

Local Democracy and Good Governance: The Nigerian Experience

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Abstract: *Since Nigeria got her independent from Britain in October 1960, there have been periodic elections conducted at various levels. Although the 4th Republic in 1999, under the then Military administration of General Abdul salami found it expedient to organize elections at the local government level across the country. This is to ascertain the readiness of relevant institutions in organizing and conducting elections. Also, to assess the levels of political acceptability and participation of the people as well as to test the workability of the reforms introduced before the general elections in 1999. Again, it was further to create a platform for local democracy where people can elect their representatives and partake actively in decision-making process. In spite of that, local governments today are still being strangulated by the state governments while the majority of the rural populaces are further disenfranchised. It is against this background that the paper attempt to examine the third tier of government from its political context. In doing so, the researchers heavily used primary and secondary data as source of information. A total of 300 questionnaires were prepared and distributed across 6 local governments in the North-east using simple percentage to analyze them. The findings revealed among others, was the lack of internal democracy, corruption, citizens non - participation as impediments to local democracy in Nigeria. Lastly, it was recommended that for local government to achieve its objectives, there must be internal democracy and unconditional autonomy and good governance.*

Keywords: *Democracy, Good Governance, Reforms, Participation, Decision Making*

I. INTRODUCTION

Local government areas in Nigeria's federal arrangement are the last tiers of the government that are closer to the people whom majority of them are economically disadvantage, socially backward and politically marginalized from the state and central governments. It was supposed to play an important role in decentralization of powers and developments to bring it closer to the rural communities. Its strategic position therefore, was meant to address the principles of political freedom, partnership and cooperation, complementary services, community participation, accessibility, transparency and capacity building of the people in the rural areas. However, with the return of democratic rule in 1999, the general expectation of majority of citizens was that, it may provide an opportunity and platform not only for political participation to elect their leaders, but also enabling them participate fully in decision processes on important issues that affects them directly, (Tella, Wali and Eric, 2012). This hopefully may bring about good governance that may ensure just and equitable distribution of resources, efficient and effective utilization of human and natural resources and the avenue to check the excesses of the elected leaders through periodic council elections.

As a result, the 20th century waves of transitions to democracy rule in Nigeria that was hitherto under total or partial dictatorship of Military administrations that lasted more than 33 years of 54 years of independence has been characterized by a symbiotic embrace between internal forces and Pro-democracy groups within the country. This was evidently clear in the activities of National Democratic Coalition (NADECO) a civil society organization under the military rule demanding for more access to political power the citizens at all levels of government and some international democratic networks that had worked to facilitate and improve open elections and transparent governance. Participation in local democracies could be perceived as an avenue and ideal way for

improving democratic development at the local level, and is the best way to deal with some of the problems of the local communities, (Aliyu and Koehn, 1982).

In this regard therefore, if democracy in Nigeria could be enhanced locally, it may offer distinct advantages for retaining local capacities to improve the quality of life and development in rural communities. This position was opined by Charas and Wali (2012) that local democracy is the key to development, and it is the only way of ensuring strong local governments and good governance since without local democracy, the national democratic process is at stake. They further concluded that local democracy is so fundamental to the achievement of freedom and fundamental human rights at all levels. As such, it deserves attentions in the political arena, and it is expected that by now crystallization of the political thought towards the new paradigm would be firmly entrenched in the system and the political thought process need to change and force the political parties to accept the reality of the local government s and citizens electoral power. This paper therefore, examines the salient features of local government system in Nigeria with particular emphasis on local democracy, good governance, reforms, participation and decision making. Others include political freedom to elect representatives, constitutional and local recognition for local democracy and citizen's participation in decision making.

II. METHODOLOGY

The data for this study was gathered from Primary and Secondary data which include Participant Observation. The information gathered was analyzed using simple percentage. The primary data comprises of interviews conducted with past and present local government officials. The study further selected randomly a sample of 300 respondents, distributed across six local governments in six states of the Northeast geopolitical zone. These are Yola North Local government in Adamawa state (50), Bayo local government in Borno state (50), Fika local government in Yobe state (50), Darazo local government in Bauchi state (50), Jalingo local government of Taraba state (50) and Gombe local government of Gombe state (50). However, out of the 300 questionnaires distributed, 260 were retrieved and analyzed. Consideration was given to proximity due to security situation of the areas before local governments are chosen in these states, and to assist in administering the questionnaires, six research assistants were engaged, one in each state.

III. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND DEMOCRACY

Local government as a concept and as one of the subordinate unit in federal political system has attracted definitions of various scholars. Though, there is no unanimous or consensus agreement among scholars on the definition of the term, but according to the United Nations Office for Public Administration as quoted in Ola and Tonwe (2009), it means a political subdivision of a nation or (in a federal system) state, which is constituted by law and has substantial control of local affairs, including the powers to impose taxes or to exact labors for prescribed purposes. The governing body of such an entity is elected or otherwise locally selected. It is a political subdivision of a Nation or Regional Government which performs functions which in nearly all cases receives its legal power from national or regional government but possesses some degree of discretion or autonomy in making of decisions and which normally has some taxing power (Adeyemo, 2010).

Local government as contained in Dasuki Reform of 1976 is a government at the local level exercise through representative council established by law to exercise specific powers within defined area. These powers should give the council substantial control over local affairs as well as the staff and institutional and financial powers to initiate and direct the provision of services and determine activities of state and federal; government in their areas, and to ensure, through devolution of functions to these councils and through the active participation of the people and their traditional institutions, that local initiative and response to local needs and conditions are maximized.

Therefore, local government can be regarded as social, political, economic and social institution primarily established as an organized social entity based on the feelings of the majority of the people that has common identities such as language. It is a political institution and mechanisms for

governance at the grass root level, which is characterized by local bureaucracy like other higher levels of government that coordinate the activities and the operation of day- to- day running of the system.

Democracy has been more and more widely acclaimed from all sections of the political spectrum. Democracy according to Chaturvedi (2006) is a term derived from two Greek words, ‘demos’ and ‘cratia’. ‘Demos’ means the people and ‘Cratia’ means power. In short, it means power of the people. Liberal democratic scholars reduced the concept of democracy to mere elections, multiparty system, and universal suffrage such that any deviation becomes aberration. In this context therefore, Tony (1994), perceived democracy to mean free elections contested by freely organized parties under universal suffrage for control of the effective centers of governmental power. But for Makinta (2012), democracy is conceived as a way of government firmly rooted in the belief that people in any society should be free to determine their political, economic, social, and cultural systems. But the form it takes can vary according to the particular circumstances of any society. But for Appadorai (2004), democracy may be described as a system of government under which the people exercise the governing power either directly or through representatives periodically elected by themselves.

A broader concept of democracy include what David Maillu refers to as “cultural definition of democracy” in which African democracy, “like philosophy, had to be lived, theories left aside.” For him, African societies were socially and politically structured so that “everybody participated according to his ability, ages-status, and wishes . . . everybody was invited to offer the cooking of his mind.” African democracies, therefore, transcended the realm of politics; it constituted an integral part of the peoples’ culture, which allowed everyone a sense of belonging. It was a “practical democracy as opposed to theoretical democracy,” which required people to be more sensitive and responsible for their neighbors’ well-being. This is not to say that there was a total absence of social stratification based on wealth and age. Certainly there were commoners as well and offenders were stigmatized because they violated or trampled on others’ rights or well-being.

IV. GOOD GOVERNANCE

Good governance is an extremely elusive objective. It means different things to different organizations. According to UNDP (1997), good governance is a participatory, transparent and accountable, effective and equitable, and it promotes the rule of law. It ensures that political, social and economic priorities are based on consensus in society and that the voices of the poorest and most vulnerable are heard in decision, making over the allocations of development resources. This is the process whereby public institutions conduct public affairs, manage public resources and guarantee the realization of human rights (Alobo, 2014). Good governance therefore, is about the processes for making and implementing decisions. It is not about making ‘correct’ decisions, but about the best possible process for making those decisions.

