

## ELECTION RIGGING AND GOVERNANCE IN NIGERIA: AN APPRAISAL

Moshood Babatunde Abdul-Wasi  
Department of Political Science  
Lagos State University  
Ojo, Lagos

### Abstract

Election rigging has become a cankerworm in Nigerian polity, a proverbial disease that has defied all palliative means, in the direct democratic system in Greek City State Pericles declared "that in Athens one man was equal to one vote" which is the ideal of any democratic setting. But Alas! In Nigeria, the reverse seems the case – a vote could be equal to ten counts and multiple of it, our country, is a country where individual vote does not counts, what however counts is the whims and caprices of political juggernauts the political kingpins who use the resources to arrogate and appropriate power to themselves at all cost, without a recourse to the people's interest, this, Unequivocally has dented our nascent democracy and thus prevented the country from having quality leadership, culminated to lack of development in both human and material resources. This paper unearths the causative of election rigging in Nigeria while also periscoping its historicity and its damaging effects on the polity. It however, locate this malaise as the unrefined inclination to leadership and concludes by suggesting possible solutions to the problem in view.

### Introduction

Perhaps one of the major issues confronting the present democratic government in Nigeria is how to promote the substance and content of democracy and not just its infrastructure or form. As Ihonvbere (1998) once noted, the tragedy of Africa's experience of the third world is that democratization lies in the fact of its "non-transition to democracy". This assertion is premised on the cosmetic nature of the democratic enterprise in many parts of Africa. It may be uncharitable to dismiss Nigeria's current democratic experiment as a "non-transition", but certainty it is not yet democratic.

The challenge facing the current civilian dispensation is how to put in place a democracy that is profoundly transformative in the sense of changing the perception of the ruling class about power, and the follower about credible followership, changing the character of the Nigerian state, the disposition of government to the people and the disposition of the political elites who constitute themselves into the leadership of various political parties to true democracy seems an herculean task.

Ake (1996) in his graphical analysis of the problems of democracy in Africa in general has this to say:

*What is being foisted on Africa is a version of liberal democracy reduced to the crude simplicity of multiparty elections. This type of democracy is not in the least emancipatory, especially in*

*African conditions, because it offers the people rights they cannot exercise, voting that never amount to choosing, freedom which is patiently spurious, and political equality which disguises highly unequal power relations.*

The above statement aptly captured the dilemma Nigeria faces in sustaining democratic governance in contemporary Nigeria, our democracy must be enriched in such a way that people must be able to make a choice through the art of voting devoid of rigging or manipulation. It is regrettable that previous and recent events in the political scene, especially with respect to the 2007 election give cause for concern. Many governorship position have been upturned where elections have been slated for many others, and non of the levels of government could be spared from this show of shame. The recent killings resulting from local government election in Oyo, Benue among others is a resultant effect of election rigging, even Lagos State where the prominent political parties shun the election, there were still reported cases of election manipulation by the ruling party in areas like Ikorodu, Ibeju-Lekki, Epe and the likes where D.P.A presented candidates for the election, yet, we have not learnt from our past experience.

It seems that in contemporary Nigeria, the political class still sees politics as a business and a do-or-die affair. As Gavin Williams once observed: "...the ethics of business penetrated politics, the ethics of politics penetrated business, the ethics of the gangster penetrated both". The various groups in the political arena see it as an empire to be jealously protected, at all cost, where election rigging is utilized as a means of achieving this end, governance in Nigeria thus become a nightmare because our governing system preclude responsibility and responsiveness, what we now have is lost of confidence in the so called people's government. It is in the light of this that this issue of election rigging will be x-rayed in this paper.

### Conceptual Discourse

For us to properly appreciate the quintessence of this discourse, it becomes highly imperative to conceptualize some of the key terms as they will be used in this paper.

**Electoral Process:** By this we mean the processes, activities and procedures involved in the election of leaders and representative by the electorate in the state (Akamere, F. 2001).

