

REVIEW



Evaluation of the challenges bedevilling the effectiveness of local government councils in Nigeria's Fourth Republic: The experience and the way forward

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ABSTRACT

The third tier of government in Nigeria, which is the local government, was created to provide certain statutory services that may be local in nature; it is believed that it is the level most suitable for that because of its proximity to the grassroots. But since Nigeria's Fourth Republic, discharging their responsibilities effectively has been a big challenge to the local governments. This paper therefore, seeks to evaluate the challenges that have been preventing the local governments from achieving its responsibilities effectively and proffer solutions. To achieve this, the researcher adopted Content Analysis as its methodology where it reviewed the works of other researchers and writers and arrived at a conclusion based on the prevailing views and opinions. The research work concluded that most of the challenges being experienced at the local government level in Nigeria is as a result of the contradictions and ambiguities in the hastily compiled 1999 Constitution by the retreating military government of Gen. Abdulsalami Abubakar. Some of the recommendations include, there is need to review the sections of the 1999 Constitution that dealt with local government, to guarantee autonomy to that tier of government. Again, there is need to abolish the State Joint Local Government Accounts, as state governors have been diverting funds meant for development at the local government to other areas, Local government service should be made attractive like the federal and state services to attract qualitative manpower that will engender effectiveness and socio-economic development at that tier of government.

KEYWORDS

Challenges; Effectiveness; Fourth republic; Tier of government; Local government councils

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Introduction

Nigeria's Fourth Republic came into being with the handing over to a democratically elected government on the 29th day of May 1999. This was preceded by the signing into law and adoption of the 1999 Constitution by the retreating military junta, headed by General Abdulsalami Abubakar. The 1999 Constitution like its predecessor of 1979 recognized the local government as the third tier of government and gave it its powers and responsibilities. But the wording and the design of the 1999 Constitution hurriedly packaged by the retreating military junta created many challenges which worked against the smooth running and effectiveness of the local government councils in Nigeria.

For instance, Section 7 (1) of the 1999 Constitution recognized and guaranteed the existence of the local government as a distinct tier of government. It guaranteed a system of local government by democratically elected local government councils. Accordingly, the government of every state is required to ensure the existence, composition, finance and functions of local government councils. (1999 Constitution). According to Okoli (2019), local government possesses the three criteria of entity existence, government character and autonomy. It operates under a free and independent circumstance.

A simple interpretation of that same section invariably made local government a creation of the state government, for

the fact that it has to a large extent, established and subsumed the local government under the control and supervision of the state government. But this section of the constitution brought ambiguity into local government administration by placing it at a crossroads with the concept of federalism, thereby creating a lot of problems or challenges.

With regard to federalism, a system of government in which power is divided between two levels of government (federal and state) according to the principles of centralization and non-centralisation, local government is normally regarded as a subordinate rather than an autonomous level of government. According to Eghosa in Akinsanya and Ayoade (2005), this is attributable to the fact that it was not a party to the original foedus or contract that brought federalism into being. Eghosa (2017), further argued that in most cases, local governments are units of decentralization created and superintended by state governments and fall under their jurisdictional competence [1,2].

The efforts by many military regimes in Nigeria to change the tradition in a federal set-up by trying to place local government under federal control, granting it autonomy and making constitutional provisions to that effect caused much friction and intergovernmental problems between the federal, state and local authorities over issues of autonomy and control. The issues over the status and structure of local

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government as provided in the constitution, the extent and way of involvement in local matters and the creation of new councils among others are some of the issues emanating from the rivalries and controversies.

Again, the 1999 Constitution's adoption of the presidential system made matters worse for the local government councils. The hallmark of the presidential system is the enormous powers available and exercised by the Head of the executive branch of government and the premium placed on the doctrine of the separation of powers, apparently to check possible excesses on the part of the Chief Executive. Osaghae (2017), raised some posers which are very important in this research which are, how well can local government fare under such powerful chief executives who have powers of fiscal and administrative control, including powers to create new local councils and dissolve elected bodies? How much autonomy for instance can they exercise under such suffocating circumstances?

There has been an ensuing battle between the federal and state governments over the control of the soul of the local government since the advent of Nigeria's Fourth Republic, exacerbated by the ambiguities and contradictions in the 1999 Constitution [3]. These battles have been fought severally on the turf of the Supreme Court. For instance, in 2001, an attempt was made by the National Assembly to assume responsibility for determining the tenure of elected local councils and the timing of the elections, which were resisted by the states which secured Supreme Court rulings affirming their jurisdiction over local governments.

