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Decentralisation And Local Government Autonomy: Implications For Grassroots Development In Nigeria's Fourth Republic

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Abstract

The paper argues that local government autonomy in Nigeria is attainable on the platforms of democratic imperative (local self-governance); legal/administrative competence; financial innovativeness and responsibility. This paper interrogates and affirms the nexus between decentralisation and local government, zeroing - in on devolution as the taxonomy for guaranteeing autonomy, and ultimately leading to grassroots development. As a qualitative study with reliance on secondary sources of data, the utilisation of Development Theory (in Local Government Studies) as the framework for textual analysis of issues/themes illuminated the discussion, conclusion and recommendations. Findings reveal that constitutional ambivalence, defective federal practice, intergovernmental relations and institutional weaknesses have in several ways stymied local government autonomy and inhibited the developmental roles of local governments in Nigeria. The suggestions proffered are capable of addressing the gaps and problems identified.

Keywords: Autonomy; Decentralisation; Grassroots; Development; Local Government; Nigeria.

1. Introduction

There is an avalanche of literature and prodigious debates on the intertwining issues/concepts of decentralisation, local government autonomy and grassroots development. The denominator and underlying argument zero - in on the attainment of effective service delivery in the localities. For instance, while some writers conceive decentralisation as a type of power relation that describes local government (Duru; 2001b; Odoh; 2004), a group of scholars agree that local government is a product or derivative of decentralisation (Adamolekun; 2002; Ezeani; 2004). However, these assertions must be qualified and utmost caution taken, in order not to mislead and create unnecessary ambiguities.

The notion of decentralisation as a type of power relation and power sharing among sub-national units introduces the dimension of intergovernmental relations

to the discussion on local government autonomy in Nigeria which is controversial and has created liabilities for federal practice in the country. To be sure, the identification of local government as a product of decentralisation must be discussed as devolution (or democratic decentralisation) in order to be understood with reference to local government autonomy. It becomes clear therefore that devolution is a form of decentralised administration. The taxonomy includes: deconcentration (administrative or bureaucratic decentralisation in which autonomy is an exception, rather than the rule of operations); and delegation. Adamolekun (2002, 50), added fiscal decentralisation which amounts to "transfer of responsibility for budget and financial decisions, from higher to lower levels of government." This refers to Intergovernmental Fiscal Relations which has been a thorny issue in the discussion on federalism in Nigeria, and partly explains the dismal performance of local government councils in Nigeria as some studies have shown (Onah; 2004b; Onah and Ibietan; 2010).

It is particularly striking and noteworthy that the oscillation of paradigms in Public Administration which introduced the New Public Management as a movement away from the disciplinary orthodoxy has added divestment as a typology of decentralisation. Adeyeye (2013) posits that divestment is the transfer of planning and administrative responsibilities or other public functions from government to voluntary, private or non-governmental institutions with clear benefits to and involvement of the public. Contracting-out, partial service provision, deregulation or full privatisation are cited as illustrations of divestment. This slant of Managerialism into Public Administration scholarship has been traced to predatory global capitalism with heavy attributes of sweeping privatisation, de-legitimization of public administration, shrinking the "public sphere," and degrading the state and public administration (Farazmand; 2012, 494). It is however doubtful if public sector reforms in Nigeria underscored by Managerialism at central and sub-national units have yielded much results, especially in this Fourth Republic.

Additionally, the narrative in the Fourth Republic have taken the form of queries and questions on the capacity of local government councils (LGCs) in providing services, let alone initiate actions that can facilitate grassroots development. Funding inadequacies; executive and administrative incapacity; political interferences from higher level governments have been advanced as weakening the capability and viability of LGCs as potential agents of rural development (Odoh; 2004). These factors conjoin to circumscribe the much touted autonomy of local governments in Nigeria.

In a related discourse, Adamolekun (2009, 19) submits that "since the return to civilian rule in 1999, news reports on LGs … perceived [them] as failed institutions [and] in virtually all of Nigeria, the Local Government system is largely seen as a conduit for the mindless plunder of resources otherwise available … for worthwhile development of the grassroots." It is obvious in the above assertion that the LGCs have not been able to justify their existence by providing socio-economic services and democratic dividends to the local populace. Mimiko (2010, 12) stretches the argument further and corroborates that "… most Nigerians find succour and fulfilment in their ethnic groups …, and increasingly on their own individual initiatives, underscoring the emergence of micro-municipality governance system in the country…" Mimiko (2010) expatiates thus:

> The concept of micro-municipality governance describes a situation in which all social services paid for and/or entitled to by the citizenry are either not delivered at all or delivered in a perfunctory manner by the state, thus compelling the individual to set up virtually all apparatuses of governance for their own private usage-infrastructure, security, rules of engagement (as the law and order regime is hardly effective) …

The above averment confirms the palpable state of infrastructure and service delivery in Nigeria, and responsibility for the deficit must be shared by all tiers of government. However, studies have shown that the LGCs as the closest tier of government to the grassroots is best positioned to deliver these services, and the extent to which they perform underscore their efficiency (Ibietan and Ndukwe; 2014a), but Odoh (2004) illuminates our understanding on the default in this area, based on the lack of autonomy and sundry issues. As a corollary, Adeyemo in Ikeanyibe (2016) advances the explanation of conflicting constitutional provisions as an impediment to effective service delivery at the third tier and as an obstacle to grassroots development.

