

The Protuberance Of Government Autonomy And Service Delivery In Anambra State

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Abstract: *This study examined the impact of local government autonomy on the provision of public goods to the citizens at the grassroots. Three objectives, research questions and hypotheses guided the study. Local government refers to the government at the grassroots level. Local government also means the interests of the rural and urban communities under it locally. Service delivery means services provided or delivered to the citizens at the grassroots by the government. The research approach adopted was cross sectional survey targeting purposively selected local government areas and data were generated from both primary and secondary sources. The study was anchored on structural functionalist theory. The sample size consists of 400 respondents which were purposively selected from the 21 local government areas in Anambra state. A structured questionnaire in Likert scale was used for data collection and out of 400 questionnaires distributed, 377 were returned indicating a response rate of 94.0%. Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22 was used for the analysis via Friedman test, factor analysis, percentages and mean. The findings of the study revealed that lack of financial autonomy of the Anambra state local government hindered the provision of public goods to people at the grassroots. The study also revealed that lack of autonomy of the local government negatively affected the growth of grassroots leadership and democracy as the people were not involved in managing their affairs as they are not given the opportunity to select their leaders. However, it was recommended that local government should be elected and not appointed in any manner at any point in time in order to increase local participation. The National Assembly should amend the sub-sections on state joint local account and replace with direct allocations to local government councils from the federation account.*

Keyword: Grassroots, Local Government Autonomy, Local Government Council, Service Delivery,

Preambles

Local government is one of man's oldest institutions. The earliest form of local government exists in the form of clan and village meetings. In fact, democracy itself originated and developed along the lines of local governance initiatives in the ancient Greek city states (Ahmad, 2014). One of the major functions of local government is to bring about meaningful development in the rural areas. As agents of rural development, local governments are to utilize the funds obtained from federal and state governments and their internally generated revenue to improve the lives of the people within their areas of operation such as: initiating and attracting developmental projects to the local government. Globally, local government has been recognized as a veritable tool or framework for administering the grassroots and for enhancing overall national development (Andrews, 2012; ALGON, 2012). In Nigeria, the formal introduction of local government administration started with the enactment of the Native Authority Ordinance of 1910 (Ofoeze, 2002; Ogbuene, 2011). It has since then been going through various reforms aimed at strengthening its capacity to effectively operate and play significant developmental roles in national development process (Ogunna, 1996)

However, the current platform for local government administration started with the 1976 guidelines for local government reforms. The guidelines gave the present local government system its basic structure and functions as a third tier of government within the Nigerian federal government arrangement (Abada, 2007; Ade, 2012). Unlike the previous local government reforms, the 1976 reform conceptualized local government as operating within a common institutional framework with defined functions and responsibilities in line with national development objectives (Saalah and Stanley, 2011). Indeed, before the reform local government was merely local administration without formal recognition as tier of government (Andrews, 2012). Very importantly too, the 1976 reform initiated particularly, the financial and political autonomy of the local government that was further strengthened by the civil service reform of 1988. As well, the provisions of the 1999 constitution as contained in section 7 (1) and section 162 (paragraphs 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 & 8) are intended to also guarantee local government autonomy. The provisions for the autonomy was essentially and ostensibly aimed at protecting the local government from unnecessary interference from other tiers of government and to enable it play significant roles in the national development

process. However, findings from researches by scholars and observations overtime point to the fact that the autonomy of the local government is becoming increasingly difficult to realize following particularly, the propensity of the state government to interfere in the political, administrative and financial affairs of the local government (Ugwuanyi, 2014). It is however, necessary to observe that the pervasive practice by state government to interfere in the statutory allocations of the local government is antithetical to the spirit of the constitution in the creation of the state joint local government account. The undue control and appropriation of the local government fund in the state joint local government account therefore contradicts the spirit of the constitution for its provision. Financial crisis being suffered by local governments in Nigeria is attributable, in a reasonable measure to the erosion of their financial autonomy through frequent interference by state governments on their finances.

Generally, the outright refusal to allow democratically elected local government councils to manage the local government affairs constitutes an interference in the local government autonomy as envisaged by the constitution and has very far reaching implications for democratic development and practice at the grassroots level. The pervasive and flagrant manipulation of the local government is done through the instrumentality of the state appointed and controlled electoral body (state Independent Electoral Commission, (SIEC).