Osaghae (2017), further argued that states have also had a running battle with the Centre over the allocation and disbursement of revenue to local governments [3]. Federal authorities have used their control over the Federation Account and disbursement of money from the account to serious advantage in this battle. In order to claim their authority over local governments in Nigeria, some state governments went about the business of creating another level of local government administration called Development Areas but this did not go down well with the Federal government under President Olusegun Obasanjo.

In 2004, he ordered the stoppage of statutory allocations to Ebonyi, Katsina, Lagos, Nasarawa and Niger states over the new local government areas created by the state governments, claiming they were illegal and unconstitutional. This step was in spite of the fact that the 1999 Constitution gave the State Assemblies the power to create and alter the boundaries of local government areas. Again, in 2001, an attempt by the National Assembly to assume responsibility for determining the tenure of elected local councils and the timing of the election into local councils was resisted by the states which secured a Supreme Court ruling that affirmed state jurisdiction. Even on the issue of resource allocation, states have had running battles with the federal government on the disbursement and monitoring of allocations to the local councils.

Nigeria's Fourth Republic inter-governmental relation between the Federal and state governments as it has to do with local governments, has been characterized by stiff and fierce competition, instead of cooperation. This Federal-State rivalry has led to several challenges hampering the effectiveness and

efficiency of local government councils in Nigeria. This therefore is the objective of this research, to evaluate these challenges and proffer solutions on the way out or the way forward.

Conceptual Review

The concept of local government

World over, various strategies and approaches have been adopted or used by governments for the management of rural areas. Ugwu (2020), posits that there is no congruence on consensus on the most appropriate strategy for the administration of the rural areas [4]. This gave rise to the varied interpretations being given to this concept by various scholars. Efforts to define local government gave rise to various viewpoints; this could be due to the various perspectives on the actual roles of local government, which differ from one environment to the other. There is no consensus among experts on a common definition of the concept of local government. However, from the various definitions of local government by scholars and experts, an emerging trend became glaring. While some see it as a sub-national unit with full sovereign powers, autonomy and authority, others see it as a mere creation of the states or regions for administrative and development convenience.

According to Ugwu (2020), "local government is the third tier level of government created for the purpose of efficient and effective administration of the localities" [4]. On the other hand, Agi (2002), sees local government as "that part of government of a nation or state which deals mainly with matters of concern to the people of a particular place" [5]. In the same vein, the 1976 local government reform handbook conceived local government as "government at the local level, exercised through representative councils established by law to exercise specific powers within defined areas". The United Nations Office for Public Administration defined Local Government as:

"A political sub-division of a nation (or in a federal system of state) which is constituted by law, including the powers to impose taxes or to exact labour for prescribed purposes. The governing body of such an entity is elected or otherwise is locally selected"

The definitions above are in consensus that local government is a third level of government in a federal political system with some measure of autonomy and powers given to it by the constitution for the objective of performing important activities and functions that are in the best interest of the particular local councils.

On the other hand, another group of scholars believed that the local government is a subordinate unit of government to the other units and not sovereign or autonomous. For Example, Rao, V.V. defined local government as that level of the government that deals mainly with local affairs, overseen by authorities below the state government but elected independently of the state authority by qualified citizens. Again, Robson (2021), thought that local government involves the conception of a territorial, non-sovereign community, having the legal right and the necessary power to regulate its activities [6]. Corroborating on the subordinate level of the local government, Osaghae (2017), Akinsanya and Ayoade (2017) averred that "in most

cases, local governments are units of decentralization created and superintended by state governments and fall under their jurisdictional competence [1,3].

In conclusions, Sakpere RO (2021), said that from the various definitions put forward by different authorities and institutions as have been chronicled, local government could be defined as a localized governing body, entrusted with the authority to generate funds through taxation in a designated area (be it a village, town or city) for the provision of essential services such as sanitation, education, water supply and more [7]. Does the Nigerian situation align with the notion of local governments enjoying autonomy from state and central control to effectively perform their services? Are local governments in Nigeria politically, administratively and financially autonomous from the other levels of government? This raises a critical question about the level of autonomy granted to local governments in Nigeria.

Nigeria's fourth republic

The Fourth Republic signifies the republican government in Nigeria, which has been in effect since 1999. Governed by the Fourth Republican Constitution, commonly referred to as the 1999 Constitution, it echoes certain aspects of the earlier Second Republic (1979-1983), which faced challenges such as the presence of multiple ministries that impeded policy planning. On May 29, 1999, Nigeria officially adopted the constitution of the Fourth Republic.