**Election:** On the other hand could be considered as a mechanism for articulating demands. It is actually more of a post mortem investigation of the record of those in office, whose actual performance may have little to do with promises made when they were last elected (Dickerson, M. et al 1990). It is the process of censuring, reposing duty in a leader of one's like and removing unpopular leader. Elections are thus an ingenious mechanism for coping with an uncertain and ever-changing future. It prevents chaos and instability in a system because it provides opportunity for peaceful transition from one civilian rule to another.



Election rigging on the other hand can be defined as a deliberate perversion of people's interest through manipulation of election results. Oxford advanced dictionary, defines rigging as a way of influencing something in a dishonest way in order to get the result that you want. Election rigging in this context could be understood to be any form of undue influencing and manipulation of election result in a dishonest way to represent a particular interest outside of a general interest.

Governance on the other hand is the art of governing, that is, where people choose or elect representative to represent their interest while equally providing for their needs through proper representation.

#### ELECTION RIGGING DATED IN TIME

When the masses of Nigeria people supported their leaders in the fight for independence, they had hope that sovereignty would bring with it a change for the better in terms of equity and freedom to re-order their own affairs to the furtherance of their individual and corporate interests, enhancement of human dignity and of what Nkrumah described as "*African personality*" and liberation from imperialism of disease, ignorance and poverty. It is however disheartening that activities before the independence had already prepared the ground for electoral rigging (malpractices) which followed immediately after independence. This trend however, has become a recurring phenomenon in the polity.

Four years after independence, the country had the elections of 1964 in which there were allegation of widespread election rigging and deadly hands of malpractice also clamped down on the western region election of 1965 where electoral officers were alleged to had colluded with a favoured party to prevent candidates of an opposing party from filling their nomination papers – this event coupled with the census crisis brought an end to the first republic.

The 1979 election was also a replica of the previous elections – where the army regime played dubious roles and then enthroned unpopular leader through election rigging, this was the era when we have the phrase two third of 19 is twelve as pronounced by the federal high court in favour of NPN when chief Awolowo challenged the election outcome in court. Ditto to the 1983 elections conducted by the civilian government, in 1983 elections, there was a high rate of electoral rigging. Even though, the 1993 election considered to be a departure from the previous election held, still had its own black spot as far as malpractice is concerned. Infact this brought a new phase to election rigging in Nigeria when Babangida, could not achieve its mission at the poll, he publicly manipulated i.e. rigged people of their interest by annulling the election results. Considered as the freest in the history of Nigeria.

Consequently, due to the fear that the military may not hand over power after their long interregnum, the 1999 election was embraced with low spirit and not many people gave it desired keen interest, this gave the junta to have a free hand in their election rigging and at the end handed the power to the person they wanted. Expectedly, Nigerians came back to life with enthusiasm and zeal in the 2003 general election, having been assured that the military was ready to relinquish power. Electioneering this time now took a new dimension, people

were anxious of gaining political power at all cost having seen the way money exchange hands among the stakeholders of the tenure. The incumbent political leaders also were desirous of retaining power through election.

Thus, the second tenure issues became a household concept, this actually led to the way election was conducted. By May 2007, election rigging has assumed a scientific posture – INEC itself during this time has gone computerized and its leaders promised Nigerians an electronic voting system. It is however disdainful that inspite of international and local monitoring groups and the promise of the INEC chairman Professor Maurice Iwu, the 2007 elections were also fraught with a lot of malpractice. Many of the election outcomes were challenged in the law court, many of which have been upturned while fresh elections have been declared in other states; examples include Edo, Oyo, Ekiti, Benue among others.

This time and as of old, the election could be seen as a struggle between those already in the power circle and those who wishes to join using the instrumentalities of political parties. Different tool were employed during this struggle between both groups thereby creating tension and large room for election rigging and malpractices of all kind among the power circle groups.

#### CAUSES AND EFFECTS OF ELECTION RIGGING ON DEMOCRATIC CONSOLIDATION IN NIGERIA

The love for power, the bid to consolidate oneself in power and the desirous inclination of political office seekers which can be summed as the political-economic reasons explain the reason for election rigging in Nigeria. This unequivocally has brought a telling effect on democratic consolidation in Nigeria. These effects are multifarious ranging from inculcating bad political culture in people and thus breeds political apathy in them, the corollary of this is violent political practices and instability in the system.

