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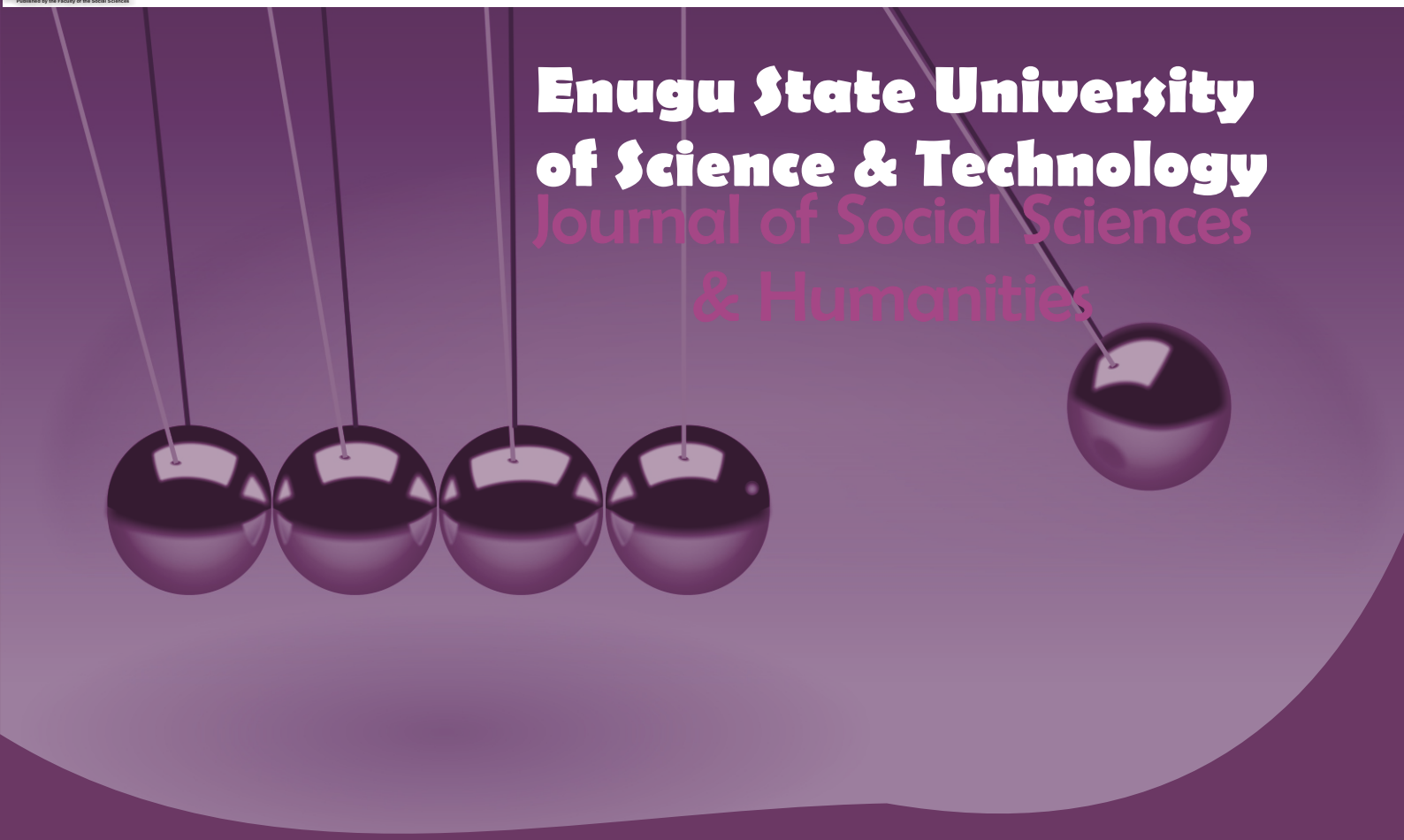

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Problems of Local Government in Nigeria and Dilemma of Exit Strategies: The Historical Nexuses and Viable Antidotes

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Abstract
Local government system is a colonial heritage that contradicted and displaced the erstwhile pre-colonial native authority systems in the communities. As a result, the system has continued to produce mixed feelings and reactions since Nigeria adopted and legally incorporated it into its governance architecture. Studies on local government administration and the recurring dialogues on the problems of the system wear a look of turbulent journey, characterized by dilemma. Sometimes, it does appear that virtually everything that ought to be written about the system has been extensively attempted by both scholars and public commentators but in reverse, government and the practitioners (politicians)seem not to take appropriate actions to address the identified lingering problems and the recurrent concerns being expressed by the public. Several areas still pose palpable challenge to smooth operations of the system and it is disturbing how the problems have persisted despite different reforms in the local government system. As a qualitative research, the study relies on secondary data, content analysis and adopts systems theory as a theoretical framework. The paper examines the problems of local government in Nigeria, and the findings identified that the problems in the case of Nigeria are diverse in nature and adversely affect its performance. It suggests the best strategy for redressing them.
Keywords: *Problems, Local Government, Nigeria, Dilemma, Historical Nexuses, Viable Antidotes*

1. Introduction

Local administration in Nigeria is as old as colonial administration, (Idike, 1995:7). Local government is the third tier layer of administration in Nigeria. Its essence hinged on the need to devolve administration to the grassroots and, thereby, integrate the rural populace into the mainstream of leadership training, participation in decision-making, development efforts and governance. In other words, people clamour for local government because it meets their basic expectations, needs and perhaps, the overall embodiments of community aspirations, in every ramification, (Okibe, 2016:110). Accordingly, the socio-economic and political roles and exigencies of government make local government inevitable. Local government provides the government with the structure to reach out to the grassroots, to test and feel the pulse of each and every citizen, residents and visitors, (Nwachukwu, 2000, in Udenta, 2007:27).

This service oriented need that local government serves made the system become inevitable path to inclusive local governance across countries of the world. Although it sometimes bears different names, nonetheless, the functions it performs at different climes and administrative systems, such as in either presidential, parliamentary and hybrid political systems, including military regimes as witnessed in Nigeria, remain significantly similar and interrelated. What it means is that local government system of administration is not peculiar to federal and/or parliamentary systems of government but generally enshrined and domesticated in virtually all governmental systems as a conveyor belt for mobilizing local resources and human capital to engage in rural transformation and improved economy for sustainable development.