A resultant effect of the care-taker committee arrangement has been the existence of tensions which significantly constitute a serious threat to the operation of the local government and their ability to implement their constitutionally assigned developmental roles or functions.

According to Akpan and Ekanem (2013) local government principally exist to bring government closer to the people and effective service delivery to the rural area. Also Fawaehimi (2009) stated that no government can satisfy me if it does not address the food poverty of Nigerians, the health poverty of Nigerians, education poverty of Nigerians, the infrastructural poverty of Nigerians, and the energy poverty of Nigerians, As creatures of Federal Government, Local Governments are constitutionally mandated to perform four basic functions to provide a machinery for the discussion of local needs and for the provisions of corresponding services within the competence and capability of the local area, to provide machinery for the execution at the local level of regional or federal government policy, to provide consensus mechanism for the resolution of conflicts of interest at the local level; and to provide a training ground for political participation and articulation (Okoli, 2000), but this was not the situation of local government councils during Peter Obi's administration as the administration seriously interfered and diverted the funds meant for local government. This implies that Nigerian local governments are to render innovative services that will foster socio-economic development of the rural people. If properly managed, local governments are viable instrument for rural transformation, development and the delivery of social services to rural communities in their jurisdiction. Local government service delivery has continued to dwindle and epileptic in nature despite financial allocations to the local government. It is in the context of the prevailing observation that the study examined the impact of local government autonomy on service delivery, a study of Peter Obi's administration.

Research Questions

1. How has lack of financial autonomy of the local government hindered the provision of public goods at the grassroots?
2. To what extent does lack of autonomy of the local government hinder the development of grassroots leadership and democracy?
3. How has lack of autonomy of the local government hindered transparency and accountability of the local government councils in Anambra State?

Local Government Autonomy and Development of Grassroots Leadership and Democracy

The concept 'grassroots democracy' is not a negation of the concept of democracy as wrongly posited in some quarters. In fact, grassroots democracy is inextricably linked with the larger concept of liberal democracy. Grassroots democracy has a two-way analytical expression namely, structural and philosophical both of which are directly connected with liberal democracy. Structurally, democratic value (such as liberty, accountability, equality etc.) and practice (such as separation of powers and checks and balances) in a full-blown democracy find their way to the grassroots by some kind of structural arrangement or reformation which links levels of government - the federal, state and local in a complex whole (Awofeso & Afolabi, 2014). For instance, before the 1991 local government reform which extended presidentialism to local government in Nigeria, presidential system of government was restricted only to the federal and state governments. The extension of presidentialism and the principle of separation of powers to local government helped to enhance democratic values at the grassroots.

Philosophically, grassroots democracy implies an ideal and acceptable democratic practices congruent with the people's culture and social values in a particular environment and akin to what the center for democracy in Nigeria describes as 'indigenous democracy' in this regard, Muggenyi (1988) sounds a note of warning:

Democracy, like any other political style must be adjusted to the conditions of the countries that chose to practice it. Such conditions are complex and diverse. And the countries which opt for democracy are under no obligation to adopt a peculiar version of it. Some of the tenets of democracy may fit many countries, but it is unlikely that they could fit all countries in the same way.

Compressing both the structural and philosophical viewpoints of grassroots democracy, Akindele, (1995) explains grassroots democracy in the following words:

