

## AN ASSESSMENT OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATION AND SUSTAINABLE RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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***Abstract:** Local government is a vehicle to drive social service delivery for people in the grassroots; some obstacles undermined these services despite various reforms from military and civilian regimes in Nigeria. The paper will articulate some issues to address the responsive needs of the people in rural areas irrespective of the fat revenue accrued to local government from the federation account. The politics of do-or-die affair, undue interference from state and federal levels, constitutional provisions and unqualified personnel has decline the primary function of local government to the grass root. The paper x-rays some factors derailing socio-economic development to people in the rural areas with special reference to peasants who are at the receiving end of underdevelopment. The Nigerian political arrangement negates the essence of federalism which is decentralization but local level became highly centralized. The gross fiscal practice skewed was in favour of central government couple with unaccountability among political class thwart meaningful development efforts in the grass root. Local governments have refused to perform their constitutional roles, let alone address the social needs of people in the rural area due to emasculation by other tiers of government. An integrated rural development approach is de-factoring in ameliorating the responsive needs of rural populace. Also, the autonomy of local governments will help strengthen fiscal and political reforms to enhance sense of belonging and good governance to Nigerian grass root.*

**Keywords:** Local Government, Rural Areas, Revenue Allocation, Decentralization, Politics

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### INTRODUCTION

The complementary nature of local government administration is to reach rural dwellers, political organization and socio-economic development. Constitutionally, Local government is the lens through which higher levels of government view people in the grassroots; it is a barometer to enhance social service delivery to rural communities (Barry and Goldman, 2000). Consequently, grassroots administration is employed as to describe the location of this governmental arrangement. It is obvious that effective development of people must be adequately mobilized. The local energies with

government effort improve the socio-economic conditions and encourage political participation of rural dwellers. The idea of local government was born out on the need to bring government closer to the people in rural area and a mechanism to engender good governance in rural area. The reasons for establishing local government is to bring good governance to rural areas so that local people can participate fully in the process of governance, for local services and speed the pace of socio-political development (Ogunna, 1996). Section 7 of 1999 Constitution guaranteed a system of local government on democratic principle, and stipulates that the function of local government council is to participate in developing their area (Abbas and Ahmad, 2012). It is pertinent to note that local government is a training ground for political participation, though the constitution amplifies the relevance of local level as level of governance with viable fiscal powers to sustain the needs of the rural areas. The philosophy of local level makes people in the rural area to participate in choosing their representatives on democratic principle. Awasthi and Sanjay (2002) assert that an ideal local government means good governance achieved through decentralized local governance, some local government that has relative autonomy perform creditably in social service delivery. Omotola (2009) assert that the reason for endless local government in Nigeria is under-performance at the local level. In Nigeria, the 1976 local government reforms was a turning point in the affairs of local government through uniformity, multi-purpose and single tier structure, fiscal autonomy, elected representatives, constitutional recognition (Agagu, 2004). The expression of energies to mobilize rural communities is concretize in tangible projects such as roads, clinics, schools, potable water and other communal initiatives to benefit the people. However, the score-card of local government in Nigeria has not portended flying colours in rural development (Ogundiya, 2007). However, rural development cannot be ignored at the local government level if the yearnings and aspirations of people in the grass root must be attained in Nigeria.

## **PROBLEM STATEMENT**

Many scholars assert that local government has not yielded much desired development at the grass root level in Nigeria, the service delivery continued to dwindle and remains epileptic in nature despite huge financial allocations from the federation account. The governors have the mentality of winning second term election at all cost (Oladunjoye and Agboola, 2004, Omodia, 2009). The political affiliations in local government council election create apathy and instability in the system, the competition now becomes "do or die affair" selection rather than election, the candidate apparently captures the position by hook or crook (Benjamin, 1998, Ajayi, 2000). Some state governors have gone to the extent of withholding democratic elections in local governments in their states indefinitely to enable them husband local government allocation from the federation accounts. These challenges are impossible to attain consolidated democracy that will in turn, facilitate development (Kolawale, 2003). The unbridled diversion of local government fund by state governors make the council inefficient (Okonmah, 2003, Olamilekan, 2006). The state governors fund local government and collect a chunk of the allocation meant for the development of rural areas. Local government is directed to

pay huge sum of money to state governments' coffers without any official papers acknowledging the receipt of such money (Otabor, 2010). Most state governors without due consultations cut the local government monthly allocations and give whatever is left to the councils for their operations. In some cases the federal government agencies located in the local governments premises are directed to collect funds from their host councils for their up-keep to conduct state and national programmes. This is evident in the general elections; census exercise and host of others that are partly sponsored by the local government councils. The situation worries the former national chairman of People's Democratic Party (PDP) Chief Audu Ogbah threatened those governors with the penchant for deducting council funds, despite this threat; the situation is worrisome (Ola, 2004 Vanguard Newspaper). This was attributed to what most people tagged as total loyalty (Ogundiya, 2007, Ali, 2008). As long as state governors get away with their loots from the local government, the struggle for control of state funds would not stop.

