

Administration of the Local Government in Nigeria: Interrogating the 1976 Local Government Reforms

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Abstract

Local government reforms over the years, in the recent past and most recently have gained unprecedented prominence in local government administration. This development has provoked the concern of this paper to examine the reforms and its implications in the performance of its functions. This paper therefore aims to establish the importance of effective local government administration in Nigeria following the various reforms initiated as strategies to boost local government efficiency. This study proceeds by adopting the use of documentary evidence embedded in semiotic, qualitative and descriptive analysis while relying on Localism as the basis of theoretical framework. The study also revealed that local government administration in Nigeria has not yet reached its full potentials which is very possible should the right framework of reforms be applied in accordance with the needs of the local people that are as varied as each locality. The paper concludes that there is ample opportunity for the local government to deliver essential services for which it was established ab initio especially if the State allows it to fully function on its own without interference. Against this backdrop, the study recommends that there is need to have the political will to ensure the autonomy of the local government, freeing it from legal strangleholds and ambivalence in terms of where its loyalty lies.

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Background to the Study

The nexus of Local Government (LG) administration and Local Government reforms have been variously engaged in and have also elicited conversations in extant literature. It is therefore not new but rather gaining traction in the understanding that they are increasingly becoming very germane as to interrogate issues that bother on the workability or otherwise of local government administration in Nigeria, hence the need for this paper which deals basically with LG Administration in Nigeria and the Post 1976 LG Reforms. It becomes germane according to Kalu (2010) to better appreciate the distinction between local government administration and administration of local government, whereas the former focuses on organizational structure and processes (mostly internal management), the later looks more to the external oversight, regulation, and support of local government by higher authorities such as the Federal and State governments with regards to intergovernmental relations. The later further focuses on such issues as compliance, coordination, standardization including supervision.

Odesanya (2021) posits that Local Governments are essentially designed to make a significant impact on the lives of citizens, focusing mostly on the following:

1. Economic Impact:

Aimed at achieving

- a. Job creation and entrepreneurship
- b. Local economic growth and development
- c. Infrastructure development (transportation, utilities)
- d. Business-friendly environment
- e. Tourism promotion

2. Social Impact:

Designed to bring about

- a. Improved healthcare and wellness
- b. Quality education and skills development
- c. Social welfare and community services
- d. Housing and affordable living
- e. Community cohesion and social inclusion

3. Environmental Impact:

That will bring about

- a. Sustainable development and environmental protection
- b. Waste management and pollution control
- c. Conservation of natural resources
- d. Climate change mitigation and adaptation
- e. Green infrastructure development

4. Governance Impact:

With the intention of

- a. Transparent and accountable governance

- b. Citizen participation and engagement
- c. Effective public service delivery
- d. Responsive and responsible leadership
- e. Efficient resource allocation

5. Community Development Impact:

That will provide

- a. Community facilities and recreation spaces
- b. Cultural and arts development
- c. Youth and Senior Citizens programmes
- d. Public safety and emergency services
- e. Disaster preparedness and response

The above 5 major areas are not in themselves exhaustive; however, these basically are the demands on Local Government. How much these demands have been met is subject not only to another debate but also to empirical investigation. Similarly, the above is in tandem with the views conversed by Oyedele, Osezua, Abdulkareem and Ishola (2017) that there are certain expectations from local government and that when they happen, the fortunes of the people will dramatically improve resulting in the development of Local Government, these include;

1. The expectations for creating local governments include:

Political Expectations:

- 1. Increased citizen participation and representation
- 2. Decentralization of power and decision-making
- 3. Enhanced accountability and transparency
- 4. Improved responsiveness to local needs
- 5. Empowerment of local communities

2. Economic Expectations:

- 1. Local economic growth and development
- 2. Job creation and entrepreneurship
- 3. Improved infrastructure (transportation, utilities)
- 4. Enhanced business environment
- 5. Increased revenue generation

