



## The Rising Trends of Corruption in Nigeria's Local Government: Implication for Socio-Political Development

NwaodikeChibuzor Ayodele<sup>1</sup>, AyomolaOluranti Oluronke<sup>2</sup>,

<sup>1,2</sup>Department of Political Science and Public Administration, Babcock University, Ilishan Remo, Ogun State,  
Nigeria

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**ABSTRACT:** Local government is the third tier of government in Nigeria with the responsibilities of bringing governance closer to the door step of local inhabitants and facilitating socio-economic and political development. In spite of the various reforms by successive administrations to promote this noble gesture, these goals have not been attained. The reasons behind this setback are many. At the heart of these challenges are the corrupt practices among politicians and public servants. Documentary data were obtained from books, reputable journals, government publications, internet sources and personal observations. This paper observed that corruption is on the increase at the councils and this were manifested through irregular elections by the State Independent Electoral Commissions (SIECs) and appointment of caretaker/transition committees by the state governors, non-remittance of the contributive pension scheme, nonpayment of public servant salaries and allowances and abuse of the state joint local government account by the state government. The paper, therefore, concludes that for the local government to attain its constitutional goals and good governance, SIECs should be scrapped and elections conducted by the Independent National Electoral Commission in every three years, regular and adequate remittance of the contributive pension scheme to the beneficiaries to avoid the temptation of involvement in corrupt practices when in active service, regular payment of salaries and allowances and direct allocation of statutory revenue to the local government.

**Keywords:** Election, Corruption, Development, Local Government, Statutory Allocation.

### I. Introduction

Local government in Nigeria is confronted with many challenges among them include corrupt practices and lack of discipline. These challenges started during the colonial era when it was vested in traditional rulers and operated in such an undemocratic way to 1976 when elected councils were to administer its functions. Adeyeye (2003), noted that a “fundamental feature between 1950’s to 1975 was that each region or state carried out the organization of its local government system in the way it deemed fit”.

It is instructive to note that attempt to address and reposition the local government necessitated the different reforms carried out by different regimes to place the councils in its rightful place so it can fulfil its constituted obligations. For instance, the 1976 local government reform brought a fundamental change in the development of local government in Nigeria and for the first time a single-tier structure of local government against the different structures was practiced by various states.

This reform is remarkable because it strengthened the position of the councils and also marked a watershed in the annals of grassroots administration in the country. In spite of the 1976 and other in-house reforms, in practical terms, local government lack the drive to add value to the grassroots people. As such, after many years of experimenting with the local government system, scholars have expressed concern over the parlous state of local councils in Nigeria and the apparent disconnect between it and the lives of the people. Therefore, if anyone is to examine the reason for Nigeria’s underdevelopment and the state of the nation, one should visit the local council (Nwaodike, 2016).

The objective of this paper is to identify the trends of corruption in the grassroots government and how this menace has affected socio-political development of the Nigerian state as well as proffer solution on how these corrupt practices can be eliminated and by extension make it more responsive toward the developmental needs of the people. Documentary data were obtained from books, reputable journals, government publications, internet sources and personal observation.

## **II. CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION: LOCAL GOVERNMENT**

This is a popularly elected democratic council that has formal powers derived from the laws or constitution of the land, to decide on a range of public matters in consultation with other stakeholders, including traditional rulers, for the locality. The formal powers can only be altered by a subsequent legislation or constitutional amendment. (Imhanlahimi and Ikeanyibe, 2009: 15). Conversely, Nwaodike (2013) noted that local government is a government at the grassroots (territorial unit) with powers to elect its representatives and is saddled with responsibility to provide social welfare of the local people. Though a creation of state government in Nigeria, local council is recognized and saddled with responsibilities in Nigerian constitution. In this context, local government and local council will be used interchangeably.

### **2.1 Corruption**

Corruption entails an abuse of office, attempt to embezzle, divert, misappropriation of public funds, conspiracy to act either by way of stealing or otherwise and illicit enrichment. It includes a subversion of the statutory allocated resources/revenue of any tier of government and budgetary process. Corruption is more obvious when it is established that elected/appointed officials allegedly influenced to act contrary to their official obligations by a way of financial gain to themselves. This act is against public interest and may emanate a situation whereby a cynical public becomes uninterested in political participation which often lead to political apathy among others.

### **2.2 Development**

Development connote different things to different people. Some scholars use it interchangeably with industrialization while others view it as modernity or westernization. When these opinions are assembled, one will be tempted to agree that development is the improvement, transformation or change from one status to a higher or better one. Barder (2012), argued that to define development as an improvement in people's well-being does not do justice to what the term means. Development also carries a connotation of lasting change. That is, development consists of more than improvements in the well-being of citizens. To him, "it conveys something about the capacity of economic, political and social systems to provide the circumstances for that well-being on a sustainable, long-term basis". Thus, for development to make an impact in the lives of the masses, it has to be sustained for present and future generation to benefit.