V. LITERATURE REVIEW

The need to empower, educate and encouraged the participation of local communities in the decision making and implementation process at the local government have been an ongoing struggle in Nigeria dated back to colonial period as expressed by Aluko (2010) it was in view of this, the British colonial administration introduced local government administration in Nigeria to facilitate their control over local communities, which led to the reforms of 1947 that coincides with political changes taking place in the country at the national level as a result of growing agitation for self participation in governance by the indigenous nationalist. According to (Ola 1998), local government dispatch of 1947 stipulated the British colonial government in the shortest possible time which makes it feasible for the indigenous population to govern themselves. Perhaps, this laid emphasis on the control and management of local government by representatives of the people resulting in participation in council meetings thought by few elected councilors guided by colonial administrators, (Odenigwe,1977). This was because some laws were enacted which includes the Eastern Regions Local Government Ordinance of 1950, Western Region Local Government Law 1952 and the Native Authority Law of 1954 all these reforms paid much emphasis on the structural changes rather than

encouraging citizens participation in governance and political activities. The colonial pattern of local government was adopted when the country got political independence in 1960.

Subsequently, when Nigeria got her political independence in 1960, the search for a viable and functional local government system became eminent. The aim of which was to inculcate local democracy in the political system. In the words of (Aliyu and koehn, 1982), the declared objectives of enhancing popular participation in local government and distributing amenities in rural areas, State government replaced the extant Native Administrations (N.A.S) with Local Government Authorities (L.G.A.S) between 1968 and 1970. However, the government then made no provision to fund the local governments properly and neither was there any attempt to establish a common frame work for the tier. More so, the exercise had not introduced significant structural changes from what was obtained during the colonial rule.

Consequently, the absence of popularly elected local representatives and increasing state government encroachment on the functions of local government authorities characterized the immediate pre-reform period as rightly observed by (Egwurube, 1980). It was against this development that local governments in Nigeria continue to be mere extension of state government administration. Ever since Nigeria attained political independence in 1960, it was not until 1976 that a clear landmark was set. It was in view of that the famous 1976 local government Reforms made an impact on the system because of the structural changes it introduced which was a product of a nation –wide cross fertilized ideas. Although, it began in 1975 as one of the few most salient features of the Federal Military Government program to return to civil rule. It was intended to rationalized and stabilize government at local level, stimulate democratic self-government and as well as encourage initiative and leadership potential at the grassroots levels and or, building a sound foundation for democracy which was an important premise (Gboyega, 1987).

However, the reform later changed the membership of the local government councils especially in the northern states of the country to a defined structure and introduced tenure system of maximum periods of 3 years for each council. According to Adeyemo (2010), it was during that period that the tenure of decision makers through an electoral system was tacitly recognized. The program of decentralization adopted assigned local functions through devolution of some responsibilities closest to the point of consumption and provides financial resources for meeting them. The criteria applied in this process were to assign local government functions that; require detailed local knowledge for efficient performance; in which success depends on community responsiveness and participation and, which are of personal nature requiring provision close to where the individuals affected live. According to Egwurebe (1989), all these innovation notwithstanding, with the return to civilian rule in 1979, the tier was bastardized with the proliferations of newly created local governments by elected state governors all over the country and by 1984 serious problems had bedeviled the local government system. Partly on account of the above, short comings of the 1976 reforms which failed to meet the expectation of Nigerians. The Military Administration of General Mohammad Buhari set up the Dasuki committee in May 1984 to review the creation of more local government's areas in the country. It was against this backdrop that the committee recommends the creation of more local governments with the following conditions: a minimum taxable population of 250,000, in addition to the approval of the supreme head quarters (hogget and Hambleton 1986). All these reforms mention above appears to be more structural than political and at the end; it failed to address the problems.

This led to the emergence of 1988 civil service reforms under General Babangida military administration .The roots of the reform were located in the report of the political bureau which was set up in1986.The situation has become apparent that Nigerians are becoming increasingly wary of big and complex government. They are becoming apathetic about the government activities and are crying out that government is becoming increasingly too distant from them (Babangida 1988).A long held view by past government and actors that the local government no more than an administrative apparatus established only for maintenance of law and order was refined to conceived of the tier as a promoter of the realization of national political objectives.