Some elected official have no plans to account for their stewardship; this has breed corruption and unaccountability in local level system. Many local government accounts are shrouded in secrecy, and some governors are not comfortable the way monthly revenue allocation is published in national dailies. This monthly publication of revenue accruing to local governments enable the citizens to know the amount of money allocated to their council from the federation accounts; and the deductions by the state government level from source (Guardian Newspaper, December 3, 2009). The Chairman Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) described local government as "bastion of corruption" because most criminal cases pending in the court involved local government council chairmen and their officials. The constitutional tussle and power conflict between federal and state government over "who controls what and how" in the affairs of local government often results to poor service delivery. The revenues accrue to local government council in Nigeria were deducted at source and in some occasions withheld by the state government through Joint Allocation Committee (Okafor, 2010, Chukwu, 2010). The state joint local government account reflects what happens in the grass root across Nigeria. This unwholesome state of affairs has left the local government on a beggarly situation and made social service delivery to the people at the grassroots a herculean task (Mbuba, 2014, Jakpa 2004).

Local politicians put their children, wards, cronies and party members even when their services are not needed in the council even when their services are not needed (Ogunrin and Erhijiakpor, 2009).. These constitute waste of funds and increase the financial burden of the local government (Omotola, 2009).The problem of over-assigned functions in the local government, in 1999 revenue mobilization, allocation and fiscal commission (RMAFC) recommends 5% from the federation account to fund primary schools in Nigeria (Danjuma, 1994, Alapiki, 2000). The national primary education commission (NPEC) established to manage primary schools was dissolved but "Decree 3 of 1991" assigned management of primary schools to local government. This virtually affects their operations since not much balance was left after deducting teachers' salaries. It is believed

that all the allocations including teachers' salaries get to the local government purse (Omotola, 2009, Asaju, 2010). The net allocation is the actual amount of money that gets to the local government councils but the total allocation appears on pages of newspapers as amount received (The Punch, 23 September 1999). All these tend to undermine grass root development to rural dwellers.

## CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

### Local Government

The concept of local government depends on the political arrangement of a nation (unitary or federal system). Adeyeye (2000) defines local government in a unitary state as "non-sovereign community possesses the legal right which serves as administrative agents of the central government" Local government is the government at the grassroots level meant to serve the peculiar needs of the people (Agagu, 2004, Olowu, 1988). Local government is the third tier of government created to decentralize governance closer to people in the grassroots and render social services to engender good governance (Agba and Chukwurah, 2013). Local government is in the vintage position to articulate and facilitate the needs of the rural development through the application of the needed human resources for the purpose of efficient and effective service in the localities (Adeokun, 2003, Ugwu, 2000). In Nigeria, local government is constitutionally mandated to provide services to the people, ensure participation of the citizenry in government (Izueke and Nzekwe, 2012). The council controls a range of fund to perform the assigned functions with statutory allocations from the federation accounts, local taxes, grants and returns on investments. Lawal (2000), states that local government is the tier of government closest to the people and is vested with certain powers to exercise control over the affairs of people in its domain. Local government plays the role of promoting democratic ideals of a society and coordinate development programme at the local level for socio economic development in the locality. The idea of creating local government makes people at the grassroots to play part in promoting democratic ideals and coordinate development programme at the local level. Olowu (1988) views local government as a political sub-division of a nation-state constituted by law to impose tax for prescribed purpose of socio-economic development in the locality.