Election rigging has also aided the installation of bad political leaders, this in no small ways has helped to promote corruption and terse development of human and material resources. The political stage is hostile and could only accommodate the most fit in the society. The fittest as I refer elsewhere is some body who possesses economic and political prowess and is ready to assume political office tooth and nail. This no doubt has prevented somebody who in actual fact is a visionary leader but is no fit in Nigerian context.

Other effects include parochial political culture, where politicians and political actors being aware of the prevailing ignorance and poverty among the people, exploit the opportunity in perpetrating acts of electoral fraud and violence in the course of promoting their narrow political interest.

Election rigging and electoral fraud also weaken the political party activities in a country and participation of electorate in an election because of the manner in which elections are conducted. The 2003 and 2007 general election further gave credence to this, where electioneering process in Nigeria rather than improving is further deteriorating.

By and large, mention need be made of present mood of the federal government in the person of President Yar-Adua, his resolve to uphold the rule of



law and to also strengthen the electoral process through viable electoral reform – a report has been submitted in this regard. The recent happenings in Edo and Ondo states where Oshiomole and Mimiko were given back their mandate is a pointer that at least Nigerians may in no distant future catch a sight of relief in their electoral process.

#### RECOMMENDATION, SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

As alluded to earlier, the present federal government disposition must be consolidated, the whole economy must be revamped to give people economic independence, security of lives and properties must be guaranteed in and outside of poll, the electoral act must be holistic and practically pursued to a realistic end, the institution of justice must be strengthened and made to be independent alongside electoral commission. Professor Maurice Iwu the INEC chairman, identified election problems in Nigeria and proffered the following solutions to the present election quagmire: “*Excessive use of money*” and stressed that merit, rather than money should be the cardinal factor for electing candidates into any political office.

The second factor, Iwu, also noted; is the “*fear of violence*” thus encourage preaching peaceful conduct at election.

On the third constraint, which is ‘gender inequality’ Iwu believed that gender considerations would improve the quality of electoral process. To him, it is not a question of monitoring but the fact is that women who have so far ventured into politics have excelled.

The fourth constraint is “*the mindset of Nigerian politicians*” who returns to accept constitutionally laid down rules and procedure, adherence to laid down rule will help solve election rigging (emphasis mine) (Daily Independence, February 17, 2009).

In conclusion, election rigging is as old as Nigerian state, it began shortly after Nigeria gained her independence. This became more pronounced because politicians and political stakeholders have seen political office and power as an avenue for amassing wealth. The struggle between these groups become a cat and mouse fight when politicians in office intend to consolidate themselves and the aspiring ones struggle to dislodge and discharge them from office – election rigging is one of the viable tools then rise to achieve their political interest, this concomitantly make the political space to be chaotic, and governance elusive, unreal and a mirage in nature. This however, will be resolved if the judiciary is further strengthened, electoral act giving a human face, people afforded economic independence and politicians encourage to play by the rule.

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## LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND GRASS-ROOTS DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA: A CRITICAL REVIEW

Babatunde Abdul-wasi Moshood

### Abstract

*This paper examines the powers of local government in relation to other tiers of governments, namely: the state and central governments in the context of its development mandate. It argues that local government has more or less been run as local administration with delegated powers rather than as local government with democratic autonomy. It then concludes that unless the true autonomy of local government is restored its objectives of development at grassroots will remain elusive.*

### Introduction

The strengthening of local government is regarded in particular as crucial to political and economic reforms and development in the continent. In relative terms, local government in Africa are less developed politically, institutionally and financially than other public sector organisations or local government in other continents.<sup>1</sup> Consequently, within the last few decades, several national government institution, as well as donor agencies, have made effort to

"strengthen" local government in Africa, in the belief that it is essential for economic and social progress.<sup>2</sup> In 1989, for instance, the World Bank organized two sets of workshops for senior African policy makers, experts and major donor agencies in Poretta Terme, Italy, on "Strategy for Strengthening Local Government in Africa".<sup>3</sup> UN agencies such as the United Nation Department of Economic and Social Development, the United Nation Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nation Development Program (UNDP), the

*Moshood, lectures at the Department of Political Science, Lagos State University (LASU), Ojo, Lagos, Nigeria.*

World Health Organisation (WHO) and the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) are also supporting capacity building efforts aimed at strengthening local government.<sup>4</sup>

Dele Olowu<sup>5</sup> observed that the problem with the recent decentralization or devolution of power initiative sponsored by African governments like the ones before them, failed to produce the expected outcomes, such as greater citizen participation and empowerment of the people. Yet, the reforms are often linked to the process of democratization, and therefore, are quite explicit about their overriding goal of empowering the people.

