

DEMOCRACY AND PARTY POLITICS IN LANGTANG NORTH LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF PLATEAU STATE 1978-2008

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ABSTRACT

The conduct of free, fair and credible election is one of the features of democracy in the world. Unfortunately, this is not the case in Langtang North. It is against this backdrop that this study examines the causes and impacts of the manipulation of the electoral process in Langtang North local government area of Plateau State. It focuses on the local government chairmanship elections which has recorded the highest number of cases of electoral manipulation over the years. The research was carried out through a field work that involved interviews and telephone conversation with the electorate, politicians and other relevant stakeholders from Langtang North. Other scholarly works were used in a corroborative manner to throw more light on the focus of the study. The Marxist theory of democracy was utilized to unearth the principal role played by the political elite in perpetuating electoral manipulation before, during and after the local government chairmanship elections in Langtang North. From the data collected and analysed, we identified poverty, clannish sentiment, lack of voters' education among others as the factors responsible for the manipulation of the electoral process in Lantang North. And thus, we highlighted the impacts of electoral manipulation on democracy and party politics in Langtang North to include mistrust of the electoral commission, imposition of undesired leadership, disunity among others. Conclusively, recommendations were made towards ensuring the conduct of free, fair and credible elections so as to consolidate democracy in Langtang North and by extension Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

The history of Nigeria's democratization began at independence with the adoption of democratic institutions modeled on the British Westminster Parliamentary system.¹ From Independence onwards, Nigeria has been grappling with the task of entrenching the culture of democracy and good governance through the platform of political parties. Political parties provide the means of promoting accountability, collective action, popular participation, inclusiveness, legitimacy and accountability through the integrating of their competing principles, ideologies and goals for the eventual control of the government of the state.²

This paper examines the democratic practice in Nigeria and the Tarok participation in politics. The first phase of the democratic practice in Nigeria was not devoid of Tarok participation, as the likes of Ezekiel Yusufu and Solomon Lar among others were partisan politicians in the United Middle Belt Congress (U.M.B.C). In the 1950's, a group known as the Yergam Union mobilized voters in the Tarok area to support the UMBC. In 1959, Mr. Solomon Daushep Lar was elected into the Federal House of Representatives in Lagos under the platform of UMBC. However, after his election on the platform of the UMBC, Mr Solomon Daushep Lar cross-carpeted and joined the Northern Peoples' Congress (N.P.C), and by 1964, he was re-elected on the NPC ticket.³

With military intervention in 1966, all the democratic structure was halted. Meanwhile, the military remained in power for thirteen (13) years. It is worth noting that on the 21st September, 1978, the then military Head of State General Olusegun Obasanjo lifted the ban on partisan politics and thus gave room to the formation of political

¹. Linus Ugwu Odo, "Democracy and Good Governance in Nigeria: Challenges and Prospects," *Global Journal of Human-Social Science: F Political Science*, 15, issue 3 (2015): 1.

². Amana Philip. <http://www.rcmss.com>. (accessed April 11, 2016).

³. Nanzip Shagaya, *Tarok History* (Ibadan: Daybis Limited Jericho, 2005), 337-338.

parties.⁴ These political parties include among others Unity Party Of Nigeria (UPN), the Nigerian Peoples Party(NPP) and National Party of Nigeria(NPN). No doubt, Tarok participation in Nigeria politics was heightened in the Second Republic from 1979 to 1983. During this period the prominent figures among others were Solomon Lar and V.K Dangin. For the popularity gained by Solomon Lar, the Tarok of Langtang Local Government Council rallied round him under the platform of the NPP which earned him the governorship of the state.

When General Abdulsalami Abubakar succeeded General Abacha after his death on June 8th, 1998, he mid-wifed the transition to civilian and democratic rule. On May 29th, 1999, General Abdulsalami Abubakar handed over to a democratically elected president, Olusegun Obasanjo of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP). The emergence of democratic governance is seen as a landmark in the political development of Nigeria. This period which is popularly called the Fourth Republic (i.e 1999 till date) lasted longer than the previous republics and has witnessed unprecedented participation in politics by top politicians and retired military generals in Langtang North.

With the increased involvement of prominent Tarok politicians and retired generals in the Fourth Republic, it was hoped that the gains of democracy would be visible in Langtang North through the platform of political parties in terms of the processes that encompasses party politics. However, democracy seems to have become a mere slogan devoid of application in real life as the government of the people, by the people and for the people is now nothing short of government of the elite who are political gladiators using political parties to mortgage the present and the future of the people. It is against this background that this study examines local government chairmanship elections in Langtang North Local

⁴ .Plateau State; *Centenary History of Plateau State 1914-2012*(Publication of Plateau State Government,2012),267.

Government Area. In fact, the manner in which results of elections were manipulated and given to the losers as the winners form the basis of this study.

