets, street lightings, drains and other public highways, parks, gardens, open spaces, or such public facilities as may be prescribed from time to time by the House of Assembly of a State;

(g) naming of roads and streets and numbering of houses;

(h) provision and maintenance of public conveniences, sewage and refuse disposal;

(i) registration of all births, deaths and marriages;

(j) assessment of privately owned houses or tenements for the purpose of levying such rates as may be prescribed by the House of Assembly of a State; and

(k) control and regulation of -

(i) out-door advertising and hoarding,

(ii) movement and keeping of pets of all description,

(iii) shops and kiosks,

(iv) restaurants, bakeries and other places for sale of food to the public,

(v) laundries, and

(vi) licensing, regulation and control of the sale of liquor.

2. The functions of a local government council shall include participation of such council in the Government of a State as respects the following matters -

(a) the provision and maintenance of primary, adult and vocational education;

(b) the development of agriculture and natural resources, other than the exploitation of minerals;

(c) the provision and maintenance of health services; and

(d) such other functions as may be conferred on a local government council by the House of Assembly of the State.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is anchored on the theory of structural-functionalism. Structural-functionalism theory originated from Sociology and is closely associated with Emile Durkheim and Talcott Parsons (Udoji, Nduba & Okwuadimma, 2020). The theory grew from the writings of Herbert Spencer, an English philosopher and a biologist, who saw resemblance between the society and the human body. Spencer contended that just as the various organs of

the body work together to keep the body functioning, the various parts of the society work together to keep society functioning.

Structural-functionalism sees society as a complex system whose parts work together to promote solidarity and stability. It attempts to explain why society functions the way it does by focusing on the relationships between the various social institutions that makes up society. Structural-functionalism was adapted to political science in 1969 by Gabriel Almond (Udoji, Nduba & Okwuadimma, 2020). He argued that in order to understand a political system, it is necessary to understand not only its institutions or (structures), but also their respective functions. Therefore, structural-functionalism simply sets out to interpret society as a structure with interrelated parts with each structure performing specific but interrelated functions. The failure of one structure leads to dysfunctionality or disorderliness in the entire system.

Situated within this paper, the structural-functional theory bears pertinent cum suitable applicability in examining and understanding the Nigerian local government system and the challenges it faces in the discharge of its constitutionally mandated functions. Local governments in Nigeria are structures created to perform specific functions that will deliver even development in the country as well as bring governance close to the people. Additionally, the idea of dysfunctionality as advanced by the theory can be used to explain the incapacity of the Nigerian local governments to effectively and efficiently fulfil its constitutional functions.

4. CHALLENGES OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN NIGERIA

Local government worldwide has long been recognized as a veritable instrument for the development of the local communities. This is because, as the tier of government nearest to the grassroots, it is in a better position to know and address the problems of its residents. Regrettably, the Nigeria local government since colonialism have never played and/or been allowed to play their appropriate roles as institutions, structures and agents for change, progress and development of their localities. Local government in Nigeria has over the years established a dubious reputation as a place where nothing ever gets done. Several factors contribute to this phenomenon and they include:

- Personnel problems
- The loss of Autonomy
- Financial problems
- Corruption
- Bureaucracy
- Negative party politics

4.1 Personnel Problems

One of the challenges that hinder local governments in underdeveloped states such as Nigeria from effective and efficient performance of their functions is personnel problems. This is manifested in many ways like politicization of recruitment, selection and placement as well as dearth of staff training and development. With regards to staff recruitment, selection and placement, local government in Nigeria has been noted to jettison merit system as contained in the Handbook on Local Government Chapter II, Section 5.9 to recruit and select mainly 'sons of the soil', party stalwarts and relations of high ranking members of the council like the councillors. Recruitment practices based on patronage and parochialism have created problems of indiscipline and redundancy in local government in Nigeria where stern measures like queries, suspension of staff and termination of appointments are rarely contemplated. Additionally, most local government chairmen, caretaker committee members and sole administrators recruit and place their relations, friends and political sympathizers or party members without due regard to rules and regulations or in keeping with manpower requirements.

Staff training and development is another thorny personnel problem of local government in Nigeria. The importance of staff training and development cannot be over emphasized. Staff training and development are aimed at imparting the necessary skills, knowledge and attitudinal change needed by employees for effective and optimum performance on their jobs. The lack of adequate training for staffs of local governments in Nigeria traverses to staffs without necessary skill set required to make formidable contributions to local government service delivery, and thus also account for local government inefficiency and redundancy.

4.2 Loss of Autonomy

Section 7 subsection 1 of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria guarantees the existence of local government in Nigeria, though its autonomy is theoretical. As succinctly captured by Olowu (1988, p. 71) "most governments in Africa have opted for the direct control by central government of their local governments through a battery of legal, financial and administrative control... so called local government units in reality operate like field administrative unit of the central government or, worse still, exist as parallel institutions to the governments field administration, controlled by both the central and field units."

The autonomy of local government in Nigeria is further eroded by their dependence on statutory allocation from the federal and state governments. It puts local government at the mercy of the federal and state governments. Furthermore, successive Nigerian governments (both state and federal government) have interfered in the

actual functioning of the local governments for instance, between 1984/and late 1987, local government councils were abolished and the administration of the affairs of the local government were placed entirely on the sole administrator. Again, in 1994, the elected local government councils were disbanded by the military government of Gen. Abacha and replaced with caretaker committees (Ezeani, 2004). In addition, states often determine the tenure of elected members of local government councils. Wilson (2013) 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 government 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. (p. 142)

Also, the finance meant for local government has on many occasions been confiscated by the state governments. This is currently the case in Nigeria where some state governors confiscate federal allocations to local government and give whatever amount they like to the chairmen to run their local governments. Oyediran (2001) found that allocations channelled through the state governments were not remitted to local governments. They were instead credited to state governments and used by state governments to reimburse themselves for expenditures made on behalf of local governments.