3. Social Expectations:

- 1. Improved healthcare and education
- 2. Enhanced social welfare and community services
- 3. Increased access to basic services (water, sanitation)
- 4. Promoting social inclusion and cohesion
- 5. Protecting vulnerable groups (women, children, elderly)

4. Administrative Expectations:

- 1. Efficient public service delivery
- 2. Effective resource allocation

3. Streamlined administrative processes
 4. Enhanced capacity building for local officials
 5. Improved data collection and analysis
- 5. Environmental Expectations:**
1. Sustainable development and environmental protection
 2. Conservation of natural resources
 3. Climate change mitigation and adaptation
 4. Waste management and pollution control
 5. Green infrastructure development
- 6. Legal Expectations:**
1. Compliance with national and international laws
 2. Protection of human rights
 3. Rule of law and justice
 4. Effective dispute resolution mechanisms
 5. Access to information and transparency
- 7. International Development Goals:**
1. Achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)
 2. Implementing the Paris Agreement on Climate Change
 3. Promoting human rights and social justice
 4. Enhancing global cooperation and partnerships
 5. Supporting national development agendas
- 8. Principles for Effective Local Governance:**
1. Subsidiarity (decisions made at lowest level)
 2. Participation (citizen engagement)
 3. Accountability (transparency and oversight)
 4. Efficiency (effective resource use)
 5. Equity (fairness and social justice)

By meeting these expectations, Local Governments can improve the lives of citizens, promote sustainable development, and contribute to social progress of the Nation. How much all of these have been achieved is subject to debate.

Tiku, Obetan, and Onyenemerem (2019) have averred that the government guarantees the statutory nature of local government by embodying it in the 1979 constitution wherein Section 7(1) of the constitution states that: The system of democratically elected local government councils is under this constitution guaranteed. According to Adeyemo (2005), despite the inclusion of this provision in the constitution, successive administrations in the country have undermined the so-called autonomy of the local governments.

Ibitan and Ndukwe (2014) as well as Odo (2014) are in agreement that Local governments are designed to catalyze socio-economic and political development in countries of the world

as they provide the foundation upon which other structures of governance (state and federal) are rested. Local governments are closest than other levels of government to the mass of the people who inhabit the areas. Iyiani, Aghedo and Oka (2020) argue that they are thus, in a better position than any other sub national government and the central/national (or federal government in the case of Nigeria) to better appreciate the real problems of the people and serve as the most effective agents for mobilizing the people for collective energy and resources towards engineering positive social, economic and political development of the country. As would later be seen under theoretical framework, it is in the realization of the importance of local government as a catalyst of development and engine of progress that their performance and conduct of affairs as vehicle of socioeconomic and political development at the grassroots has become germane to interrogate the reforms that have been associated with local government even before independence.

Method

This paper relies mostly on qualitative content analysis and to some degree on semiotic analysis both of which basically make use of documentary evidences from journals, policy papers, books, including websites of organizations that are familiar with the thematics under review. In addition, longitudinal approach will apply to this study.

Country Overview

Allu-Kangkum and Ochedi (2015) have identified Nigeria to be located in West Africa and endowed with arable landmass of more than 924'000km². it is bothered to the South by the Gulf of Guinea and the Bight of Biafra, to the West by Benin Republic and to the East by Cameroon. Nigeria is further bothered to the North by Niger Republic and Chad. Nigeria is obviously Africa's most consistent federal polity, and demographically, the most populous in Africa with a multi ethnic population speaking more than 200 languages and dialects. Nigeria is Africa's largest crude oil producer as well as largest economy. Indeed, Nigeria's ethnic demography and her attendant oil mono-economy have consistently shaped the evolution of her intergovernmental relations.