Historical Background to the Creation of Langtang North Local Government

Langtang North Local Government was formerly known as Langtang Local Government before the year 1991. The Local Government Area was initially referred to as Yergam and Resettlement Native Authority which came into being in 1961. At this point in time; it was answerable to Shendam Lowland Native Authority.⁵

It is on record that Tarokland had remained splited before 1961, namely: the Plain Yergam (Tarok) and the Hill Yergam (Tarok). While the Plain Yergam(Tarok) comprises Langtang (Kuffen), Bwarat and Pil-Gani with its sub-native headquarters in Langtang and on the other hand, the Hill Yergam(Tarok) which had Gazum(Zinni), Funyallang (Igyang) and Kwallak with its administrative seat at Gazum. Both blocks were then answerable to Shendam Lowland Native Authority.⁶

Subsequently, in the year 1966, with the fundamental change from civilian rule to military regime, the designation "Native Authority" was replaced with "Local Authority".⁷ The 1976 Local Reforms saw Langtang Local Government Council created alongside other thirteen Local Government Areas in Plateau State. The Local Government was therefore, essentially a merger of two geo-political entities of Plain and Hill Yergams (Taroks). With this development, five district were created namely; Langtang, Gazum, Bwarat, Pil-Gani and the Resettlement Areas.⁸ This development obviously helped in

⁵ Langtang Local Government: *Focus on Langtang Local Government Area of Plateau State*(A Publication of Langtang Local Government,1989),6.

⁶ Langtang Local Government : *Focus on Langtang*....6.

⁷ John Nanzip Shagaya, *Taroh History* (Ibadan: Daybis Limited Jericho,2005), 332.

⁸ Langtang Local Government: *Focus on Langtang*....6.

heightening political activities in Tarok land as more people became involved in partisan politics.

Langtang North Local Government Area was created on the 27th August 1991 out of the defunct Langtang Local Government Area by the then Military Administration of Gen. Ibrahim B. Babangida. It has Lantang town as its administrative headquarters.⁹ This period also witnessed the emergence of Langtang South as an autonomous Local Government Area. It is vital to stress that this gave the Tarok ethnic group two local government areas in which they predominantly occupy.

Democracy and Party Politics in the Second Republic in Langtang Local Government Area 1978-1983

Party politics during the Second Republic centered on personalities like Solomon Lar and Ezekiel Yusuf among others. This is because the Tarok people had so much trust and confidence in them considering their background as former Sudan United Mission (SUM) School teachers who had better understanding of the people at the local level and their antecedent as Politicians during the First Republic.

The Tarok people were united in their support for NPP because of Solomon Lar. In Langtang Local Government Area, it was more or less a one party affair, as other existing political parties were completely silenced by the popularity of NPP built around the personality of Solomon Lar.¹⁰ With the popularity gained by Solomon Lar, not only within Langtang Local Government Area, but other parts of Plateau State, he eventually won the governorship seat of the state as he defeated his main opponent Michael Audu Buba of the NPN.¹¹ Within Langtang Local Government Area, NPP was the only political party

⁹ Peter Yilkur Daji, "Tarok in Politics of the Middle Belt Region of Nigeria C1945 -1999" (M.A Dissertation, University Of Jos, August 2003), 8.

¹⁰ Senator V.K Dangin (aged 84) personal interview, Jos, 21 June, 2016.

¹¹ Plateau State, *centenary History*.... 268.

that was considered as worth supporting as the people overwhelming supported those who were the party flag bearers in elections against other candidates of other political parties, especially that of NPN. In 1979, William Joro was appointed the Chairman of Langtang Local Government. In Langtang Local Government Area, NPN was seen as the Hausa/Fulani political party that was out to project and to protect the interest of the Northern elites against the Middle - Belt region. As a result, NPN flag bearers were rejected by the people in Langtang Local Government Area through voting against them in elections.

Similarly, by the end of 1982, campaigns for the 1983 elections were on heightened as intense political activities were obvious in all parts of the country. In Plateau State and in Langtang Local Government Area in particular, the major contending political parties were the NPP and NPN.¹² Between July and August 1983, elections were held nationwide in a frenzied atmosphere, characterized by high-blown charges and counter-allegations by the participants, and the announcement of conflicting election results by sources both authorized and unauthorized. The political atmosphere in Plateau State was invariably tensed especially by an avowed plan of NPN to wrest control of the State from the NPP. In the 1983 Governorship election which took place in the State in September, 1983, Chief Solomon Lar defeated his main opponent Mr. John Jatau Kadiya of NPN in what was described by some people as a controversial poll. Solomon Lar scored 434,845 votes against John J. Kadiya's 432,546, a narrow margin of just 2,299 votes. Solomon Lar of NPP was alleged to have rigged the election with what was fondly referred to as "Doma Votes". On the other hand, the NPP also accused NPN of using the Federal Might to gain power in the State. Sensing the fear to be shortchanged by the NPN, Chief Lar hurriedly announced the result by declaring himself as the winner. On the first of October 1983, he was sworn in for the second term as the democratically elected

