

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT THE THIRD TIER OF GOVERNMENT IN
NIGERIA: IMPACTS AND CONTRIBUTION TO PROMOTING
DEMOCRACY AT THE GRASS ROOT FOR SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT**

Samuel Olabode DADA

Department of Social Science Education,
Bamidele Olumilua University of Education, Science and Technology, Ikere-Ekiti, Nigeria,
Email: dada.olabode@bouesti.edu.ng

Abstract

The study was designed to assess the Local Government and its impacts, contributions to promoting Democracy at the grass root level in Nigeria. The study looked into the various definitions of local government and the conceptual review was done. It was revealed that there was no definite universal definition of local government that will be acceptable by all scholars. The historical development of local government and its creation by successful governments in Nigeria were observed. The colonialist employed local government as mere instrument of politics of exploitation. The local government reform of 1976 carried out by the Military government brought in a uniform local government administration that was enshrined in the Nigerian constitution. Today we have 774 Local Governments Areas in the country, with some Local Council Development Areas (LCDAs) that were created for political reasons. Democratic Participatory School of Thought Theory underpinned the study. Local Government and its participatory activities in government has been seeing in fielding officials both at the ward levels and at the local government levels. The role of Local Government in promoting democracy at the grass root cannot be overemphasize. A lot of its functions include: The Nigerian local government has constituted an effective instrument for initiating, promoting and executing rural development policies, projects and programmes. It has also been involved in broader issue of nation building sustainability. The strength of these obvious facts in embracing grass root democracy can be seen or viewed from the dynamic nature of the international community; coupled with the principle of inter-dependent nature of the various units in the global world system.

Keywords: Constitution, Government, Democracy, Human resources, Administration, Development and Sustainability

Introduction

Local government an entity but a subordinate government. It's found at the grass root level set up by the central government and charged with the responsibilities of dealing with government matters at the local level. (Adeyemo, 2005). Most people interact, relates and depends on the local government more than the central government. The in Nigeria, the struggle for local democracy has remain an age long battle. In particular, from 1914 local government came to be mere instrument of Colonial politics of exploitation. Until perhaps about 1951 when many systems existed across the region there are various reforms to make the localists a people – oriented

administration. Local government is not like nation-state. It is not a sovereign decision makers are the local people they know and if they are not satisfied with any move by the local officials they can easily find solutions to such issues in short time and distance.

In the study of Local government and democracy, series of arguments as regards whether local government promotes democracy or the concepts are antithetical to each other as widely been argued upon by notable scholars. In an attempt to justify either of these schools of thought, this paper will focus on first, the introduction. Secondly, the concept of local government, thirdly, the theoretical frame work and fourthly, Local government and political participation and fifthly, the role of local government as an agent of democracy in Nigeria.

The concept of Local Government.

Before the 1976 local government reform, there was no uniform system of local government administration in Nigeria. But the reform of that particular year established democratic and uniform system of local government administration in in Nigeria.

Local government was a creation of law in Nigeria. Section 7(1) of the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria of 1999 as amended guaranteed the existence of Local Government. This provision allows the creation of 774 local Government which cut across all the six geo - political zones of the federation. In other to expand the focus of this third tier of government and to bring development closer to the grass root, some states embarks on the creation of Local Council Development Areas. Although these LCDAs are not known to the constitution of the federal republic of Nigeria. Many of it, if not all of the LCDAs were created for political reasons by politicians. (Dada 2021)

The term "local government" has been defined in a variety of ways. Finding a theory and description of local governance that everyone can agree on is very challenging, if not impossible (Oviasuyi, 2010). Local government is a legally formed political subdivision of a country (or state in a federal system) with extensive authority over local affairs, such as the ability to levy taxes or employ people for specific tasks, as stated in Ola and Tonwe (2003) by the United Nations (UN) office for Public Administration. Electoral or other means of choosing a governing body can be employed.

Because of its proximity to the people and its significant influence, local government is an essential component of grassroots organising. The goal of establishing local governments as subordinate political authorities within a nation or state is to devolve or de-concentrate political power, as stated by Aina (1981). According to Emezi (1984), local government is a form of community administration that aims to keep the peace, provide a limited set of social services, and engage the residents in working together to improve their living conditions.