Theoretical Foundation

This paper anchors itself on the theory of localism to explain the failure or otherwise of local government to spur effective grassroots development in Nigeria. The virtues of localism can be gleaned from the principle of subsidiarity as propagated by the Catholic Church which stresses the need for local institutions in carrying out local functions. The principle of subsidiarity is a governance concept as contained in *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931), the Encyclical letter of Pius XI on reconstruction of the social order which states among others that: Subsidiarity is a principle of social organization, emphasizing decentralization and local autonomy, limiting state intervention while promoting intermediate bodies such as families, associations etc. Basically, it bothers on the fact that Decisions should be taken at the lowest level of authority closest to the people affected by those decisions.

It therefore follows that the key takeaways from this concept which may form key elements include but not limited to;

1. Decentralization: Power is distributed to smaller, local units.
2. Proximity: Decision-making occurs near the affected community.
3. Participation: Local stakeholders are involved in decision-making.
4. Efficiency: Decisions are made at the most effective level.

The implication of all of these is that subsidiarity, promote local autonomy and self-governance, increase citizen participation and engagement, improve decision-making relevance and effectiveness as well as reduce bureaucracy and administrative burdens. It is important to mention that there are other Church documents that align fully to *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931), these include *Rerum Novarum* (1891), the encyclical of Leo XIII on Social Justice, *Centessimus Annus* (1991), encyclical of John Paul II on Social and Economic issues and *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (2004), which arose from the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace.

Tobi and Oikhala (2021) agree with various writers such as Jenkins (2004), Boyle (2009), Hartwich (2013) and, Ibietan and Ndukwe (2014), among others that have extensively written on localism, that by emphasizing the virtue of the participation of the local population in the decision-making process, the idea and practice of localism are antithetical to centralisation. Similarly, Ibietan and Ndukwe (2014) advanced the view that localism seeks to create effective "subsidiaries" at the local level that can handle the responsibility of governance as well as the provision of social services". Accordingly, Localism presupposes that government at the sub-national level should have powers to determine local affairs and engage on issues of local interest. In this context, localism becomes of no relevance in the face of the Central-State-Local relations which on its own promotes centralism. In such a situation there is the tendency that the powers of local entities in making independent decisions would be threatened or may ultimately come to naught. Thus, in political climes where other tiers of governments carry out powers that ought to be conferred on local government, localism is eroded, and its utility becomes inconsequential.

Conceptual Review

To properly situate local government for clearer understanding, Local government according to Emezi (1984) as well as Elekwa (1995) refers collectively to administrative authorities over areas that are smaller than a state. The term is used to contrast with offices at nation-state level, which are referred to as the central government, national government, or (where applicable) federal government. 'Local government' only acts within powers delegated to it by legislation or directives of the higher level of government and each country has some kind of local government, which will differ from those of other countries. Kalu and Okeagu (2025) argue that in primitive societies, the lowest level of local government is the village headman or tribal chief. Federal States such as the United States have two levels of government above the local level: The Governments of the Fifty States and the Federal National Government whose relations are governed by the constitution of the United States. Local government in the United States originated in the colonial period and has been modified since then: the highest level of local government is at county level.

In modern states, local governments according to Ojukwu, Okeke, Obiorah (2014) usually have some of the same kind of powers as national governments do. They usually have some power to raise taxes, though these may be limited by central legislation. The question of Municipal Autonomy-which powers the local government, has or should have, and why-is a key question of public administration and governance. The institutions of local government vary greatly between countries and even where similar arrangements exist, the terminology often varies. Common names for local government entities include state, province, region, department, county, prefecture, district, city, township, town, borough, parish, municipality, shire and village. However, all these names are often used informally in different countries and local government is the legal part of central government.