Grassroots' democracy is that type of democracy that emerges from an inward looking set up, it connotes that local dwellers are governed at the local level in manners - conducive to feeling the impact of the existing government in terms of inputs and outputs and, the relationship between political actors and the governed within the political culture. Through this type of democracy, government is representatively brought nearer the grassroots. Attempts at democratizing local government in Nigeria since independence till date, appear to have witnessed a tragic history of democratic ups and downs. By this, we mean to say that, the inputs of successive administrations, both during and after colonialism, to ensure democratic practice at the grassroots are yet to fully elicit behavioural attitudinal disposition, which are congruent to democratic ethos to actually justify these efforts. Needless to reiterate here the attempts made by successive administration at democratizing grassroots government as earlier demonstrated in various reforms of the 1950s in the Southern Nigeria, the 1976, 1984, 1988 and 1991 local government reforms. It is interesting to know that these efforts were short lived, aborted or manipulated by those who were supposed to practicalize these ideals (Awofeso & Afolabi, 2014). This goes to confirm the popular truism that, no matter how good or efficient an imported structure or an ideology looks, it is the people that would make it work. In this regard, it appears that grassroots governance in Nigeria had witnessed a catalogue of democratic failure to the extent that democratic ideals such as political representation, popular participation and accountability are still battling hard to survive. The efforts made in the 1950's, 1976 and subsequent reforms aimed at ensuring participatory and representative local government, it is however surprising to note that such efforts were short-lived in the 1950s, while the democratic government that succeeded.

The Murtala/Obasanjo military regime in 1979 never conducted any election at the local government level following the 1976 local government election. Instead, elected local council were being dissolved by state governments and replaced by appointed party loyalists. Gboyega (2003) in his analysis of this development attributed this multitudinal disposition to a number of factors among which were legal and constitutional constraints, non-availability of a revised voters list and the lack of political will on the part of the state governments to conduct local government elections. Of all the 19 state governments, then, only Lagos state attempted to conduct local government election. The practice whereby electoral results in the entire polity do not reflect the people's wishes is another shortcoming to the principle of representation which had characterized local government electoral process. Thuggery and electoral violence are still being used by politicians to ensure their electoral victory at "all cost", even at the detriment of the people's popular choice. The consequence of this is no doubt severe on democratic practice at the grassroots. In this regard, Awa (1996) once observes that: Universal suffrage has been in operation in the country for a long time but this has little democratic value. For rigging in one form or another had characterized the elections since independence and severe violence had accompanied some. What this makes clear is that the voters were denied the right to vote for the candidate of their choice. All these mean that those who rule are not truly representatives of the population of the country. It is important for us as Nigerians to know that democracy has its price; hence giving autonomy to local governments will further strengthen democracy in Nigeria. Giving autonomy to local government will strengthen the political institutions in Nigeria. It is common now to see that a governors' party dominates the local government council, that is to say that the governors in Nigeria not only controls local government funds, but also influence the political structures of the local government by appointing for election whoever they or their party wanted. Grassroots democracy is a people/community driven participation in elections, governance and decision-making. It can be seen as a tendency towards designing political processes whereas much decision-making authority as practical is shifted to the lowest level of organization. Thus, a local government is a government at the grassroots level of administration meant for meeting peculiar grassroots need of the people (Agagu, 1997 cited in Oruonye, 2013). To this end, it is very important and very necessary for the local governments in Nigeria to have their autonomy; this will bring development closer to the people and also take pressure off the state government.

The Financial, Political and Administrative Interferences of the State Government in Local Administration

Interference in the local government financial autonomy: The financial autonomy of the local governments is being severely interfered in by the state government principally through the instrumentality of the State Joint Local Government Account. Andrews, (2012) and Ogban, (2011) observe that state government use the State Joint Local Government Account (SJLGA) mechanism to make local government appendages of the state. Odo (2003), Okolie and Eze (2001), Oguntuase (2012) and ALGON (1999), observed that the state government have turned the state joint local government account into an instrument to manipulate and control the local government. For instance, in Enugu State under the regime of Governor Chimaroke Nnamani, between 1999 and 2007, the control of the state joint local government account by the state government was so total that local government in the state were only "dashed" peanuts from their statutory allocations. There were equally cases of over deduction in respect of certain expenses made by the state on behalf of the local government. Such was the case in Enugu State then that the local government sometimes barely had enough to pay salaries of the staff. A similar situation existed in Bornu State between March 2002 and March 2003, where half of the total of N13.3 billion that was available to the local governments in the state was improperly deducted at source by the state governments (Dlakwa, 2010 cited in Okafor, (2010). Abada (2007) in respect of state governments' interference in the local government financial autonomy generally observes thus; local government between 1999 -2007 witnessed a lot of financial misappropriation and fraud being perpetrated by various state governments that actually eroded the autonomy of local government.