Abutudu (2011) notes that the Babangida regime attempted to address this problem, from 1988, the federal government removed the state government from its intermediary role in the transmission of funds from the Federation Account to local government. Until 2000, allocations from the Federation Account were collected directly by local governments from the Federal Pay Offices in their respective states. However, this changed when the 1999 constitution introduced the State Joint Local Government Account (SJLGA). The aim was that federal allocations would reach local governments via their respective state governments. However, these SJLGAs have become infamous, as allocations are misappropriated.

Due to the constitutional barriers imposed by the SJLGA, and the way these accounts are being manipulated, local government have become ineffective. Even with the little that reaches them, post-budget control imposes further restrictions on their operations. In an effort to ensure financial autonomy and to debottleneck administration of

local governments in Nigeria, the Nigerian Financial Intelligence Unit (NFIU) Guidelines of May 2019 was pronounced by the federal government. Despite that, local governments still draw their funds from their respective states' joint accounts.

4.3 Financial Constraints

Finance constitute another major challenge of local government in Nigeria. There is no need overemphasizing the fact that finance plays a critical role in service delivery of local government as well as any structure or organization in the world. Therefore, the ability of the local government to perform their constitutionally assigned functions depends on the funds available to them. Along this trajectory, Akpan (1982) argues that the bottom line in judging the effectiveness of local bodies is the amount of funds at their disposal. The success of a local authority is often measured in terms of its ability to provide services to the public and these services cost a lot of money which the local governments do not have sufficiently.

The financial crisis of most local governments in Nigeria is worsened by the fact that they are located in the rural areas. As a result of rural poverty, they are unable to generate enough internal revenue. They therefore, rely mainly on statutory allocation from the federal government which is usually inadequate for any meaningful development activity. As aptly stated in the Local Government Year Book (1998, p. 18):

in the area of finance, local government has not demonstrated the desire for autonomy in that most of them depend on the federal government to survive. Apart from the fact that this source dictates the fluctuating fortunes of the local governments, it is more regular and constitutes more than 90% of total revenue of most local governments in the country. Most local governments can only pay workers' salaries and take care of recurrent expenditure.

However, some scholars like Ocheni, Atakpa and Nwankwo (2013) argue that local government receive adequate financial support from the higher tiers of government (states and federal). Furthermore, they stress that local government have many sources of internal revenue generation. But the inefficiency of local government boils down to corruption.

4.4 Corruption

Corruption is a universal problem and remains one of the major problems which has constrained local government in Nigeria from contributing meaningfully to rural and national development. Accordingly, Aina (2006) notes that:

almost every council position, whether of elected council or appointed staff, has its salary and also its additional income through corruptive activities. Corruption and bribery fit into internal and external political conflicts in the council. In fact, they form a major political aspect of local government (p. 286).

This problem is manifest in almost all local governments in Nigeria in the way of outright falsification of financial transaction, inflated contracts, revenue declaration by collectors, existence of ghost workers, connivance with states' apparatus that are supposed to perform oversight functions and downright embezzlement of available and limited funds by officials of the council. Corruption in these forms has contributed to the present rampant cases of inability of some local government to pay the salaries of their workers for many months as well as its state of service delivery deficiency.

4.5 Bureaucracy

Bureaucracy is one of the fundamental problems facing the Nigerian local government system. It is used here simply to mean excessive complicated administrative procedure. Bureaucracy has been a cog in the wheel of progress and slows down the rate of development (www.scharticles.com/bureaucratic-corrup-tion-local-government-system/).

4.6 Negative Party Politics

According to Okeke and Obiora (2007), another major stumbling block in local government administration derives from negative party politics among the political office holders. They argued that council chairmen and councillors are usually rigidly inclined to their party positions. Consequently, party interest takes preference over council interest. Consequently, any conflicting party interest results in squabbles and in extreme cases, impeachment and outright breakdown of law and order; situations that impede growth and development.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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As an underdeveloped state, Nigeria strives for economic, social and technological development as well as political integration of its culturally plural and diffused societies. Local government worldwide has been recognised as a veritable instrument for development and the Nigerian government has keyed into this by wonderfully outlining the services the local government are meant to undertake in this regard in the fourth schedule of its constitution. The structure of the local government in Nigeria has also been variously reformed in order to aid the smooth running of government.

Despite these, local government in Nigeria has been unable to deliver the services it was created to accomplish due to factors that include personnel problems, loss of autonomy, financial constraints, corruption, e. t. c. Against this backdrop, the paper recommends the following as panacea for the challenges of local government in Nigeria:

- ✓ Measures should be taken to make sure recruitment, selection, and placement are not politicized and done on merit base system as contained in the handbook on local government. If possible, outsourcing should be employed in recruitment into the local government to ensure competency of staff.
- ✓ With regards to staff training, adequate measures should be put in place to take care of all areas of operations.
- ✓ Local governments should strive to engage in activities that would enable her generate wholesome internal revenue by committing more to her constitutional functions as contained in the fourth schedule of the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.
- ✓ There should be transparency in the award of contracts in order to bring to a minimum the gross cases of fraud and embezzlement of funds.
- ✓ The State Joint Local Government Account (SJLGA) should be abolished to help restore the financial autonomy of local governments and thus, improve their viability.
- ✓ The local government autonomy bill recently signed into law by the president should be rigorously applied cum enforced.

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