Local government's role in the political system as opined by Ikejiani-Clarke (1996) has been considered primarily in terms of its relationship with central government. Observers from a liberal democratic standpoint have stressed two bases upon which such relationships have been formulated since the nineteenth century. First, local government has been considered important to the encouragement of political education and participation, and the basis upon which services could be provided according to local needs. Hence, relationships with the centre have been based on the partnership of free democratic institutions. Secondly, local government has been seen as rational from an administrative point of view as it allows for the efficient provision of public services at the point of service need under the direction of the centre. It is perhaps on this basis that Elekwa (1995) opines that local government is seen as the agent of central government. France may be taken to typify the stress on both bases for the development of local government. Political participation has been maintained through the strong community identity underpinning commune local government, and a strong relationship between the operations of local government and the interests of the state has been maintained through the office of departmental prefect. Ojukwu, Okeke, Obiorah (2014) pointed out that Britain's leaning towards the utilitarian administrative efficiency purpose of local government is reflected in the fact that even its lowest-tier authorities may have bigger populations than some other countries' county/province level authorities. In all these, there exists a fundamental reason and purpose for the activities of local governments and more importantly other human endeavours and this has been located in the nature of the state.

Local Government functions under certain known conditions that tend to give impetus and yet influence its activities. For instance, Ikejiani-Clarke (1996) and Ezeani (2004) are of the view that local governments like other administrative systems are conditioned by their environment, and this conditioning is reciprocal in that local governments through their activities influence their environment. Since local government is conditioned by its environment it follows that it will differ from one country to another or even within one country, from one region or state to another. Wraith (1972) and Ezeani (2004) agree that the ecological factors which condition, and help to determine different patterns of and purpose of local government are very complex and yet agree that it includes historical, political, social, economic, physical or geographical. These factors have been extensively analyzed in Kalu (2016) as follow;

Political Perspective

The nature of politics or the political system as a way of influencing local government system cannot be the same under different political system like parliamentary, presidential, democratic, monarchical, republican, military, capitalist, socialist or communist systems of government. Ojukwu, Okeke, and Obiora (2014) agree with Ikejiani-Clarke (1996) and Ezeani (2004), that local government enjoys high level of autonomy under parliamentary or Anglo-Saxon tradition whereas to the contrary, local government is denied autonomy in a military regime or communist type local government system.

Social Environment

Social environment refers to the anthropology of the local government area which include customs and traditions, religion, the family, kinship, traditional institutions, habits, culture, norms and mores which in one way or the other tend to influence or shape the local government system. Ezeani (2004) in Ojukwu, Okeke, and Obiora (2014) notes that one prominent feature of the Nigerian social environment is its heterogeneity such as cultural plurality, multiplicity of ethnic groups and diversity of languages which defy uniformity in local government system.

Historical Perspective

The import of history in shaping and understanding the local government system in any country cannot be over emphasized. For example, one cannot understand local government in France without investigating the influence of the French revolution on its local government system. Similarly, one cannot discuss local government in Africa outside the colonialism or colonial influence like indirect rule of the British colonial administration in Nigeria and other parts of Africa. More specifically, Ojukwu, Okeke, and Obiora (2014) citing (Ezeani, 2004) opine that it would be futile to study local government in Nigeria without examining the long years of military rule and its influence on local government system in Nigeria, of particular note is the 1976 local government reforms of the Murtala/Obasanjo Regime that introduced a uniformity or uniform system of local government in Nigeria.

Economic Environment Underpinnings

The economic environment, under which the local governments operate according to Kalu (2016) has great influence on local government system. For instance, economic system like capitalism and socialism influence the local government system. Generally, in a capitalist system, local government enjoys more autonomy than in socialist or communist system. Furthermore, Ezeani (2004) states that economic crisis impoverishes the people such that it affects the local government ability to generate adequate internal revenue to embark on capital and/or development projects. Another implication of economics crisis on local government is that it may lead to economic or financial dependence of the local government on other levels of government for statutory allocations, which may make them to lose a measure of their autonomy, having lost their financial autonomy. This situation as captured by the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN, 2024) is made worse with the domestic currency coming under severe pressure against the Dollar (USD) exchanging at more than NGN1'600 to USD1 as of September 2024.