Ideally, local people feel a sense of belonging and fulfillment when they are co-opted to participate in governance and resource management. The inclusiveness in local administration is a general tendency cutting across every political system, and therefore, not an experience or practice exclusively reserved for developing political systems. It is also in the same way that the problems of local government and local administration appear generalized amid differences in their types and magnitude across national boundaries. In most developing societies, local governance, including the attendant rural development suffers from inherent critical operational problems, challenges and plague.

The problems could present in the forms of legal lacuna, structural deficit, and dearth of human resource or operational difficulties, and sometimes the whole of them combined. This is where Nigeria measures high in the scale to attract attention and research insight. Focus has been on deficit in quality of leadership, lack of autonomy, financial dependence, overbearing control by the State government, mismanagement of scarce resources, corruption, discomfiting legal framework, (Okibe, 2016:110), and so much more. The multifarious nature of the problems facing local government system in Nigeria first related to the fact that it had no uniform structure when each region in Nigeria adopted what it found to be compatible with its general orientation in local administration. Against the background, the study focused on the under-listed sub-themes to interrogate the concerns of local government in Nigeria:

- The problems of local government system in Nigeria during the colonial period
- The post-colonial challenges facing local government administration in Nigeria
- Policy Directives towards eradicating problems of local government in Nigeria
- The challenges of implementing identified solutions to problems of local government in Nigeria

These are part of the general epidemic in the governance system of the country, which local government is no exception. As an embodiment of systemic anomaly, it culminates in practices that stifle institutional capacity to wither rising idiosyncrasy, and other inherent challenges in the system.

2. Conceptualizing Local Government

Both practitioners and scholars, including public commentators, define the term local government in many ways. The multiplicity of the perspectives, no doubt, renders the concept to plethora of meanings and interpretation. Nwankwo, (2001), in Shaibu, (2006:76), for instance, defined local government as an arrangement legally put in place, at a legally recognized geographical area, to perform assigned functions for the benefit of the inhabitants of the designated area. Also, Anger, (2006:138), shares a similar view that local government refers to a political authority set up by a nation or state as a subordinate authority for the purpose of dispersing or decentralizing political powers.

In furtherance of explication of the multipurpose nature and roles of local government, Agbo-Ugwumba, (2019:2), posited that, local government is government at the local level exercised through representative council established by law to exercise specific powers within defined areas. In fact, Imoode, (2006), in Okibe, (2016:110) contended that local government is a political subdivision of a Nation-State, (if unitary like Britain and France or federal like USA and Nigeria), which is constituted by law and has substantial control of local affairs. This includes the powers to impose taxes or exert labour for prescribed purposes with its governing body usually elected or otherwise locally selected.

Whenever the leadership of the local government is elected or locally selected, what it signifies is that in the first case, the system of democratic composition of the leadership as provided in Section 7(1) of 1999 Constitution is observed and in the second case; the provision is violated, which engenders problem. Logically, there should be no case of usurping the powers and controlling the finances of local government, no matter however the leadership is constituted. Elected or selected leadership, when they freely exercised their powers could be desirable for fulfilling local needs of the people. According to Agbo-Ugwumba, (2019:2), 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, to complement the activities of the state and federal government in their areas. This is to ensure, through active participation of the people and their traditional institutions that local initiatives and response to local needs are maximized.

What is implied thereof, is that local government and rural development are two focal areas of concern in most developing countries. The concern results from the distinguishable context under which it operates and performs it statutory functions in Nigeria compared to other countries and governmental arrangements, (Okibe, 2016:110). Apparently, the concept and origin of local government system in Nigeria is mired in academic debates. Etymologically, ample evidences in history, custom and tradition, show that "local government in Nigeria did not start with the British colonialism to which Nigeria owes her existence as a nation. Rather, colonialism started with the prevailing structure of local administration among the different ethnic groups and peoples of Nigeria. In essence, the local communities in the present day Nigeria had been involved in local administration before the advent of British colonialism, (Ugwu, 2005).

The Emirate system in the North, with centralized hierarchical positions, the Oba system in Yoruba nation that presented governance through the instrumentality of checks and

balances and the segmented authority system in Igbo nation, which was republican in nature, represented great institutions for local administration during the pre-colonial period. In interim, the claim that British colonialism was a pathfinder to formal structure of administration in native Nigeria is suspect. Nonetheless, modern local government system and its problems originated from British colonialism.

3. The Theoretical Building Block

The study anchored the interrogation of the problems of local government system of administration in Nigeria on Systems Theory, adapted from the works of Okibe, (2016), citing Easton, (1965), and Kaplan, (1957), etc. The suitability of the theory emanates from the consideration that local government is a sub-system in Nigeria federal system and thus a subordinate to other levels of government and depended on their discretion for its structure, operation and effectiveness in role performance. The major assumptions of system analysis are that:

- A political system implies interrelatedness;
- The attribute of the political system is reciprocity.
- The different parts depend, rely, and benefits from each other
- All the different interrelated parts usually look for a situation of equilibrium, and
- A political system usually has certain needs that must be satisfied or else such a system is bound to atrophy.

Based on the foregoing, a political system is more or less, a system of interactions that are related to the authoritative allocation of values in the society, (Easton, 1957). It is composed of different parts that are functionally interdependent, meaning that the dysfunction of a part significantly affected the other parts. The system consisted of environment with specific boundary – it generated input in the forms of demands and supports; which are transmitted to the conversion mechanism, representing the decision-making process; it culminated in output - made up of decisions, policies, programme and finally, the feedback mechanism, which communicated the feelings from the environment back to the system. This process occurred at every level of administration including the local government. Corroborating this intertwined functional network, Kaplan, (1957), noted that:

> *It focuses on factors, which make for stability and instability in a political system by examining how they are able to manage demands, threats and supports directed towards them in such a way as to maintain their existence. The system depends on its ability to maintain order. It therefore, draws attention to the importance of goal-realization, and highlights that no political system can survive for long without articulating and pursuing identifiable goals.*

Local government, from this perspective, was required to conduct local affairs and articulate rural development programmes to align with the broader expectations of the people. This involved managing their demands efficiently, communicating prioritization of the

projects that conformed to wider needs of the populace and implementing the projects to create tangible impacts other than the symbolic. They invariably infused stability and supports for the system and its leadership. Nonetheless, systems theory explained the symbiotic working synergy linking the various parts of a system and the impacts of their function on each other. The synergy and interaction typifies local government system.