Indeed, the interference in the local government autonomy by the state government has become so pervasive that in 2010, 31 out of 36 state governors tampered with local government fund through the instrumentality of the state joint local government account (Ukiwo, 2010). The interference in the local government financial autonomy by the state government is made easily possible as a result of the subordination of the local government to the state through the provision in section.

162, paragraph 6 for the establishment and operation of state joint local government account. Indeed, the provision of the state joint local government account does not allow for direct funding of local government from the federation account which would have formed a realistic basis for the realization of the local government financial autonomy. In fact, as Anikeze (2012) observes, the operation of state joint local government account ties the councils to the apron strings of the state governments.

It is however, necessary to observe that the pervasive practice by state government to interfere in the statutory allocations to the local government is antithetical to the spirit of the constitution in the creation of the state joint local government account. Indeed, the state governments are only expected to act as a trustee of the account and to ensure reasonable oversight of the statutory allocations of the local government. The undue control and appropriation of the local government fund in the state joint local government account therefore contradicts the spirit of the constitution for its provision. Very worrisome is the interference in the local government statutory allocations by the state government, reasonably accounts for the inability of the local governments to initiate and execute development programs or projects (Onah, 2004; Azelama. 2008; Ezeani. 2012). This is understandable in view of the fact that almost the 774 local governments in Nigeria rely on the federation account for between 90 - 95 percent for their financial expenditures every year (Halidu and Bello, 2012). Indeed, the financial crisis being suffered by local governments in Nigeria is attributable, in a reasonable measure to the erosion of their financial autonomy through frequent interference by state governments on their finances. Andrews (2012) in this respect notes that in the context of diversion and siphoning of council fund by the state government the local government leadership that even desire to initiate and implement development project programs are hampered by inadequacy of fund. Even though some scholars argue contrarily, that the major cause of the financial crisis in the local government system is the pervasive corruption particularly at the leadership level that results in huge financial misappropriation, it is just better that the local governments get fully what is allocated to them so that one can then judge them on the basis of what they actually do with the funds.

Interference in the local government political/administrative autonomy: The political administrative autonomy which section 7 (1) of the 1999 Constitution seeks to confer on the local governments are equally being undermined in several ways by the state government. One of these ways is the use of care-taker committee system for administering local government areas. In this case some state governors refuse to conduct elections for the constitution of the local government council and instead appoint care-taker committees to run them. For example, Anambra state government under Governor Peter Obi did not conduct local government election throughout his tenure in office. The Governor rather preferred to use caretaker committee to run the local government. In Bayelsa State, under Governor Timpre Silvia, local government election was not held for three years (Abutudu, 2011; Idris, 2013). Indeed, the practice of adopting caretaker committee is tending to become an accepted norm instead of an

aberration to democratic practice. In Edo, Kogi and Delta States, care-taker committee was equally used at some point in time to administer local governments (Abutudu, 2011). This is because as at June 2011 over 2/3 of the 774 local government councils in Nigeria are being run by non-elected caretaker committee appointed by state governors. (Ezeani, 2012).

In some cases, the state governors even terminate the tenure of elected councils or suspend them before the expiration of their mandate for reasons that most often bother on petty politics (Idris, 2013). In such cases, care-taker committees are appointed to replace them. This happened in Imo State where the governor, Rochas Okorocha dissolved the local government councils and replaced them with appointed care-taker committees. This practice is in fact, undemocratic and unproductive as it is used, in most cases by state governors to selfishly direct and control the operations of the local governments.

A resultant effect of the care-taker committee arrangement has been the existence of tensions which significantly constitute a serious threat to the operation of the local government and their ability to implement their constitutionally assigned developmental roles or functions (Ezeani, 2012). Again, for the fact that in care-taker committee system, the committee can be "fired" if it proves "disloyal" or "inefficient" in the estimation of the state government that appointed it, the stewardship by such committees are usually more to the state governor that appointed them with the activities of the local government becoming less development oriented (Okolie and Eze, 2006). Generally, the outright refusal to allow democratically elected local government councils to manage the local government affairs constitutes an interference in the local government councils to manage the local government affairs constitutes an interference in the local government autonomy as envisaged by the constitution and has very far reaching implications for democratic development and practice at the grassroots level.