The Physical Environment Factor

The physical environment according to Ezeani (2004) is the geographical or climatic factor that may influence the local government system. The physical environment consists of land, plains and hills, mountains, rivers, lake and population which have great influence in shaping or conditioning local government which exists in varying physical environments making uniformity in local government system either very difficult or practically impossible. For instance, local governments in the Northern part of Nigeria are sparsely populated while those in Southern part of Nigeria are densely populated. Same holds true of rural-based local governments and urban-based local governments for whereas local governments in the rural areas are sparsely populated, local governments in urban centres are densely populated.

That effective local governments can transform communities, improve lives, and contribute to national development cannot be denied, therefore, the essence of local governments is to provide effective governance and services to the people at the grassroots level, ensuring their needs and concerns are addressed. Why then does local government require reform? Reforming the local government system in Nigeria is crucial for effective governance and grassroots development. The current system has been criticized for being ineffective, and reforms aim to address these challenges. All though successive Nigerian Constitutions have accorded recognition to the local government as a distinct tier of government, local governments are still considered to perform abysmally below expectation for grassroots development (Olukotun, 2019). This study therefore examines the reason behind the inability of successive reforms to transformed the local government into effective institutions for grassroots development.

Despite the seeming ambiguity surrounding the meaning of grassroots development, this study will in addition to the definitions contained in *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931), rely mostly on the definitions provided by the World Bank (2023) World Development Report, that views grassroots development in terms of the methods and strategies designed to promote the well-being of a specified group of people, particularly those in the local areas. In addition, Tobi et al (2021) citing George (1988) advances the view that grassroots development denotes the approaches and initiatives and capacity-building initiatives aimed at empowering vulnerable communities to develop following their needs and values. Viewed in this prism, grassroots development focuses on mechanisms of development that deemphasise the trickle-down method or the top-bottom approach but emphasize a bottom-up approach to development which stresses the participation of the local population in addressing local issues as well as promoting and protecting the interest of the local inhabitants.

Kalu (2019) agrees with Gboyega (1987) and Ezeani (2004) both of whom identified four phases through which the Nigerian local government system had passed. He stated that each phase had a distinct set of philosophy on the purpose of local government. The first phase was the period of colonial rule when the Native Authority system was in vogue. The philosophy of this period was administrative patterns at the local level to achieve the goal of colonial rule. The second phase was the period between 1952 and 1966, which was characterized by a series of reforms designed to enhance the participation of the people in the affairs of the locality. In

fact, it started in the Eastern Regional Government that embarked on series of reforms according to Obi (1995) in Kalu (2019), the result of the reform was informed by the uprising which led to the loss of 50 lives in Aba and other areas within the region, the inefficiency and waste associated with the small size of native authorities, including the need to democratize and decentralize the local government system.

Based on the above reasons, in 1950, Wraith (1972) posited that the Eastern Region Government passed a Local Government Ordinance, which was a prototype of British local government model, with three-tier systems, viz, the County, District and Local Councils and Western region in the early part of the 1950s. The third phase was between 1966 and 1976, and it witnessed the reversal of some of the values of participatory local government that started in the pre-independence era. In some states like the Mid-West, local government was designed as development administration and seen as an extension of the state. The fourth phase was the post-civil war period, the reforms of local government were undertaken by the Federal (Military) Government to have a uniform local government system. This was when the 1976 local government reform was carried out.

Features of the 1976 Reforms

It is distinct according to Kalu (2010) owing to the following reasons:

- a) It is first time in the political history of Nigeria when federal government initiated local government reform all the state governments across the country.
- b) It marked the introduction of a uniform system of local government for all the states of the federal.
- c) It introduced the uniformity of local government areas based on a given population ranged (150'000-800'000) and these local government areas are large in size.
- d) The federal government command the practice of giving statutory allocations to local governments.
- e) Local government should be recognized as a third tier of government, with its attendant implications.
- f) Another implication is that with democratization, the traditional ruler lost their positions within the local government throughout the federation.
- g) Training of local government staff as an effort between the local government and federal government became an integral part of local government management strategy.
- h) The reform introduced full-time chairman of the local government and supervisory councilors, and councilors were paid fixed salary instead of sitting allowance
- i) It provided for a two-way channel of communication between local communities and government both State and Federal.