More so, the concept is multi-dimensional. That is, it could be political, socio-cultural, economic or human. Local councils as a grass root government must have positive effect in the life of the masses in every dimension. This is one of the reasons it has to collaborate with the higher level governments (i.e federal and state) and promote socio-economic and political development.

## **III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: SYSTEM THEORY**

The paper is anchored on system theory. A system is a set of phenomena that affect each other within an environment that transform to a larger pattern different from any of the parts. That is, whatever affect any part invariably have effect on the whole (Nwaodike 2016).

The Nigerian federal structure encouraged intergovernmental relations (IGR), by implication, the levels of government relates on governmental issues that affect the whole. They all work towards achieving the collective goals of the State which include meeting the needs of the populace, providing infrastructure, mobilizing people and resources to meet ends amongst others. Local Governments play vital role in the development of the State especially in the developing world like Nigeria, since they have the privilege of knowing and understanding the needs and resources of their domain and as such can provide better facilities to meet the demands of the population (Nwaodike, 2016). Ironically, the scenario as observed in this paper is different, rather than play a pivotal role in initiating development, public servant saddled with the responsibilities of effecting change siphoned the resources for personal aggrandisement. This unwholesome act affect the expected development and the grassroot people often pay the price as a result of bad governance.

## **IV. TRENDS OF CORRUPTION IN NIGERIA'S LOCAL GOVERNMENT**

The most prominent form of corruption among the career public servants in local government is through the use of illegal staff popularly known as "**ghost workers**". The number of workers on the pay roll of the council is much more than the legitimate number of workers actually working in the council. Sometimes these ghost workers are regarded as consultants, liaison officers etc. in fact, some of these names do not exist in actual sense, that is, council officials only add such fictitious names and the money meant for such ghost names will finally find their way or be transferred to these officials account. Some ghost workers in some states are illegal names given by political office holders comprising their supporters who are not working but collecting wages/salaries from the local governments (Nwaodike, 2013). For instance, Abia State government discovered 1,727 ghost workers on the payroll of its 17 local government councils in 2012. The ghost workers were fished

out by the biometric data implementation committee set up by the state government to find out why the council's wage bill had steadily been on the increase. The figure showed that Aba South council has the highest number of ghost workers with 245, followed by Isiala-Ngwa South with 153 ghost workers, while Ugwuagbo with 28 ghost workers had the least number (Okoli, 2012). In a similar trend, Azubuike (2016) noted that Rivers State government at the end of its biometric exercise, uncovered over seven thousand ghost workers in the state work force. Similar to the above scenario is the issue of truancy or absenteeism from office. It has become a recurring decimal in most local government across the federation. A situation where some officials of the council will disappear and only resurfaced at the end of the month to receive salary and share the statutory allocations of the council for personal aggrandizement. Okey Ani, former commissioner for Local Government matter in Enugu State corroborated this occurrence. According to him,

**The level of truancy in Local Government calls for concern and that the majority of staff members only go to work to collect salaries at the end of the month and disappear thereafter. The introduction of biometrics system would eliminate concept of truancy in the service. Nobody pays for nothing, therefore, no work, no pay. You are meant to work for you to earn your salary, if we establish this biometrics system, it will checkmate both ghostworkers and absenteeism, and so on. We will be able to establish how many staff in the Local Government system, the real authentic staff because the ghost workers syndrome is not a joke (Vrankuli, 2012).**

Besides the aforementioned form of corruption, others come in the form of fake projects as part of the ongoing developmental projects the councils claim to have embarked on. These unidentified projects include, drainage systems, lockup shops, construction of new and renovation of the existing ones respectively, agricultural projects like poultry farms, health centres for their staffs, etc. the council normally adds these projects as part of their achievement for the year but in real sense, such hardly exist. Hence, allocations meant for the budgeted projects are distributed among the local government officials to the detriment of the local people (Nwaodike 2016).

More worrisome is the viability of State Joint Local Government Account. Besides the first line charges of the primary school teachers' salaries and allowances, there are dimensions to the malfeasance, especially, the deduction of the local government funds from the State Joint Local Government Account in some States. According to Nwaodike (2013:199), these among others include:

1. 1% training fund for Local Government Service Commission.
2. 4% for the traditional rulers (traditional council).
3. 7.5% for employer contributions (contributory pension/NCPS).
4. 5% redemption bond.
5. 15% primary school teacher' pension.
6. Maintenance of Ministry of Local Government and Chieftaincy Affairs.
7. Contribution to SUBEB.
8. 0.5% life insurance premium.
9. 1% audit fees.
10. 15% local government staff funds.