Another dimension of interference in the political autonomy of the local government by the state government is the pervasive and flagrant manipulation of the local government elections, in cases where a state government allow for the conduct of local government election. The manipulation is usually done through the instrumentality of the state appointed and controlled electoral body (State Independent Electoral Commission, SIEC). Through manipulations, state governors impose candidate on the people and in which case the councilors and chairpersons who emerge from elections do not reflect the preferences of the people who they are meant to govern. The extent of the manipulation is usually such overwhelming that the results of elections conducted by SIEC across the country always and invariably produce 100 percent victory for the ruling party in the State (Abutudu, 2011). This for instance, was the case in Enugu under Governor Chimaroke Nnamani between 1999 and 2007 where the ruling party in the state, the People's Democratic Party, (PDP), won in all the local government council elections through active connivance with the Enugu State Independent Electoral Commission (ENSIEC). The implication as it was in Enugu State then was that the local government operated as mere appendages or agencies of the State and consequently, was not "safe" to even embark on any development program or activity suited to their local areas without the consultation and consent of the state governor who "appointed" them.

The situation has however significantly improved under the government of Sullivan Chime in the State. A major factor that induces the state government to interfere in the political/administrative autonomy of the local government is the inadequate and unfavourable constitutional provision for the political/administrative autonomy of the local government. Basically, the 1999 constitution as provided in section 7 (1) does not adequately and in a clearly defined manners provide for the political autonomy of the local governments as it essentially conferred the power of control and constitution of the local government councils in the country to the state governors and the state houses of assembly. Further, the constitution contains no explicit provision for the tenure of local government councils as it provided for in the case of the president, state governors, national and state legislatures. The implication of this is that the state government is at a wide discretion to determine the tenure of elected councils and when to conduct another election to replace an out gone council. In the exercise of this discretion, some states grant local government councils a 3 - year tenure, the majority operate a 2 -year tenure, some 2/2 -year tenure and others even less than 2 - year tenure (Ezeani, 2012). The constitutional provision for the state government to appoint and find the SIEC that conducts local government elections make it easy for the state government to control the activities of the electoral body and ultimately the results of elections. This is understandable as idiomatically, he who plays the piper dictates the tune. In the circumstance, the state government that is supposed to be an unbiased umpire in the conduct of local government elections not only become an active participant but decides the eventual outcomes or results of elections.

In the context of pervasive control of the political and electoral process in the local government councils, the core objective of the local government serving as an avenue for deepening democracy, and decentralizing power through greater citizen participation in electoral process and for leadership training for higher political positions cannot be

realized (Andrews, 2012). Arguably proper democratic practice at the local government level will be difficult to realize if state governments decide whether elections would be held or not, when and how it will be held. No doubt, the proper practice of democracy would be maximized when the people at the grassroots are empowered to elect their own representatives and to initiate and implement development programs without undue interference by any other higher unit. In summary we posit that constitutional inadequacies and lapses, as much as the greed and undemocratic tendencies and inclinations of the state government constitutes the key constraints to the realization of the local government autonomy in Nigeria.

Local Government Autonomy and Accountability/Transparency in Local Councils Despite the initial differing conceptions to local government autonomy, the term financial autonomy has not been fully explained (Odunfa, 1991). Local government financial autonomy is the freedom the local government has to exercise their financial authority within the confines of the law or constitution. This is to enable the local government to discharge legally or constitutionally assigned financial authority and responsibilities satisfactorily, without undue interference or restraint from within or higher authority (Adeyemo, 2005). This definition argues for adequate financial autonomy for local governments within the law for the purpose of efficient and effective service delivery. Without performance, the law or constitution may not be able to guarantee even adequate autonomy for local governments as the people yearn for development. Autonomy operated within a democracy must be limited as indeed democracy limits the use of power. Adeyemo (2005) defines financial autonomy under a federal system of government that "each government enjoys a separate existence and financial independence from the control of other governments". It is an autonomy which requires not just the legal and physical existence of an apparatus of government such as financial autonomy enjoyed by the legislative assembly, governor, court etc. Local government must exist as an appendage of state government but as financial autonomous entity in the sense of being able to receive its own allocation directly from the central purse and manage its internal revenue without I interferences from state government.