To further strengthen and consolidate participatory principle at the local level the idea of granting more functional autonomy to the tier in order to make it fruity local to the environment was introduced. To ensure its management by responsible competent and dedicated people imbued with a sense of service and accountability, the reform of the public services at the state and federal levels bearing in mind those localist peculiarities of local government was extended to the tier. The principle of the presidential system to local government by the reform was introduced, particularly the doctrine of separation of powers and institutions of checks and balances. From May 1989 to present day, the number of local governments in the country had risen to 774. This was largely during the Babangida and Abatcha years when the number of local governments had more than doubled, political rather than developmental reasons have been adduced (Oyediran, 2003). The 1999 constitution of Federal Republic of Nigeria section seven provides that the system of local government by democratically elected local government councils is under this constitution guaranteed. Structurally, the reform allowed for the creation of up to seven development areas by the states for geographical contiguity and administrative expedience. All these reforms and constitutional provisions were meant to produce leadership and participation at the tier through democratic institutional provisions.

VI. LEADERSHIP AND INTERNAL DEMOCRACY

The council chairman and councilors are to be elected under political party platform, the supervisory councilors are to be appointed base on their expertise. This reform continues to enjoy patronage when it was provided for in 1999 constitution despite the problems that entangled the tier from the time when the reform was made to present day. Most pronounced among these problems are the behaviors and activities of elected councils; appointment of care taker committees by state governments and the incompetent and unpopular leaders imposed on the people against their wishes and aspiration. All these notwithstanding the local government remain strategic tier in democratization of Nigeria, and its proper functioning for service delivering to the people in rural community lies with local democracy which is the only opportunity that may enable citizens being part of their governance.

The structure of local government that will empower the people so that they can exercise their rights required a functional concept of local democracy with fundamental changes in the political administrative and financial structures. If local democracy is to stay in the political system, then the position on ground in Nigeria had to change in favor of the people. The people had to be empowered to have control over resources, elect leaders that would be answerable to them and to get involve in policy initiation, formulation and implementation. Democracy requires that people through their elected representatives be made responsible and accountability for their decision (CLGF 2006).It is in the light of the importance attached to this, that democracy at the local level has been stressed so much since the popularized 1976 National local government reform as opined by Aliyu (1981). Similarly, in the word of Hoffet and Hambleto (1986), that the 1976 constitution as well as 1999 constitution of the federal republic of Nigeria also places emphasis on representative governance in accordance with section 7(1) of the two respectively.

The planned expectation of the 1976 reform and the constitutional backing it derived was that the administrative assumptions of local government would be more responsive to local needs by virtue of their proximity, greater knowledge of local conditions and therefore greater capacity to react generally to those needs. The economic assumption was that local government would become more efficient in resource allocation based on their superior ability to identify and rank priorities in terms of different services the community needs. The political assumption is that local government would develop the potential leaderships capable of mobilizing the community and articulating, and aggregating its interest (Aliyu, 1981).However, a critical look at the chronology of local government administration in Nigeria from 1976 till date shows that as far as democracy is concerned, not much has been achieved. The tier continues to suffer strangulation from the states and federal government which creates doubt in minds of the citizens as to whether it is relevant in the federal arrangement of Nigeria. This external political interference instead of creating environment favorable for political participation at the local level is compounding the problems where every citizenry should be free to have political opportunities to elect their leaders.

It is expected that local government representatives should reflect the views and needs of the community they serve. It is also believed that this could be best achieved through regular timely elections. Whatever the means or process of local democracy the result should reflect the wishes of the electorates. Local government in Nigeria on the other hand is far from actualizing this dream. Good governance in a democratic regime depends on the credibility of election processes because it's the only way of legalizing political power and fortifying authority and obligation into voluntary consent. It raises citizens' consciousness and enhances stability of the political order. But the experience in Nigeria from 1950 till date has been on record that elections have not been free from electoral fraud or manipulation. A number of study has revealed that political leadership/ elite from the state levels has never been interested in free and fair election at the grassroots ,even when elections were held. On the occasion, the elites believed in selection rather than election in the local government (Aluko, 2010).