Predicated on the preceding and a litany of other failings/foibles of the LGCs, scholars have argued that "it is absurd and wasteful to retain the current uniform local government" (Soludo; 2012, 4). In a recent study, Ikeanyibe (2016, 13) concurs and submits "that Nigeria and similar emerging federations…should discard the idea of a third-tier local government system." These averments notwithstanding, there were conscious efforts on the part of successive central governments to make LGCs in the country live up to their billings. These found expression in reforms, and as documented by Duru (2001a), local government reforms constitute part of decentralisation. On this note, the 1976 LG reforms is a watershed in the annals of decentralisation efforts in Nigeria. Ibietan (2008, 26) affirms that the reform "leaves no one in doubt as to the … role of local government in governance and as a veritable agent of development and grassroots participation in the democratic process." Subsequent developments and practices stymied this, and the expected gains were eroded.

2. Method, Main Argument and Structure of the Paper

This is a qualitative study, and it adopts the longitudinal research approach. Through a reliance on secondary sources of data collection, the trajectory of federal practice in Nigeria, with a bearing on the observable trends in local government autonomy and implications for grassroots development in Nigeria's Fourth Republic, were highlighted. The utilisation of development theory (in local government studies) as framework for textual analysis of issues illuminated the discussion, conclusion and recommendations of the paper.

The thrust of this paper, is that LGCs must be economically competitive and innovative to strengthen their internally generated revenue levels. They must also be fiscally responsible and responsive. The combination of these will invigorate them as robust institutions capable of attracting and retaining techno-bureaucratic and competent manpower that can formulate and implement people-oriented policies and pro-

grammes culminating in grassroots development. It is an oxymoron to assert or uphold local government autonomy by relying on federal financial handouts, experiencing poor fiscal health, combustible intergovernmental relations, and unnecessary interferences from higher - level governments. Power is not given; it must be taken by being financially independent and responsible, technically competent, and leveraging on democracy to provide good governance to the local populace and in public affairs.

The paper is segmented thus: Abstract; Introduction; Method, Main Argument, and Structure of the paper; Conceptual Discourse on Decentralisation, Local Government, Autonomy, Grassroots/Rural Development; Theoretical Framework; Local Government Autonomy and Implications for Grassroots Development in Nigeria; Conclusion and Recommendations.

3. Conceptual Discourse

The concepts of Decentralisation; Local Government; Autonomy and Grassroots/ Rural Development are discussed in this section.

3.1 The Concept of Decentralisation

Extant literature in Public Administration provides an array of discussion on the concept of decentralisation. Many writers demonstrate how decentralisation underpins effective management of organisations and sub-national units for qualitative service delivery and the attainment of goals and objectives. Ordinarily, decentralisation presupposes the existence of a centralised body or authority that requires decongestion through the transfer of decision - making power or abilities to subordinates for effective operations.

In the context of this discourse however, the concept has a wide range of uses within the purview of Public Administration. A first usage refers to "an administrative measure involving the transfer of management responsibilities and resources to agents of the central government located outside the headquarters at one or more levels (province, region, division and district)" (Adamolekun; 2002, 49). This form of administrative or bureaucratic decentralisation is commonly known as deconcentration and it typifies local administration, in which the essential attributes of local government such as autonomy, democracy and independent finance are lacking. There are also field offices of the central government emanating from the process of deconcentration, and this is known as field administration.

Another type of decentralisation entails the transfer of specific powers, functions and resources by the central government to sub-national units. When these sub-national levels of government are substantially independent of the central government, possess legal personality and operate at the grassroots, such arrangement is referred to as devolution or democratic decentralisation, which is synonymous with an ideal local government backed by autonomy. In some federal and unitary systems, the structure, functions and powers of the devolved tier are enshrined and clearly stipulated in the constitution (which is the supreme law governing the country). This, therefore underlines and dictates the nature of intergovernmental legislative, social

services, administrative and fiscal relations (for details, see Ibietan; 2011, 59-66). It is therefore not surprising that Adamolekun (2002, 50) discussed fiscal decentralisation as intergovernmental fiscal relations.

Decentralisation is also used to refer to delegation of authority, and Ezeani (2004) posits that it is more extensive in usage than deconcentration. Delegation is conceptualised thus:

> … the transfer of decision-making and management authority for specific functions to semi-independent agencies such as public enterprises, regional planning and area development authorities, multi-purpose and single-purpose functional authorities, and special project implementation units (Luke in Ezeani; 2004, 5).

The organisations and agencies invested with delegated authority may enjoy varied or measured degrees of autonomy and resources to enable them execute development schemes. Typical illustrations of this in Nigeria include: the Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI); River Basin Development Authorities; National Agricultural Land Development Authorities; the Nigerian Agricultural and Rural Development Bank; the Operation Feed the Nation; and the Expanded Programme on Immunization (EPI) to mention but a few.