4. Interrogating Problems of Local Government from the Colonial Perspective

4.1 Native Administration and British Style of Local Governance

The British meddlesome roles in the native administration of different groups that composed the present Nigeria commenced with the appointment of Fredrick Lord Lugard as High Commissioner of Northern Protectorate in 1900, and introduction of Indirect Rule System thereat. The system held sway even when the two administrative units – the colony and protectorates of Southern Nigeria and the protectorate of Northern Nigeria was amalgamated in 1914 to form one political entity called Nigeria.

The indirect rule system relied on the existing local administrative structures that predated colonialism but the dissimilarities in the indigenous administrative system, in both authority and command structures, manifested in different ways. There was success of indirect rule system in Northern region; it was a near success in the Western region, but a complete failure in Eastern region, with Aba Women riot against obnoxious policies as the climax. The dynamics of the systems posed big challenges to British perception of local administration. The consequent efforts at solving them created more problems when the educated elites began to oppose native authority system.

The problems revolved around the stealthy penetrative ambitions of British colonial government into the interior of Nigeria with obvious complicity for disarticulation of the local culture, authority structure and value system. Many of the natives viewed it as a system of foreign dominance and control, imposition and spread of alien socio-economic and political exploitation, especially when denied the corresponding autonomy (both financial and administrative), lack of powers over matters in areas of their jurisdiction and nonexistent fiscal responsibility.

Although the Native Authority System of Local Government was entrenched in the Native Authority Ordinance of 1916, (Ugwu, 2017:40), the natives lacked control over their resources and were unable to exert any influence over the policies and programmes of colonial government. Instead, they played along with colonial dictates in domestic affairs and ended up sandwiched the native authority system of administration in the nebulous contrivance of colonial escapade in Africa.

4.2 Dichotomy between Native Authority and Colonial Local Administration Systems

During the colonial era, there was dichotomy between the native system of administration and the model of local administration introduced by the colonial masters. The latter was not controlled by the natives; hence, alien interests and interference disorganized the efficacy of the native system of administration without viable alternative. According to Idike, (1995:7-8), during colonial period, local administration was vested on officers appointed by the colonial administrators, the crown office, its later successors and then regional governors. These appointees were called the District Officers, "D.Os", who were vested with legislative, executive and sometimes judicial functions.

Following the introduction of regionalism by Arthur Richards' constitution in 1946, Coleman, (1958:271), in Okibe, (2000:101), emphasized that the problem with regionalism was "how to reconcile the native authority system, as the primary unit of African self-government, with a parliamentary system of government at the central territorial level". The five types of local authority in England, e.g. county councils, district councils, unitary authorities, metropolitan districts and London boroughs differed from what were introduced in Nigeria. It was thereon that the dichotomy between the native authority system and the model implanted in colonialism began to yield dreaded consequences on the customary practices of the people.

In fact, the system of local administration fronted by the colonial authority clandestinely crystallized into gaining unhindered access to rural people to instigate them against each other, for authoritative annexation of their lands, resources and imposition of human labour. Contrary to British county administration, they preferred to institute a colonial teleguided system of native administration in Nigeria, which systematically denied the indigenous people full access to government, either by participation in policymaking and control over it or in participation in the implementation mechanisms.

It resulted in some reforms in "the Local Government Ordinance of 1950", (Ugwu, 2017:40), with an expectations that it would obliterate the problems of subjection of the native system to colonial dictates against the traditional heritage of the people in sources of authority, loyalty and control. However, the dichotomy between colonial and native systems continued to soar. This was apparent in both Northern and Western regions but most especially in the Eastern region where the novel Warrant Chief, with autocratic nuances met high resistance. Of note, the nationalist leaders protested the abuse of the traditional institutions, requested Britain to allow Africans to elect and depose their chiefs, according to their traditions and customs other than the constant colonial interference, but to no avail.

When the Lyttleton constitution of 1954 formalized a federal system of government and institutionalized a seemingly three-tier structure, it could not resolve the impasse, but instead, increased the tempo of agitation against usurpation of local authority, including several other brewing problems that confronted and continued to bedevil the system. The problems lingered on until the departure of colonial masters from Nigeria. The result was that each region had its own local government system quite different from others, (Idike, 1995:7-8), and none was a complete prototype of the native system.

4.3 Struggle for Power between the Native Authority and the Educated Elites

The colonial experience created opposition to the institution of native administration in Nigeria, especially in the areas of powers conferred upon the Chiefs, Obas and Emirs to play political roles. The roles assigned to them solely intended to shield the deficient policies of colonial government that had adverse effects on the common interests of the natives, in exchange for protection and preservation of their throne. Nonetheless, the regional colonial government accepted nominations for appointment into political positions from the local chiefs and occasionally referred to them when discussing enforcement of taxes and labour matters relating to or affecting their subjects. They did this to the provocation of the educated elite who felt displaced and reasoned that the native authority system was already compromised and largely converted to instrument for subjugation of the locals, whereby the chiefs served as stooges to the whims and caprices of the colonial masters.

The development occasioned power contestation between the native authority and the educated elites, who upon their return from overseas training were eager to take up positions and contribute their quota in the administration of their locality. The power rivalry cracked the wall of unity in native enclaves, and largely, conformed to the wish of the colonial masters to instigate hate and infighting between the traditional leadership and emergent educated class in virtually all African communities. It is not only that the untoward relationship between the native authority institution and elites affected enthusiasm for nationalism, patriotism and the necessary push from the local setting, the divided loyalty and the resultant sabotage became a dagger on the neck of struggles for political independence.

4.4 Lack of Autonomy for Colonial Local Governments in Nigeria

The native authority system during the colonial period lacked autonomy, exactly the same way that every other levels of government operated under the strict control of the colonial government. The chiefs, who visibly occupied demeaning positions in the rungs of colonial government, sparingly addressed local matters and most times only acted based on directives. The colonial government used the system as a channel for communicating her policies down the line for necessary compliance. There was no autonomy, either in resource control or in human mobilization for rural development. In addition, colonial government denied local administration the independence to develop and implement socio-economic and political plans, which are not consistent with their exploitation mission in Nigeria.