After the death of General Sani Abacha, the military Head of State and de facto ruler of Nigeria in 1998, his successor, General Abdulsalami Abubakar initiated the transition to civil rule programming. This marked Nigeria's return to democratic rule in 1999. The ban on political activities was lifted and political prisoners were released from detention facilities. The Constitution was modelled after the ill-fated Second Republic, which saw the British Westminster type of democratic government jettisoned for an American Presidential System. Political parties were formed, including the People's Democratic Party (PDP), All Nigerian Peoples Party (ANPP), and Alliance for Democracy (AD), and elections were set for April 1999. In the widely monitored 1999 election, former military ruler Olusegun Obasanjo was elected on the PDP platform. On May 29th, 1999, Obasanjo was sworn in as President and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

In the controversial general election held on 21st April 2007, Umar Yar'adua of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) was elected as the President of Nigeria. However, following his death on 5th May 2010, Goodluck Jonathan became the third President (Interim). He later won the election the following year, which was widely considered a fairer and more transparent election than all the previous ones in the Fourth Republic. Muhammadu Buhari won the general elections held on 28th March 2015, after the PDP party's rule of sixteen years (1999-2015). Muhammadu Buhari was the President of Nigeria until 29th May 2023.

Empirical Literature Review

The Nigerian Constitution of 1999 guarantees the Local Government system, which consists of democratically elected Local Government Councils. Section 7(3) of the Constitution

provides for the functions of a Local Government Council under its Fourth Schedule, which is mainly derived from the Basic and Constitutional Transition Provisions (Decree 15 of 1987).

The main functions of a Local Government Council are as follows:

- a. Consideration and making of recommendations to a state commission on economic planning or any similar body;
- b. Collection of rates, radio and television licenses;
- c. Establishment and maintenance of cemeteries, burial grounds, and homes for the destitute or infirm;
- d. Licensing of bicycles, trucks (other than mechanically propelled trucks), canoes, wheelbarrows, and carts;
- e. Establishment, maintenance, and regulation of slaughterhouses, slaughter slabs, markets, motor parks, and public conveniences. These functions are geared towards promoting economic development in the State, particularly in the areas of authority of the council and the State, and ensuring adequate facilities and services are provided to the public.
- f. The construction and maintenance of roads, streets, street lighting, drains, parks, gardens, open spaces, and other public facilities as prescribed from time to time.
- g. The naming of roads and streets and the numbering of houses.
- h. The provision and maintenance of public conveniences, sewage, and refuse disposal.
- i. The registration of all births, deaths, and marriages.
- j. The assessment of privately owned houses or tenements to levy rates as prescribed by the House of Assembly of a State.

The following matters fall under Section 2 of the Fourth Schedule of the functions of a Local Government Council:

- a. Outdoor advertising and hoarding
- b. Movement and keeping of pets of all descriptions
- c. Shops and kiosks
- d. Restaurants, bakeries, and other places for sale
- e. Laundries vi. Licensing, regulation and control of the sale of liquor.

Local government administration is responsible for participating in the government of a state regarding the following matters:

- a. Provision and maintenance of primary, adult and vocational education.
- b. Development of agriculture and natural resources, other than the exploitation of minerals.
- c. Provision and maintenance of health services.
- d. Any other functions conferred on a Local Government Council by the House of Assembly of the State. In addition to the above, local government administration carries out informative functions such as enlightenment, development projects, administration, democratic and leadership initiatives, and maintenance of peace, law, and order in the locality.

An in-depth examination of local government performance in Nigeria reveals that local governments have failed in effective service delivery due to a number of factors. Some of these factors underlying the inefficiency and ineffectiveness of local government in their service delivery responsibilities were identified in a study conducted by

Bello-Imam and Roberts [8,9]. These factors include:

- a. revenue inadequacy
- b. the erosion of local functions particularly in the revenue-yielding areas by state governments and their agencies
- c. politico-administrative problems such as inadequacy of skilled and technical manpower, lackadaisical attitude of existing local government staff, official corruption variable structures/sizes of local government among others, and
- d. lack of integration of the relevant communities in the execution of local services.

