



Local government autonomy and rural development in Kaduna state, Nigeria

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Abstract

Local government is closest tier of government to the people at the grassroots which are saddled with certain powers to exercise over the affairs of the people at the grassroots. The study seeks to examine how lack of autonomy of local government affects the development of rural areas in Kaduna state grassroots level. The study adopted descriptive research design. The study generated data from secondary sources which includes published and unpublished materials such as textbooks, journals, newspaper, magazine, conference paper, seminar, internet materials, among others. The study adopted Hegemony theory as the theoretical frame work. The study revealed that the State-Joint Local Government Account and the imposition of Caretaker Committee system have negative effect on the development of rural areas in Kaduna state. The study concluded that autonomy is a sine qua non to the development of Local Government areas Kaduna State. The study recommends that there should be need for a total abolition of joint- account of local government in Nigeria and also the constitution be amended in that light abolishing both State-Joint Local Government Account and the illegal imposition of the practice of Caretaker Committees in a democratic system of government

Keywords: Autonomy, Development, Local Government, Rural Development

1. Introduction

Local government's councils are the creation of the constitution, with the sole mandate of bringing government closer to the people at the grassroots level. Globally, local government administrations vary in size and structure and operate under different arrangements based on the system of government in operation in different nations or nation-states of the universe. In conjunction, as observed by Mello (2012), local governments globally endeavour to meet the people's demands for goods and services in a cost-effective manner.

Local governments were created as a subordinate system of government to federal, central, or state governments with subordinate characteristics. It is charged with powers to perform legislative, administrative, and quasi-judicial functions to mobilise development for rural people, which is not only seen but felt in the lives of the rural populace or dwellers. It also has

the responsibility to initiate policies, prepare local budgets, and have a measurable means of control over its own personnel, with a view to bringing about unhindered development and efficient service delivery to the rural dwellers or populace.

Charlie (2007), Ajayi (2012), and Kolawole (1997) contend that among other reasons for the establishment of local government is the need to inculcate democratically modern ways of administrative practices in order to mitigate the suffering of the people at the grassroots. This opinion surfaces the need for democratic participation, decentralisation, speedy economic development at the grass-roots, building communication gaps, and also serves as a leadership training platform for political leaders. (Ajayi, 2012)

Section 7(6) of the 1999 Constitution, as amended, opined that: (a) the national assembly shall make provision for statutory



allocations of public revenue to local government councils in the Federation; and (b) the Houses of Assembly of States shall make provisions for statutory allocation of public revenue to local government councils within the state.

Many reforms were carried out to see that local government is not only effective but also brings about meaningful development for rural dwellers, including the following reforms: The 1976 reforms stipulated the need for local government responsibilities and uniformity in staffing and financial activities of local government councils. Other critical areas considered by the reform include political, administrative, relationships with traditional rulers, inter-governmental relations on governance functions, and sharing financial allocations. For the first time in the history of local government in Nigeria, the reform provided for multi-purpose, single-tier local government councils. In Coventry, they abolished the divisional local administrative system practiced in various parts of the federation. The reform also stipulated that one hundred and fifty thousand (150,000) be the minimum population and eight hundred thousand (800,000) be the maximum population for each local government council. On political functionaries, the reform made provision for elective council members, not otherwise. The reform also made provision for revenue grants from the federal and state governments. Therefore, the federal and state governments were to give regular financial allocations to local governments to be shared by twenty-five percent (25%) equity and seventy-five percent (75%) population (Cinjel, 2022). The 1999 Constitution significantly disregarded the important changes introduced by the 1976 Local Government Reforms, even though it started a different approach aimed at improving local government operations and efficiency.

According to Oyidiran (2014), the 1999 constitution, unlike the former, created

room for state joint-local government accounts under the notion of promoting efficiency, accountability, transparency, and prudent use of resources to bring about even development in Kaduna State and the country at large. Due to the fact that funds meant for local government areas are not released on time, and if they are, they are not enough to bring about the development of local government areas in Kaduna State. The 1999 constitution, unlike the previous one, provides for democratic governance, the call for democratisation without a precise number of councils, the pseudo-autonomy of the local government as the third tier of government, the governor decides when elections will be held in the state, he appoints whoever he wants to head the affairs of the local government areas in Kaduna State, and others as such. Ovaga (2010) and Charlie (2007) observed that the 1976 Local Government Reform granted great autonomy and functions to local government satisfactorily in many areas to bring about development in Nigeria and Kaduna State at large. It's a mirage in Kaduna State as we speak; the government has been interfering with the activities of local government areas in the state, and as such, rural development is not felt by the people of Kaduna State. It is in line with this that this study intends to look at local government autonomy and rural development in Kaduna State from 2018 to 2022.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of the study is to assess local government autonomy and rural development in Kaduna State. Other specific objectives are to