The State governments which has not disbursed the 10% of their internally generated revenue to the local governments for years since the beginning of the fourth republic encroached on the financial rights of the councils as stated in the constitution. In essence therefore, it appears that there is no justification for the Joint Allocation Account Committee. The essence of this account is that when revenue is remitted from the federal statutory allocation, it will only contain a single figure for all the local governments in the States across the federation, and under normal circumstances, the state government is expected to add the 10% internally generated revenue and thereafter, all genuine deductions such as salaries and allowances of primary school teachers, 1% training fund for Local Government Service Commission, 4% for the Traditional Council, 7.5% employer contribution, 5% rendered scheme etc. are made before it is shared among the local councils (Nwaodike 2013). The formula for sharing among the local governments changes from time to time, and these includes lateral and horizontal sharing which is fashioned out by the State House of Assembly of each state. According to Section 162 (8) of the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria as amended, "the amount standing to the credit of local government councils of a State shall be distributed among the local

government councils of that State on such terms and in such manner as may be prescribed by the House of Assembly of the State”.

The committee members that assemble on a monthly basis to share the revenue include the state governor (or his representative), state accountant general, and all the local government chairmen in the state (Nwaodike2013). Unfortunately, there is nothing to show for these deductions by the state governments. These monies suddenly developed wings and disappear without a trace. The new trend among some states in the south west of Nigeria i.e Osun and Ogun States is the refusal of the state to allocate the statutory allocations to the local governments, whereas the local government salaries, recurrent expenditure as well as capital projects (if there is any) are funded directly by the state government. The states do not declare and allotted what is due to these councils.

The nature of democratic practice in Nigeria has not led to the stability of the local councils. Although, elections have been held at the grassroots but the outcome of these elections were not true reflection of the mandates of the people. The party in power at the state level usually capitalises on the incumbency factor to manipulate the outcome of these elections to its favour. Sometimes, political god-fathers go as far as buying votes from poor and illiterates electorates during the elections (Ojo, 2008). Besides the fact that sometime the opposition parties are frustrated to withdraw from these elections (as witnessed during the March 27, 2004 local government election in Ogun state), the government party also uses the machinery of government to achieve victory. This, among other reasons, such as electoral malpractices accounted for the landslide victories often witnessed in the local government elections (Nwaodike 2013). On the other hand, at different occasions when the tenure of these political functionaries at the local government expires after three years (in some cases, two years), elections are not conducted necessitating the appointment of caretaker, transition or interim management to administer the councils. The reasons for these appointments among others is to patronize political cronies who will facilitate corrupt practices and make it difficult for opposition party (since opposition party is not appointed as caretaker/transition or interim management) to challenge the sharing/looting of local government fund through the Joint Allocation Account Committee. Again, the State Independent Electoral Commissions saddled with the responsibility of organising and conducting elections at the local government have not lived up to expectation. Some of the SIECs lack funding by the state government. On other occasions when these elections are held, these SIECs work in favour of the party in power. These among other reasons landslide victory is recorded in local government elections.

## **V. CONCLUDING REMARKS**

The trends of corruption at the local government is on the increase and this is as a result of those saddled with responsibility at various level (state and local governments) who had failed to act responsibly in the management of council funds. The resources at this level is diverted to personal accounts to the detriment of grassroots development and as such hindered the local government from attainment of statutory responsibilities. This has affected the rural electrification which the councils in collaboration with the higher level government should made available. Other functions saddled with the local government which this level of government has failed to execute as a result of corruption include water supply which has become a luxury in part of the councils across the country.

More so, the corrupt practices has resulted to inability of the councils to provide an enabling environment that can attract investors to establish business and employ the timing youths across the country. The more the people are suffering and miserable especially in having access to social welfare which are the responsibilities of government as well as get employed, the more the society will be characterised with militancy, armed robbery, terrorism, kidnapping and other forms of insecurity.

On this note, the paper recommend that anti-corruption agencies/institutions should beam their search light on the local government, most especially on the disbursement of the statutory allocations. More so, a bottom top approach should be adopted in fighting corruption and whosoever is caught should face the wrath of the law. Biometric exercise should be intensified to checkmate ghost worker and absenteeism syndrome. A regular and adequate remittance of the contributive pension scheme to the beneficiaries to avoid the temptation of involvement in corrupt practices. There should be regular payment of salaries and allowances to avoid the temptation of illicit transaction by the public servants. There should be a direct allocation of statutory revenue to the local government so that the councils can have access to their allocations so as to know who is responsible for the mismanagement of the council funds. State Independent Electoral Commissions should be scrapped and elections conducted by Independent National Electoral Commission. The tenure of elected political functionaries should consistent and three years is advocated.

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