Also, some scholars in the field of public administration and local government studies identified the following factors affecting service delivery at local government administration in Nigeria as; lack of funds financial constraints, corruption, undue political interference/ lack of autonomy, lack of qualified professional staff/ unskilled workers, leadership problem, poor work attitude, among others [10-15]. Some of these factors will be discussed below

Lack of funds- financial constraints: For local government to effectively provide essential services at the grassroots, enabling environment most especially funds must be available to carry out its assigned responsibilities. In Nigeria, aside from other common problems, the non-provision of enough funds to the local government has hindered the effective performance of the local council [13]. Ibok (2014) pointed out that: Aside from the fact that statutory allocations and grants from the federal and state governments to councils are inadequate, the problem is exacerbated by the low revenue generation capacity of the council [13]. Associated with this problem is also exacerbated by frequent sundry deductions by the federal and state governments from their monthly allocations.

Worst still is the failure of most state governments to fulfil their monthly statutory obligations to local government by outright refusal to remit 10% of internally generated revenue accrued to the state monthly. In some situations, it has become so bad that many local councils cannot pay staff salaries not to talk about basic needs provisions". These financial constraints account for the inadequacy of funds in the local government administration in Nigeria and they inhibit the efforts of local councils to provide better, efficient and effective social services to the grassroots.

Corruption

Corruption has been identified as one of the problems confronting effective local government administration in Nigeria. Corruption has eaten deep into the fabric of Nigeria's local councils and it is the greatest bane of local government administration in Nigeria. Bolatito & Ibrahim (2014) pointed out that at the grassroots level, corruption has been canonically accommodated, entertained, and celebrated within the system [14]. In the local government setting corruption is Misnomer labelled and euphemistically referred to as "Egunje" (a slogan which means "illegal offer" in Nigeria) and a major hindrance to good government. The inability of local governments to provide services to the people at the grassroots has been linked to high levels of corruption among local government officials [12].

There have been glaring cases of embezzlement and misappropriation of the councils' funds by the officials of the

council [13]. For instance, in February 2010, the chairman of Ijebu East Local Government Council in Ogun State was suspended from office on account of various financial misdeeds. Similarly, in April 2010, the House of Assembly in Benue State suspended 12 council chairmen in the state and directed that the chairmen should refund a total of 150 million naira being financial misdeeds associated with the excess crude funds received by local governments in the state [12]. Generally, wide-scale embezzlement by officials of the grassroots has made the needed development of the grassroots a tall dream and has rendered them financially incapable of discharging their constitutionally assigned responsibilities.

This unethical conduct has rendered the local council financially impotency, hence incapable of providing basic needs to its citizens [10,13]. Unarguably, Chukwuemeka et al., (2014) stressed that the high level of corruption in the local government makes it difficult for them to channel even the available scarce resources towards development projects and programs [15]. Specifically, corruption in the local government system in Nigeria, manifests, for instance, in the award of inflated and fictitious contracts, award of contracts and subsequent abandonment, over-estimation of cost of projects, inflation of staff salary, Inflation of prices of bought items, fraudulent sale of government property, outright embezzlement of local government fund, payment of huge sums of money to political godfathers and lack of accountability [14,15].

The import of the foregoing is that apart from financial constraints, corruption constitutes a major obstacle to the effectiveness of local government service delivery. Undue political interference – lack of autonomy: Another reason for the failure of local government in the area of service delivery is the role of the state governors in the affairs of local government [11]. According to Eboh & Diejomaoh (2010), there is a high degree of external influence and interference in local government affairs by the higher levels of government, particularly the state governments [10]. The governors are found of taking over their financial allocation, taxes, and counterpart funding and refuse to conduct Local Government elections, but instead rule local governments with appointed administrators, most of whom are party loyalist and their friends and relations turning the entire process of local governments into irrelevance schemes of things [16].

There have been instances where state governors unconstitutionally dissolved the entire elected council's officers without proper recourse and due process [10]. As soon as a new governor comes into office, one of the first actions is to dissolve the existing local councils, whether elected or caretaker [17]. This, as the recent case of Imo State demonstrates, can degenerate into anarchy, with claims of legitimacy between rival appointees or elected officials. The staff of the councils invariably find themselves caught in the middle [18]. In many cases, care takes ship is perpetuated through promises of elections which are invariably postponed. This has been the case in Edo, Delta and others [17].

The outright denial of democratically elected local councils through caretaker committees demonstrates the increasing authoritarian holds of the councils by state governors. As such most state governors never bothered to conduct local

government elections. For instance, as of 2009, Anambra State had not held any local council elections since the return to civil rule in 1999 [19]. The high level of interference by state governors on local government affairs was also expressed by Khaleel quoted in John (2016); and Adeyemi (2013) when he observed this.