This undemocratic trend manifested in form of incumbency factor by the governor who chooses their minions as members of local government care-takers committee invariable causing more harm to local democracy in the country. This unfortunate development has made genuine democracy to elude the grassroots in Nigeria and the consequence is the lack of meaningful socio-economic development at the level which should normally provide a solid foundation for the nation infrastructural development. The political marginalization and deliberate disenfranchisement of citizens at the grassroots level put to test and scrutiny the question of local democracy in Nigeria.

Moreover, even if elections were held, the ruling party in the states made it difficult for opposition party or candidate to win even a councilor seat for the simple reason that it controls the State Independent Electoral Commission (SEIC) by way of its composition and financing. The fact that periodic elections are held to test popularity of ruling party and acceptance of its policies, that notwithstanding, distortion and manipulation of the electoral process had become the order of the day. This is partly attributed to the prevalence of sit-tight syndrome in the political system, and also a collective dictatorship by the ruling party at the national level. Historical discourse on elections in Nigerian Local governments reveals that the process suffered alterations and deliberate distortions which made such contests incapable of producing acceptable and credible leadership, sometimes leading to post election violence.

This is particularly perpetuated through the activities of political elites at the state and some local champions who constituted themselves into 'political godfathers' called the stakeholders, whom according to Atere and Akinwale (2006), create democratic setbacks by encouraging illegitimate means of seeking political power thereby indulging in corrupt practices such as arms-stockpiling political thuggery, bribery and all forms of political misdemeanor. At a stage, the state governors, especially in states where there were changes in ruling parties allowed their cronies to be appointed as caretaker committee members in order to take firm control of the local council areas before forthcoming elections (Aina, 2006). These categories of politicians, claimed ownership of the party by way of financial involvement, and caused an obstacle to internal political party democracy and blocking citizens' participation by dictating the tune. They employed all incumbency tactics available at their disposal to plant stooges. All instruments of modern and traditional authorities are deployed with heavy hand to intimidate and repress oppositions. Electoral malpractices are very rampant, and corrupt officials during elections period use the powers attached to their offices to prevent the conduct of free and fair election. This also raised the question of political participation in decision making.

VII. DECISION MAKING AND IMPLEMENTATION

Local democracy gives citizens the freedom to participate in making decision that are local in nature and serve the peculiar needs of local communities. It is of paramount importance that local government is proactive, and reaches out to its communities to ensure that public participation is maximized. The political will to build and sustain that relationship with the electorates must be initiated and nurtured within the local government council itself, and subsequently building a robust relationships between local government and interest groups such as civil societies and community

association which is central to local democracy and to the development of sustainable communities, fundamentally empowering the public at the local level to take decision according local priorities.

The democratic setup envisaged in the local government system in Nigeria since the country return to democracy in 1999 provides for election in which the elected councilors represent the people and the community within that ward. But achieving the goal remains elusive. Elections into the councils are not conducted timely and when due as earlier mentioned, but rather characterized by external interference and manipulation making caricature of the whole system. A little discourse to the past military regime will shade more light on attempt made so far. The position taken on local government then from 1985-1993 is still what is being practiced today. According to Babangida (1998), the political and fiscal empowerment of local government under his administration was intended to bring governmental closed to the grassroots because government must be the business of people. It must torch their lives, it must be closer to them and it must reflect their aspiration through their direct involvement in the governance at that level.

Twenty nine years after, Nigeria is yet to bring governance to the door steps of citizens at the grassroots as expressed by Idike, (1996) that if local democracy is to be the process of local government system in Nigeria as earlier mentioned, then the process of election have to be transparent to ensure fairness. The involvement of the people in selecting their representative must be secured. The general practiced all over the 36 states in the country is that state governors and their political parties are taking an advantage of official powers and incumbency by misusing the system and keeping their stooges and unpopular puppets in control of local government, only to be used in elections when general elections are to be conducted. It is a common feature in Nigeria political scenario that whenever local government election are held in any of the state the ruling party will no doubt win all of the majority local government in the state. In fact to a certain extent, opposition political parties are not allowed to freely contest the election and or party members lacked internal political party democracy to prevail in the selection of its candidates, but rather the contestant are hand- picked and imposed on the people even against their wishes.