It may be instructive to emphasize that if local governments are truly alive to their development duties and primary aim of providing services at the grassroots level, it is proper that development is made manifest, not fictitious. It suffices to say that development on a large scale can easily be catalyzed and could become a justification for increment in allocation or subvention to them. State in this instance will be less intrusive and play purely a coordinating role.

The conception of development at the grassroot level in this paper is conceived to be autonomous and not prescriptive for the local government officials. It is the development which they initiate and

are relevant to the local community. Looking inward to generating revenue without causing undue hardship to the receiving community could be part of the initiatives.

This paper examines the diminishing powers of the local government vis-à-vis other units of government like the state and central government. In spite of various reforms, which were aimed at decentralizing power and guaranteeing its autonomy, it is argued that the local government autonomy seems to be elusive because of the domineering role of state and federal governments. This has had deleterious effect on the goals of development at the local level. Therefore, the paper concludes that for the grassroots development to be meaningful and people-oriented, power devolution must translate into real autonomy in ways that make the third tier local government not local administration.

### Conceptual Framework

It is imperative to properly contextualize the term local government, so as to differentiate it from the term local administration. Local government like most terms in the social sciences has different meanings arising from the perception of different scholars. In spite of these differences, scholars still agree on some salient characteristics. The International Encyclopedia of the Social



Sciences defined it as "a public organization authorized to decide and administer a limited range of public policies within a relatively small territory which is a subdivision of a regional or national government". For the United Nations Office of Public Administration, it is a "political sub-division of a nation or in a federal system a state which is constituted by the law, including the power to impose taxes or to exact labour for prescribed purposes for the governance body of such an entity which is elected or otherwise locally selected". The guideline to National Local Government Reform of 1976 defined local government in Nigeria as a government at the local level exercised through representative council established by law to exercise specific power within defined areas and that *these power should give the council substantial control over the local affair as well as the staff and institutional and financial powers to initiate and direct the provision of service and to determine and implement project so as to complement the activities of the state and federal government in their areas.*

In distinguishing local government from central government<sup>6</sup> the guidelines clearly emphasized that local governments as bodies which are created by and derived its power from state government (i.e. they are

derivative and not sovereign) and that "they spring from the local community of which they should be representative." Lastly, they are nearer to the citizens than the state and federal government.

Succinctly put, local administration unlike local government lacks legal right of existence or legal personality, has no substantial autonomy and its existence is at the mercy of higher level(s) of government, which established it. Furthermore, it is subject to all sorts of external controls. Central or state government appoints and controls its finances and staff. In fact, it is an extension of the central government and exercise only delegated power and not devolutionary powers. Alex Gboyega and O. Oyediran defined local administration as the governing of the total community essentially by means of local agent appointed and responsible to the state or central government.<sup>7</sup>

From the foregoing, it is clear that the rationale and purpose of local government differentiate it from local administration, which is just an agent or representative of state in a local community. The local government is ideal in the sense that it is supposed to provide governance at the local levels, such a power is derivative from other tiers/units of government, not autonomous or sovereign. Yet, it can still be put to proper use if a visionary and thoughtful leader occupies such sensitive

position. Ironically, what seems to be operational at the local government level in the present day Nigeria, is that they are not only subservient to the state government but also governance at this level still remains an appendage of the state. This, in many ways affect developmental effort at this level of government. Perhaps, an attempt to briefly look at some of the theoretical underpinning of local government creation will help to further expand our frontier of knowledge on the subject.

#### Theoretical Underpinning of Local Government System

According to Alex Gboyega,<sup>8</sup> "the study of the development of local government and its workings (emphasis mine) as a tier of government in Nigeria will not be complete or indeed meaningful, if it is not preceded by an examination of the philosophical consideration underlying the local government system". He further posits that, the structure, composition and function of the local government are influenced by the political belief of those who have the authority and responsibility for determining the main features of the local government system.