Apparently, the system of local administration during the period refers to the administration of a community by a body which is not responsible to the local people but to those who appoint them to govern the community, (Shamsuddin & Siddig, 2014:563). The colonial administrators did not take the natives seriously for their presence or participation when making policies and rules, and when allocating resources and distribution of surplus values from African sweat. The people suffered exclusion and complete marginalization where there was inclusion, which made them to play spectator roles. It inflicted emotional injuries on Africans, leaving them as political toddler, who knew nothing about governance and management of human and material resources.

5. Interrogating Problems of Local Government from the Post-Colonial Perspective

5.1.The Problems of Post-Colonial Local Government Administration in Nigeria

On attainment of political independence on October 1, 1960, the burden of administering the nation and applying whatever model of administration that would bring relief to distortions inflicted on the native or local government administration by the departed colonial masters became a priority in the agenda of self-governance. Unfortunately, there were as many systems of local government administration as there were regions and later states, which were subject to the whims and caprices of the system, their legal existence and operations, (Idike, 1995:8).

The people desired the individual native authority system, previously practiced in each of the small communities in pre-colonial Nigeria as building block for post-colonial local government administration but the decision to uphold it was not forthcoming. Lack of precision on what system to adopt belaboured the nicety of distinct primordial imperatives in mode of governance, thus perpetuating a system that developed contempt for each other. It exposed the local government system to ranges of problems, including lack of visibility in participating in rural development, poor leadership, inadequate revenue, undue interference and frequent change of administration and inconsistency and incompetent staff, (Njoku, 2009:345). Some of them are further discussed below.

5.2.Lack of Clarity on the Structure and Tenure of Local Government Leadership

There was lack of clarity on the structure and tenure of local government leadership immediately after independence in 1960. The period witnessed regionalization of local government system in Nigeria with different structures at different regions. For example, in the Western region, significant changes occurred in the structure, tenure and powers exercised by local government councils sequel to the amendment made to the Law of 1960. It constituted the Local Government Service Board to supervise local governments in the region. In the North, the structure, tenure and powers of the local government in the region were also twisted, consequent upon the enactment of the Provincial Administrative Law of 1962, (Abang, 2018).

The latent displacement of the native authority system by the British colonial model of local administration in the region faced serious suffocation with a typology of fused native authority system whereby the admixture created situations where the Emirs doubled as both the Native Authority head and prominent actors in regional politics. The influence of the alterations was much more profound in the Eastern region, where Warrant Chief System had previously caused great upheaval. The newly introduced ministry of local government assumed regulatory roles over the activities of local government councils, thus subjecting the system to the whims and caprices of the regional government.

The discrepancies in the structure, function, tenure and powers of the local government were addressed in the 1976 local government reform, by establishing local government not only as a third tier level of government in Nigeria, but in establishing a uniformed structure that brought the same operational status to the system. Although the functions of the local government graduated to constitutional matters, by specifying its mode of operation, functions and powers, the issue of tenure remained a challenging lacuna to the

extent that it has spilled over to questions of frazzled autonomy, distorted structure, weakened financial base, loose powers and fragmented tenure. The case was glaring since the return to fourth republic and civil rule in 1999.

Consequent upon the development, there is no clear uniform term of service for local government elected executive and legislative officers across the thirty-six States and the federal capital territory in Nigeria. The predominant features stereotype caretaker/transitional committees that have become regular occurrences in the system, including the frequent dissolution of elected officers by the Governor. Most times, some states adopt two-year tenure, others three years while some prefer caretaker against the constitutional provisions, and these options alternate from time to time depending on political exigencies of the period and perhaps the discretion of the governor.

5.3.Constitutional Ambiguity on the Independence of Local Government

By virtue of the fact that the 1976 local government reform and the 1979 constitution proclaimed local government as the third tier level in the composition of Nigeria federal structure, it implies that it is autonomous in specific areas granted by the constitution. These areas include, financial autonomy, presidential system in its operation by composition of the executive with democratically elected members, and enforcement actions on matters that dwell within its jurisdiction.

Sadly, experience since after the return to democratic or civil rule in 1999 has shown that local government is far from enjoying these structures and exercising the fundamental rights contained therein. Local government is neither independent nor subordinate but completely sandwiched by the overbearing powers and influence of the state government. It is obvious fact that, “at the local government level, the governors are the general officers commanding (GOCs) and the chairmen are mere foot soldiers”, (Uroko, (2020). Perhaps, local government is considered as either an appendage to or a miniature agency of the state government. The new label violates the extant laws on local government system of administration in Nigeria and challenges the supremacy of the constitution itself.

5.4.Military Rule and Local Government System

Military first struck and took over the realm of civilian powers in Nigeria politics on January 15, 1966. It marked the beginning of consolidation of political organization in a unitary arrangement and stepping-stone to reformations in the local government structure. Evidently, at inception, the military snuffed relevance out of the life and essence of the local government system. For example, the military administration of General Yakubu Gowon in 1967 introduced statism by creating twelve states in Nigeria that discarded the colonial council structure. In place of the council structure, various forms of local administration were introduced throughout the country, except in the eastern states, which tried to secede from Nigeria then, (Obi, 1995:23).

Even when military found justifications for creation of local governments, the primary concern and emphasis seemed to revolve around distribution of national resources other than entrenching the system as pillar for national growth, economic integration, socio-political transformation, bridging of primordial boundaries and enhancing national unity, or at most,

as a primary mode of acquiring qualitative leadership education. The economy of having many numbers of local governments above others explains why local government creation dominated military regimes and not feasible under democratic administration and why the North has more local governments than the South. This has continued to fuel agitation for restructuring and resource control, to a reasonable extent.

5.5.Imposition of Leadership and Distorted Command Structure

Since the advent of modern local government system in Nigeria, there has been an intermittent, if not constant alteration in its structure, leadership composition and command structure. Nwabueze, 1982), Ogunna, (1996), Arowolo, (2010), and Ugwu, (2017), admitted that between the 1930s and 1940s, the local government was known as Chief-in-Council or Chief and Council, where Traditional Rulers were given pride of place in the scheme of things. In the 1950s, election was introduced according to the British model in the Western and Eastern parts of the country with some measure of autonomy in personnel, financial and general administration. Until military intervention in civil governance and the consequent political brouhaha in 1966 resulting in civil war, local government system of administration was regionalized to tally with each ethnic group's preferred mode of native authority structure and system of administration, based on their prevailing culture and tradition.