¹² Timothy Turfa (aged 70), personal interview, former Councillor for works in the Second Republic, Gazum, 24 May, 2016.

governor of Plateau State and he spent only three months in office before the Military overthrew the civilian government of Shehu Shagari.¹³

While elections at the Federal and State level were made possible, at the the local government level it was a different ball game as gains of the 1976 reform were speedily frittered away by the politicians of the Second Republic who, for partisan political purposes, refused to organize popular elections at the local level in flagrant violation of the 1979 constitution section 7(1).¹⁴ With the confusions that came to characterize the 1983 elections and the glaring evidence of corruption and Mal-administration, the Military intervened and took over from the Civilian administration.

The 1997 Local Government Chairmanship Election in Langtang North

Local Government Elections were held nationwide in Nigeria in 1997. The five registered political parties by NECON namely UNCP, CNC, NCPN, DPN and GDM participated in the election. In Plateau State and particularly in Langtang North, the two dominant political parties were the UNCP and CNC. The electioneering campaigns, elections and the outcomes of elections were less than decent, as UNCP which was regarded as Abacha's party was favoured in all the political processes. UNCP won the Chairmanship Elections in thirteen (13) out of the seventeen (17) Local Government areas in Plateau State, whereas CNC won in three(3) and DPN won in one (1) local government area.¹⁵ In Langtang North, the 1997 election was more or less a battle between UNCP and the CNC who had the backing of prominent personalities like Lt General Jeremiah Timbut Useni and Solomon Daushep Lar respectively. The local government elections, especially the chairmanship election was considered as the clash of

¹³ Plateau State, *Centenary History*..... 268-269.

¹⁴ O.O Oyelakin, " State-Local Government Relations under the Military,1985-1992," in *Federalism and Nation Building in Nigeria: Challenges of the 21st century*,ed. J.S Isawa Elaigwu, P.C Logams and H.S Galadima(Abuja: National Council On Intergovernmental Relations,1994),60.

¹⁵Plateau State, *Centenary History*..318.

the titans because of the quest by Lar and Useni to assert their dominance within Lantang North. The chairmanship candidates for the two dominant political parties in Langtang North were determined and subjected to the whims and caprices of Solomon Lar and Jeremiah Useni. Thus Ponfa Banda became the chairmanship candidate for the CNC while Joel Dadi was for the UNCP.¹⁶ The electioneering campaign was devoid of violence but there was a clear demonstration of might by UNCP which had the backing of the Federal government through the influence of Gen.Useni and other prominent military generals among others that hail from Langtang North. While on the other hand, CNC relied on Chief Solomon Lar and other politicians to gain relevance during the electioneering campaign. So the politics at this point in time was more or less a clash between the military generals and the politicians in Langtang North.

During the elections reported cases of electoral malpractices were minimal, though supporters of the two chairmanship candidates, Ponfa Banda of CNC and Joel Dadi of the UNCP were seen canvassing for votes at some of the polling units which of course is against the fundamentals of free and fair elections.

Outcome and issues of the 1997 Local Government Chairmanship Election in Langtang North

The outcome of the 1997 local government chairmanship election was tainted in controversy. This controversy is narrowed down to the event that led to the purported cancellation of the election results in a manner that clearly shows that the electoral process was hijacked by some of the elites who were in power. After voting had been completed the returning officer, Gabriel Zi, in the presence of political party agents began collating results at the local government headquarters of Langtang North. In the midst of the collation process, Zi received instruction to report to Jos. Because Zi had not

¹⁶ Amos Gullong, (Aged 58) Personal interview, Former Deputy Chairman of Lantang North Local Government Council, Zamko, 28 May, 2016.

yet announced the election results, he was accompanied by CNC and UNCP agents, the only two parties that contested the election. Upon reaching Jos, Zi was directed to Jos South local government headquarters, where he was permitted to finish tallying the votes which reveals a victory for Ponfa Banda of the CNC. The results were signed by Zi and counter-signed by the party agents. Zi also signed a declaration of the results, certifying that Banda of the CNC had received 15,884 votes, while Dadi of the UNCP received 15,845. The party agents received copies of the declaration.¹⁷

Although Zi intended to return to Langtang North to announce the results, as required by Decree No.7 of the 1997, he was summoned along side with the party agents to NECON headquarters in Jos, where the state administrative Secretary of NECON intimated them that there had been an "order from above" to cancel the results of Lantang North election. Later on, a radio broadcast was made claiming that the election had been cancelled "for security reasons" and that bye- election would be conducted.¹⁸