In the same vein, financial autonomy would only be meaningful in a situation whereby each level of government is not constitutionally bound to accept dictation or directive from another (Osakede & Ijimakinwa, 2014). According to Agunya, Ebiri & Odeyemi (2013), local government financial autonomy refers to the relative financial discretion which local government enjoys in regulating and managing their own affairs". The extent to which local government is free from the control of the state and federal government encroachment is in the financial management of local affairs. The state Joint Local Government Account (SJLGA) was initially introduced in the Nigerian federation as far back as 1981 during the second republic administration of President Shehu Shagari. Conscious of the fact that the Nigerian economy is a mono economy where over 80% of both the federal, state and local government revenues come from their shares of the oil wealth, the administration ostensibly wanted to create a platform where both the federal and state governments could play some roles in funding and monitoring the local government revenue earnings and expenditure to ensure their success in rural development. The joint account system was brought into being through an act of the national assembly known as "allocation of revenues (federation accounts etc.) act 1981 (Daily Trust, *f* July 27, 2006). The same act established what is today known as Federation Account Allocation Committee (FAAC), currently chaired by one Chief Olukayode Anjorin. The committee holds meeting every month; however, during intervening military eras in Nigeria, decrees were enacted by the federal government such as decree 49 of 1989 which established for the federation (not the word federation, not federal government), the Revenue Mobilization, Allocation and Fiscal Commission (RMAFC) with powers to "monitor the accruals and disbursement of revenue allocations from the federation account". This specific power of RMAFC amongst other functions in the above decree is sustained in section 153 subsection 31 and 32 (a e) part I of the 3rd schedule to the 1999 constitution (Daily Trust, 2006). This decree 49 of 1989 which established RMAFC made the Commission a member of the Federation

Accounts Allocation Committee (FAAC) as well as the State Joint Account Allocation Committee

(JAAC). However, while the State Joint Local Government Account (SJLGA) is retained in the 1999 constitution, the Federal Account Allocation Committee (FAAC) was omitted or in a lighter word, dropped. The 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria also stipulated the legislative power over public funds, especially on SJLGA, in section 162, sub-section 18 specifically, section 58 of the constitution states.

The amount standing to the credit of local government councils in the federation account shall also be allocated to the states for the benefit of their local government councils on such terms and in such manner as may be prescribed by the national assembly. Each state shall maintain a specific account to be called "state joint local government account" to which shall be paid all allocations to the local government councils of the state from the federation account and from the government of the state. Each state shall pay to the local government councils in its area of jurisdiction such proportion of its total revenue on such terms and such manner as may be prescribed by the national

assembly. The amount standing to the credit of local government councils of a state shall be distributed among the local government councils of the state on such terms and in such manner as may be prescribed by the house of assembly of the state.

But decree No 160 of 1992, sub-section 5 (2) specifically stated that the 10% of each state's internally generated revenue payable to the local government councils in the state shall be distributed among the local government in the state on such terms and in such manner as the state house of assembly may prescribe. Nevertheless, up till year 2000 when there were no joint account committees, local government councils picked up the cheques for their allocations from the federal pay offices (PROS) in their respective states. These PPOS (pay offices) religiously kept records of all the allocations collected and the accountant general's office still publishes such remittances/disbursements to states and local governments for public consumption at regular intervals. Those provisions introducing the joint account system since 1981 had remained silent and unimplemented by the states due to the constant interruptions of the military in the political process. However, on resumption of civilian democracy from May 1999, some interest groups with obvious ulterior motives for the allocations prevailed on the state chief executives who adopted the sections of the 1999 constitution dealing on the state joint local government account system and consequently set-up the joint account system in their respective states (This day July 21,2006). Since the inception of the system of local government in Nigeria, there had been persistent clamour for the autonomy of local government as the third tier of government in the federation. It is interesting to note that even the federal government have in recent times joined in the championing the course of local government autonomy. In the forward of the guidelines for the 1979 local government reforms, it was clearly remarked that, "the states have continued to encroach upon what would have been the exclusive preserve of local governments. With this reform, the local government was granted the autonomy of grassroots governance with apparent improvement as the third tier of government in the country.