The local government has not been able to effectively and responsive to meet developmental challenges due to administrative, financial and structural constraints which have held the system by the jugular. These noticeable shortcomings have manifested largely under democratic dispensations i.e. 1979-1983, 1999 till date. The resources accruable to the Local Government from the federation account are not only tempting but considered too juicy to be ignored by states government, hence, hiding under section 7(1) & (6) of the 1999 Constitution to rob the local

government of the benefits of adequate funding. The Joint Account Allocation Committee (JAAC) is one of the major avenues through which state government preside over local government funds. Accordingly, the local government system has been struggling to meet the yearnings and aspirations of the people at the grass root due to paucity of funds and improper planning.

It is expected that if the democratic notion of decentralization and the application of federation at the State or local level implicit third tier of government is to be meaningful a minimum level of local autonomy must be in operation in theory and practice. The important view is the fact that the base of any local government lies the principles of representation and democracy.

The fact remains that democracy involves the decentralisation of power from the centre to the periphery in any society. The decentralisation of power to the grass root is precisely very much important to the third world countries in which Nigeria is inclusive. Whose mass of the people live at the grass root of society. Invariably, as an instrument of development. Local government is founded upon the premise that small unit of government stimulate popular participation in developmental activities.

Theoretical frame work

Local government theories postulate that people's cultural norms and the characteristics of their physical surroundings dictate the form of governance that best meets their developmental requirements (Ola & Tonwe, 2003). Because of this, there hasn't been a single, all-encompassing theory or description of local government administration (Wickwar 1970)

Democratic Participatory School of Thought

According to proponents of democratic participatory education, the primary function of local governments is to foster democracy and encourage citizen engagement in political processes. Among these is the reality that involvement at the federal, state, and regional levels begins at the municipal level (Tony, 2011). As cited in chukwuemeka et al. (2014), "The concept of local government involves philosophical commitments to democratic participation in the politics and governing process at the grass root level," which is corroborated by Ani et al. (2013), lend credence to it. According to Ezeani (2012), "Local government exists to provide services and it must be judged by its success in providing services up to a standard measure by the national inspectorate." Mackenzie and shape (1954) have questioned this approach. This is related to what Shape (1970) said: "as long as the local or grass root people get efficient services from the local government, things can go on fine even with the absence of democratic participation in the governance process."

Local Government and Political Participation

Local government has always been considered as important agent for enhancing democratic and developmental structures at the grass root. Robert Dahl (1974) states that different levels of government are most competent to address various task. But concludes that democracy is more likely at the most local level. At the local level citizens can tell, even in the absence of the media coverage. Whether administration is competent or they are not.

Also, people who argue that being involved in local politics is beneficial usually assume that LGAs are physically located in the same locations as the communities to which their members have

strong emotional ties. They will develop a sense of ownership over local matters through this attachment.

Since 1979, the establishment of democratic local government system has been constitutionally guarantee and through this, local government has undoubtedly provided genuine opportunity for people to participate in the management of their affairs. It has also served as an effective training ground for breeding political leaders both at state and federal levels. Studies carried out as regards 1987 and 1988 local government elections points to the fact that councillors who contested the said election were only interested in running for state and national political offices. (Johnson 1994) Moreover, the primary importance of local government towards democracy at the local level cannot be overemphasised. In fact, the role of local government in grass root politics towards the success of the transition to civil rule of 1999 cannot be ruled out.

Role of Local Government in Promoting Democracy at the Grass root

Local government in Nigeria have no doubt undergone series of extensive reforms since famous 1976 reform. In particular, the 1988 local government reform embarked upon by Babangida administration carried out a number of innovations which have given strength and hope to local government system of administration in Nigeria. This laudable fact has made this level of government one of the most enduring legacies of Military administration in Nigeria. Essentially, it is largely a credit to the Military that local government system has experienced a radical change and transformation from being an ordinary agent of State administration to an important autonomous third tier entity with properly defined roles, functions and responsibilities as well as assured source of funds. All these attributes of local government have helped a lot in promoting democracy at the local level.