Ogbete, Idam, and Olumide (2018) maintain that the 1976 Local Government Reforms, have shown that change is possible, but more needs to be done to address the current challenges. By reforming the local government system, Nigeria can unlock its potential for sustainable development and improved governance. The thought of a just and egalitarian society is believed to be among the inert reasons for the reforms in the local government.

However, there seems to be growing concern over the decline of the local government system, as its degradation and incapacitation have contributed significantly to developmental setbacks at the local level and the inability of the nation to effectively address prevailing national security threats. It perhaps on this basis that Tinubu (2024) opined that strengthening local government to address social and economic challenges, empowering local authorities with necessary resources and capacities to implement sustainable development initiatives can create such opportunities that can address and ensure not just a virile local government system but a stable nation at large.

Whereas it has been made manifest that the local government is created to give the citizens a sense of belonging through developments from grassroots level of governance. There are undoubtedly critical issues of governance that bedevil the local government and these problems include but are not limited to leadership challenges, corruption, constitutional and electoral reforms, rising civil unrest, poverty, unemployment, insecurity and human rights. All of these have proven the reason local government in Nigeria does not seem to have actualized neither its goals nor that of the various reforms it has been subjected to for efficiency. It is on these bases that Iyiani, Aghedo and Okah (2020) and Odesanya (2021) have provided some insight into the problems responsible for the underperformance of local government in Nigeria as listed and discussed below as follows;

The Constitution: While the Constitution has undergone several reviews over the years, it has failed to address pertinent issues that hinder the local government's development. These issues include the qualification of Chairpersons and Councillors, operation of local government service commission, employee's qualification, direct funding, etc. Nigeria's constitution does not seem to make a clear distinction between the powers and boundaries of both State and Federal Governments regarding local governments' creation and operation. This has led to a continuous encroachment on how the local government functions. More fundamentally, the use of State Joint Local Government Account as entrenched in the constitution has made the quest for financial autonomy in local government seem impossible; the joint constitutional account implies that the State still has much influence on LGAs in terms of finances.

Inadequate Finance: Much of the funds of LGAs come from the Statutory Monthly Allocation from the Federation Account, and grants from the State Government, subject to politics. This inadequacy of funds hinders developmental projects at local government levels and results in impeding governance and performance. **Undue Interference from the State Government:** According to the 1999 Constitution, Local Governments are empowered to impose levies on private establishments at the grassroots level for revenue generation. They are saddled with providing good primary health care and education for the people. Unfortunately, the State Governments have taken over these responsibilities, especially those that have to do with revenue generation, this undue Interference has kept Local Governments in a perpetual state of being broke and insolvent including inability to pay workers' salaries and meet other grassroots demands.

Corruption: Although corruption as concept is amorphous, it nevertheless has components that identify it when it occurs. Indeed, corruption is a major cause of misery in Nigeria's democracy, it is believed to be intense at the Local Government level. Funds meant for payment of salaries are siphoned with a large number of ghost workers. Project budgets are inflated with a growing tradition of favouring some parts of the Local Government Area over others in developmental projects. Combined with this, State Governments also strive to put their cronies in power during Local Government elections to assert control over them and the finances of the Local Government, thereby undermining the entire concept of popular participation at the grassroots level.

Poor Leadership: Without a doubt, many local government chairpersons and councillors are not qualified to hold such an office. Most of them only got there through their political godfathers' favours or blessings who use such political positions to reward their loyalty and service. With this repulsive tradition, many local government chairpersons lack the knowledge of what it takes to run their office. They spend most times in their respective States' capitals, which is not their base of operation.