In order to strengthen the autonomy and philosophy of government at the local level, the federal government guaranteed the statutory nature of local government by embodying it in the 1979 constitution. In section 7(1) of the constitution, it was stated that, "the system of democratically elected local government councils is under this constitution guaranteed". Even the military administration of General Ibrahim Babangida from 1986 took bold steps to strengthen the autonomy of local government. By January 1988, good measures of autonomy came the way of the local government with the scrapping of the state ministries of local government throughout the country thus removing the political control and bureaucratic red-tapism perpetuated by these state ministries. According to Adeyemo (2003) other efforts made towards strengthening local government autonomy include: The approved scheme of service for local government employees following the recommendation of the Oyeyipo committee report of March 1988. The direct disbursement of funds to local governments; thus preventing the hijacking of the funds of local government by the state governments (through the federal pay offices). Subsequent increases in the statutory allocations to local government in the 1989 constitution which are aimed to remove the inadequacies of the local government need to be granted good measure of fiscal autonomy so as to be able to carry out effectively the task of rural development. These series of reforms carried out by the federal government in order to strengthen the local government as the third tier of government in the federation has given rise to visible improvements of the revenue base of the councils. It has been stated that the act which established the state Joint Local Government Account (SJLGA) was passed in 1981 by the National Assembly but the eventual domestication and implementation of the provisions of the act by the states in the federation only took effect in the early years of the fourth republic when state house of assembly passed the SJLGA laws to give effects to that constitutional provisions.

Accountability is-a big problem in the management of local government finances especially when it comes to the issue of joint account syndrome. The joint account concept was initially developed with good intention of helping the state checkmate and exercise control over the way and manner the local government councils spend their allocation. With time the whole idea and concept changed completely as the state governors began to exploit it to the detriment of the local councils. For example, in Taraba State, the money is in the custody of the Bureau of local government and traditional councils, which is headed by a special Adviser (SA) to the governor on local government and chieftaincy Affairs. It was formally ministry for local government and chieftaincy Affairs. Each month, the Bureau will release an amount that is sufficient enough to pay the local government workers salaries which is already known to the Bureau and sometimes even less. This usually makes it difficult for the local government council to meet up with payment of staff salaries. This condition is further worsened in situation where the local councils borrowed money from banks to finance some pressing project needs in the local government area because banks will always effect their deductions as soon as money is paid into the account.

Local government have over the years suffered from the continued whittling down of their power and state governments had continued to encroach upon what would normally have been the exclusive preserves of local governments and consequently there has been a divorce between the people and government at their most basic