Local government under the Federal Presidential system in Nigeria has accelerated the country's democratic culture's growth and fostered an environment where citizens can actively participate in politics at all levels. It is important to recognise the vital role of local government institutions in promoting grassroots representative democracy, particularly in light of the transition to civil rule agenda. In order to achieve these aims, it is clear that local government institutions are crucial to the establishment of local government at the community level.

The incessant and demanded reformation and improvement in the status of local institution as corroborated by recent developments are indications of the relevance of local government institutions to grass root representative democracy and development.

With the feasibility of the elections held at the local government levels in the past two decades (one on non-party and others on party basis during the military era of Abacha and Abubakar administrations and the present civilian rule) more prospects are likely to be achieved in the area of grass root democratization, with the influence of local government system of administration during the transition to civil rule.

Most scholars and practitioners (Akindele 1992, Oyelekin 1995, Olugbade 1992) observed that the local government plays a crucial role in the transition to democratic government in the post – authoritarian system as currently being experienced in Nigeria.

Decentralization is closely linked to democratic government/ governance through its impact on grass root participation. Thus, the establishment of restoration of viable autonomous subnational government seems essential for a democratizing political system. Autonomous local government are particularly important for enhancing the link between popular participation, legitimacy and democratic governance. In fact, it is our conviction that local government exists to bring about grass root democracy and to serve as the requisite base for political participation and political education. This function has greatly been performed by all the local government in Nigeria. Before and since the commencement of the transition programme with renewed vigour, even though such practices have remained at an adhoc basis in view of the irregularities and instability in Nigeria Military rule.

Also, local government in Nigeria has precisely moved from the parochial confines of the traditional elite to that of mass concern. Meanwhile, it is generally agreed upon that local government is the primary government in view of its decision which directly touch the lives of the masses more than those of any other level of government. With the changing structure of local government administration, the philosophy has equally changed.

Initially, before the 1976 local government reform, local government in Nigeria had no common law, right being used to delegate functions only which was at the whim and caprices of the power that be. Thereby constituting more agent of the federal government. But this process has changed as a result of the 1976 reform. This system of administration has gained its constitutional recognition as the third tier of government, as a partner to both State and Federal government in governance. All these constitutional changes have helped the local government to act positively in grass root democracy in Nigeria.

Local governments in Nigeria are now getting the credit they deserve for serving their communities and empowering citizens via democratic self-governance. The catalyst to maintain national development can, in fact, be set up at the level of local government. Clearly the most accessible tier of government.

The local government in Nigeria has been actively involved in the larger subject of nation building and has been an efficient tool for launching, promoting, and carrying out plans and policies aimed at rural development. Based on the principle of interdependence among the many units in the global world system and the ever-changing nature of the international community, it is clear that these facts support the adoption of grassroots democracy.

Based on this, Nigeria has no alternative to democratic process which is the current trend all over the world. It is against this background that one can rightly predict the genuine birth, nurture and growth of grass root democracy in the country, through the development of local community politics.

Local government in Nigeria since 1976, when it was accorded its due recognition as the third tier of government has embarked on the process of promoting democracy at the grass root. With the advent of local government at the local level people had the opportunity of electing their representatives to the local council. More so, local government through its constitutional role has made it a duty to improve the level of awareness on the need for people to decide for themselves

what will pay them politically. People in the rural areas now feel the sense of belonging and through this, they are able to contribute their own little quota towards the process of governance.

As part of the efforts been made by the local government to promote democracy at the grass root level, government had embarked on the grass root, a lot of programmes that tends to educate the rural inhabitants politically. All these are attempts to improve their level of political socialization and participation.

Local government in conjunction with other enlightened organization such as National Orientation Agency (NOA) consistently embark on seminar sand workshop on political matters. The seminars and workshops are to educate the rural inhabitants politically and intimate them with the policy been initiated by the government and to let the rural people know and aware of the stages of transitional programme been put in place by the government. These seminars and workshop are meant to improve their level of awareness and be less ignorance on the need to participate in government.

Furthermore, local government often embark on public campaigns from one area to another on the need to educate people politically. Most times, this campaigns takes place in public places such as markets, schools etc. In improving the level of awareness of local inhabitants, the local government often intensifies campaign processes through regular advertisement on newspapers, magazines, Television and Radio set. This often takes place most especially when the election is at hand as the need of the people to come enmass and exercise their constitutional rights. Empirical studies show that lees than ten (10) people have an access to one radio set while few has the opportunity of listening to news from television or reading newspaper. So, because of this message locally passed across the rural people by the local government rural inhabitants are better informed.