Therefore, a bye election was conducted on the 13th of April, 1997 but it was boycotted by the CNC. As a result, Joel Dadi of the UNCP prevailed by default to be the winner of the chairmanship election. Nevertheless, Banda employed the legal means to challenge the validity of the bye-election conducted on April 13, 1997 after the March 15, 1997 had produced him as the duly elected chairman of Langtang North Local Government Area. However, the Local Government Election Tribunal ruled against him and upheld the election of Joel Dadi of the UNCP.¹⁹

Banda filed an appeal with the Plateau state election tribunal headed by justice Owen Feidei who later reversed the decision of the lower tribunal on the grounds that the summaries of March 15 election

¹⁷ <http://www.nrw.org/reports/1997/nigeria/Nigeria-04.htm> (accessed 06/08/2016)

¹⁸ Amos Gullong, (Aged 58) Personal Interview, ...28 May, 2016.

¹⁹ <http://www.nrw.org/reports/1997/nigeria/Nigeria-04.htm> (accessed 06/08/2016)

results provided conclusive evidence of the CNC victory. Therefore, the tribunal ordered that Banda should be sworn in as the chairman of Langtang North Local Government Area.²⁰ This verdict was made on the eve of the sudden demise of General Sani Abacha. Consequently, Banda occupied the office as chairman of Langtang North for only three (3) days while most of his colleagues had been in office for one year.²¹

The controversy over the cancellation of the chairmanship election clearly shows that the process was hijacked by those in authority that have the state apparatus at their beck and call. Again, it means that when election results are not favourable to the elite, they can easily maneuver the process to suit their selfish interest at the detriment of the people's interest which in real sense is a mockery of a democratic setting.

The 2004 Local Government Chairmanship Election in Langtang North

The 2004 Local Government Election was held in most states of the Federation on the 27 March, 2004 to produce Councillors and Chairmen to run the affairs of the third-tier of government. Though the election was conducted in Plateau State, Jos North was not part of the exercise for security reasons. Before the elections were conducted, the then executive governor of Plateau State, Joshua Chibi Dariye had sworn in another set of Transition Interim Chairmen for the seventeen local government areas of the state on the 12th of March, 2004.²² That is barely two weeks to the local government elections. In Langtang North Local Government Area, the local government election was more or less the battle between the All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP) and Peoples Democratic Party (PDP). This was so because of the domineering influence of Jeremiah T. Useni a prominent member of the ANPP and Solomon D. Lar who

²⁰ <http://www.nrw.org/reports/1997/nigeria/Nigeria-04.htm> (accessed 06/08/2016)

²¹ Plateau State, *Centenary History*....318

²² *The Nigeria Standard*, March 19, 2004, 899, no, 7, 1.

was the first National Chairman of the PDP. Their influence was visible before and during the local government elections in Langtang North.

Both the All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP) and Alliance for Democrats (AD) conducted primary elections that produced Kumjwan Binbol and Paul Rimdans respectively as Chairmanship candidates, while the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) had no chairmanship primary election, but rather Amos Kumtul was handpicked by the party bigwigs or elite.²³ Amos Kumtul had served as the Transition Interim chairman of Langtang North from 2003 to 2004 shortly before the election in 2004. The electioneering period was peaceful devoid of any major violent conflict among supporters of the three political parties that participated in the local government elections. Nevertheless, according to Nanzhi Roga, voters were given all manner of gifts, especially money to sell their votes during election.²⁴

Outcome and Issues of the 2004 Local Government Chairmanship Election in Langtang North

The local government elections conducted by Plateau State Independent Electoral Commission on the 27 of March, 2004²⁵ was not devoid of irregularities. Particularly, in Langtang North where there were instances of vote buying to favour the chairmanship candidates of the two dominant parties at the time. PDP which was the party in power then had a better opportunity financially to undo the financial strength of the other political parties, especially the main opposition party the ANPP. With this financial advantage, PDP was able to leverage on the voters to garner votes to ensure victory for her chairmanship candidate Mr. Amos Kumtul. Therefore, PLASIEC declared the PDP candidate Amos Kumtul as the winner of

²³ Amos Gullong, (Aged 58) Personal Interview, ...28 May, 2016.

²⁴ Nanzhi Rogin (Aged 48), personal interview, former supervisory councilor of Langtang North Local Government Council, Mban, 27 May, 2016.

²⁵ The Nigeria Standard, Friday, April 2, 2004, 901, no. 2, 2.

the chairmanship election having scored the highest number of votes.

Nevertheless, Mr Kumjwan of the ANPP filed a petition at the electoral tribunal to challenge the declaration of Amos Kumtul of the PDP as the elected chairman. However, the tribunal ruled against him for lack of sufficient evidence to show that the electoral process was manipulated and therefore, the tribunal upheld the election of Mr Kumtul of the PDP candidate as the duly elected chairman of Langtang North Local Government Area.