The councilors elected as representatives of the electorates are responsible for managing the affairs of the local government. They are expected to be fully empowered to decide on administrative, financial and political matters pertaining to their respective wards and local governments. But for the simple reason that elections into the council are not free and fair, elected candidates are imposed on the people and consequently resulting in patron-client relationship. Instead of representing the people, the officials imposed are protecting and serving the interest of their political God-fathers. This is rightly characterized by the position held by follet (2009:146).Democracy was born of the pursuit of individualism. Follet states that party domination and the marriage of the business and politics have inhibited individual participation in the political process and served parochial interest while seeking justification under the guise of majority rule. The local government chairmen and councilors are being used to divert public funds meant for the development of rural communities for other state government projects in the municipal centre's and or projects that has no relevance to people.

To Usman and Charas (2008), decision making in the council are done through voting. A simple majority is required for passing a resolution. Thus, the democratize process in the council ensures participation of all members in the decision. Councilors who are elected from wards are presumed to be representative of that area. Similarly, every decision he partake in is seen to have the mandate of that constituency. However, due to the reiterated fact that the election was not free and fair, candidates are selected not elected, planted against the wish of the electorates, decisions are either been influenced by powerful politicians or the issue of godfatherism comes to play and control the political machinery at the detriment and expense of the majority. This undermine the meaningful positive role of local governments in economic and political process because it is only the local authorities that provides the opportunities for local people to participate in local decision and local schemes within the general national policies and act above all, as local centers of initiative and activity conclusive to general development (Idike 1996).The consequences of all these actions made the councils that are supposed to be law makers and representatives of the electorates to be a mere rubber stamp, and decision are taking from outside and imposed on the people at the grassroots.

While the cardinal goal of democratic local government in Nigeria and world over is to encourage and provide opportunities for citizens to participate in decision making on issues that affects them most, the political structure of Nigeria’s local government is another area that is problematic. The system or structure which is patterned along presidential system of governance with clear separation of powers to provide for checks and balances is not fully implemented. For some states, there is executive arm comprising the chairman and appointed supervisory councilors, and the legislature which constitutes the elected council members then the judicial arm under office of the legal adviser. But in other states, the councilors and supervisory councilors are appointed from within the elected members and without any functional judicial arm. This was made possible because of the provision of the constitution of the federal republic of Nigeria section seven as referred above which empowered the states House of Assemblies to control the local governments.

This arrangement by implication further empowered the local government chairmen and made them more vulnerable to the ‘God-fathers’ at the expense of the teaming citizens. Suffice to these mentioned above, the council is just an avenue for unemployed ambitious youth, most often than not, the council meetings are not held. The voices and wishes of the electorates are not heard because those that are elected to represent them are not there for the people; talk less of defending their interest. There is a total absence of checks on the actions of the chairmen, and decisions are unilaterally taken without consultation with the representatives of the wards. These representatives on the other hand lacked any defined responsibilities and powers to check- mate the arrogant behavior of the council chairmen.

VIII. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

From the questionnaires distributed and retrieved, the following are the analysis of the information gathered;

Table 1 Local Government autonomy

RESPONSE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Yes	40	15.4
No	220	84.6
Total	260	100

Source: Compiled from fieldwork in 2014

This table shows that forty 40 respondents in the sample representing about (15.4%) have indicated that the local governments in this areas are autonomous. While two hundred and twenty represents representing (84.6), are of the position that the local governments are not autonomous. From the above analysis, we can observe that there are several points to deduce. First, the margin between respondents who believed that local governments are autonomous and those who are on the opposing side is too wide. This simple interprets that there is no local government autonomy in the area of study. To further buttress this position, Chubado (2015), blamed the constitution for the problems of local government autonomy in the country. This lacked of autonomy is affecting performance of the tier, because politically and financially its operations are constraint and straight-jacketed. In an interview with some key functionaries and politicians at the local government, it reveals that the inter-government relationship between the state and local government completely eroded the autonomy of the tier. According to Bitrus (2015), what hijacked local autonomy is section 7(1) of the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. This section gave the state governors powers to dissolve democratically elected council and constitute care-taker committees.