The Guideline (1976) Reforms, assert that local government is exercised at the grass root level through representative councils established by law to exercise specific powers within defined area. These powers should give the councils substantial control over local affairs as well as the staff, institutional and financial powers to initiate and direct the provision of services to determine and implement projects so as to complement the activities of the state and federal government in their areas to ensure, active participation of the people and their traditional institutions, that local initiatives and response to local needs are maximized. Adeyemo (2005) describe local government as the bedrock for national politics in line with the objectives of the system. Sharma and Sadana (2008) defined local government as a statutory authority in a specified local area, and power to raise revenue through taxes to perform local services like sanitation, education, water supply amongst

others. However, the authority of the local government is constituted by elected representatives of the local people, with sufficient control to perform its services adequately. Ezeani (2003) asserts that local government is a veritable tool for people within and outside government circles to transform rural areas, and promote rural development. Obi (2009:304), asserts that local government is the third tier of government set up to meet the needs and aspirations of the rural dwellers. Olisa (1990) see local government as a unit of government below the central, regional or state government, established to exercise political authority through a representative council within a defined area. In a nutshell, local government is seen as a government which operates at the lowest level of the society, within areas established by law. It is equally a level of government closer to the rural dwellers, which major function is to satisfy the needs and aspirations of the people. Local government level allows the local inhabitants to be associated with the government's function, and accountable to the people. Mill (1921) cited in Ajayi (2000), states that local government is one of the institutions that provide political education, a plank by which grassroots politics can be promoted, a vehicle for political training and leadership qualities fostered in young politicians at the local level. Fajobi (2000) states that local government is a political authority under the states that decentralize political power and delegate authority; this decongests the burden of central and state level to provide services that are local in nature. Awa (2006:96) state that local government is exercise through representative councils 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 to determine and implement projects so as 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 maximized (Awa, 2006). Local government is a political division of a nation in a federal or state system which is constituted by law and has substantial control of local affairs including the power to impose taxes to exact labour for prescribed purposes (Ezeani, 2003, Ugwu, 2000).

According to UN (1959), local government is a political sub-division constituted by law that has substantial control over local affairs including the power to impose taxes; usually the government is elected or appointed in some cases. Bello-Iman (1996) states that local government is the political decentralization within Nigeria that has the power base of decision-makers in the grass-root, the structure of local government in the context of federal system serve as insubordinate unit of state and federal level. Ikelegbe (2005) state that local government is "a segment of constituent state or region of a nation state" established by law to provide public services and regulate public affairs within its area of jurisdiction, for the interest of rural people by local representatives. According to Federal Republic of Nigeria Constitution (1999), local government is government at the local level which is exercised through representative council enacted by law to exercise specific powers within defined areas. This gives local council substantial powers over local affairs as well as the staff, institutional and financial powers to initiate the provision of social

services and implement project to complement the activities of the state and federal government through devolution of functions to their councils, and active participation of people to the local needs (FRN, 1999). Local government is a small unit of governance for convenient administration through elected or appointed representatives to exercise powers conferred on them within a defined area (Awotokun, 2004).

### Rural Development

Maboguje (1980:30) assert that rural development is the improvement of rural living standards to low income people living in the rural area for self sustenance through transforming the socio-spatial structures of their productive activities. It is a broad based reorganization and mobilization of the rural masses and resources to enhance the capacity of the rural populace to cope effectively with the daily tasks of their lives and with the following changes. The three important features in the definition are:

- a. Improving the living standards of the subsistence population through mobilization and allocation of resources to achieve desirable balance between the welfare and productive services available to the rural populace.
- b. Mass participation aimed at achieving allocative rationality and equitable distributive efficiency.
- c. Making the process self-sustaining: skills acquisition and development; capacity building; and availability of functional institutions at local, state and federal levels to facilitate optimal use of available resources and the development of the rural areas. Self-sustenance implies grassroots participation in development programmes is geared to transform their lives.

Uma Lele (1975) posits that the realization of above objectives hinges on the interaction of the under listed crucial variables:

1. National policies like land tenure systems; commodity pricing and marketing systems; wages and interest rate structure.
2. Administrative systems impinging on devolution in governmental structures.
3. Scope for institutional pluralism: devolution in distributing development responsibility among government structures; semi-autonomous governmental institutions, traditional institutions and elective bodies.

Rural development involves the improvement and transformation of social, mental, economic, institutional and environmental conditions of low income rural dwellers through mobilization and rational utilization of their human, natural and institutional resources to enhance their capacities to cope with the daily tasks of life and the demands of contemporary times (Okoli and Onah, 2002). Similarly, it encompass multi-sectoral advancement in agriculture, promote rural industrial activities and establish appropriate decentralized structures that fosters mass participation in the development process. It is observable that government policies geared toward rural development in Nigeria have always been to the advantage of few individuals in the privileged class. The administrative system around the implementation of rural development programmes is not functional

to the interest of rural dwellers that programmes ought to capture. Okoli (1988) asserts further that "all these institutions which are intended to function in the interest of the rural people, invariably promote the interest of a few individuals who control and manipulate them".