Olowu (2002) discussed decentralisation within the ambit of reforms and with reference to African countries. The first typology (out of the four identified) is regionalisation or federalisation. A notable trait of this is that "each region is recognised and protected by the national constitution to define and deliver a number of specified services in a way that reflects the tastes and peculiar needs of that region's population within a federal framework" (Olowu; 2002, 129). The author also captured this as "nonconcentration" and alluded to Nigeria's dismal performance on this. Corroborating, Onyeoziri (2002) identified regionalism as an alternative policy option for managing the nationality question in Nigeria, but it failed due to the contradictions embedded in it (for details, see Ibietan and Itodo; 2015, 3-4).

Another form of decentralisation, according to Olowu (2002) emphasises the creation and strengthening of democratically elected local governments with substantial discretionary powers to elected persons from the locality in unitary or federal states. This taxonomy converges with the idea of devolution as posited by Adamolekun (2002) and Ezeani (2004). The third and fourth type of decentralisation identified by Olowu (2002) crystallised around deconcentration/field administration; and divestment to voluntary organisations as discussed by Ezeani (2004) and Adeyeye (2013) respectively. It is noteworthy that inadequate human capacity in the localities to undertake people-oriented services, and the preponderance of zero-sum game in intergovernmental relations in many African countries, especially Nigeria constitute impediments to the full realisation of decentralisation initiatives.

Building on the works of other scholars, Abe and Omotoso (2014) posit that decentralisation presents a shift from top-bottom approach to governance towards a bottom-top orientation. According to them, it entails the transfer of power and responsibilities from the central government to sub-national units or agencies. The authors however identified Privatisation/Partnership as the fourth type of decentrali-

sation, and their discourse on this tallies with that of Adeyeye (2013). The other (three) forms of decentralisation discussed by Abe and Omotoso (2014, 187-188) bears convergence with Adamolekun (2002).

3.2 The Concept of Local Government

Local government as a concept lends itself to many interpretations, and as noted by Ibietan (2010), it is encapsulated in a definitional web like other themes or concepts in the social sciences, because there exist divergent views on the subject as authors, scholars, writers and practitioners abound. Some of the views or notions can be wrong and misleading. For instance, Effiom (2001. 86) treated local government and local administration thus: "local administration would be used interchangeably with local government." This is quite erroneous and it is bound to confuse a neophyte in Public Administration or Local Government studies.

Marshall in Nwachuku (2000, 1) conceives local government based on three characteristics, namely: "operation in a restricted geographical area within a nation or state; a locally elected or selected membership or a local council; and a measure of autonomy." As appealing as this definition would have been, because of the identification of the principle of autonomy which is germane to this paper, it missed the point, having ignored the attributes of legal personality, political participation, efficient service delivery and resource mobilisation which are central to the existence of a devolved local government system.

Duru (2001a) avers that local government "refers to a political authority set up by a nation or state as a subordinate authority for the purpose of dispersing or decentralising political power." This definition is similar to that of Awa in Nwachuku (2000), except that the latter identified the purpose as rendering delegated services. This conceptualisation typifies deconcentration, delegation or field administration, while the former assertion (Duru; 2001b) merely underscores the democratic criterion and imperative of local government.

Ezeani (2004, 24) posits that the local government refers to the "transfer of substantial decision-making powers and responsibilities to legally dependent units outside the control of the central government." This characterisation reinforces the ideal local government and approximates the Whearean Concept of federal practice as relationship between equals and coordinates. Stretching this point further, Ezeani (2006:253) submits that "local government is generally seen as a veritable agent of development and grassroots participation in the democratic process." This view underlines part of the focus of this paper, but misses the angle of autonomy which is required to facilitate development and enhance democratisation at the grassroots.

Building on the works of other scholars (Duru; 2001a; Ezeani; 2006), Ibietan (2008, 26-27) infers as follows:

> …local government must be representative, autonomous to a reasonable degree; must be functional. It must also be technically and economically viable. It has to be representative in the sense that the policies made by it must reflect the wishes of the people; and to mobilize the local populace for self-development…

The above averment is tangential to the central themes of this paper. It underscores autonomy, grassroots development, democratic local self-governance, technical and economic viability as bases for autonomy, mobilisation for rural development, and more importantly, there is an emphasis on locality principle. The author expatiates that economic viability implies the ability of local governments to generate financial resources required for operations and developmental purposes. However, most local government councils in Nigeria have not performed well in this regard due to poor internally generated revenue efforts which arises from the dominance of poverty in rural areas, tax evasion, corruption, fraud and over-dependence on federal allocation. Technical viability refers to the competence, skills and expertise of personnel.

There is unanimity of opinion among scholars (Wapmuk, 2005; Ezeani, 2012; Wilson and Ibietan; 2013) on the clarity and comprehensiveness of the idea of local government as documented in the celebrated 1976 Reform Guidelines as follows:

> Government at the local level exercised through representative councils established by law to exercise specific powers within defined areas. These powers should give the councils 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 complement the activities of the state and federal governments in their areas and ensure, through active participation of the people and their traditional institutions that local initiatives and response to local needs are maximised (Federal Republic of Nigeria; 1976, 1).