- i. Ascertain how state interference in local government affairs affects the contributions of local government to rural development in Kaduna State.
- ii. Examine whether the operation of the State Joint Account impedes the development of local government areas in Kaduna State.



- iii. Find out to what extent the appointment of a transition system of local government affects the development of local government in Kaduna State local governments.

2. Literature Review

Local Government

Scholars and practitioners in the discipline, despite mounting volumes of work, cannot agree on an exact definition of the concept of local government. This concept has been defined in various forms, depending on the salient considerations or personal idiosyncrasies of the scholars and practitioners. This lack of consensus, according to Charlie (2007), on the definition does not, however, diminish its usefulness. Rather, local government has assumed unprecedented currency in Nigeria, especially since the 1976 local government reforms, when the concept took centre stage in the country's local administration (Charlie, 2007).

Nwankwo (1992) sees local government as a 'government' set up by a central authority or state government as a means of ensuring effective administration at the grass-roots. In other words, a local government is the type of government that aids either the central or state government to carry out effective and efficient administration of the country at the grass-roots level. Atadoga (2014) asserts that local government is a household name common to both urban and rural dwellers. The reason he advanced is that it is the nearest government to the grassroots. It is pertinent, therefore, to have a working definition. Ugwu (2000) defined the concept as the "third-tier level of government created for the purpose of efficient and effective administration of the localities." Odeniqwe (1984) perceived the concept of local government as "that part of government of a nation or nation-states that deals mainly with matters of concern to the people of a particular place."

The 1976 Local Government Reform conceived the concept as government at the

local level exercising through representative councils was established by law to exercise specific powers within defined areas. Ola and Tonwe (2009) view local government as a political division of the nation that is constituted by law and that has substantial control over local affairs, including the power to impose taxes or exact labour for prescribed purposes. Mello (2012) states that local governments globally strive to meet people's demands for goods and services in a cost-effective manner, particularly at the lowest level of government or at the grass roots. According to the United Nations Division of Public Administration (2010), local government is a political division of a nation (or, in a federal system, a state) that is constituted by law and has substantial control over local affairs, including the power to impose taxes or exact labour for a prescribed purpose. Such an entity elects or otherwise selects its governing body. The definition has been reviewed by a number of scholars who have also elaborated on it. A common example is Whaleh (2010), who stated that "each unit of local government in any system is assumed to possess the following characteristics: a given territory and population, an institutional structure, a separate legal identity, a range of powers and functions authorised by delegation from the appropriate central or intermediate legislature, and lastly, within the ambit of such delegation, autonomy subject always to the test of reasonableness."

We can directly apply Whaleh's (2010) definition of the characteristics inherent in each local government unit to understand the operation and structure of the local government system in Nigeria during the Fourth Republic. This period witnessed an attempt to delineate local governance with clear-cut functions, territorial jurisdictions, and institutional frameworks as prescribed in the Nigerian constitution and further reforms.

First, defined territories and populations within the nation's geopolitical setup



demarcate the Nigerian local government system. The design of each local government area (LGA) takes into account the unique administrative requirements of its population, and it establishes boundaries to enable efficient governance.

Second, the constitution and subsequent legislation outline the institutional structure of each LGA, providing a framework for local governance. This includes establishing local councils and delegating authority to elected officials, ensuring that each LGA operates within an organised administrative structure.

Lastly, the delegated authority in Nigeria allows LGAs to exercise a degree of autonomy. This autonomy, however, is subject to the principle of reasonableness, ensuring that the exercise of power is in line with national interests and subject to oversight by higher levels of government. This system aims to balance the local government's independence with the need for integration and coherence within the national governance framework, reflecting Whaleh's conceptualization of local government operations.

In practice, the realisation of these ideals in Nigeria's Fourth Republic has faced challenges, including issues of fiscal autonomy, political interference, and administrative inefficiencies. Nevertheless, Whaleh's definition provides a useful lens through which to assess the aspirations and hurdles of local governance in Nigeria during this period.