### **Evolution of Local Government Reforms in Nigeria**

The foundation of local government in Nigeria is anchored on the 1976 local government reforms, this create autonomy that gave local government power to control their jurisdiction as granted by the central level especially in functions assigned them in the constitution. Local government has been dated back to pre-colonial and post colonial period, when powerful empires and kingdoms existed in Nigeria, these empires and kingdoms have bulk of administrative activities at these levels of administration (Okoli, 2000). The advent of British brought a change from traditional to colonial government based on indirect rule. Local administration was under the traditional rulers to take charge of traditional institutions that led to native authority ordinance promulgated in 1910. This indirect rule system recognized traditional rulers were sole authority that maintains law and order. In south-west, the existing traditional institutions did not recognize traditional rulers as absolute rulers, in the south east, there was non-existing traditional institutions; In the north, indirect rule system was accepted due to existing traditional system that regard emir as sole authority (Imuetinyan, 2002). The federal system of 1950 marked another stage of local government administration in Nigeria with three regions, where each region decides to adopt its own system, the regional system of local government administration collapse in the first republic. The military intervention of 1996 brought a radical change to accommodate the hierarchy of military structure and redress the abuse in the system (Gboyega, 2001). The regions and their successor states takes over the control of local government policy-making and carry out reforms that are appropriate to their circumstances with mixed results. The 1976 reform is a turning point in the development of local government administration in Nigeria, Ugwu (2001) states that the reform is a watershed in the evolution of local government administration in Nigeria; the reform makes way for national local government system. Orewa and Adewumi (1983) states that the major thrust of the reform entrust beneficial political responsibility to people for effective service delivery, but other reforms restrict scope but the reform follow due consultations at the federating units.

The reform conceptualize local government as the third tier of government operating in a common institutional framework with defined functions and responsibilities, local government was funded from the federation account and has control over its spending, and provisions for a democratically elected officers were entrenched in the 1979 constitution of the second republic. Gboyega (2001) observes that the second republic was turbulent in the history of local government administration; it was a time when state and federal level went in agog to contest the control of local government with each other. The state abuse some provisions of 1979 constitution to suit their desires, they void aspects of 1976 reforms. The 1979 to 1983 did not experience local government council

election; sole administrators were appointed (Iyoha, 1997). The re-emergence of military to political arena in 1984–1998 brought a change in local government from state to federal level, in 1985–1993, Babangida regime enhance local government autonomy, abolish ministry of local government, establish executive and legislative arms in local councils and disburse allocation direct with increase of 15% to 20% in 1992. Igbuzor, (2003), states that the reform transform the status of local government by transferring powers to local councils more than state government, Abacha regime of 1993–1996 revised some reforms by Babangida administration. The democratic government of May 29, 1999 reincarnates the problem of local level administration; the provisions of sec. 7 and 8 recognize local government as the third tier of government and gave state power to lord over local level (FRN, 1999). The local government election was held on 5<sup>th</sup> December, 1998 by Abdulsalam Abubakar administration assume office six months after May, 29, 1999. Decree No. 36 of 1998 provides three years term, but Association of Local Government of Nigeria (ALGON) proceed to Supreme Court to pray four years term in collaboration with national assembly, the apex court ruled that national assembly does not have power to alter the tenure of local government officers. On May 2002, the three years term was put to a halt by state governors, they now appoint care-taker chairmen in 774 councils pending the date of election. The election was postponed twice due to power tussle between state independent electoral commission (SIEC) and independent national electoral commission. The election was postponed to 21<sup>st</sup> June, 2003 few days after general election, on 17<sup>th</sup> June, 2003 the Association of local government of Nigeria (ALGON) push to amend the constitution to empower state governors appoint council chairmen and councilors, when Nigeria governors forum (NGF) met with Mr. President at the council of state they set up a technical committee to review local government structure in Nigeria (Obasanjo, 2003). The committee submits its report in 2006, local government election was held in 2007. Many states like Kogi, Lagos, Niger, Enugu, and Oyo among others that created new council areas in line with the provisions of the 1999 constitution, and federal government refused to recognize them. Nwabueze cited in Ugwu (2003) observed that the power to establish local government structure, composition and functions is state government affair.