More importantly, Ezeani (2012, 11-13) identified these salient features which are inherent in the above conceptualisation: localness, legal existence as enshrined in the constitution; enjoys substantial autonomy; exists within a defined territory; exercises authority over a given population; performs functions based on the constitution; the Council is composed of elected representatives of the local people; local government comprises departments, divisions and units which facilitate the accomplishment of its goals, objectives and functions. It is observable that except for a brief period (before the Second Republic, and between December 1987 and 1990) (Tonwe and Allen, 2009:359), the bulk of above features existed more in constitutional breach and largely explains the lack of autonomy in the Nigerian local government system.

Sharma et al. (2012, 995) posit that a devolved local government system "presupposes the existence of a local authority with power to act independently of external control as well as the participation of the local community in the administration of its own affairs." They contend further that "local self-government is the government of a specified locality by the local people through the representatives elected by them". These averments do not approximate the practice in Nigeria, especially in the Fourth Republic as typified by the nature of intergovernmental relations (see Onah; 2004a, 1-16; Onah, 2004b, 189-168; Abe and Omotoso; 2014, 194-196). The characteristics of local government according to Sharma et al. (2012, 996-1002) are: local area; statutory status; autonomous; local participation; local finances and accountability; civic services for the local people and general purpose authority.

Local government is vitally important for the following reasons: it is a platform for grassroots democracy; serves as training school for politics; encourages the participation of the local populace in public affairs; competence in solving local problems; it is arguably economical; reduces the burden on the central government; serves as a channel of communication; vital for national progress.

Corroborating the preceding and our discussion on this theme, Asaju (2010) in Ikeanyibe (2016, 2) expressed the features of an ideal (devolved) local government system this way:

1. Local government should become a legal entity distinct from the state and federal government;
2. Local government should be administered by democratically elected officials;
3. Local government should have specific powers to perform a range of functions assigned it by law;
4. Local government should enjoy substantial autonomy to perform an array of functions, plan, formulate and execute its own policies, programmes and projects, and its own rules and regulations as deemed for its local needs. This autonomy includes power to control its finance…recruit and discipline its staff.

The above features bear true convergence and reinforce the views of Ibietan (2008) on this note. Additionally, these statements underscore the Whearean essence of true federal arrangement and practice. However, Ikeanyibe (2016) submits that this cherished model has not materialised in practice in the Nigerian federation.

3.3 The Concept of Local Government Autonomy

There is no meaningful discourse, debate or commentary on local government in Nigeria that is concluded without reference to the subject of autonomy. Yet, only few scholars or writers have attempted to conceptualise the term, it is described more by its default or lack of manifestation, and this draws analogy to the proverbial elephant which is recognised by its sheer size.

Nwachuku (2000, 11) posits that "autonomy … refers to the degree of freedom, authority and power or command which a local authority can exercise in the management of its own affairs WITHOUT reference to the state or federal government." This view conceives autonomy in terms of wide latitudes and discretion in the management of resources and the locality without interferences and partnership from higher - level governments, and as variously documented in literature, this has been largely a mirage in intergovernmental relations in Nigeria. The author submits further that autonomy is a function of the degree of freedom that a local government council exercises on these issues: taking local strategic decisions without veto by higher level governments; formulating its own economic plans and development; determining its own operating budget/estimates; taking capital - project decisions (such as bank loans for developmental purposes). If LGCs can do these without

major modifications from States or Federal Government, then, autonomy and an atmosphere conducive for development at the grassroots would be said to exist.

One landmark contribution to theory building and operationalisation of the concept of local government autonomy in Nigeria accrues to Odoh (2004, 44) who avers that "theoretically, autonomy is conceived as a derivative of decentralization and intergovernmental relations. Indeed, it is co-terminus with power, especially power as a resource base, and power as the relationship between governments." Deduced from this, the author identified three key areas of power or autonomy, namely: democracy; legal/administrative competence; and finance. Autonomy reinforces the capacity and viability of local governments based on these three factors, and gives vigour to the earlier views expressed by Nwachuku (2000) on this issue.

It is further contended that the concept of autonomy becomes realistic based on the following characteristics of devolution: local government must be an organised entity with corporate powers; display governmental character with its principal officers elected or appointed by the local people, who they are in turn accountable to; enjoy substantial autonomy over its administrative, budgetary, revenue and fiscal matters. The inevitability of a law recognising the corporate existence and character as a government and identifying the functional areas and powers of local government in discharging those functions cannot be overemphasised. Predicated on these, Odoh (2004, 45) extrapolates that local government autonomy is pivoted on two issues: (1) "the resources available to local government (as the basis for autonomy)"; and (2) the control over these resources (legal or political or administrative) to harness and deploy these resources."

The narrative however shows that a critical analysis of the performance of LGCs in Nigeria using the Autonomy test as a function of decentralisation; intergovernmental relations on key parameters of democracy, legal/administrative competence and finance has not produced the desired results. Not only has there been a continuous whittling down of the powers of local governments in the aforementioned areas, studies show that there have been constitutional abuses/breaches; ambivalent and paradoxical constitutional provisions; conversion of LGCs to administrative outposts of the State Governments to mention but a few (See details in Onah, 2004a; Tonwe and Allen, 2009; Ibietan and Ndukwe, 2014a; Abe and Omotoso; 2014). Detailed discussion and incisive analyses on these and adjoining issues are reserved for section 5 in this paper dealing with "Local Government Autonomy and Implications for Grassroots Development in Nigeria".