Overpopulated Workforce: There have been reports that Local Governments often employ many workers than their budgets and allocations can handle. This is through indiscriminate employment of individuals to please party "godfathers" and court their favours while resulting in an inability to pay workers when due. Many cronies are employed without due qualification for respective roles, and many workers are often dilly-dallying at work with perpetual lateness, which reduces work efficiency at Local Governments and these are the direct consequences of prebendalism.

Lack of Qualified Persons/Lack of Technical and Managerial Capacities and Skills. Often, most qualified persons do not vie for electoral positions in the local governments; hence, unqualified individuals are elected to become councilors, supervisory councilors and chairmen of the councils (Odo, 2014). In collaborating the above, Ganduje (2008) observed that school drop outs are serving as Chairmen and Councilors in some local government councils in Nigeria. There is no doubt that these set of people can do little or nothing to ensure programmes and policies that will develop the rural areas; hence, the continuous deterioration of the grassroots.

Lack of Participation and Involvement of the Rural People: Exclusion of rural people in planning and execution of projects meant to benefit them has unarguably undermined the efforts of local governments in rural development. According to Odo (2014), lack of involvement of the local people in the conception and implementation of projects has led to the failure of many rural development projects in the local governments because the problems of rural communities need to be solved through the cooperation of the community and the government. If people are involved in projects' planning and implementation, their views will be considered and they will see the projects as their own. According to Okah, Iyiani and Aghedo (2020), this will give them sense of belonging and spur them into participation, completion and judicious use of the projects.

Lack of Accountability and Transparency: Lack of Accountability and Transparency also affect good governance in the local areas.

The views canvased above clearly align with those of Odo (2014), which can be summarized thus;

- a) Continued jurisdiction of state government over the most important of the functions allocated to local government in the guidelines and as stipulated in the Fourth Schedule of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.
- b) Its failure to affect a more equitable sharing of the tax filed among the three levels of government; and
- c) Continued imposition of various central government controls in budgeting and budget control, in policy determination including the determination of fiscal policies, in personnel management, etc., which tend to diminish the value of government in local government.

Having identified the features of the 1976 Local Government reforms and its attendant pitfalls, one major problematic is the unintended consequence brought about by the joint account between the State and the Local Government known as the State Joint Local Government Accounts (SJLGA), not only is this a vexed issue, it has become in itself a Constitutional Quagmire also. In what appear to be a bold step in this direction, Daure (2025) has observed that in a bid to empower local governance and diminish the dominance of state governments over local councils, President Tinubu has taken a decisive step to enforce the direct implementation of local government financial autonomy. This policy aims to ensure that local governments have unfettered access to the resources allocated to them from the Federation Account, bypassing State Governors who have historically controlled these funds through the SJLGA.

Peripherally, this policy seems to reflect a long-standing call for decentralization of power and resources to the grassroots, where local government institutions are often seen as more directly accountable to their communities. While the intent may be to empower local councils, the practical consequences have been severe. For instance, Daure (2025) notes that the Tinubu administration has insisted that local governments must open accounts with the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) to receive their allocations directly, bypassing the established State frameworks through the instrumentality of SJLGA.

While the intent may be to empower local councils, the immediate and practical consequences have been severe. Without the necessary allocations reaching the states, local governments are now caught in the crossfire of political and constitutional wrangling, leaving them unable to meet their wage obligations which has been made more intractable in a strangulating economic situation made even worse as severe hardship has hit thousands of local government workers across the country. This is because, these workers, who depend on their monthly salaries, are now facing months of uncertainty, with many struggling to make ends meet as their paychecks remain in limbo. The inability of local government authority to access their funds has created a ripple effect, increasing the economic pressures on workers, their families, and their communities. For Daure (2025), the promise of autonomy has

ironically led to greater financial instability for these workers, exposing a gap between policy intention (reforms) and reality.