Although the document of the 1976 local government reform clearly delineated the structures to be adopted in the local government system and their complementary functions, imposition of leadership has been the greatest burden weighing down the capacity of the council to deliver on its mandates. Ministry of local government affairs headed by a commissioner and the local government service commission presided over by appointed chairman and members jostle to exert influence over the leadership of the council, thus inflicting divided loyalty in the command structure. Largely, the governor in the recent past has become the revolving door, through which chairmen of local governments and councilors alike, come in and cease to exist by his proclamation. An excerpt from Wilson, (2013), which focused on empirical case analysis, reiterated that,

> *On several occasions, the states of Edo, Imo, Ondo and Rivers truncated the tenure of the democratically elected councils and replaced them with members of the ruling political party in the state, as caretaker committees. In most cases, the state governments decided not to conduct elections for the (local) councils, as in the case of Anambra State which ran a caretaker system for over six years, (Wilson, 2013:142).*

The practice is opposed to the intendments of section 7(1) of the 1999 constitution. It provides that the system of local government by democratically elected local government councils is under the Constitution guaranteed; and accordingly, the Government of every State shall ensure their existence under a Law, which provides for the establishment, structure, composition, finance and functions of such councils.

Most times, the office of the council chairman does not exercise real executive powers and the legislature (councilors) does not exercise legislative powers. Everything is cosmetic since governor is the absolute authority personified. Virtually all their development projects secure the approval of the State before it is cash-backed and implemented, and once on a

compliance note, no chairman is impeached by the councilors except if found in repeated default and it is instigated by the governor. In other words, a governor could wake up and arbitrarily dissolve or suspend a democratically constituted local government council leaderships without recourse to the provisions of the extant laws.

5.6.Lack of Administrative/Financial Autonomy – Joint Accounts Problems

The administration of local government and composition of the leadership has continued to be exposed to incessant alterations and manipulation. The Ministry of Local Government, Local Government Service Commission or House of Assembly Committee on Local Government bastardizes local government administration with unnecessary interferences. There are issues of frequent conflicting orders and directives emanating from these supervising authorities, and they make local government administration looks hazy.

On the other hand, State-Local Government Joint Account profits the State as the greatest beneficiary while local government fund are drained through the same process. It is evident that the local government leaderships are compelled to sign dubious and inaccurate financial allocation papers reflecting the federal allocation with some financial grants by the State. The essence is to attest that their full financial rights are observed by the states but in truth, it has always been a hoax package to conceal the state's meddlesome roles and present the local government as being responsible for its finances. The trickily practice has been a serious problem, thereby culminating in federal government's financial regulations, which empowers local government to access their financial allocations directly from the Revenue Mobilization, Allocation and Fiscal Commission, but to no avail. It has sustained the problem of local government's inability to embark on rural development programmes.

5.7.Relegation of Rural Development and Empowerment Programmes

Rural development encompasses activities, efforts and actions taken to provide basic amenities in rural areas; to transform the environment, develop human capital; accelerate improved living condition, and better economic activities sustained by skilled workforce, (Banko, 2016). The very essence of creating local government and devolving power to the grassroots was to expedite collaborative action towards rural development. It involves mobilizing rural human and material resources for transformation of localities and thereby decongests urban centers and redistributes the population density and commercial activities in the cities. However, ranges of factors militate against the realization of these objectives, among which are lack of funds at the disposal of the local government, inept leadership lacking in ideas on resource administration for maximum results, corruption and community conflicts, which hinder development efforts (where finance is ever feasible).

The previous illustration where the state controls the finance of the local government, in addition to both the elected/selected and appointed officers at the helm of local government leadership is an example. These officers do not have any strong voice to ask about their legitimate monthly allocations, but remain in cocoon and suffocating in suicidal silence. With the development, local government merely provides meager funds that only attend to worker's wages and running cost in the system. In circumstances where there are insufficient funds for capital projects, the local government can do absolutely little or nothing to cause the

needed or desired developments to happen at the grassroots. As a result, infrastructural projects in the rural areas such as access roads, boreholes for water supply, health and education facilities are abandoned and human empowerments sacrificed.

5.8.Lack of Transparency, Accountability in Stewardship and High Incidences of Corruption

The entire gamut of local government administration has of late, become masked in secrecy without transparency and accountability on the part of the leadership, including the elected, appointed and career civil servants. The Chairman, Treasurer (TR) and Head of Personnel Management (HPM) preside over the management of local government funds without iota of transparency and reasonable caution. Many times, local government council chairmen move around with boxes fully loaded with money in their cars, ostensibly to dash them to their friends and cronies without clear records. Other times, a governor could direct them to pay more attention to stomach infrastructure than physical infrastructure, whereby the money that supposed to be devoted to development purposes are shared as political booty, in order to safeguard future elections against the entreaties of rival or opposition parties.

Except for the publication of the financial allocations to the three tier levels of government in Nigeria by the Office of Accountant-General after each month's federation allocation, nothing is heard about the financial allocations to local governments at state level after the State-Local Government Joint Account meeting. Neither the State nor the committee publishes and makes the outcome of the sharing exercise public. It is reserved information for only few insiders in the system; otherwise, nobody knows how much a local government collects at the end of the exercise. It is part of the reasons there are calls for scrapping of the State-Local Government Joint Account.

Out of the several millions as allocation to local governments from federation allocations, there is nothing on ground to justify the monthly collections and the cycle of the corruption appears infinite. This study discovered that when the state governor chops the larger part of local government allocation, the chairmen and other stakeholders in the system find no moral justification to commit the leftover in any development project. They too share the remaining as though it is a sanctioned practice deserving applauds. The clamour for accountability by either the state government or the rural populace yields no results. The demands are silenced; the kingpins either phased out of circulation and determinedly crippled from active political participation or committed to political oblivion. Even in cases where law enforcement agencies, especially the Independent Corrupt Practices and other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) or Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) are petitioned concerning the corrupt practices, the outcomes are the least expected, otherwise, many people would be serving prison terms based on the experiences at the local government system.

5.9.Financial Leakages and Pilfering by Revenue Officials – IGR Problems

In Nigeria, most local governments have poor or narrow revenue base and consequently have to depend largely on funds from federal and state allocations, (Ogunna, 1996:119). For instance, under the provision of the 1976 Local Government Reforms, the

local governments in Nigeria were enabled to raise revenues locally from several different sources, including poll tax, property rates, licenses and fees and commercial undertakings. However, the finance department and revenue collectors in particular, mismanage many opportunities to boost local government funds through the internally generated revenue (IGR). The sources are manipulated to suit or satisfy their pecuniary interests.