3.4 The Concept of Grassroots/Rural Development

Grassroots, rural areas and countryside refer to one thing. They are usually treated as synonyms which are used interchangeably and contrasted with urban areas. The definition of rural areas or grassroots is not in contest, they are basically typified by their features of infrastructural deficits; prevalence of poverty; peasantry; disconnect from urban areas due to poor feeder roads and many other factors. To remedy these rural conditions, Nnadozie (2002, 12) opines that the ultimate goal of rural development is to initiate projects and programmes that can "open up these … backward and primitive areas and people of the country…"

Mabogunje (1980) in Ibietan (2010, 32) offers a more elaborate definition of rural development thus:

> Rural development is concerned with the improvement of the living rural standards of the low-income people living in the rural area on a self-sustaining basis through transforming the socio-spatial structures of their productive activities. It implies a broad based reorganisation and mobilisation of the rural masses and resources; so as to enhance the capacity of the rural populace to cope effectively with the daily tasks of their lives and with the changes consequent upon this.

The implications of the above conceptualisation for grassroots development are three-fold: (1) Mobilisation and allocation of resources facilitate improvement in the living standard of the rural population. (2) The full participation of rural populace in the political and development process underscore allocative rationality and distributive efficiency at the grassroots. (3) There is the issue of making rural development a sustainable process, and this calls for functional institutions across tiers of government; skills acquisition and expertise to optimise and manage available resources in the rural areas. To achieve these, national policies; administrative systems; and institutional capacities must be strengthened.

Oghoghoiye (2013, 257) building on Lele (1975) conceives rural development as "that which implies improving living standards of the mass of low-income population residing in Rural areas and making the process of their development self-sustaining." It is particularly noteworthy that sustainability re-echoes in this definition, and this implies that rural development must be pursued as series of work in progress, owned and driven by the local populace with their own resources. The author further affirms that rural development comprises indicators such as food and nutrition levels; health; education; housing; security and recreational facilities. Self-help as an issue in rural development underpins these indicators. Self-help refers to "strategies that induce progress in rural societies, all of which do not involve action by governments" (Okoli and Onah; 2002, 172). Self-help is democratic, emphasises bottom-top approach to planning and execution of projects and programmes. It is inclusive and involves communal action through coordinated efforts of the rural populace. Examples include the formation of agricultural cooperative movements and the execution of social infrastructural projects based on the "felt-needs" of the community. It engenders participation and a competitive spirit among and between communities, which ultimately relieves governments of the economic burden on social services provision (Ibietan, 2010). Local governments can leverage on this form of rural (self) mobilisation through appropriate coordination mechanisms to galvanise rural development. This becomes effective through the Integrated Rural Development (IRD) approach which emphasises integration, conceives rural development in its totality and as comprising multiple objectives. The application of the systems thinking to the IRD approach redresses problems of overlapping jurisdiction and intergovernmental jurisdictional squabbles/acrimony among tiers and levels of government; strengthens sectoral and organisational integration.

4. Theoretical Framework: Local Government Development Theory

Local Government Studies present a galaxy of theories which illuminate our understanding on the workings of the local government system or the ideal practice at that level of governance. The theories include: Democratic-participatory; efficiency-services; developmental; localist; public choice and dual state/politics thesis. Based on the focus of this paper, the development theory is considered applicable and useful for the interrogation and analyses of the intricate relationship between local government autonomy and grassroots development in Nigeria.

The development theory of Local Government Studies has Sady (1962, in Ezeani; 2004) as its main proponent. Further contributions to the theory were made by Ola (1984, in Ezeani; 2012); Duru (2001b); and Ezeani (2004, 2012). According to Sady (1962), local government in developing countries should be concerned with the following:

1. Decongesting government at the centre, thereby freeing national leaders from onerous details and unnecessary involvement in local issues;

2. Increasing people's understanding and economic development;

3. Making programmes to foster social and economic betterment at the local level more realistic and lasting;

4. Training people in the art of self-government; and

5. Strengthening national unity (cited in Ezeani; 2004, 42)

Ezeani (2004) submits further that local government in developing countries can and should function to decongest the centre by implementing socio-economic programmes that reconstructs the required infrastructure for better living. Predicated on this and other tenets of development theory, local government is conceived as a veritable instrument for development, national integration, evolution and consciousness (Ola in Ezeani; 2004:42), thus attempting to reduce the predominance of poverty and underdevelopment in the Third World, including Nigeria (Duru, 2001b; Ezeani, 2012).

4.1 Application of Theory

Nigeria presents a practical but disturbing example of what federal practice should not be. The country parades a constitution which appears federal in name, but by a dubious and strange interplay of "soldiers and oil," the practice assumes a unitary federalism which made the centre too bogus and powerful, thus confining fiscal relations to "feeding bottle federal practice" (Anichukwu; 2012). The dominance of the centre (federal government) in Nigeria has made sub-national governments less innovative, non-competitive economically and bereft of viability despite resource abundance (Suberu, 2004; Soludo, 2012). This Nigerian paradox has led to a con-

comitant juxtaposition of affluence with affliction (Ibeanu, 2008). Through a whittling - down of sub-national autonomy characterised by an increase in items on the Executive legislative list from forty-four in the 1960 constitution to sixty-eight items in the 1999 constitution (Onah and Ibietan; 2010, 264), centralisation has been reinforced and this has left other tiers of government prostrate and emasculated.