Aligning with this concept, Oyediran and Agabaye (2008) view local government as a form of governance where there is active participation from the populace in both selecting decision-makers and in the decision-making process itself. This is carried out by local entities that acknowledge the central government's authority yet are ready and capable of taking responsibility for their decisions.

Concept of Autonomy and Local Government System in Nigeria

Charlie (2007) opined that the concept of autonomy has many unresolved issues that will continue to reverberate for many years over the local government administration in Nigeria, especially in Kaduna State. Despite many reforms, local government administration has remained a hotbed of controversy. The debate has raged on over the following:

The hallmark of a federal system of government is the relative autonomy enjoyed by all levels of government, as all of them derive their existence, powers, and authority from the same constitution. The 1999 Constitution recognises local government as a third level or tier of government in Nigeria.

The 1999 Constitution, which mandates a democratically elected local government council structure, fundamentally anchors the local government system in Nigeria today. Section 7(1) of the constitution not only guarantees the existence of local government but also places a duty on state governments to ensure their operational framework through legislation that outlines their establishment, structure, composition, finance, and functions. This legal backdrop supports the concept of local governance as a means of enabling popular participation in decision-making processes, as described by Oyediran and Agbaye (2008). The principle echoes that local governments, while acknowledging the central government's overarching authority, possess a degree of autonomy. This autonomy allows them to take responsibility for their decisions within the scope of powers and functions delegated by higher legislative bodies, resonating with Whaleh's (2010) characteristics of local government units. Thus, the local government system in Nigeria today is designed to embody democratic principles at the grassroots level, facilitating governance that is closer to and more accountable to the local populace.



This very section, which guarantees the existence of the local government, also ties the council to the apron-string of the state government, which manipulates the council for political expenditure rather than any practical economic development. According to the latest developments in the analysis of the federal government, the position is as follows: Federalism involves cooperation, bargaining, and conflict.

Section 162(5) of the 1999 Constitution worsens the predicament of the local government when it stipulates that “the amount standing to the credit of local government councils in the Federation Account shall also be allocated to the states for the benefit of their local government councils on terms and in such manner as may be prescribed by the National Assembly. This is a clear case of saying that the existence of any local government depends solely on the pleasure, whims, and caprices of the state.

The above provision simply connotes that since the state government receives the monthly allocation from the federation account, it also disburses the funds to the local governments at its own convenience. This is a clear contradiction of the principles of federalism, which guarantee” to the units self-aid, self-development, and initiative.”

The implication of the above condition is that the local government does not have the freedom to operate without recourse to the state government, which is expected to give either tacit or formal approval before any self-initiative could be implemented. To embark on any project without the blessing of the state is an invitation for trouble from any local government.

The Local Government Service Commission and the Department of Local Government, located within the governor's office, are critical entities in local government administration and oversight. The justification for these bodies lies in their ability to standardize services and conduct operations efficiently at the local

government level. Essentially, their role is to maintain a degree of uniformity in service delivery and optimize the functioning of local governments in line with broader state policies and standards.

However, this oversight sometimes comes at the cost of local government autonomy. Autonomy in this context refers to the ability of local governments to make decisions, manage their operations, and initiate policies without undue interference from higher levels of government. It is an essential aspect of decentralised governance, allowing local entities to tailor their decisions and actions to the specific needs and preferences of their communities. The tension arises because the activities of the Local Government Service Commission and the Department of Local Government can lead to situations where local councils feel compelled to act in certain ways or adopt specific policies that align with state-level directives rather than following their independent judgement or the direct preferences of their constituents. This can happen through various mechanisms, including but not limited to the allocation (or withholding) of resources, the appointment of key officials, and the setting of stringent operational guidelines that leave little room for local discretion.

While the intention behind these entities is to promote efficiency, accountability, and uniformity, the effect can be a diminishment of the local government's ability to act autonomously. This scenario can lead to a disconnect between local government actions and the needs or desires of the local populace, as well as a feeling among local officials that they are more accountable to state-level entities than to their own constituents. In essence, the balance between oversight and autonomy is a delicate one, requiring careful calibration to ensure that local governments are both effective and truly representative of the communities they serve.