The officers responsible do this by not declaring the actual revenue collected through under-receipting and many times by duplication of payment invoices/receipts where one serves the need of the local government and the other their personal interests. In addition, some of the staff in the finance department stole local government funds on incremental bases and its accumulation worth much money to the council's financial profile. These double tragedies have reduced local government funds to chaotic situation in which the staff, revenue agents or contractors are the major beneficiaries.

Consequently, public perception tends to tailor towards evading, declining and refraining from compliance with their duties and financial obligations to the local government. They view payment of local government levies or rates as adding a drop of water in the ocean, where ocean wave of pilfering sweeps it away. Therefore, the public are reluctant to pay for IGR, thus further reducing the amounts of money available to the local government for the performance of its legitimate functions.

5.10. Inept Leadership and Deficit of Experienced Staff Members

The inadequacy of experienced and quality leadership has been a perennial problem at the local government system of administration. Many politicians who superintend the affairs of the local government council are not experienced. Ordinary businesspersons and artisans that lack experience on management of public institutions have since taken over the system. They have no genuine ideas on how to steer the affairs of big organizations; hence, local government is the first school of leadership they would attend. Aside offering the platform for rudimentary exposure and experience in leadership, the attendant negative consequences on enthroning a leadership that is not prudent and transparent, and who does not cherish inclusiveness in policy formulation, implementation and tolerance of oppositions, which are the beauties of democracy and good governance, are unimaginable.

Furthermore, there is the issue of personnel, which places stress on analysis of the manpower resources available to local governments in Nigeria (as compared to those in national or state services), including their quantity and quality in terms of experience, professional and technical diversification. Many of the personnel lack both training arrangements to meet future demands and the interim measures to meet shot-term supply deficiencies, (Ibodje, 1999:10). Faced with these challenges, local government operates under the canopy of mediocre and disabled recruits through political devices.

The effect of lack of manpower needs of local government is that some staff cannot initiate rural development policy plan, simply because of incompetence. This happens when people who have a good knowledge of how to carry out rural development are not employed in the service of local government to participate actively in rural development program efforts, (Njoku, 2009:348). It correspondingly makes the system lack innate capacity to perform above the potentials of its staff.

5.11. Abuse of Power and Insensitivity in the Local Government Administration

The political leaderships at the local government system are usually entrusted in the hands of cronies and diehard supporters of the government in power in a state, and for as long as they retained the support of their benefactor (governor or influential stakeholder); many of them treat their subordinates and the public shabbily and with ignominy. The ill-treatment extends to the elected councilors and other appointees under their direct supervision and control, including the career civil servants. They live in opulence while their fellow elected officers and other staff groan in poverty.

Many of the chairmen disburse the funds of the council without regard for legislative appropriations; and initiate some projects and award contracts without recourse to due process or approval at the Finance and General Purposes Committee (F&GP). Often, they are in the habit of presenting themselves as untouchable, not impeachable and unshakable by the councilors or any detractors or traducer except on the orders of the governor, whom they serve with highest explicit manifestation of sycophancy. The scenario instills sense of arrogance and insensitive to public opinion.

Above all, many local government council headquarters situate in the rural areas. Overtime, government has been emphasizing the need for the council leadership and officials to reside within their locality and imbibe culture of integration and assimilation of peculiar challenges faced by the rural people. Nonetheless, it is very common among the local government chairmen and councilors to superintend over the affairs of the local government from either hotel room or from their private houses in the town, outside the jurisdiction of the local council. In addition, some of the councilors in general and the chairmen, in particular, relocate some sensitive meetings involving their political wards and other important policy issues and decisions on matters that affect the council administration to their private residences and thereby bar any suspected opposition from attendance, (Okibe, 2016).

6. The Preceding Viable Antidotes

6.1 Reforms at the Local Government Level

Reforms are strategic measures that target restructuring of personnel components, manpower recruitment, training and development plans, administrative mechanism and operational processes in an organization. In the case of local government, government has undertaken some major reforms to bring about remarkable changes in the system. Key among these reforms was the 1976 local government reform. As already highlighted, the reform introduced a uniform system of local government nationwide, instituted a democratic composition of the leadership and sanctioned the practice of presidential system at that level of administration. Expectedly, uniformity in the administrative structure, complemented with a multi-purpose single-tier local government system, (Ajayi, 2000), opened doors of improvement in the administration and general operations of the local government.

With provisions for elective positions, where the Chairman was the executive head of local government, and supervisory councilors constituting the cabinet, the reform mandated national or federal government to set aside grants disbursed as allocation to the local government through states.

6.2 Legislative Process

The legislature has overtime sought to address the problems inherent in local government system. This has featured through constitutional enactments and the consequent amendments. Advertently, the 1979, 1989 and 1999 constitutions, reaffirmed in Sections 7(1) that, the system of local government by democratically elected local government councils is under the Constitution guaranteed; and accordingly, the Government of every State shall ensure their existence under a Law, which provides for the establishment, structure, composition, finance and functions of such councils.

Furthermore, Section 7(3) of 1989 constitution empowered the Government of a State by Law, to create for any Local Government Area up to a maximum of 7 Development Areas having regard for such factors as common historical and traditional ties, geographical contiguity and administrative expedience. The 1999 Constitution, in Section 8(3a-d), made similar provisions for creation of a local government. Both afore cited provisions subsequently resulted in balkanization of local governments into smaller administrative areas and by implication, engendered serious controversy over its legitimacy and the modalities for the distribution of its revenue among the new component units.

Nonetheless, some of the key duties and functions that all the constitutions assigned to the local government, as contained in Articles 7(3 & 5) in 1979 Constitution, 7(5 & 7), in 1989 Constitution and 7(3 & 5) in 1999 Constitution (as amended), clearly stated thus:

- It shall be the duty of a local government within the State to participate in economic planning and development of the Local Government Area concerned and to this end a joint economic planning board shall be established by a Law enacted by the House of Assembly of the State, and
- The functions to be conferred by Law upon local government shall include those set out in Part 1 of the Fourth Schedule to the Constitution.