More specifically, the fiscal practice has been most unfair not only to the LGCs in Nigeria, it is equally pertinent to note that the provisions of Section 162 (5-8) in the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria has been observed more in the breach, aggravates controversy in fiscal relations and a drag on the autonomy of local governments in Nigeria. Several studies corroborate this position (Onah, 2004b; Ezeani, 2012; Ibietan and Ndukwe, 2014a; Abe and Omotoso, 2014). This contrasts sharply with the Brazilian practice in which the post transfer of revenue is less than 40% in favour of the federal government (Taiwo; 2000, 218; Ikeanyibe; 2014, 565). Considerable political will and attitudinal re-orientation on the part of the governing elites are required to change this state of affairs if local governments must play their developmental roles and decongest the Centre in Nigeria.

LGCs must be financially responsible, innovative and competitive by leveraging maximally on their sources of internally generated revenue (guaranteed in the Fourth Schedule of the 1999 Constitution), and tapping into the benefits of Co-production for impact and development at the grassroots. Through co-production (Olowu; 2002), local governments can collaborate with other agencies and public-spirited (grassroots) citizens to provide varying services that transforms rural conditions and galvanise rural development. Co-production encourages inter-dependence and symbiotic relationships between governments and a broad spectrum of stakeholders, and this enriches citizens' understanding on programmes targeted at their advancement/ economic development as one of the tenets of the development theory.

Based on the above realisation, development initiatives and programmes are inclusive (collectively owned, driven and executed by the local populace) and sustainable. Only devolved administration at the grassroots possess the character, attributes and vitality to mobilise the people for the attainment of this goal. It is also plausible to argue that only devolution has the democratic imperative of utilising local government as a platform for training people in the art of local self-governance. This is an ideal based on the tenets of Local Government development theory, and Sharma et al. (2012) corroborates this in their characterisation of local government. However, the Nigerian situation vitiates this ideal, as several studies show reliance on impunity, democratic reversals, outright refusal by state governments to conduct democratic elections, and utilisation of Caretaker Committees at the third tier of government in Nigeria (for details, see Agi (2002); Onah (2004a); Wapmuk (2005); Tonwe and Allen (2009); Ezeani (2012); Ibietan and Ndukwe (2014b) and Ikeanyibe (2016).

There is a constitutional ambivalence in the above trajectory. The same Constitution that guaranteed the existence of democratically elected LGCs in Section 7 (1) created the unintended situation of tying them financially and in election matters to the umbilical cord of states in Sections 162 (5-8) and 197 (1b), respectively. The implication of this is that state governors from the Second Republic (except for brief interregnums highlighted earlier) up till now; capitalised on these gaps and institutional weaknesses

to turn LGCs to personal fiefdoms. A reversal of this situation, backed by the development imperatives of this theory will truly engender local self-governance.

The necessity for national unity in a plural and culturally disparate country like Nigeria cannot be overemphasised as a tenet of Local Government development theory. Local governments in Nigeria have been playing appreciable roles in this regard through institutional platforms/mechanisms such as: Association of Local Governments of Nigeria (ALGON) comprising chairmen of the 774 local governments in Nigeria, and Nigerian Union of Local Government Employees (NULGE) which is the umbrella body of Local Government workers in the federation. This should be sustained for maximum impact at the grassroots.

5. Local Government Autonomy and Implications for Grassroots Development in Nigeria

The basis for discussing this theme was laid in Section 3.3 of this paper. To reiterate, Odoh (2004) identified three key areas of autonomy as democracy; legal/administrative competence; and finance. The extent to which these factors facilitate or hinder grassroots development in Nigeria shall constitute the focus of this section.

Democracy is imperative for the effective functioning of a devolved self-governance at the grassroots. It underscores representative government, participation and accountability. This implies that where the local populace are involved in electing or selecting their leaders, representativeness, participation and accountability are satisfied as pivot for devolution and autonomy.

Democracy as a basis for autonomy has been operationalised by Odoh (2004, 49-50) as comprising these:

a. Mode of selection of the political office holders in local government – by nomination or through election.

b. Mode of electing the Chief Executive of local government – by direct or secondary election.

c. Whether elections have been fair.

d. Whether the State Governor interferes in the elections of these political office holders, especially the Chairman.

e. Whether local government executive and officials are consulted before major decisions are taken. For example, dissolution of councils, and creation of more local governments.

f. The extent to which local governments can involve communities in planning and budgeting.

g. Accountability of the chairman – Is it ultimately to the electorate or to the state government?

To confirm the place of democracy as a basis for autonomy, the above (seven) parameters must skew heavily in favour of the local government and local populace

(electorate). The narrative and situation in Nigeria suggest that the above indices have been largely in default. Support for this assertion is found in the studies conducted by Tonwe and Allen (2009); Ibietan and Ndukwe (2014a); and Ikeanyibe (2016). Detailed discussion on the different phases and features of local government, and how the localism principle underlines autonomy, plus grassroots development, are also contained in Ibietan (2008, 24-34).