### **Features of Local Government towards Sustainable Rural Development**

Oviasuyi (2010) states that each unit of local government possess territory, population, an institutional structure for legislative, executive and administrative purpose, legal identity with powers and functions authorized by the appropriate central or intermediate legislature, within the ambit of such autonomy. The characteristics of local governments in Nigeria are as follows:

- Localness implies that local government is the third tier of government at the grassroots level. Consequently, local government is subordinate but not subservient to the federal or state level (Ezeani, 2003).
- It has a legal existence enshrined in the constitution in Nigeria. This protects it from arbitrary actions of higher authority. As a legal entity, it can sue or be sued

and has a perpetual succession. This implies that local government does not expire with the end of each administration (United Nations, 1961).

- Local government enjoys substantial autonomy subject to state and federal control in certain areas; they enjoy independence in administrative and financial affairs, estimates or budgets, and execute certain projects (Ozor, 2003).
- Local level exists within a defined territory.
- Local government exercises its authority over a given population. In other words, as a corporate entity, local government is created to serve citizens resident in a known location (Blair, 1977, Onah, 1995).
- It exercises certain specific powers and performs certain functions as enshrined in the constitution or statuses as is the case in Nigeria.
- Local government is composed of elected representatives of the people.
- Local government is partitioned into departments or units to facilitate the accomplishment of its goals, objectives and functions (Ezeani, 2003).

**Table 1: The Characteristics of Local Government as Summarized by**

De Tocqueville	Whalen	Mawhood
Localness	Given territory and Population	Representative of locality.
Participation	Institutional Structure for legislative and administrative purposes	Authority to allocate substantial resources
Relative Independence	Autonomy, Subject to the Limitations of common law and test of reasonableness.	Authority to administer a range of Functions
Authority to influence community affairs to raise resources	Separate legal entity	Separate legal existence

*Sources: Olowu, D. (1988:13)*

### **Local Government and Challenges of Sustainable Rural Development in Nigeria**

The question remains why has local council failed to live up to expectations?

#### **Autonomy**

Despite the constitutional provisions for local government system beginning with the 1979 constitution and subsequent ones that defined functions and sources of funding of the council, local governments have not been able to extricate themselves from the apron string of state and federal levels of government in Nigeria (FRN, 1999). The high level of interference in local level operations undermines their autonomy. This brings the problem of diverting local government funds for personal use by state governors (Osaghae, 2006, Agu, 2000). Governor Chime accepts "the autonomy of local government councils as provided for in the 1999 constitution, but because some governors are greed, they cannot

give free hand to council chairmen to operate with their funds independently (Lion News Watch, 2013 Vol. 10).

### **Funding**

The financial paucity in the local government system could be blamed on what Suberu (2004) view as cost of distributive federalism in a federal system dominated by redistribution of centrally collected revenue. The situation is compounded by the failure of local government administrators to explore and exploit some other internal sources of revenue generation. Most local governments in Nigeria are contented with monthly federal allocation from the federation account; this has become a distributive outlet for federal and state generated revenue (Oladoyin, 2004, Yomi, 2013). The 1976 local government reform reveals that local government has produced exactly the opposite of their original objectives. Instead of bringing socio-economic development closer to the people, they succeed in producing absentee chairmen seen at the council headquarters each time "Abuja allocation" arrives with standby jeeps and mobile police escorts after super-intending over the sharing of the national cake among relevant stakeholders they vamoosed (Obasanjo, 2003). Most governors exploited the constitutional provision to establish state and local government joint account to control council funds; they hijacked the nomination and subsequent election in the local level for their acolytes as council chairmen. The aspirants that emerges victorious after rigorous processes pay allegiance and political tithes or dues to the state governor, by accepting whatever deductions made from the state and local government level joint account. For instance President Obasanjo, in a meeting with 774 local government council chairmen acknowledged diversion of local government revenue by some state governors (Aborisade, 1994, Oloyede, 2003). He argued that the proposed technical committee will look into the matter through local and state government joint account; some states arbitrarily deduct from local government account and forced them to embark on ridiculous projects that are not in congruence with the needs of the people under the pretext of uniform development (Radio Nigeria, 2004).