The 2008 Local Government Chairmanship Election in Langtang North

The local government election was postponed twice before it was finally conducted. It was first scheduled for February 16, 2008 but was postponed on the ground that PLASIEC was yet to recruit adequate manpower and other logistics reasons.²⁶ Therefore another local government election was held on the 15th of March, 2008, but the results of the election were cancelled due to alleged irregularities.

According to the then governor of Plateau State, Jonah David Jang, the :

elections were cancelled because they were marred by large scale and operational lapses which undermined the credibility of the results. The lapses were a product of the activities of some self-styled protectors of partisan interests who allowed themselves to be mis-guided into interfering with logistical arrangements. A situation whereby elections in

²⁶ The Nigeria Standard, Monday, February 11, 2008, 11, no, 16, 1

wards and polling units started at about sun-set coupled with the presence of near total absence of electric power supply in the rural areas had dreadful implications and credibility in the results of the elections.²⁷

It can be deduced from Jang's statement that the integrity of PLASIEC'S Personnel and adhoc staff is questionable. It is more or less an indictment on the integrity of the commission .Again, the lack of preparedness of PLASIEC is clearly expressed by the lateness of the commencement of the elections. Consequently, The PLASIEC chairman alongside members of the commission were dissolved and a new chairman and other members were inaugurated to conduct another local government election which eventually took place on November 27, 2008 with its obvious lapses that were not in anyway different from the earlier botched March 15 elections.

The events that preceded the local government elections in Langtang North defied the tenets of democracy right from the primaries. This was the process that led to the emergence of Nandom Pyennap as the flag bearer of PDP in the chairmanship election of 2008. The process that led to the emergence of Nandom Pyennap as the PDP flag bearer for the chairmanship election was more of an imposition rather than election.²⁸ The contest for who becomes the PDP chairmanship aspirant was between Ramnap Zingven and Nandom Pyennap. This process led to the emergence of Zingven Ramnap as the winner of the primary election. Ramnap was therefore given a certificate of return by the electoral committee. However, the then governor of Plateau State, Jonah Jang later ordered that Nandom Pyennap should be given a certificate of return instead of recognizing Ramnap as the winner of the chairmanship primary

²⁷ The Nigeria Standard, Wednesday March 19,2008,11,no.22,1 and 2.

²⁸ Nanla Zwalde(Aged 43) personal interview,civil servant, Gazum, May 3,2016.

election. Thus Pyennap was issued with a certificate of return and recognized as the chairmanship flag bearer of the PDP.²⁹

Although Ramnap filed a petition in court to challenge the recognition of Pyennap as the chairmanship flag bearer and obtained favourable judgement that recognized him as the PDP chairmanship flag bearer, but this was not to be as some political elites with the support of the then governor of Plateau State, Jang who were in control of the party's apparatus in the state refused to obey the court ruling. This created a rift among the supervisory councilors who were PDP loyalists and other PDP supporters within Langtang North Local Government Area. Within the Council, majority of the supervisory councilors supported Ramnap who they regarded as the legitimate winner of the primary election.³⁰

From the foregoing as regards the PDP Chairmanship primary election, it is incumbent to assert that the process went well, but the outcome of the election was later hijacked by the bigwigs of the party by imposing Pyennap as the Chairmanship candidate instead of the legitimate winner of the election. This clearly shows that outcomes of elections are most often the sole reserved of the elite. Similarly, Mr. Seltim Wuyep, APC branch chairman, stated that if you do not have the support of the elite, most often, it becomes very difficult for you to win an election. He also noted that once you do not have money, then it means you cannot contest and win an election because money is one of the key determinant of a favourable outcome of an election.³¹

The contest during the 2008 local government election was narrowed now to the two dominant political parties in Langtang North, namely the Peoples Democratic Party(PDP) with Nandom Pyennap as its

²⁹ Mambin Dandam,(Aged 48)Telephone interview, former supervisory councilor of Langtang North Local Government Council,17 August,2016.

³⁰ Nanzhi Rogin(Aged 48),personal interview,former supervisory councilor of Langtang North Local Government Council,Mban,27 May ,2016

³¹ Seltim wuyep(Aged 38), personal interview,Branch Chairman APC,Zamko ward, Zamko, 27 May,2016.

candidate for the chairmanship election and the Democratic Peoples Party (DPP) which had Brian B.Dadi as her chairmanship candidate. There were reported cases of late arrival of electoral materials in some wards during the elections, and voters waited for hours at the polling units before the arrival of the electoral officers. Even when voting had started, some voters were seen collecting money in exchange for their votes at the polling units.³² Generally, the 2008 local government chairmanship election in Langtang North was viewed with mixed feeling because of the overbearing influence of the state governor right from the PDP Chairmanship primary election. As a result, people were skeptical of the credibility of the outcome of the election. Many concluded even before the conduct of the election that the election results would be manipulated to favour the PDP which was the party in power. This conclusion was drawn based on the manner in which the governor vehemently imposed his anointed candidate in spite of the court ruling against it.