Tonwe and Allen (2009, 359) submit as follows:

> Elections were conducted twice into all the local government councils throughout the country; first on non-party basis on December 12, 1987 and then on party basis in December 1992. The position that the chairmen of local governments are the Chief Executives of their respective local governments was emphasised during this period and they along with their deputies were directly elected by the people. The executive arm of the local government was separated from the local council to effectively integrate the local government system into the presidential system operating at the Macro levels.

The above state of affairs held during the regime of General Ibrahim Babangida, who in an attempt to address the deteriorating autonomy of local governments, embarked upon bold and pro-active measures to wean LGCs from the overbearing influence of State Governors on local governments. Part of the measures taken witnessed the scrapping of State Ministries of Local Government; direct disbursement of statutory allocations from the Federation Account to LGCs; Ten percent of states' internally generated revenue were to be given to LGCs in the respective states, and in cases of default, such amounts are deducted at source from the state's share of federation allocation on quarterly basis. It is noteworthy that this regime paraded a huge presence of Seasoned Academics at the Ministerial level and in the "Kitchen Cabinet", and it is arguable that they must have brought theory to bear on the practice of governance.

It is observable that the above gains were reverted between 1993 and 1998 as the local government system witnessed a conversion to administrative outposts under the military regime of (late) General Abacha. At the re-emergence of civilian rule in 1999, elections were only held between 2002 and 2004 at the local government level (Tonwe and Allen, 2009). Building on Asaju (2010), Ibietan and Ndukwe (2014a, 760) report that, throughout the Second Republic (1979-1983), "no election was held into the Local Government Councils, only Sole Administrators were appointed." The preceding presents a graphic and illuminating picture of how local government autonomy has been circumscribed in the country. How then can LGCs function as tools for grassroots development and decongest government at the Centre as a tenet of local government development theory?

More recently, Ikeanyibe (2016, 8) invigorated by previous studies presents these copious emblems of state governments' infractions which have given rise to stultifying and emasculating local governments under their watch:

- Abia State: in June, 2006, the governor dissolved the elected local government officials. This matter had been in court since then, ending in the Supreme Court judgement of Friday, 11 July 2014;

- Rivers State: in 2012, the governor suspended 11 local council chairmen indefinitely for failing to attend a meeting called by the governor;
- Delta State: the governor sacked the chairman of Burutu local government of Delta State, five months before the end of his first tenure in office;
- Ondo State: in 2008, the governor of the state, on assumption of office sacked the local government chairmen and councilors;
- Ekiti State: in October, 2010, 16 local government chairmen were sacked by the governor as a result of the court ruling of Justice Cornelius Akintayo of Ado Ekiti High Court that the State Independent Electoral Commission, which organized the election was not properly constituted;
- Bayelsa State: in 2013, five local government chairmen were sacked from office by the connivance of the state governor and the state House of Assembly on the alleged crime of gross misconduct;
- Imo State: the governor dissolved the Local Government Councils in 2011 just to eliminate members of the People's Democratic Party that has been in power in the state since 1999. The governor who was elected in May 2011 was a member of the All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA);
- Edo State: in late October 2012, the state House of Assembly connived with the governor to sack the 18 local government executives of council transition committees;
- Anambra State: the state governor Mr Peter Obi refused to hold local government elections while in office. The only local government election he held from 2006 to 2014 was the one held a few weeks before the end of his tenure in December 2013.

It is axiomatic from the above data and other analyses in this paper that constitutional ambivalence reinforced by the complicity of the judicature in Nigeria conjointly relegate the autonomy of local governments to the realms of fiction and theory. It is best imagined how development can take place in these circumstances.

Another key area of local government autonomy is legal/administrative competence. This emanates from constitutional and legal powers devolved to local governments as platforms for administrative actions or duties, and this underlines state-local relations and jurisdictional latitudes. This factor stands at an intersection between democracy and finance as bulwark to autonomy. The legal basis of Nigerian local government which derives from the 1976 reform; and as enshrined in later constitutions of the Federal Republic of Nigeria is not in doubt. Section 7 and the Fourth Schedule of the 1999 Constitution underscore the democratic imperative, as well as the mandatory and concurrent functions of local governments in Nigeria. However, these are undermined by the nature of state interferences in purely local affairs, democratic reversals and ancillary anti-democratic practices highlighted (earlier) in this paper.

Other issues underscoring acrimony in state-local relations hinge on financial infidelity, political interference in administration/personnel recruitment, overlapping revenue generation jurisdiction. Additionally, due to the poor revenue base, LGCs

are confronted with poor leadership and techno-bureaucratic expertise, workers' motivation and low morale, disconnect between local communities (in resource mobilisation and decision making) and the local government functionaries. These explain the poor capacity for service delivery and grassroots development ultimately, which also impinge on local government autonomy. Several studies, including Onah (2004a, 1-16); Ibietan (2010, 30-38); Wilson and Ibietan (2013, 135-142); Abe and Omotoso (2014:183-215) corroborate this position.