Interestingly, Article 5(a - b) of the 1989 Constitution in a bid to confer some level of autonomy on the system, declared that the executive powers of a Local Government:

a. Shall be vested in the Chairman of that Local Government Council and may, subject as aforesaid and to the provisions of any law made by the House of Assembly of the State within whose boundaries the Local Government Area is situated and bye-laws made by the Local Government Council, be exercised by him either directly or through the Vice-Chairman or Supervisory Councillors of the Local Government or officers in the service of the Local Government ; and

b. Shall extend to the execution and maintenance of this Constitution, all bye-laws made by the Local Government Council and to all matters with respect to which the Local Government Council has for the time being power to make bye-laws; but such executive powers shall be so exercised as not to impede or prejudice the exercise of the executive powers of the Federation or of the State Government in the Local Government Area.

Subsection 6(a - b) of the 1999 Constitution further stated the legal mode of financing local government, among which includes the proviso or clauses, which mandated that:

a. The National Assembly shall make provisions for statutory allocation of public revenue to local government councils in the Federation; and

b. The State House of Assembly shall make provisions for statutory allocation of public revenue to local government councils within the State.

To guarantee local government autonomy, several constitution-drafting committees since the return to the 4th republic in 1999 have consistently supported, passed the bill at both Senate and House of Representatives and recommended the bill for the concurring two-third affirmative votes of the thirty six State Houses of Assembly for local government autonomy. To public chagrin, the good intention has not seen green light but the effort is continuous with hope that the dissenting House of Assemblies shall see reasons to promote the good cause and support the passage of the autonomy bill into law. This would make local government system overcome the challenges of financial dependency, excessive control by the State government and perhaps, lack of visibility in rural development programmes.

6.3 Administrative Process

Agitation against marginalization by minorities and even majorities opened vistas for creation of local government as administrative cum political measures for balancing the lopsided structure in the country's governance and efforts toward rural development. As a result, different military governments at staggered periods and based on their discretion created local governments. Incrementally, the total numbers altered intermittently as follows: 301 in 1986, 453 in 1989, 589 in 1991 and 774 in 1996, (Olasupo & Fayomi, 2012, Okibe, 2016, and Ugwu, 2017). The last exercise was by Sani Abacha regime before the inauguration of the 1999 Constitution and new civilian president in May 29, 1999.

There were efforts to solve some administrative challenges, which resulted from the 1976 reforms, whereby 75 percent of members of the council were to be elected through the secret ballot on a no-party basis under the direct and indirect systems of election, whereas the State Military Governor would nominate the remaining 25 percent, (Igbuzor, 2009). Unfortunately, the democratic flavor of local government nosedived during the regime of Alhaji Shehu Shagari (1979-1983), for inability to conduct election for local government as provided for in the 1979 Constitution. Instead, he appointed Sole Administrators, a system of administration that the regimes of Major General Muhammadu Buhari (1983-1984) fully adopted and implemented while Ibrahim Babangida (1984-1992) partly sustained it.

6.4 Directives on Financial Allocation/Autonomy of Local Governments

The Nigerian federation with three tier levels of administration varied her system of revenue sharing formula from time to time. One obvious and indispensable challenge is that revenue allocation appears to be more political in nature than technical, (Iliyasu, 2011, in Lamidi & Fagbohun, 2013). Political jingoists at state and federal levels supersede the various principles guiding revenue sharing formula, and this invariably brings about

ineffectiveness and lack of adequate funding at local government levels. The imbalance and lopsidedness associated with revenue allocation system injure the grassroots' development, lead to slow decision making and poor service delivery among other problems facing Local Government, (Lamidi & Fagbohun, 2013:2).

Essentially, Obika, (2018:72), cited a case where Engr Elias Mbam stated the absurd information at the disposal of the Revenue Mobilisation, Allocation and Fiscal Commission on how the State Joint Local Government Account is operated in various States of the Federation. It shows that the allocations from the Federation Account most times do not actually reach the Local Government Councils (LGCs) as allocated, with numerous allegations of manipulation of the Account at the point of disbursement adding that States hardly make their own contributions as stipulated by Section 162(7) of the Constitution. He stated that it is the position of the Revenue Mobilisation, Allocation and Fiscal Commission (RMAFC) that Local Government should be granted financial autonomy by ensuring that all monies due to them/statutory allocations from the Federation Account are all paid directly to their coffers and the State Joint Local Government Account be abolished.

Despite the fact that the Nigeria Finance Intelligence Unit (NFIU) directed banks in May 2019 to pay local governments all monies accruing to them from the federation within 24 hours of receipt, Osun State government had loggerhead with Zenith bank over the implementation of the directive in the State, (Sahara Reporters, June 10, 2020). This is example of likely generalized case across other States, as most State Governors found the directive incomprehensible, impracticable and open affront to the powers they exercised over the local government system, especially the leadership and the finances of the council. In same vein, the implementation seemed largely sabotaged and frustrated.

In contradistinction to the purpose of overriding national interest espoused in Section 7(6a) of 1999 Constitution previously cited, which requires that the National Assembly shall make provisions for statutory allocation of public revenue to local government councils in the Federation, nothing tangible, substantial and efficacious seemed to have been done in that direction. Evidently, the National Assembly has not met its constitutional responsibility on the matter, and the legislative lacuna gives the State governments (Governors) latitude to manipulate the finances of local government.

7. Obstacles to Solving Local Government Problems in Nigeria

7.1 Lack of Political Will on the part of Stakeholders

The foregoing discussions are laden with proof of lack of political will on the part of executive, legislative and judicial branches of government to show commitment to the afflictions of the local government in Nigeria. There are flagrant violations of Section 7(1) of the 1999 Constitution by Governors and no declarative judicial or legislative enactment with adverse consequences have been made to deter the Governors and cause them to play by rules in the composition of local government leadership and management of its finances to promote rural development programmes in the local government. Governors are not in a hurry to let go of their stranglehold on local government finances and dependency nor does the National Assembly actively adopt legislative means to address the challenges of the local

government. The lapse is most disturbing, especially from the weak background of the State Houses of Assembly when compared to the overwhelming executive powers in the State.

The power and influence of the executive has warranted that every bill passed by the National Assembly and seeking to grant local government autonomy has continued to be scuttled by State Houses of Assembly in compliance with the political dictates of the dissenting Governors. The stakeholders have not risen to the challenges of putting a stop to this debasing exploitation of the local government commonwealth for selfish purposes. The dilemma has continued to jeopardize local government financial autonomy and development of critical infrastructure in the rural communities.