There is no state of the federation of Nigeria where one form of illegality or the other is not committed with funds of local government, through over deduction of primary school teacher's salary, spurious state/local government joint account project, sponsoring of elections, taking over the statutory functions of local government and handing them over to cronies and consultants, non-payments of pensioners and non-utilization of training fund despite the mandatory deduction of stipulated percentages for these purposes nine states out of the 36 states of the federation have elected representatives running the affairs of their local governments [11,20]. This is central to the whole problem because it is by planting stooges called caretaker committees, who neither have the mandate of the people nor moral strength to resist the excruciating control of the state government that perpetuates the rot.

Local governments in Nigeria's Fourth Republic are responsible for providing various services such as meat and abattoir inspection, education at all levels, awarding scholarships and bursaries, maintaining public libraries and reading rooms, providing agricultural and animal health extension services, veterinary clinics, fire services as well as lighting and drainage. However, local governments currently seem unable to fulfil these responsibilities, and they are not achieving what they are mandated to. What could be responsible for this? What happened to the effective and efficient administration of the local government system in Nigeria's Fourth Republic?

It appears that the intergovernmental relations between the federal, state, and local governments in Nigeria's Fourth Republic are characterized by competition rather than cooperation, leading to a lack of effectiveness and efficiency in the local government councils. Scholars such as Ighodalo A, (2012), Agbodike, Igbokwe-Ibeto & Nkah (2014), Sherif (2016), Sakpere RO 2021 (2021), and Osaghe (2017), Akinsanya and Ayoade (2017) and Odalonu (2015) have identified similar challenges that hinder the effectiveness of local government administration in Nigeria [1,3,21-24].

Size of local governments

Some local government areas are too small in size and because of that, find it difficult to mobilize sufficient resources- both human and material for the proper discharge of their constitutional responsibilities. There are also those that are too big in size and population but the inhabitants have a very low per capita income. This makes it difficult for the local council to meet the needs of the people.

Corruption

Corruption is one of the biggest problems in contemporary Nigeria. It has become so ingrained in our system that it is now widely accepted as a part of it. While corruption exists all over the world, its degree of manifestation varies from system to system [25]. At the grassroots level, corruption has become a

norm and is often celebrated within the system. This is one of the major problems facing effective local government administration in Nigeria. Non-adherence to the provisions of the Financial Memorandum (FM), conspicuous consumption of local officials, extravagant lifestyles that are not commensurate with the official sources of income, the imposition of leaders through a corrupt political process, and low wages of local government officials are some of the issues that contribute to corruption in local government in Nigeria [25].

The following are some of the common issues that are prevalent in many local government councils:

- a. Inflation in prices of purchased items;
- b. Overestimation of project costs;
- c. The ghost worker phenomenon;
- d. Poor financial foundation and limited revenue;
- e. Awarding of contracts and subsequent abandonment;
- f. Payment of huge sums of money to political influencers;
- g. The long-standing belief by officials that people are ignorant, illiterate, and unenlightened;
- h. Lack of accountability

Lack of funds

Section 162 (5) of the 1999 Constitution made provision for a State Joint Local Government Account to be established and principally managed by the state. Most state governors hardly make the local government share of the revenue available to them. Since the Fourth Republic, especially since 2004, state governments have been treating local governments as an appendage of the state and not as an autonomous unit.

Elections are hardly conducted at the local government level, the state governors usually constitute caretaker committees and put their stooges and errand boys as committee chairmen, whose loyalty is to the state governors and cannot question whether the correct amount due to the local governments are released or not. That same section of the constitution equally made it mandatory for states to give 10% of their Internally Generated Revenue (IGR) to be given to the local governments. But these are obeyed only in breach. The result of this is therefore an acute financial challenge, making it difficult for the local government to carry out their statutory responsibilities and programmers.

Lack of autonomy

Autonomy is the state of being free and independent, without external or remote control. According to section 7 (1) of the 1999 Constitution, local councils must be democratically elected and state governments are responsible for creating laws regarding their "establishment, structure, composition, finance, and functions." However, this puts the local councils under the control of state governors and state houses of assembly, who can manipulate them however they please. In Nigeria, local governments are not completely independent and are managed by federal and state governments. These governments oversee the administration of local governments through various agencies, such as the Offices of Local Government Affairs, the Ministry of Local Government, Offices of the SA to the Governor on Local Government Affairs, and the Local Government Service Commission. Consequently, these agencies are preventing the local governments from having self-dependent administration and autonomy in Nigeria.