The constitutional ambivalence, breaches in federal practice and institutional weaknesses highlighted and bemoaned in this paper constitute serious puzzle and inhibition to the autonomy of local governments in Nigeria, and this hampers grassroots development in many ways. To resolve this puzzle, Onyeoziri in Onah and Ibietan (2010, 268) alluded to the inconsistencies that characterise the logic of federal practice especially in Nigeria, where each level/tier of government which is supposed to be coordinate and independent in its sphere become subordinated. This contradicts the letter and spirit of federalism in the Whearean conception. The argument stretches further that federalism creates certain liabilities for the integrity of the state which derives from the tension that characterises the inconsistencies in the logic of centralisation and decentralisation. In addition, the imperfections in state institutions also create disability for federal practice; therefore a meaningful discussion of federalism must be backed with "the theory of state" (which is the infrastructure) onto which federalism is grafted. This closes the gap and a mutual reinforcement of the two variables offers a reliable strategy for guaranteeing stable federal arrangements.

It is arguable that finance is the bedrock of local government autonomy. Odoh (2004, 51) expatiates that finance as the basis of autonomy comprises the following indices:

1. Amount of money available to local government from internal and external sources.
2. The regularity and reliability in disbursement of statutory allocation and how much of these end up in local governments account.
3. Internal revenue generation capacity and efforts of local government in constitutionally designated areas like rates, fines, fees, property tax, investment and others as reflected and guaranteed in the 1976 Reform Guidelines; State edicts and Fourth Schedule of 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.
4. Problems encountered by local government in raising revenue, especially in relation to administration, political and legal constraints.
5. Financial administration as typified by availability of revenues for project execution at the right time, plugging revenue losses through effective supervision of revenue collection, fraud prevention, stemming corruption by upholding transparency and accountability.

Studies have shown that the above indices operate within the ecology of Nigerian local government administration in the negative, and in many ways, circumscribe

the required autonomy for performance and grassroots development. For instance, Duru (2001b, 104-105) avers that rural poverty conspire with very high administrative costs of revenue to rob local governments of internal sources of raising funds. Oghoghoiye (2013, 262-268) corroborates this by affirming that rural poverty is an inhibition to rural development in Nigeria. High incidence of corruption, fraud and embezzlement by LGCs revenue officials, inadequate staff/lack of experts to man finance and its allied units of audit, budgeting and planning have impacted badly on the expertise required for developmental purposes at the third tier of governance in Nigeria.

Onah (2004b, 192 & 196) alludes to "gross neglect of…financial obligations to local governments by state governments" and "denial of statutory allocation to local governments aggravates their low internal revenue generating capacity." These contravene the constitutional provisions on public revenue as contained in Section 162 (5-8). Adamolekun (2009, 19) submits that "… both state and federal governments, in different harmful ways, have undermined local government autonomy." Adedeji in Ibietan and Ndukwe (2014b, 134) enumerates low quality staff, funding deficits among others as conjoining to "lead the local governments into a vicious circle of poverty … [and] circumscribing their powers/functions." Local government autonomy in the face of these can only belong to sophistry and rural development tantamount to a mere ruse. On this note, Ikeanyibe (2016, 8) affirms that "the state governors either misappropriate the funds of the local governments or reduce them to perform other functions meant for the state government." The anatomy of the local government system in Nigeria as the foregoing discourse show is an emaciated and thoroughly emasculated institution which requires intensive care and attention to enable them to play their developmental roles robustly.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

From the discussion and analyses of the themes and adjoining issues in this paper, it is observable that local government is a product of decentralisation. This must however be qualified to mean democratic decentralisation (devolution) which has autonomy as its corollary. The kernel of our argument in this paper is that only devolved systems of governance at the local level possess the attributes and capacity for participation, resource mobilisation, and effective utilisation targeted at grassroots development. It is deductible from this and other studies that the above averments do not reflect the practice in Nigeria. It is also disturbing that the governing elites in Nigeria do not seem ready for the required reforms to position local governments as veritable agents of development. LGCs must rise to this challenge by being economically innovative, fiscally responsible, and be leadership/techno-bureaucratic - competent. Power must be earned and taken to execute people-oriented programmes geared towards rural development.

Predicated on the foregoing discourse, the paper recommends the following:

1. Sections 8 and 162 of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria require another serious look and amendment to tinker with the superintending roles and untenable paternalism of state governments in state-local

relations (especially in fiscal practice), with a view to enhancing local government autonomy.

2. The theory - to - practice approach of this paper is quite illuminating, and grassroots development will find expression in the tenets of Local Government (Studies) development theory and constitute realistic pivot for the reforms desired.

3. LGCs should explore innovative and robust revenue streams by invigorating their extractive functions to boost internally generated revenue.

4. The paper highlighted the imperative of Co-production in service delivery. This is achievable through financial buoyancy and networked partnership with stakeholders in the development process.

5. As a corollary of the above, effective sensitisation and mobilisation of the rural populace is required for grassroots development as canvassed by the developmental school of thought.

6. There is need to energise agencies responsible for mobilisation, civic re-orientation and elections (NOA, INEC), and institutions of allied mandates to improve and sustain citizen awareness; ensure credible/transparent process that can produce accountable and responsible leaders.

7. This paper suggests a complete de-politicisation of the institutions (and mechanisms) saddled with ensuring rectitude and accountability in public governance, thus strengthening them and leading to deceleration in resource plunder, mismanagement and conversion of public resources to private gain.

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