levels. Local governments are still prevented from functioning the way they should because of lack of funds. There is no gainsaying, that the critical role of local governments has indeed been impaired, nay out-rightly subverted because of corruption in some instances by states. In other cases, the processes of disbursement of the accruable funds, as allocated from the federation account, to the respect beneficiary local councils more often get grossly abused; while some states deduct certain percentage before their lease of the balance, in the name of servicing social amenities and infrastructure, which are non-existent, in most cases, others simply hold on at will. Discontinuation of the state/local government joint account will help to eradicate or substantially check "Delay in states' release of the funds to the respective Local Government Area; wanton and arbitrary deductions by states; utilization of the provision as a suppressive tool by some governors" (Usman, 2017). Usman added that "it would also ensure for Local Government Area's, the facilitation of project execution, enhance effective service delivery, efficiency and quick response to the needs of the citizenry whose peculiar internal affairs the local governments directly oversee". Several reasons have been advocated for local government financial autonomy in Nigeria. The essence is to pare the local government specific powers to perform a range of financial functions assigned it by law to implement its functions, plan, formulate and execute its own policies, programmes and projects, and its own rules and regulations as deemed for its local needs. The financial autonomy includes power to control its finance, manage it and allocate the resources to strategic place. It is premised on the ground that when local government has power to take decisions on its own as regarding its finance, services to the local people in grassroots politics then a sense of belonging is likely to be evoked from the local people (Agunyai, Ebirim and Odeyemi, 2013). It also sought for and designed to lessen, if not avert the belligerent state encroachment and the use of unelected leaders (care-taker committee) to govern the local government has characterized Nigeria's democratic systems. This was deliberated in the last year's constitutional amendment/adjustment in the country (Agunyai et al, 2013). However, it is imperative at this juncture to state that local government financial autonomy as speculated in the various legal documents reveals that is not foreseen to have under its realm total removal of state control over local government finance as the constitution specifically given the power to create local government according to established laws to the state. This accentuated by the fact that the issue of allowing unelected leaders to govern the local government, for the purpose of relegating to the background the utility of local government autonomy, has always been on such areas as "finance", "corruption" and "conflicting sources of revenue between state and local government". It is further reinforced by the fact that, in its implementation some of these form the basis of the objections and oppositions to the approval of local government financial autonomy in past constitutional amendment at the National Assembly (Osakede & Ijimakinwa, 2014). Another reason for local government financial autonomy is rural development, local government is closer to the people at the grassroots and when local councils have the powers to receive its allocation directly from the federal without any overbearing interference from the state, they could implement decisions or policies that will enhance rural transformation without having to wait for the state which in most cases focus mainly on the state development and undermine the grassroots areas. In Nigeria, there are conspicuous cases by observations according to IDI (2016) the money meant for rural development and provision of social sciences for people at the grassroots have been diverted and mismanaged by the state governors. Local government autonomy will make local councils to have direct access to their finance with which to implement policies and decisions that will promote grassroots development in Nigeria. The quest for autonomy should be related to financial viability. However, local government financial autonomy should not be seen as making local government a sovereign entity, or the chairman of a local government, thus comparing himself with state governors. But local government financial autonomy should be enjoyed by the citizens at the grassroots. The provision in the constitution that clearly stated the responsibility and financial relationship between the various tiers of government. especially the state and local government are deliberate. They are made to serve as check and balance and ensure transparency and accountability among others.

Summary of Findings

The result revealed that lack of financial autonomy of the Anambra State local government hindered the provision of public goods to people at the grassroots.

The findings of the study also revealed that lack of autonomy of the local government negatively affected the growth of grassroots leadership and democracy as the people were not involved in managing their affairs as they are not given the opportunity to select their leaders.

Also the findings of the study however showed that factors such as lack of transparency and accountability were responsible for the poor performance of the local governments as money for the development of the grassroots are being diverted into personal pockets.

Conclusion

This research work focused on local government autonomy and service delivery. Lack of local government financial autonomy had a significant effect on service delivery, grassroots democracy as well as accountability and transparency of the local government councils.

The provision in the constitution that clearly stated the responsibility and financial relationship between the various tiers of government, especially the state and the local government are deliberate. They are made to serve as check and balance and ensure transparency and accountability, among others. But these provisions had been arbitrarily used by state governors. As evident from Anambra State during Governor Peter Obi's lead administration where the State and the local councils work like master and servant relationship by operating a joint account. This has greatly hampered the developmental efforts of local government councils in the area of road maintenance, construction of local food markets for any of the constituent communities and it hindered the local government councils to execute projects in various communities within the local government due to lack of fund.

In addition, it is a known fact in Nigeria that factors responsible for local governments' poor performance are lack of transparency and accountability. For instance, during Peter Obi's tenure as governor of Anambra state, the local government appointees sacrificed accountability to the people at the altar of loyalty to the government who appointed them.

Recommendations

With respect to the above conclusion drawn from the finding of this research, if the following recommendation is implemented there will be meaningful development at the various local communities. These recommendations include:

- I. The national assembly should amend the sub-sections on state joint local government account and replace with direct allocations to local government councils from the federation account.
- II. Local government officials should be elected and not appointed in any manner at any point in time in order to increase local participation of the people in grassroots democracy.
- III. The establishment of an independent audit agency comprising state, local government and private representatives with members comprising of people who has a track record of financial management to supervise, inspect and audit the use of statutory allocations by local government councils. This would provide checks and balances on local government officials' administration of finance matters to ensure accountability and transparency in the use of local government funds. It will also help to promote transparency and accountability of the local governments in Nigeria.

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