Table 2. Opinion on whether or not council elections were held freely

respondents	Frequency	percentage
Yes	50	19.2
No	210	80.8
Total	260	100

Source: Compiled from fieldwork in 2014

Table 3, participation in decision making

Response	frequency	Percentage
Yes	66	25.4
No	194	74.6
Total	260	100

Source: Compiled from fieldwork in 2014

The view of the respondents as whether the community is participating in decision making at the local government levels shows as follows outcomes; sixty-six 66 respondent representing (25.4%) acknowledged that the people in the community are carried along in decision making process. On the other hand, one hundred and ninety four 194 representing a whopping (74.6%) said the community are not participating in decision making. Even though council members in a representative democracy are elected to speak on behalf of the wards they came from but, the gap created between the elected officials and the electorates is wide. Just as was rightly described by Kolo (2015) he said that the councilors are not elected but rather selected therefore they are not representing the people of the area neither are they briefing them on fundamental issue.

From the above analysis of information gathered from secondary sources and the data from the response of the sample population, one of the findings of the research is that local governments in Nigeria are only autonomous in principles. This was informed by the fact that people at the grassroots are not allowed to elect their leaders; rather candidates are imposed on them by the political parties and Governors of that state which leads to corruption and misplaced priority when it comes to developmental projects. Furthermore, communities that are supposed to actively take part in decisions that directly affect their lives are denied such privileges. Therefore by implication, the people are neither represented nor consulted on fundamental issues of paramount importance. This resulted in engaging on projects if any, that are not the priority of the rural teeming populace.

Thirdly, the level of corruption and mismanagement at the tier was the result of patron-client syndrome as a result of the activities of the political elites. More so, hijacking of the funds meant for the tier by state governors further strangulates the local governments. Another problematic area is the provisions of the constitution of Federal Republic of Nigeria. The sections that placed the local government at the mercy of the state houses of assembly, the roles of the State Independent Electoral Commission (SIEC) and the Joint State and Local Government Account are factors that are rendering the tier ineffective and not performing.

IX. CONCLUSION

Conclusively therefore, local government in Nigeria which is the tier that is strategically close to the rural populace is going through a difficult democratic trend since the country returned to the Democratic rule in 1999. A number of reforms were made to perfect the functioning of the tier from pre-independence period to date, all with the aim of empowering citizens' participation in governance and more so to give the people freedom to elect their representatives and fully participate in decision making on issues that are local in nature. However, with all these good intentions of the reforms notwithstanding, Nigeria's local government continues to suffer from incessant interference and lack of legal protection. These problems lead to local marginalization of the teeming population at the grass root from participating in governance and which characterized the tier with undemocratic tendencies and bad governance..

RECOMMENDATIONS

- i. There is need to put effective and efficient institutional mechanism such as EFCC and ICPC in all the local government areas across the country to enable them fight corruption at grassroots level
- ii. The practice of Joint Account system should be discontinued so that LGAs could have their statutory allocation directly from source to enable the councils partake in developmental projects .

iii. The State Independent Electoral Commission (SEIC) be scrapped and replaced with Independent National Electoral Commission. These will create free fair and acceptable elections in all elections in the local government areas rather than the current practice

iv. Leaders found to be corrupt must be penalized, and their properties be confiscated no matter how highly placed they were so as to serve as a deterrent to others.

v. Local councils must comply with the law which mandates regular sittings to approve expenditures and make by-laws in their area, and failure to comply should equally be penalized;

vi. All Political Parties must be forced to adhere strictly to the Internal Political Party democracy policies and guidelines at all levels. This is to create conducive atmosphere for all eligible contestants.

vii. Community associations and organizations operating at the local government levels should be encouraged in the participation of local government activities.

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