The state's imposition of policies and programmes on local governments, under



whatever guise, is a threat to the latter's freedom. The freedom of local governments in Nigeria is rationalised thusly:

i. a variety of human needs: to avoid a system of government that tries to superimpose the wishes of a section of the country on others, and

ii. Certain services by nature are local; to deprive local governments of their freedom to discuss and decide on them is to override the localness inherent in such services. For instance, the citing of cemeteries and the collection and disposal of refuse. Local freedom is non-existent when local governments are deprived of initiative in the provision of such assigned local services.

One of the reasons for the 1976 local government reforms was to give a modicum of freedom to the third tier of government so that it would be free to initiate and implement policies and programmes that were the priority needs of the local people. The military government had observed, thus:

Local government has over the years suffered from the continuous whittling down of its powers. The state governments have continued to encroach on what would normally have been the exclusive preserve of the local governments.

Despite the noted observations and ensuing reforms, local governments still struggle to achieve even a basic level of autonomy. Certain legal and informal provisions, which often heavily influence or directly control local governments, perpetuate this challenge.

Local Government Joint Account with State

The provision for a joint account with the state government in which the state is the sole signatory has continued to raise unresolved questions as to its rationality or justification. It raises a fundamental question about the nature of the relationship existing between the state and local government if the former has overwhelming control over the joint resources with the

local government (Oyediran and Agbaye, 2008).

Section 162(6) of the 1999 constitution made provisions that "each state shall maintain a special account to be called 'State Joint Local Government Account, into which shall be paid all allocations to the local government councils of the state from the Federation Account and from the government of the state'"

There is no doubt that one of the reasons for the above provision might be the need to avoid unnecessary delays that might arise when dealing individually with several local governments within a state. Paying the allocations into just one account for later distributions to both the state and local governments is understandable. However, it confers much power on the state, thereby making it a senior and superior partner in the joint account relationship as contained in Section 162(8), which stipulates that:

the amount standing to the 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 above provision has deepened the grave dependence of the local government councils on the state government, which decides how much to give to the councils and under what conditions. The state is the sole signatory and unilaterally decides what amount to allocate to each council. This provision has put the council chairmen at the mercy of the state assembly, which threatens them periodically with sanctions on spurious excuses. The chairmen have been reduced to mere errand boys of the state governor, who must be pleased for any "edited" allocation to be given to the council (Oyediran and Agbaye, 2008). This is why it has become common practice for the state governors to coerce the council chairmen to collect less than the figures of allocation signed. For instance, a council chairman may be coerced to sign N100



million while he has received not more than N40 million for a particular month.

The Joint State Account has enriched the governors and turned some of them into instant billionaires, as they have perfect plans for regular shortchanging of local governments. The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) was said to have recovered N2 billion in cash from a special assistant to a former governor of a south-eastern state in Nigeria. The assistant to the governor was in charge of the state's local government and chieftaincy affairs. The money was said to be a deduction from a one-month allocation to the local government in the state.

Autonomy can simply be viewed as the state of being self-governing or reliant, especially giving local government councils the right to exist independently. What is required is not complete independence for local government councils but a degree of substantial autonomy," as evidenced by fiscal and administrative independence subject only to the requirements of state law and supervision.

Autonomy therefore refers to the degree of control over the exercise of the local government council's resources. The more control, the more autonomous, while the less control, the lower the degree of autonomy. The understanding of the concept is itself encircled by the concept of decentralization.

Decentralisation, according to Rodinelli, allows "local managers greater discretion in decision-making so as to enable them to cut through the red tape and the ponderous procedures often associated with over-centralized administration. He identifies four types of decentralisation, but the ones that apply to local government are de-concentration and devolution. While de-concentration is the handing over of some amount of administrative authority responsibilities to lower levels within central government ministries and agencies, devolution is the creation or strengthening, financially or legally, of sub-national units of government

whose activities are substantially outside the direct control of central government.