### **Inadequate Skilled Manpower**

Most local government workers exhibit poor attitude to work such as absenteeism, indiscipline, laziness, non commitment and lateness to work (Ogunrin and Erhijakpor, 2009). This may be linked to poor remuneration, lack of equity and stagnation on the job; this compels workers to seek extra income from private firm (Maquabum, 1990). Local government councils have not succeeded in retaining skilled personnel in the system. Many local governments in Nigeria have redundant workers who receive huge salaries and wages. This ugly development has weakened local government financially in pursuit of their tenets (Aborisade, 1994). The local government officials, ranging from chairman to messengers is found wanting in their place of work. This is virtually why all the 774 local government council in Nigeria are desert of under-developed (Oni, 1999).

### **Corruption and Abuse of Office**

This is perpetrated by both career taker officials and political office-holders in the system. These categories of local government council administrators are bent on inflating contracts, outright embezzlement, kickback and non-execution of contracts (Oladunjoye, 2010, Onwuemenyi, 2008). The inability of local government councils to provide quality governance to the people is linked to corruption virus among these officials. Most state governors explore this undue advantage to divert part of the statutory allocation to frivolous projects, robbing local government level the capacity to live up to expectation (National Issue, Vol. 12, Vanguard Newspaper, 2011, May 11). In 2000, the former Chairman of Enugu North Municipal Council, Hon Ben Onyia and his counterpart from Enugu South Local council, Hon Sunday Anyanwu, were suspended by Governor Nnamani administration for insubordination and corruption in office (Ugoani, 2009, Source Magazine).

### **Leadership Problem**

The democratic experience in the first twelve years in Nigerian local government produced either no election at all or pseudo election, for obvious reason some governors appoint transition committee chairmen to administer local government council when rigging is impossible due to formidable opposition parties. Most states organized their election if the state independent electoral commission (SIEC) is strong to rig the elections (Aiyede, 2005, Ushie, 2005, Abdulhameed, 2013). In 2004, the local government election during Governor Nnamani administration and Enugu state independent electoral commission (ENSIEC) in 17 local governments of Enugu state gave People's Democratic Party (PDP) clear victory in all the chairmanship and councillorship positions against opposition parties (ENSIEC Bulletin, 2004). The operations have come under severe criticisms with some persons calling for the scrapping of the third tier government. The 2003 re-election of President Obasanjo threatened the aspiration of council chairmen, councilors and patrons who were worried that the third tier of government was about to be scrapped. The flag bearers of various political parties at huge financial costs were at alert. When Mr. President postpone the council election indefinitely in 2003 pending the reform of local government (Obasanjo, 2003, Live Radio Broadcast) thus:

*What we witness is abysmal failure at the local government level. It is on record that no time in the history of the country has there been the current level of funding accruing to local governments from the federation account, yet the hope for rapid development has been a mirage as successive councils grossly underperformed in almost all the areas of their mandate.*

### **Undue Interference**

The external intrusion in the affairs of local government needs re-evaluation and this subverts democratic process and good governance at the grassroots (Ogbe, 2013). The reluctance of most state governors to enthrone democratic rule in their local councils portends a lot of dangers for the polity and undermines good governance. The delayed

elections denied stakeholders the much desired political participation and thus, the people do not have control over their leaders. Whereas, people should be able to call their elected representatives in order and hold them accountable, but because elections do not hold, their representatives' responsiveness is always the governor, rather than people. The governors' nominees neither enjoy the goodwill of the people at the grass root nor possess the constitutional mandate to question any strange directive in the administration of the local level (Asogwa, 2010). The council chairmen are hand-picked by the governors, with the assurance that they cannot to be removed or dropped. This hampers development at the grassroots and the dividends of democracy expected on the long run. The arbitrary power to run the local government council by state governors enables them to deduct local government funds at will. Because the council 'caretakers exist at the mercy of the governors, then it gives undue support to state executives to do and undo which is strange to good governance and democratic consolidation. The administration in the local government as extension of the state is alien to the federal structure that Nigeria proclaims. In a true federal structure, all tiers of government should be autonomous. Local governments have the right to operate as an independent, and equally partner in the governance process. The present arrangement negates the United Nations (1996) position that local governments can effectively address local interests and exercises a check on illegal operations at the higher level of authority. A true democratic local government council should be able to exercise powers in decision making, revenue generation and financial autonomous, staff matters and administrative responsibilities.