According to Hassan M and Ammani (2017), Section 7 of the 1999 Constitution guarantees democratically elected Local Government Councils (LGCs) as a system of Local Governments (LGs) [26]. However, the same section of the Constitution ties the LGCs to the State Governments, which takes away all the benefits of democracy and social justice that should be derived from this constitutional provision. This leads to a compromise in the ability of LGC's functionaries to be directly responsible to their respective LGs, resulting in the negation of democracy and social justice.

The poor performance of the Local Government Councils (LGCs) in Nigeria can be attributed to the actions of State governments. Many State Governors and their corresponding Houses of Assembly do not seem to recognize that LGCs are a constitutionally guaranteed third tier of government. The LGCs are composed of democratically elected officials who are also constitutionally guaranteed. It is unfortunate that we see State Governors removing elected LGC chairmen as if they are state government employees. An expert on this issue, Ammani, believes that local government councils need to be freed from the control of state governments in order to have a bright future. The Constitution needs to be reviewed to make LGCs independent of state governments, just as state governments are independent of the Federal Government. This will make LGCs truly a third-tier of government.

Leadership problem

In most Nigerian states, the ruling political party selects and endorses candidates for local government elections. Without the party's support, such candidates have little chance of winning. Furthermore, the state authorities appoint caretaker chairmen for the Local Government Council, who are often puppets of the state governor. Even when elections are conducted, the ruling party in the state and the state government frequently manipulate the electoral process to favor their chosen candidates. This skewed system leads to inefficiency in administrative performance, diversion of local government functions, and the neglect of programs intended to benefit the local population.

Lack of qualified staff

Local government in Nigeria hardly attracts qualified and qualitative staff due to lack of money. Staff with professional administrative and technical competence like; doctors, engineers, architects, surveyors etc. are usually very reluctant to join the local government service because there are few promotion opportunities. Top-level manpower many at times are seconded to the local government by the state governments, making it easy for such a staff on secondment to escape the control of authorities for which they work. This scenario makes it difficult for the local government to function effectively.

There is a problem with job satisfaction among skilled personnel and professionals in local government. Many prefer to work in private organizations or start their own businesses, rather than risk staying with the local government where there are no incentives and they may not be fully utilized. This has resulted in local governments depending on unskilled labor, such as diploma and certificate holders who may not have the practical skills to match their qualifications. This situation presents a significant challenge to the efficiency of local government, as unskilled workers can often struggle to be

productive and effective in their roles.

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Inadequate and poor budgetary allocation

Local governments in Nigeria often suffer from insufficient and inadequate budgetary allocation. This is often the result of deliberate cuts made by some State Governors, either for political reasons or due to corruption. These governors siphon funds through frivolous activities and fictitious contracts to their party members and friends, significantly impacting the financial needs of local governments. As a result of this, local governments in Nigeria often fail to meet expectations, rendering this tier of government meaningless and lacking the essence of democracy.

Administrative inefficiency

Local governments in Nigeria are facing administrative inefficiencies and ineffectiveness due to various factors such as low educational qualifications of staff, poor motivation, autocratic leadership, and poor work environments. Effective management and control of finances play a key role in the overall management of local governments. The quality and effectiveness of local government services are highly dependent on the quality and quantity of workers within the system. Unfortunately, politicians in Nigeria often fail to deliver on their campaign promises and instead focus on ways to stay in power while misusing public funds. This neglect of good governance and democratic ideals undermines administrative efficiency and hampers progress in Nigeria's local government sector.

Government/party interference

There is interference on the part of the federal or state governments, especially when the government parties try to make use of the local government councils to achieve their plans. Moreover, this party politics divides the councilors into different factions, with the result that divergent goals are pursued. This makes the local governments councilors most inefficient. There is also such interference that comes from the ministry of local government. This had created a situation that makes it difficult for the council to make use of their own initiative in handling their affairs.

Inter-governmental conflicts

Intergovernmental conflicts on who controls the local government between the centre and state governments have been a recurring decimal in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. The central government has always wanted the local governments to be autonomous in some issues but the 1999 Constitution have placed local governments under the states. This has led to several legal tussles between the federal and state governments at the Supreme Court. For instance, in 2001, the federal and state governments were in court on the tenure of elected local

government chairmen. While the National Assembly tried to legislate on their tenure, the state headed to court seeing that move as an encroachment into their jurisdiction. Again, the issue creation of new local governments led to a confrontation between the federal and some state governments like Lagos, Ebonyi, Katsina, Nasarawa and Niger, that created new local governments, on the grounds that the new local governments created by the states were illegal and unconstitutional, leading to the stoppage of their allocations by the federal government [3].