Rural Development

According to Abimiku (2012), the concept of rural development is very broad. It is a multi-dimensional process involving such areas as agriculture, health, education, the provision of rural infrastructure, social life, political and economic issues, commerce, and industry, among others, and their integration with the national economy. Since the scope of the concept is wide, it is the pivot on which sound national development in all its ramifications can effectively be achieved. It is, however, often assumed by policymakers and development planners that rural development is synonymous with agriculture. To correct this imprecision, it is extremely necessary to carry out a detailed conceptualization of the concept by scholars in the field of rural development. Since the concept of "rural development" is very wide in scope, it is necessary to write about an integrated approach to the definition of the concept. Thus, according to the United Nations (1976:4), the concept of integrated rural development implies that it is a composite or comprehensive programme for rural development in which all relevant sectors such as agriculture, education, health, and employment are conceived as interlinking elements in a system having horizontal as well as vertical linkage in operational and spatial terms. According to Aziz (1999), the concept of rural development should be viewed as a holistic concept that recognises the complexity and interrelatedness of the many variables that influence the quality of life in rural areas. It is a complex process that involves the interaction of economic, social, political, cultural, technological, and other situational factors.

Local Government Autonomy in Nigeria

In this decree, the gains of the local government system since the 1987 democratic experiment were consolidated,



including some of the reforms that had taken place within the period.

However, it was not until 1991 that the presidential system was decreed. Subsequently, an amendment decree (No. 23) was promulgated, which amended the 198 Decree. The major features of the presidential system are the separation of powers between the executive and the legislative (council) in local government. In addition, the checks and balances that derive from this would provide for autonomy and accountability. The major features of the presidential system in local government are outlined in a separate guideline.

These guidelines are meant to expound on the theory of separation of powers and checks and balances. From the wave of romanticization with local governments (either for political or altruistic purposes) or for the real purpose of empowering these units for development, the presidential system was one of the experiments that served such an agenda. Credit must, however, be given to it for the autonomy it held out for local government.

Local governments were empowered to debate and approve their own budgets and also make their own laws. The councils could, in addition to these, vet local government monthly statements of income and expenditure and monitor project implementation. It was hoped that with each arm of government being separate in terms of roles and responsibilities and acting as a check against the other, there would be no need for the excessive control hitherto exerted by the state governments.

In fact, initially, local governments were empowered to recruit and manage their own staff, as the Local Government Service Commission was then scrapped. This only lasted for six months because the chief executives of local governments turned this new-found autonomy into witch-hunting, a victimisation exercise. The tenure and stability of local government career staff were seriously jeopardized. This forced the

federal government to re-instate the Service Commission.

In terms of funding, one can safely say that the period 1991–93 was one of the most prosperous for local governments. The statutory allocation increased from 15% to 20%, designed to support the presidential asset. There was also a stabilisation account, and later on, the local government came to benefit from the value-added tax (VAT).

Accountability was enhanced as impeachment and recall clauses were built. Into the electoral and "operational guidelines" of local government. Despite all these concessions to local government as reflected in their finances, momentary relaxation in staff control, and whittling down of the powers of the State Departments for Local Government And with the democratisation that created a consciousness of service and accountability, there were little signs on the ground to show for these enormous powers; instead, there were accusations of massive corruption on the part of the chief executives and even confrontation with the state governments. The autonomy conceded to the local government was interpreted to mean autonomy for the political actors rather than autonomy for the local government as an institution and its people. Such massive failures in the use of autonomy led to interventions here and there on the part of the superior governments, like the removal of confrontational local government chairmen, the dissolution of docile and corrupt councils, and even probes into some others (Cinjel & Danjuma, 2019).

The real issue, however, is that the period of 1991–93 was when real attempts were made to devolve powers to local governments adequate enough to label them as autonomous and even meet the criteria of autonomy. But the fact that this experience failed can be traced to a number of factors. First, that the concept of autonomy was misconstrued (as stated earlier) either



inadvertently or intentionally, and second, that the legislature allowed itself to be guided and bamboozled by the chief executive of the local governments and therefore their key role as a check and balance institution. In fact, the power enjoyed by the chairman is a function of the activity and activism of the legislature. Two illustrations provided by Jun from two local governments can attest to the manner in which the system operates.

Writing on Zaria Local Government, Adamu observed that the noticeable allure of the system can be attributed to the following:

1. The chairman of the executive council was seen to be attending meetings of the Legislature when he was not supposed to.
2. The state government interfered in the affairs of the local government by passing on extra budgetary responsibilities from time to time. An example of this was the forfeiture of N2 million by each local government at one point and the responsibility to refurbish state secondary schools in their area of jurisdiction.