The Outcome and Issues of the 2008 Local Government Chairmanship Election in Langtang North

After voting and collation of results had been concluded, PLASIEC declared Nandom Pyennap as the winner of the chairmanship poll in a controversial manner and issued him a certificate of return as the duly elected chairman of Langtang North Local Government Area.³³ It is pertinent to note that most of the votes collated from the wards clearly showed that Brian Dadi of the DPP was leading. The declaration of Pyennap of the PDP as the winner of the chairmanship election by PLASIEC ensued legal battle at the election tribunal. Consequently, Brain Dadi of the DPP challenged the declaration of Nandom Pyennap of the PDP as the winner of the November 27, 2008 local government chairmanship election of Langtang North. The local government election tribunal chairman, Magistrate Ishaku

³² Selzing Zakka, (Aged 43) Personal Interview, Former Councillor Langtang North Local Government Council, Langtang, 25 May, 2016.

³³ Zemfa Singdir (Aged 38) personal interview, PDP Secretary, Zamko Ward, Zamko, 27 May, 2016.

Kunda in his ruling nullified the election of Pyennap of the PDP as the duly elected chairman and declared Brian Dadi of the DPP as the duly elected chairman of Langtang North. This was based on the recounting of the votes ordered by the tribunal which indicated that Dadi of the DPP polled 15,807 votes as against Pyennap of the PDP who polled 15,499 votes.³⁴

Therefore, Mr Pyennap filed an appeal against this judgement of the lower tribunal. His appeal was heard, but not found meritorious as Justice Yargata Nimpar, the Chairman of Plateau State Election Petition Tribunal upheld the decision of the lower tribunal and ordered the Plateau State Independent Electoral Commission to issue Mr Brian Dadi of the DPP with a certificate of return and equally directed that the appropriate authority should swear him in as the duly elected chairman of Langtang North.³⁵ Dadi of the DPP was later sworn in as the duly elected Chairman in December 2009 a year after he was elected.

It can be deduced from the foregoing that PLASIEC compromised by declaring Pyennap who had the lowest score as the winner of the election. Also, it shows to an extent that the state government interfered with the electoral process, particularly as regards the outcome of the chairmanship election in Langtang North, where Pyennap the PDP candidate was declared the winner of the election and was hurriedly sworn in by the state government even when Dadi the candidate of the DPP polled the highest number of votes. This act of manipulation of the electoral process by those in power and the elite spell doom for the conduct of a free and fair election, and particularly endangers the survival of democracy as the government by the people. This in a long run will lead to voters' apathy as the credibility of elections is in doubt in most cases.

³⁴ www.allafrica.com/stories/200909240287.html (accessed 19 August,2016).

³⁵ www.dailytrust.com.ng/index.php/news/3025-lamido-tasks-mdgs-on-teacher-training?device=iphone (accessed 19 August,2016).

Factors That Promote Electoral Manipulations in Langtang North

The conduct of a free, fair and credible election has become a herculean task in Langtang North. This is particularly true as regards most of the local government chairmanship elections held so far in the local government. However, this does not mean that the conduct of a free, fair election is not possible within the local government. From records, the outcomes of the local government chairmanship elections have been marred by different degree of irregularities which often ends with the verdict of the election appeal tribunal in ascertaining the duly elected chairman. It is against this background that this study focus on some identified causes of electoral manipulation in Langtang North.

Financial inducement is one of the major causes of electoral manipulation. Most voters interviewed note that vote buying before and during election is common in Langtang North. Nanfe Lachang, a voter from Zamko Ward asserted that money was used to buy voters during elections. She noted further that candidates who do not have sufficient money are silenced through buying of votes.³⁶ Similarly, Rogin Nanzhi, stated that delegates are normally bought with money to vote for a candidate and party agents help in manipulating election results in favour of a candidate who has given them money.³⁷ Again, Selzing Wuyep, branch chairman of PDP Zamko Ward, also emphasized on the use of money during elections. He stated that money is the bane of politics in Langtang North. He further noted that voters are influenced through the use of money, and that they are bought with as low as two hundred naira (200 Naira). Additionally, Selbyen Nandap, a voter from Langtang North noted that women were given gifts such as magi, salt, money in order to vote for a candidate.³⁸ Although some of these voters collect

³⁶ Nanfe Lachang,(Aged 40) Personal interview, former PDP women leader, Zamko Ward,Zamko, May 27,2016.