Lack of provision of basic social amenities

The decline in the delivery of social services to the people at the grassroots level is being felt more by the common people. This indicates that the local government administration has failed to meet the basic needs of the people, such as good roads, metro transport, potable water, regular electricity supply, sanitation, rehabilitation of local roads under their local jurisdiction, and the delivery of quality healthcare and education. Furthermore, there is a lack of maintenance of existing social services. As a result, there is a strong demand for the cancellation or eradication of the third tier of government, which is the Local Government Administration in Nigeria.

Discussion

Having reviewed the literature available on the subject matter, the researcher arrived at certain far-reaching findings. Firstly, the local government system in Nigeria is facing a lot of challenges. These challenges stemmed from the hasty piecing together of the 1999 Constitution by the retreating military junta of Gen. Abdulsalami Abubakar. This constitution brought a lot of confusion into local government administration in Nigeria and this made local government as the third tier of government not to live up to its constitutional responsibilities. Again, the local government has turned to a battleground between the federal and state governments since the Fourth Republic, no thanks to the confusion caused by the hastily written 1999 Constitution.

For instance, Section 7 (1) gave the state powers to create local governments, when some states like Lagos, Niger, Ebonyi etc. exercised this constitutional right, the Federal government under President Obasanjo saw the exercise as illegal and unconstitutional and forced the states to cancel the local government areas. Lagos states that refused to be intimidated had their allocations seized by the "Almighty Federal Government". The constant litigations between the federal and state governments because of local governments was a big distraction and challenge on its own which in no small measure, contributed to the ineffectiveness of the local governments in Nigeria's Fourth Republic.

Again, stemming from the confusion inherent in the 1999 Constitution, the autonomy of local governments as a supposed third tier of government was mortgaged. While both the 1979 and 1999 constitutions of Nigeria recognized local governments as the third tier of governments, this was only in principle, for in practice; local governments are under the states. This was worsened by the lack of checks and balances that are obtainable in a presidential system at the state level. The state governors have absolute powers as most of them pocketed the state houses of assembly and are supposed to supervise the activities of this tier of government, thereby usurping their functions.

They decide which local government council to dissolve even without recourse to the state houses of assembly. They decide the longevity of democratically elected local government officials and may even decide not to organize elections and have them administered by caretaker committees, which have no place under the constitution. This practice usually left local government administration in the hands of political thugs and stooges of the governors whose only loyalty is to the governor and not to the electorate or inhabitants of the local government area. While both the Federal and state governments exercise full autonomy independent of each other, such could not be said of the local governments, most states have Ministries of Local Government Affairs, Office of the Special Assistant to the Governor on Local Government Affairs, Local Government Service Commission etc. all aimed at eroding the autonomy and independence of the local government as a tier of government.

This practice is a very big challenge to the efficiency and effectiveness of local government administration, especially in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. One of the biggest challenges confronting local governments is the issue of grossly inadequate finance to carry out their statutory responsibilities. Most local government areas are financially insolvent, their statutory sources of revenue like markets, licenses for liqueur and eateries, etc have been appropriated by state governments. Their share of the federation account is lodged in State Joint Local Government Accounts, managed by states. Even the statutory ten percent of state Internally Generated Revenues are not remitted to the local government councils.

This makes them perpetually insolvent; you hardly see local government councils carrying out development projects these days, and simplest things like the evacuation of refuse dumps are hardly done let alone other capital-intensive activities and responsibilities. All local government councils do since the advent of the Fourth Republic is the payment of salaries which is not even paid as and when due. Many occasions, the National Union of Local Government Employees (NULGE) will threaten or embark on strike actions before worker's salaries are paid, mostly through bailouts from state governments. This has been a challenge to the effectiveness of local governments in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. Again, local councils which used to be a training ground for future political leaders no longer play that role. This has been destroyed by governors of states who refused to conduct free and fair elections in these councils. Instead, they appoint their stooges and relatives into such leadership positions. Since they were not democratically elected through popular elections, they owe nothing to the electorate or the inhabitants of such places and do not care whether they carry out their statutory responsibilities or not, the only thing that qualified them to be there is their unalloyed loyalty to the state's chief executive.