Two schools of thought worth noting in this regard. These are liberal and the radical schools. The liberal school tend to justify the existence or need for local government on the basis of its being

essential to democratic regime or for practical administrative purpose like responsiveness, accountability and control. The radical on the other hand differs in the sense that they belief that local government system is an aberration. To them, if democracy is aimed at unifying the entire fragmented segment of a country, local government brings differentiation and to that extent, it is antithetical to democracy.

In the first school, John Stuart Mill justified local government on three main grounds: first, there is certain concern or interest which only a section of the community has in common and it is convenient as well as advisable that only those who share this community of interest should administer them.<sup>9</sup>

Second, local government is one of the "Free Institution" which provides political education. In Mill's words, "I have dwelt in strong language hardly any language is strong enough to express the strength of my conviction on the importance of that portion of the operation of free institution which may be called the public education of the citizens. Now, of his operation, the local administrative institutions are the chief instrument".

The third reason is accountability. As Mill expressed it, not only are separate executive officers required for purely local duties but the popular control over



those officers can only be advantageously exerted through a separate organ. Their original appointment, the function of withholding the resources for their operation, should rest with people.

While these are the heterogeneous ideal, but what operates in most countries like Nigeria is that advocating the creation of local government based on people (population) with common interest will further ethnicise society. A problem arises on how to decipher or delineate a common interest group in a cosmopolitan state. The mode of election of local government executives, often compromised by political actors, does not allow the electorate the freedom of choice and the local government functions are consequently captured by private interests. Hence, the radical denied the existence of an inevitable tie of reciprocal dependence between democracy and local government. Indeed, Professor George Langrod argued that there is fundamental contradiction between local government and democracy:

Democracy is by definition an egalitarian majority and Unitarian system. It tends every where at all times to create a social whole, a community which is uniform level and subject to rule... On the other hand, local government is by definition, a phenomenon of differentiation, individualization of

separation... thus, since democracy moves inevitably towards centralization, local government by the division which it creates, constitutes, all things considered, a negation of democracy.<sup>10</sup>

By and large, the system envisaged by Langrod may be feasible in an homogeneous society where unitary thrives, where diverse cultures and orientations exist in harmony. What is probable is to galvanize unity in diversity as Osuntokun,<sup>11</sup> advised: *where local government creation may serve as avenue of accommodating diverse ethnic group in a federated state*. As alluded to earlier, the view of the radical school may not be relevant in a country like Nigeria with plurality of culture and orientation. In the case of Nigeria, the need for local government creation cannot be over emphasized because for government to enhance its purpose in a democratic setting, the local government is one of such ways government benefits could be extended to the people and where activities of government can be strongly felt in such areas like education, health delivery, security and other social infrastructure.

It is important to note that local government system when allowed to function properly, is at the heart of governance and devolution of power because the burden of governance

would be less on the central authority and the state government. Although in many instances, the liberal and radical schools differ on local government functions. These differences are further articulated in democratic/participatory and efficiency schools.

Central to the democratic/participatory school, is the concept of democracy. Local politics and politics at all levels deal with conflict and conflict resolution. Hence at the grassroots level, citizens are called upon, learn to make choice, to tolerate the views of the minorities and to respect others views whether supportive of their own view or not. Local government according to this school is also seen as a good recruiting ground for highest level of government and hence the necessity for greater participation.

The efficiency/services school see the essential function of local government as not the bringing about democracy nor is it the provision of a base for political participation and education, rather they view Local Government as existing for the provision of services and it must be evaluated in terms of its efficiency and the services it renders to the expected measure. Moreover, because of its closeness to the people, it is expected that it can provide some services more efficiently than state and federal

government. Indeed, it is on this basis of efficient performance that local government must stand or fall.