Furthermore, he observed that in Zaria Local Government:

The needed leaders use the Career Officers to fulfill their selfish interests to the detriment of the Local government interests For Instance, there were cases when these political leaders siphon the resources of the local government and divert them to their own personal use"

On the issue of accountability, he remarked that "the electorate mostly lacks the political awareness that would enable them demand for accountability from those they elect to represent them". These Issues suggest that the spate of democratization in local government and the autonomy that accompanied it was a cover up for manipulations and personal gains. Democratic power an important issue in autonomy was actually hijacked by the representatives of the people and the state governments, leaving the people helpless even in the area of accountability.

A second example is from Ekiti South West Local Government of Ondo State where Ebenezer found that:

"... The political conflict between the Executive and the legislative arm is one of the problems facing the system in the local government. Another major problem is the conflict within the members of the council The two factions in the legislative house always quarrel on every flimsy excuse In view of the quarrel within the council, they have failed to serve as a watchdog for the executive Their meetings are not conducted openly and in most cases meetings are not held The strained relationship between the executive and legislative did not allow for the smooth functioning of the legislative arm... moreover the local government chairman wields enormous powers in the absence of a vibrant legislative council."

The above is a reminder of how the legislature under the Presidential system in local government weakened itself and fell prey to the whims and caprices of the executive thus making nonsense of the checks and balance which would have guaranteed autonomy for the council.

At a broader, level and in line with the above observations on the two local governments, Bello, points out that we saw that in many local governments in Northern States of Nigeria, not much has been achieved. What we saw through direct contact and discussions with chairmen and supervisors on one hand and councillors on the other were and still are:

1. Political inexperience on the part of most councillors who regard political office as means of making two ends meet
2. Lack of seriousness by councillors to settle down to the business of governance
3. Dictatorial tendencies by many chief executives either in pursuit of personal aggrandizement or taking advantage of the political weakness of councillors who are supposed to serve as checks... insensitivity of many chief executives to the demands and expectations of their people due to selfish reasons of politics of deceit.



The net effect of these observations and experiences is that even though autonomy was a major objective of the system, the managers did not allow it to nurture and so did not rise above mediocrity consequently these local governments ended up neck-deep in corrupt practices and other bad management practices.

Local Government System under Fourth Democratic Dispensation

The Local Government (LG) structure in Nigeria during its Fourth Republic, which began in 1999 after the end of military rule, plays a crucial role in the country's federal system. Designed to bring governance closer to the people, this level of government is fundamental to addressing local needs and issues.

The Fourth Republic of Nigeria established the LG structure.

The Nigerian Constitution and the Local Government Area (LGA) Act outline the structure and functions of LGAs. Each LGA is administered by a Local Government Council, which is composed of a chairman who serves as the LGA's Chief Executive and other elected members known as councillors. The number of LGAs in Nigeria is officially 774, covering all 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) (Nigerian Constitution, 1999).

Prospects

Decentralisation and Autonomy: The Fourth Republic promised greater decentralisation and autonomy for local governments, aiming for a more efficient and responsive governance structure at the local level (Olowu, 2001).

Grassroots Development: With closer proximity to the populace, LGAs have the potential to directly address and manage local issues, infrastructure needs, and development projects, promoting grassroots development (Akindele & Olaopa, 2002).

Enhanced Democratic Participation: According to Agagu (1999), the goal of democratic governance at the local level is to increase political participation and

accountability, giving citizens a more direct say in their governance.

Challenges

Financial Dependency: Despite constitutional provisions for LG autonomy, many LGAs remain financially dependent on state governments due to the joint state-LG account system, limiting their operational independence (Oviasuyi & Uwadiae, 2010).

Corruption and Mismanagement: Corruption, mismanagement of funds, and inefficiency plague many LGAs, undermining their ability to effectively deliver services and development projects (Ezeani, 2006).

State governments frequently compromise the autonomy of LGAs through political interference and control over resources, undermining the principle of local governance (Olowu & Erero, 1995).

Differences with the Military Style of LG Governance and Autonomy: Under military regimes, LGAs experienced significant centralization, with military leaders often appointing LGA chairmen and officials, thereby reducing local autonomy and democratic participation (Nwabueze, 1982). In contrast, the Fourth Republic attempts to democratise local governance, despite ongoing challenges.

Legislative Framework: The democratic era has seen efforts to strengthen the legislative framework governing LGAs, aiming to delineate more clearly their powers and functions, unlike during military rule, where decrees could abruptly alter local governance structures (Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999).

Public Participation: Military regimes typically suppress political participation and dissent, limiting public engagement in governance. The democratic system, in principle, promotes inclusivity and participation at all levels of governance, including at the local level, although actual practice varies (Diamond, 1999).