With the creation of local government at the grass root, the channel of communication between the central government and the local people in the grass root has improved tremendously. The phenomenon has made it possible for the rural inhabitants to feel the impact of the central government and for the central government on the other hand to know the feelings of the rural people as regards the programme and policies being initiated for the socio-political development of the country. The factor is a positive attribute to the development of democracy at the local level. With the establishment of the office of Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), National Population Commission (NPC), National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS) and the enlightenment agency like National Orientation Agency (NOA) at the local government level is good testimony. On the part of the Federal government to promote democracy indirectly through the local government council. The fact is that the establishment of local government has made it possible for democracy to be practicable at the grassroots.

The closeness of the people at the grass root to the local government has made most local politician to confine themselves only to their local environment in an attempt to develop their areas socially, economically and politically. To all these, local politicians, the means to do this is to actively participate in the formulation of policies and partake in the process of governance at the grass root.

Conclusion

Local government serves as an agent of democracy at the grass root level. Looking at the various ways by which the existence of local government has improved the life of the people at the grass root and its involvement in the process of political participation and socialization. Its involvement in the running of government is a major land mark in National Political Development. The closeness of the local government to the rural people has to a very great extent develop the rural inhabitants democratically and this will surely go a long way to make democracy strive very well at the grass root. To sum up, local governments can't just sit on their hands and hope for social change and overall economic growth; they need everyone's help to get development off the ground with the right conditions, energy, enthusiasm, and, most importantly, initiative. Within the framework of national policy, local authorities create chances for citizens to have a say in matters pertaining to their own communities.

References

- Aborisade, O.R (1995). Local Government in Nigeria and the United States Learning from Comparison: Local Government Publication Series. Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife.
- Adeyemo D.O. (2010) Local Government in Nigeria: A Historical Perspective. Journal of Local Government Studies. 80
- Aina G.O. (2015) Unequal Political Participation Worldwide: Toronto Public Library: <https://www.torontopubliclibrary.ca>
- Ani et al. (2013) Local Government Finance and Performance in Nigeria. International Journal of Public Administration. <https://journals.rcms.com>
- Akindele S.T. (1992) The Transition to Civil Rule Programme and the Role of Local Government in Enhancing Grass Root Representative Democracy in Proceeding of Annual Conference of the Nigeria Political Science Association held at the Nigerian Institute of International Affairs
- Ayoade I.A.A (1995) The Development of Democratic Local Government of Nigeria in Aborisade and Murdi. Local Government in Nigeria and the United States. Learning from Comparison: Local Government Publication Series. Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife.
- Bello Imam, I.B. (1998). Challenges of Grass Root Democracy in Nigeria: A case study of 1987/88 Local Government Election: Report of individual Project NISER. Ibadan.
- Bello Imam I.B. (1996). Local Government in Nigeria Evolving a Third Tier of Government in Nigeria. Published by Heineman Education Books Nigeria.
- Benjamin S.A. (1995). Grassroots Democracy in Nigeria: Constraint and Prospects. NISER. Monography Series No.3
- Chukwuemeka E. (2014). Nigeria Local Government: A Discourse on the Theoretical Imperatives in a government system. African Research Review Journal 8.2

Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999

Dada S.O. (2021). Power Politics and Government. Ado-Ekiti. Omobala Printing Press

Emezi C. (1984). The State of Local Government and Service Delivery in Nigeria.
<https://apsdpr.org>

Ezeani E.O. (2012). Delivery the Goods. Nsukka. University of Nigeria, Nsukka.

Johnson. S. (1994) Elites and Grassroot Democracy in Nigeria. A Paper presented at the Conference organised by the faculty of Social Sciences, OAU, Ile-Ife

Ola & Tonwe (2003). Theories of Local Government and their relevance to Nigeria Experience.
<https://wwwresearchgate.net>

Ugwu I. (1993). Contemporary Issues in Local Government and Democracy in Nigeria: Aceria Publishers, Enugu.