All these undermined good governance since 1999 in most local government councils in Nigeria because state governors encroach in local government affairs (Ikeanyibe, 2009). For instance, Governor Sullivan Chime condemns total interference on local government funds by some state governors in the affairs of local governments; it is unconstitutional for states to interfere on the funds meant for local government. The suspension of elected local government officials and outright refusal to conduct local government elections without cogent reasons is unconstitutional (Chime, 2013, Lion News Watch, No. 10). The illegal dissolution of elected officers by state governors without proper investigations on spurious allegations is not conducive for the future of local level in Nigeria (Odoh, 2004). The independent financial power in the affairs of local government incapacitate them functionally on one hand, and alienate good governance expected from the grassroots on the other hand (Eme and Onyishi, 2012).

## TECHNIQUES OF INVESTIGATION AND FINDINGS

**Table 1: Functions of Local Government to the Grass Root**

	Response	No	%
1	An instrument for efficient service delivery.	37	23.12%
2	To Implement the objectives of national government	32	20%
3	An agent of national government	47	29.3%
4	Machinery for mass mobilization	44	28%
	Total	160	100%

Source: 1976 local government guide line

The table analyze that local government is an agent of national and state government; these should be enforced through strict compliance with fiscal relations for effective social service delivery and active participation to feel the impact of national government closer to the people as enshrined in the constitution.

**Table 2 The Landmark of 1976 Local Government Reforms**

S/N	Response	No	Percentage
5	Representative Democracy	53	33.1%
6	Defined territory	42	26.2%
7	Relative autonomy	30	18.7%
8	Structured uniformity	35	22%
	Total	160	100%

Source: 1976 Local Government Guideline

The table analyzes representative democracy as the landmark of 1976 local government reform because this gives grass root the right to choose people through election from their localities through participatory democracy for efficient service delivery.

**Table 3: Local Government Serves as a Vehicle for Grass Root Development**

S/N	Response	No	%
9	Strongly Agree	75	46.88%
10	Agree	50	31.24%
11	Undecided	20	12.5%
12	Strongly Disagree	15	9.38%
	Total	160	100%

Source: 1976 Local Government Guideline

There is a strong indication that local government is a training ground for political participation and socio-economic development in the grassroots', citizens will be stake on who governs them through credible election for equity and fairness. The electorates in turn get their cake from government through its representative who has their mandate at ward level with strict compliance on two way process of representative and grassroots.

**Table 4: Local Government and the provisions of 1999 Constitution**

Response	No	Percentage %
Disagree	55	34.38%
Strongly Agree	43	26.87%
Agree	47	29.38%
Undecided	15	9.37%
Total	160	100%

Source: 1999 Local Government Law.

The provisions of the 1999 constitution has not impact positively to rural dwellers, state governors and legislatures determine the composition, structure and finances at their whims and caprices this has disenfranchise rural dwellers. Local government in 1999 constitution sky conflict between state and local government with the attention of national government in fiscal conflict, the two parties settled at court of adjudication. The beneficiaries appraise 1999 constitution as a welcome development on the ground that local level is extension of state government. The beneficiaries see it as a way to privatize power based on party affiliations, blood relations, friends, school mates. Unaccountability without probity becomes the other of the day; the constitution empowers state government to manage local government as their private firm. This has clip the wings of rural migrants to have little say in choosing their representatives at the local level unless you pair with state governors that is when are absorbed in grass root power.

## CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Local government is an agent of national government to promote socio economic development for people in the rural area, and efforts of the people must be mobilized. The combine efforts of people and government are a leap way to improve the living standard and encourage political participation in rural areas. Rural development strategy is designed to improve the economic and social well being of the rural people. The land mark rural development involves self-help; attend to felt needs; integrate citizens in development; mobilize human and material resources to facilitate social services. Local government remains the opium to enhance the life of rural dwellers in Nigeria.

- The independence of the local level will enhance its ancillary roles in the constitution.
- Local governments should strive to raise revenue to enable her improve quality living to the grassroots and reduce rural-urban drift.
- Local governments should be people-centred such that necessary partnership with communities in its domain will facilitate rural development.
- There is need for realistic political reforms to decongest federal level and whittle down the exclusive list in favour of local governments. Also, the disconnection between the representatives at the local level and the masses, credible elections will enhance elected officials to deliver people-oriented programmes that will aid rural development.

- Local governments should engage the services of agricultural extension officers in teaching and dispersing modern farming methods to farmers. This will inculcate the adaptive methods of farming with improved for food sufficiency and reliance.

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