This lack of competitive, free and fair elections at the local government level has been a big challenge to local government administration in Nigeria's Fourth Republic, politicians no longer care about coming back to the electorate to canvass for election and at that, can afford to be irresponsible, this has destroyed the desire to achieve so one could be reelected as it is in other levels of government in Nigeria. Finally, the caliber of workers found at the local government level at the moment, cannot guarantee effectiveness. The uncertainty that has

characterized local government administration since the Fourth Republic has led to the exodus of professionals and other highly qualified personnel from the local government service. These set of people have left to the private sector, the federal and state services or even private practice, leaving only the half-baked and artisans to be in the local government services. This set of local government employees could hardly interpret the policies of the government of the day, let alone effective implementation, leading to inefficiency and ineffectiveness. These have been part of the bane of effectiveness at the local government level in Nigeria's Fourth Republic.

Methodology

This research work adopts a qualitative method which deals with non-numerical data and is used to generate rich and detailed social phenomena that can help researchers develop theories or arrive at certain informed conclusions. For the purpose of this work, involves gathering secondary data on the challenges of local government in Nigeria's Fourth Republic and the way forward.

Conclusions

Based on the findings above, one can conclude that the 1999 constitution created a lot of challenges for local government councils and by extension, local government administration in Nigeria. From the issue of lack of autonomy by subsuming it under the state, unlike the federal and state levels that are autonomous to allowing the existence of State Joint Local Government Accounts which kept local governments perpetually dependent on the state governments for the financing of its basic responsibilities. This lack of autonomy and financial independence, coupled with the powers to dissolve democratically elected governments created a lot of challenges for the third tier of government, especially since the return to a democratically- elected governance in 1999, which coincided with Nigeria's Fourth Republic.

The way forward

From the foregoing, it has been established that Nigeria's Fourth Republic which is anchored on the 1999 presidential constitution brought a lot of challenges to the local councils and by extension, local government administration in Nigeria. Here, the researchers proffered some recommendations that could make the local government not only alive to its responsibilities but equally very effective. Some of the recommendations on the way forward include:

1. Review of the 1999 Constitution: There is an urgent need to review some sections of the 1999 Constitution, especially Section 7 (1), which placed the local government under the states. There is a need for the newly reviewed constitution to determine whether Nigeria is a two-tier or three-tier federal state. Calling it an autonomous tier or level of government on the one hand and subsuming under the state on the other hand is a recipe for confusion. This has been the subject of contention and litigation between the federal and state governments severally at the Supreme Court and the last on this may not have been heard. Only a clearly defined status in a new or reviewed constitution will settle this issue once and for all. This ambiguity when removed will lead to effectiveness in the operation of the local government councils under this republic.
2. Abolishing State Joint Local Government Account: Another thing that will aid the effectiveness of local governments in this Republic is making them to be financially autonomous. Both the federal and state governments receive their own share of funds from the federation account directly, why can't such be extended to the local governments? What is the essence of State Joint Local Government Accounts? If the state does not have a joint account with the federal, why should the local government have a joint account with the states? Full financial autonomy will lead to effectiveness at the local government level, as it will make finance available for the local governments to carry out their statutory responsibilities to the inhabitants of its areas of jurisdiction. Again, this seems to be the attraction of state governors that they don't allow democratically elected governments to thrive at that level, so they could be appointing their loyalists and stooges into the caretaker committees who cannot question them on how they disburse and utilize the local government fund, since they are in office at the pleasure of the state chief executives.
3. Democracy should be restored at the local government level by all means. This present practice of allowing the tenure and time of elections in the hands of the lame state assemblies who are puppets to the state governors, cannot guarantee effectiveness at the local government level. This lack of credible election to elect the local government chief executives has removed the responsibility of political leaders at that level to the electorate and transferred to the state assemblies under the whims and caprices of state governors. Instead of dedicated leaders with a development mindset, we have all manner of people whose only credentials are unalloyed loyalty to the governors, there is no how the local governments could live up to their statutory responsibilities under such an arrangement. As a corollary, the conduct of elections at the local government level should be removed from the hands of state independent electoral commissions and placed in the hands of the Independent National Electoral Commission. From all indications, these bodies have failed in the conduct of credible, free and fair elections at the local governments; they are there to do the bidding of the governors and not the will of the people. This could be taken care of through constitutional amendments. Some people may argue that this is not the practice elsewhere but the emphasis should be on what works for us, this present arrangement is not working, it has killed democracy at the local government level in Nigeria.
4. Finally, the local government service should be reformed and made attractive like the federal and state services. This is the only way to attract qualitative manpower at this level of government, people who could understand the policy direction of the government and equally implement them to the letter. It is only this caliber of people that will deploy their expertise and experience to engender efficiency and effectiveness at the local government that will lead to socio-economic development.

Disclosure statement

The authors affirm that there are no competing interests that could influence the findings or conclusions presented in this research.

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