³⁷ Nanzhi Rogin(Aged 48),personal interview, former supervisory councilor for Agriculture in 2008,Mban,27 May ,2016

³⁸ . Selbyen Nandap (Aged 55) Telephone interview, August 31, 2016.

money and other form of inducement, but at the end of the day, the cast their votes for their most preferred candidate. This to an extent shows how political conscious some of the people are within Langtang North, as the demonstrate that their vote is not for sell. This malady also manifests itself even among those recruited to serve as officials during elections. Some of them accepted money to alter results of election. A report had it that while electorate are given money to sell their votes , party agents on the other hand join forces with opponents of the popular candidates to rig after collecting money.³⁹

It is obvious that poverty constrained the electorates to an extent that they are forced to vote against their wishes, which actually deny them of their right to free choices. Also, the electoral officials and party agents are forced to compromise their stand because of their economic disadvantaged position. In short, all this is directly linked to poverty as a causative factor. Therefore, election results favour the highest bidder as all candidates are not immune from using money to induce voters to vote for them. The incumbency factor is yet another reason. According to Salahu Muhammed Lawal, the ruling party in the Fourth Republic since 2003 has been using the incumbency factor to extend her domineering position in the electoral system.⁴⁰ This is made possible through the use of state resources and machineries to create chances for the electoral victory of candidates in the ruling party. This is evident in Langtang North as the PDP which is the ruling party in the state had on some occasion denied the opposition parties electoral victory even when they clearly won the election. For instance, Daniel Dul of the DPP won the local government chairmanship election in 2014, but was denied the opportunity to occupy the office by sheer manipulation by the PDP which was then the ruling party in the state. This clearly

³⁹ Emmanuel Yaya Gata, *Politics and Electoral Malpractices in Nigeria: Perspective from Christian Education*(Ibadan: Boga press,2013),43.

⁴⁰ Salahu Mohammed Lawal, "An Appraisal of Corruption in Nigeria Electoral System." *European Scientific Journal*,11,no.25(2015),267.

shows how the electoral process is manipulated by the incumbent government to favour their political party, knowing fully well that the more chairmanship seats they possess within the state the better chances for the party to retain power in the state and the entire country. Through this also, subsequent victory in elections to an extent becomes easier. Lack of voters' education is a factor worthy of mention. Most of the voters or electorates that were easily brainwashed during election in Langtang North were not politically aware of their right to vote and the consequences of some of their actions. It is this problem that made Bassey James Ejue and Samuel Asuquo Ekanam to point out that most Nigerians voters lack the requisite knowledge to freely and independently vote for a credible leader. They further states that most Nigerians vote on the basis of party and ethnicity and some do not know what constitute electoral offences.⁴¹ This describes the very picture of what is obtainable in Langtang North and what has been seen so far in the conduct of the local government chairmanship elections and other elections as well. Supporters and equally voters chant the slogans of their political parties at the polling units which of course is against the provisions of the electoral act.

Clannish sentiment is also a contributory factor to electoral malpractices or manipulations in Langtang North. This is arguably one of the reasons that have become a potent force against the conduct of free, fair and credible elections. The controversy surrounding the Jat Ward election results is directly linked to clannish factor. The chairmanship election result from Jat Ward was clearly inflated to favour Nanmwa Kumzhi, who is from the Jat clan as against the other candidate Daniel Dul who is from the Kumbwang clan. This practice is not only detrimental to the consolidation of democracy, but also to the unity of the people in Langtang North. In short,

⁴¹ Bassey James Ejue and Samuel Asuquo Ekanam, "Voters Rights and Credible Election in Nigeria: The Imperative of Rethinking the Content of Citizenship Education". *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*,1,no.19(December 2011),290.

there is a link between free and fair election and stability that encourages economic and social development.

Corruption is another vital factor. Corruption is more or less a household name in Nigeria. It is one of the main factors that promote rigging of election and is popularly called "Nigerian factor".⁴² It is responsible for the unethical conduct normally experience before, during and after election. Olademeji as cited by Emmanuel Yaye Gata pointed out that the so called Nigerian factor such as corruption, greed, favouritism, bribery that manifest in electoral fraud and malpractices is making it impossible to have free and fair elections in Nigeria.⁴³ This implies that corruption is a potent force limiting the conduct of free and fair elections. Unless corruption is checked free, fair and credible elections will remain a mirage. Instances abound in Langtang North where electoral malpractices are directly linked to corruption. In short, electoral manipulation itself is an act of corruption. Virtually all the noticeable methods of electoral manipulations are succinctly linked to the fact that corruption is in place and it dominates the entire process. It thrives with impunity.

Impact of the Manipulation of Electoral Process in Langtang North

One of the impacts of the manipulation of election is fact that it has erased peoples' confidence in the electoral commission. Today, many people in Langtang North no longer have confidence in PLASIEC. This is because of their experiences during the local government chairmanship elections conducted thus far. Many people interviewed noted that the electoral commission is not truly independent. Bongfa Sunday Luka a voter during the last local government election stated that Daniel Dul of the DPP won the chairmanship election but was

⁴² Emmanuel Yaya Gata, *Politics and Electoral Malpractices in Nigeria: Perspective from Christian Education*(Ibadan: Boga press,2013),43.