The developmental school arises out of the growing consciousness in the developing world and believes that one of the problems confronting developing nations is political integration. The ideas of the two schools might give the impression that these two schools have concerned themselves only with local government in developed western democracies. In fact, a national consciousness is beginning to emerge and so has to be built up and sustained. However, political and other problems in developing nations appear to be more urgent and apparent at the national level than at the local level. This is not to discountenance local problems and peculiarities, but the achievement of national integration must become a focus. Local government must make conscious contribution to national integration, national evolution, and consciousness. The developmental school stressed the following as the focal point for local government:

- a. Decongesting government at the centre thereby relieving the state and central government of involvement in local issues.
- b. Increasing people's understanding of economic development.



- c. Making programmes to foster social and economic betterment at the local level more realistic and lasting.
- d. Training of people in the area of self-government.
- e. Strengthening national unity.

For the functional school, all these functions of the local government mentioned above are to be expected in varying degrees from all local government system whether in developed or developing countries. In a developing nations where functions are designed to promote the needed progress of the country, the other aspect of political participation, education and socialization of the masses to ideal of freedom, liberty as well as national integration and stability cannot be ignored. Why both set of schools are integrated, a functional approach evolves. This functional approach emphasises the efficiency and effectiveness of local government as a tool in developmental process. At this juncture, the need to locate the evolution of local government and its developmental creed is important.

#### Local Government System in Nigeria: An Overview

Local government system in Nigeria evolved from local administration and

community management before the advent of colonialism; this later transformed into native administration during colonial period. The system of native administration was modified or modernized and expanded to other parts of the country and thus formed the bedrock upon which indirect rule was solidly established. The native administration rested mainly on the traditional institution: Obas, Chiefs or Emirs as the case may be. He was also assisted by his chiefs who constituted what could be termed the Council of Elders, a judiciary/native court system and a native treasury. Under this system, each of the provinces to which Nigeria was divided headed by a resident commissioner who was charged with the coordination of the area on behalf of the British administration.

Moreover, in the East, the Local Government Ordinance of 1950 brought about the democratization or widening the representative character of native administration as about eighty percent of the councilors were to be elected. Similar changes took place in Western part of the country with the enactment of Local Government law of 1952. With this law, local government were to be made of at least three quarters of elected members while the remaining were nominated members. In both the East and the West, three tiers of local government system operated. The East comprised county, district and local

council, while in the west, divisional, district and local were put in place.

In spite of the democratic instinct and intent of this local government system, the system was faced with some problems. First was the problem of ridiculously small sized local government. This made it difficult for some to even pay their staff, others was the problem arising from the unpopularity of divisional and county councils. When they faced competition from district councils, they relied on the same resources. This among others led to friction among the tiers of local government and the call for the scrapping of divisional and county councils.

In the Northern part, the native authority law of 1954 merely consolidated the Native Authority System. Although, the law did not bring about a break from the former system, it however conferred legal recognition on native authority as operated in the south. In 1963, there was a major development in the North. This was in respect of the democratization of government in that year. It was decided that there should be some elected members. This had been effected before the military took over in 1966.

Conversely, the military brought a new phase in the administration of local government system in Nigeria. Said

Adejumobi avers that "the intriguing and paradox in the reform and practice of the local government system in Nigeria is that it is mostly military regime, which are the least democratic government that often promotes the values and philosophy of local self-government. Civilian regimes, which are supposedly democratic government quite regrettable usually undermine such values".<sup>12</sup> Hence, the 1976 reform brought a unified local government system in Nigeria. The 1979 Constitution and subsequent ones gave legal recognition to the establishment of the system and various legislations have been entrenched most especially under the Babangida's regime to enhance the autonomy of the local government system in Nigeria.

#### Local Government and Grassroots Development in Nigeria: A Critical Review

Writing on the concept of development, Ugwu<sup>13</sup> argues that:

the concept of development includes not only economic, social and political changes, but a broad and embracing transformation of the society. It connotes the totality of societal improvement, which of course starts with man himself. Development according to him, is structuring of society in such a way that will improve the quality of lives as well as the satisfaction



of psychological wants of members of any given rural area. It involves and mobilizes resources, which will facilitate rural development.