7.2 Godfatherism and Persisting Corruption

Godfatherism is practices where moneybags, very influential political stakeholder and powerful men/women in the corridors of power conditionally sponsor or help their godson to ascend unto political power only to keep him in a cage of servitude without breathe of freedom in the management of the affairs of the office. Some of these people played strategic roles in the creation of their respective local governments. They take local government leadership as a profitable business with high potential for material and financial benefits and the perception corroborates the popular claim that godfathers prevail on the leadership of local government that they installed to share local government allocations among stakes and areas of concern. It is the bane of Nigeria politics and the negative implications are overwhelming.

Evidently, godfathers are the major contractors, major influence in local government employment and posting of staff, and in appointment of other political officeholders and support staff in the local government. Obviously, the practice of godfatherism contributes immensely in nurturing, manifesting, promoting, perpetuating, sustaining and consolidating corruption in the local government system. Corruption thrives in local government in the under-listed areas, although not limited to them:

a. Inflation of prices of bought items;
b. Over-estimation of cost of projects;
c. The ghost workers syndrome;
d. Award of contracts and subsequent abandonment; and
e. Outright payment of huge sums of money to political godfathers, (Aghayere, 1997).

In other words, over the years, the high rate of corrupt practices in the local government has rendered the local government administration inactive and devoid of concrete development activities, (Aghayere, 1997; in Oviasuyi, Idada, & Isiraojie, 2010). The implication is that godfathers play critical and catalytic roles, (either by themselves or through their agents and representatives)in scuttling any policy implementation that portend danger for their monopolistic aura and stranglehold on the finance of the local government. Many of them erroneously assume that local government fund is their birthright, and selection of the leadership their sacred duty. The phenomenon of godfatherism increasingly complicates the network of corrupt practices in the local government, thereby diversifying into many forms, including patronage systems, bribery, extortion, embezzlement, nepotism

and graft. These corrupt practices seem to be permanent features of local government administration in Nigeria.

7.3 General Quagmire in Politics and Governance in Nigeria

Politics and governance in Nigeria are in bizarre states. Deficit in quality leadership stunts growth in leadership values and further complicates the issues of greed, nepotism, corruption, abuse of power and public office. The general political culture and fundamental orientation in leadership creates a serious gap on the path of institutionalizing corporate rules and practices against building personality cults in the system. Majority of the leaders in Nigeria are merchants of opprobrium and leave nothing to chance when it concerns appropriation and mismanagement of public resources. Once one wins an election, the general notion is that the person will bring development projects to his immediate environment, give employment to family members, relatives, and cronies; amass wealth and become rich. Public expectation usually appears tempting for even angel to misbehave in political offices in Nigeria. In fact, the system encourages corruption and many leaders easily fall prey for it.

Accordingly, people situate themselves around where their placement in the political ladder and economic ranking will afford them the opportunity to benefit from sharing of public resources/funds. The sharing of these resources frequently occurs at the national, state and local government. In the case of local government, political gladiators easily convert the system into goldmine for the benefits of godfathers and other stakeholders. It is a general slump that characterizes the entire body polity and not peculiar in the local government system of administration in Nigeria.

The foregoing privileges enjoyed by those who occupy positions of leadership at strategic levels of governance in Nigeria impels others to scout for similar inestimable opportunity for authoritative allocation of values, at least, being able to determine who gets what, when and how. The lust for power worsened since people discovered that politics is the easiest way of becoming rich, and many political leaders have actually amassed inexplicable wealth by engaging in fraudulent and corrupt practices.

8. Policy Directives toward Eradicating Problems of Local Government in Nigeria

This study has taken cognizance of the implication of each policy option and the essence of collaborating among stakeholders to delink local government from the very plague that does not allow it to live up to its constitutional mandates. On the heel of the identified problems, the following recommendations could provide a roadmap for overcoming the challenges and improving the system:

- To effect comprehensive constitutional amendments whereby the statutory functions and finances of every tier of government would be spelt out and none dependent on each other for funding but each having equal constitutional competence to directly collect allocations and taxes within its areas of jurisdiction.
- Entrenching democratic leadership at the local government system, providing for a uniform tenure, conditions of service, command structure, regular elections without

state interference and independent legislature with oversight powers over executive activities and where all the governing bodies are accountable to the people within the jurisdiction of the local government.

- Scrape State-Local Government Joint Account, State Independent Electoral Commission and every form of State control over the structure, personnel, operation and finance of the local government, in order to uphold and maintain their constitutional and jurisdictional equality in the exercise of the statutory powers and performance of their key responsibilities.
- Institute mechanisms for effective checks and balances among the local government leaderships, and to commit community leaders and other stakeholders like Civil Society Organization, and Community Based Organizations to serve as watchdog over the activities of local government. The essence is to engage them in policy formulation and active participation in policy implementation in order to curb incessant cases of corruption and maladministration.
- Internal democracy should be deepened to guarantee and promotes election and not selection, good and accountable governance and not insensitivity in leadership and where the influence of godfatherism is extinct. This will ensure the emergence of popular and quality candidate as a leader and collaborative efforts among all the stakeholders in setting development agenda.

9. Conclusion

This study commences with an observation that local government is the third tier level of governance in Nigeria, just as it operates elsewhere around the world. In many other parts of the world, local government administration is a form of deconcentration in which all subordinate levels of government within a country are agents of the central authority, usually the executive branch. The regions, provinces, districts, municipalities and other units of government headed by or are responsible directly to a central government agency are inclusive and the heads of the local administration serves at the pleasure of the nation's chief executive, (Rondinelli, 1981).As a system of government generally, it places emphasis on local administration.

The study identified and discussed the problems facing the modern local government system in Nigeria. Some of the core problems include inadequate funding, lack of autonomy resulting from excessive control by state government, corruption and constitutional problems, etc., (Agbo-Ugwumba, 2019). These problems have remote origin and government have adopted several measures and approaches in attempts to resolve them. Some of the measures have paid off while others seemed like wasted efforts and in this category belongs constitutional options of asserting local government autonomy. Although the problems have not lagged in receiving theoretical emphases, the practical implementations of the proffered antidotes to the problems are grossly inadequate. As a result, the study further recommended that local government, as a prime agent of rural development should be reinvigorated by funding its activities fully, eradicating corruption and inept leadership in the system.

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