⁴³ Gata, *Politics and Electoral Malpractices in Nigeria*....42.

denied the victory by the State governor.⁴⁴ Another voter, Selzing Wuyep noted that PLASIEC manipulated the electoral process in favour of Nandom Pyennap of the PDP during the 2008 chairmanship election by rejecting the votes from Warok ward because of some baseless reasons. As a result of this, Pyennap was issued with a certificate of return and sworn in by the state governor instead of the Brian Dadi. It was the electoral tribunal that later restored Dadi as the duly elected Chairman.⁴⁵ The import of this is that the people no longer consider PLASIEC as a neutral umpire in the conduct of elections but a partisan commission that is employed to further the interest of the party in power by either act of commission or omission.

The perennial lack of free and fair election is linked to the issue of development. This is why Gata noted that electoral malpractices have serious implications on the development of a nation.⁴⁶ This also explains why the expected dividend of democracy is still an illusion in Langtang North and Nigeria as a whole. The abysmal development on ground is attributed to the fact that those who rigged themselves into power by the aid of their acclaimed Godfathers and some political baron end up spending more money on them rather than impacting positively on the lives of the people. To buttress this are the views of indigenes of Langtang North interviewed, who decried the lack of tangible development in Langtang North, especially in the Fourth Republic. Amos Gullong, stated that Mikang and Kanke Local Government Areas that were created not too long ago have had a decent level of development than Langtang North.⁴⁷ Similarly, Nanla Zwalde noted that Langtang North is backward in both physical and human development and that the elected officials, especially, Chairmen have not performed well.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ Bongfa Sunday Luka ,(Aged 38),personal interview, Jos, May 21,2016.

⁴⁵ Selzing Zakka(Aged 43) Personal Interview...,25 May,2016.

⁴⁶ Gata, *Politics and Electoral Malpractices in Nigeria*..54.

⁴⁷ Amos Gullong(Aged 59),personal interview,former Deputy Chairman of Langtang North, Local Government, Zamko,28 May,2016.

⁴⁸ Nanla Zwalde, (Aged 43) , personal interview,Gazum,May 23,2016.

Furthermore, the imposition of undesired leadership on the electorates is one of the obvious effects of a government that rigged her way into power. Political leaders who are not elected via popular mandate, but installed by the manipulation of the electoral process⁴⁹ tend to suffer from lack of recognition by the people. This describes how the people in Langtang North regarded the administration of Nandom Pyennap and that of Nanmwa Kumzhi.

The instability of tenure of local government chairmen is another impact worth noting. This has resulted to what can be succinctly called "chairmen of uncertainty". For instance while other local government council in Plateau State had only two elected chairmen from 2009 to 2015, Langtang North had four because of the manipulation of the electoral process. This uncertainty has greatly distracted the focus of the chairmen on project planning and executions that would have benefited the people.

CONCLUSION

This paper sets out to explore democracy and party politics in the light of manipulation of the electoral process. The focus of this study has established the extent of the impact of electoral manipulation on democracy and party politics in Langtang North which is a clear extrapolation of what is obtainable in all states of the federation in Nigeria. To say that electoral manipulation is a threat to democracy is to categorically state the obvious. This observation is solely based on the evidential impacts of electoral malpractices on the entrenchment and consolidation of democracy in Langtang North and Nigeria in general.

The quest for political dominance by the political elite either directly or indirectly has continued unabated through their antics to subvert the conduct of free, fair, and credible elections in Langtang North. The political elite used political platform and aspirant to

⁴⁹ Gata , *Politics and Electoral Malpractices in Nigeria..51.*

further their political self-centered interest. It is deducible from this study that the political elite have perfected the act of election rigging by capitalizing on the vulnerability of the electorates and the electoral officials. This has impaired one of the fundamental elements of democracy which is free and fair election. Consequently, this has led to the mounting disillusionment and discontentment with the electoral process. In fact, more than ever before, people are increasingly being alienated from the freedom to choose or elect their representatives in government. There is therefore a rapid decline in legitimacy and relevance of political leadership that rigged itself into power.

The high number of petitions after the Chairmanship elections in Langtang North is quite significant in explaining how political conscious the people are within the local government. Again the elite who are on the two divides are also instrumental in this regard. They always want to ensure that their candidates are not shortchanged and by extension to preserve their political influence. The Electoral Tribunal provides the platform for them to explore in order to reclaim a stolen mandate. It was also noted that the elite took advantage of some of the vulnerable electorate some of whom are not politically aware of their right and are oblivious of the consequences of their actions in subverting the electoral process. It is therefore expedient to note that unless concerted efforts are geared towards providing meaningful voters' education, if not the problem of electoral manipulation might continue unabatedly.

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