No doubt, the definition above seems to give a comprehensive definition about development. But one thing that deserves our attention is how various communities have always come together to defend and develop their community before and during colonial incursion. Moreover, by the 1955 local government law according to the Ugwu,<sup>14</sup> the law empowered the local government to take responsibility for rural or grassroots development within their area of authority. This provision in the law enables the district officers to spearhead the rural development in their various districts. Government provided matching grants and technical aids to communities, which embarked on self help project. Since then, Okeke<sup>15</sup> opines that rural development has become a shared responsibility between the people and the government. It is to be noted that rural and grassroots development play a vital role in the economy of any nation. Hence, if the resources at these levels are not properly harnessed and utilized, they equally portend a great danger to the state because the army of the unemployed grassroots already on the increase, can breed various social vices in the country.

In actual fact, when the government began to increase its tax collection at the local level and took on a modern state system, development effort gradually shifted to the government – because it is said “to whom much is given much is expected.” Initially, part of the reasons adduced for collection of tax is that government will provide basic development and social services to the people. Now, people fervently look up to government to discharge its primary duty. The extent to which this has been achieved in Nigeria, most especially at the local government level, is questionable.

The importance of local government towards grassroots and national development cannot be over emphasized. As mentioned earlier, local government is widely acknowledged as a viable instrument for the grassroots development and for the delivery of quality social services to the people. It is the belief that this third tier of government is strategically placed to fulfill the multi-dimensional function because of its proximity to the grassroots, which enhances its ability to easily articulate and aggregate the demands of the people.

Expectedly, government at the local level, is to bring development in various areas such as the economic sector, transportation, communication, agricultural sector. Other roles include

the provision of essential amenities such as medical facilities, water, electricity in advanced cases, building of adjunct roads e.t.c. Basically, it is expected to improve industrialization in its areas through provision and building of markets and conducive environment where industries can thrive, to provide housing estate, encourage town union and voluntary agencies, provide health care in form of dispensaries and to also see to the education of those at the grassroots. Unfortunately, Nigeria's case is abnormal because most of the officials elected into local governance, have narrow conception of local government, half baked and where there exist well nurtured ones, the corrupt situation in the country and lack of accountability make them to be docile in the discharge of their duty, except siphoning of public wealth.

In spite of these, local government in Nigeria can still achieve the above stated developmental objectives, if truly the government at the local government level is made to function as the third tiers of government. Ironically, and unfortunately too, the local government in Nigeria have not been able to live up to its expectations as it relies on the state and federal government for subvention and survival.

The point of contention is that if the money collected from the federal and

state coffers are put to judicious use, the development at the grassroots would tremendously be improved. But, rather and regrettably too, this money more often than not go into private pockets. For example, in Odi-olowo/Ojuwoye Local Government Development Area in Mushin Lagos State, during the period that local government funds were withheld by the Obasanjo-led government, the state devised a soft loan to help the local government in taking care of their sundry expenses but this money was not used for the purpose it was meant for. In other words, workers in the Local Government were owed seven months salary without hope of payment insight. About the same time, the Local Government Chairman, Hon. Adeyemi Ali allegedly bought a house worth a hundred and seventy million naira (170m) in Ajah.

### Concluding Remarks

In an ideal situation, a local government unit is supposed to complement the efforts of the state and federal governments by critically looking inward for internally generated revenue outside routine taxes. Most local government areas in the North, East and West have arable lands where they can farm and provide food and employment for the teeming masses. While some can embark on the cultivation of agricultural products, others can embark on animal



husbandry. Places like Lagos with their aquatic nature could focus on fish farming and also encourage industrialization. This, will not only provide job for the people, but also help to develop the economy and stabilize the state. Perhaps, because the local government are being found wanting in the discharge of their duties, emphasis is more on the federal and state governments. In addition to the corrupt situation at this level of government vis-à-vis the corruption in the country, lack of autonomy in the areas of policy decision and revenue sharing also contribute to the inefficiency of the leadership at the local government level.

In effect, devolution of power has not translated to true autonomy at this level of government. In an heterogeneous society like Nigeria, a two tier federalism will retard development, and put national integration in jeopardy. But a proper devolution will attract good and visionary leaders at the local government level.

Until such a time, when power devolution will translate into true autonomy for the local government and thus attract responsible leadership, the goals of development at the local level will remain elusive.

## Notes and References

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