Essentially, at the heart of this ambivalence lies a constitutional conundrum, notably, Sections 162(5), (6), and (7) of the 1999 constitution of Nigeria. These aspects of the constitution clearly state that allocation to Local Governments from the Federation Account be paid to States for the benefit of the Local Governments. It further stipulates that these funds be deposited into the SJLGA, from which they are then distributed to the various Local Governments within the State. As a matter of fact, to bypass this constitutional framework and send funds or make releases of funds directly to Local Governments has not only sparked a legal firework but has made a constitutional crisis inevitable. By attempting to side-step the established procedures for Local Government funding, the Federal Government is at odds and at variance with the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria as amended, which requires that the States play a central role in the disbursement of these funds. Until the relevant Sections of the Constitution are amended, any attempt to directly allocate funds to local governments risks being seen as inconsistent with the groundwork and unconstitutional, it remains null and void and goes to issue.

The looming deadlock leaves Local Governments in a precarious position as States are unable to access the allocations such that they can make disbursements and subsequently pass funds to their respective Local Councils. The result is a growing crisis, as public servants at the Local Government level are forced to endure delays and non-payment of monthly salary. The attempt by the Federal Government towards Local Government autonomy is apparently rooted in a genuine desire to shift the balance of power away from State governments towards the Local Councils thereby fostering more effective, transparent and accountable grassroots governance. Whereas this policy of financial autonomy has revealed deep gaps and flaws in its execution, the lack of constitutional backing for the direct allocation of funds to Local Governments, without amending the relevant provisions of the 1999 Constitution as amended, risks undermining the very cause it seeks to redress or champion. To get around this situation, the National Assembly (The Senate and The House of Representatives) of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, must urgently address this constitutional challenge that stands in the way of realizing the full implementation of this autonomy. Unless and until Sections 162(5)-(7) of the Constitution are amended to accommodate the direct disbursement of funds to Local Governments, the policy is doomed to failure under the weight of its own legal contradictions.

Conclusions

Howbeit, despite these far-reaching measures as recommended by the various reforms notably, that of 1976, which became the bedrock of modern Local Government system in Nigeria, one can safely, assert that the Local Government still has some constraints that have actually impeded its success. The current system has been criticized for being ineffective, and reforms aim to address these challenges seem to have been short-circuited. Nevertheless, by reforming the Local Government system, Nigeria can:

1. Improve Governance: Ensure that Local Governments are more accountable,

- transparent, and responsive to the needs of the people.
2. Enhance Grassroots Development: Bring government closer to the people, promoting economic growth, social welfare, social progress and infrastructural development.
 3. Empower Traditional Institutions: Leverage traditional institutions to promote peace, security, and community development.
 4. Increase Efficiency: Streamline Local Government administration, reducing bureaucracy, bottlenecks and improve service delivery.
 5. Promote Decentralization: Give more autonomy to Local Governments, enabling them to make decisions that benefit their communities.

Recommendations

Arising from the foregoing discourses, it is evident that the issues interrogated above have contributed in no small measure in diminishing the gains and achievements of the Local Government, if any, and more importantly, have contributed in more ways that can be imagined in ensuring that the reforms remain ineffectual. With the myriads of problems identified above, it is evident that the 1999 Nigerian Constitution as amended needs further and thorough review with special provisions to distinguish between the constitutional powers and functions of all tiers of government to avoid undue encroachment and usurpation of functions of one by the other. Adequate measures and criteria should be provided on the Local Government creation process, qualifications, tenures and operation of the Local Government Service Commission. The Local Government should be autonomous for an effective administration and such autonomy should be clearly defined within the context of the constitution. Simultaneously, the State Joint Local Government Account should be reviewed such that Local Governments should have their own independent accounts and its operations clearly and properly set out and where there must be a joint account, it should contributory, measured in ratio and deducted at source from the federation account of the allocation to both the State and Local Government. That way, the modus operandi is such joint account is clearly understood to the benefit of both parties.

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