While the local government structure under Nigeria's Fourth Republic holds the promise of enhanced governance, decentralisation, and democratic participation at the local level, it faces significant challenges. These include financial dependency, corruption, and undue interference from state governments. Comparatively, the democratic LG system seeks to afford more autonomy and public engagement than the centralised, appointive system under military rule, despite the persistence of some governance challenges from the past.

Empirical Review

Stephen, Chinedu, Chibuikwe, and Uchenna (2020) investigated whether LGAs in the southeast geopolitical zone have contributed to the rural development of the areas that make up those local governments, and why local government has not lived up to expectations despite its relative autonomy. Because it was survey research, it used development theory as its theoretical framework for analysis. The study reveals that LGAs in the southeast geopolitical zone have no iota of autonomy in practical terms and, as such, have not contributed to the rural development of the areas. The study concluded that local governments in Nigeria will reap the benefits of democracy in terms of rural development if they have more practical autonomy (discretion) than they currently. The study recommended that LGAs should exercise practical autonomy to address the local people's aspirations for rural development and transformation.

Okirika and Sokoh (2023) examined local government autonomy and the challenges of rural development in Delta South Senatorial District. To achieve the study's general and specific objectives, we raised two research questions and hypotheses as guides. The sustainable development framework was adopted as the theoretical framework of this study. The descriptive survey design was used with a population of theory one, one million seven hundred ninety-six, and one thousand eight

(1,796,800). 100 serves as the major instrument for data collection. The hypotheses were tested using the product moment correlation (PPMC) questionnaire and the Pearson tool. Based on the analysis, the study revealed that there is a significant relationship between local government autonomy and rural areas, and as such, local government needs to be granted the needed development, both financial and freedom, to develop otherwise rural areas. It is needed to review existing laws concerning local and state government joint accounts and revenue generation. The study therefore recommends, among others, that local government should be given the needed freedom, both financially, politically, and administratively, to organise and coordinate its affairs for rural development.

Theoretical Framework

The hegemony theory was adopted for this study. The theory was propounded in 1930 by Antonio Gramsci and was further developed by other scholars such as Gitlin (1994) and Strinati (1995). It can be argued that Gramsci's theory suggests that subordinate groups accept the ideas, values, and leadership of the dominant group not because they are physically or mentally induced to do so, nor because they are ideologically indoctrinated, but because they have reasons of their own. Dominant groups in society, including fundamentally but not exclusively the ruling class, maintain their dominance by securing the spontaneous consent of subordinate groups, including the working class, through the negotiated construction of a political and ideological consensus that incorporates both dominant and dominated groups. In the relationship that exists between the state and local government, they should work in unity to complement each other to achieve societal goals and rural development for rural dwellers. Gramsci argues that in order to understand a political system, it is necessary to understand not only its institutions or structures but also their respective functions.



Dominance and consent in political structures:

According to Gramsci, hegemony occurs when the dominant social group in society exercises control over subordinate groups through a combination of coercion and consent rather than by force alone. The autonomy of local governments in Kaduna State reflects the broader hegemonic influences exerted by higher levels of government. The central or state government may grant certain degrees of autonomy to local governments, fostering a sense of consent and voluntary participation in state-led initiatives rather than imposing direct control.

Ideological and political consensus

Hegemony also entails creating an ideological consensus that supports the ruling group's dominance. In rural development, this could manifest in the promotion of specific development agendas that align with the interests or ideologies of the dominant political groups at the state or national level. This framework interprets local government autonomy as a strategic move to secure the buy-in and cooperation of local leaders and communities, thereby integrating their local interests with broader state objectives.

Institutions' functions and roles

Gramsci emphasised understanding the functions and roles of institutions within their political and social contexts. For local governments in Kaduna State, examining how these bodies function under the influence of state-imposed hegemony can reveal much about their true autonomy and effectiveness in rural development. Are they genuinely empowered to address local needs, or are they merely administrative extensions of the state, designed to facilitate the implementation of centrally decided policies?

Rural Development as a Negotiated Process

According to the theory, various stakeholders, including local and state governments, negotiate rural development. This negotiation shapes rural development

policies and practices, potentially favouring the interests of more powerful or influential groups. Local governments may receive autonomy as part of a broader strategy to secure rural populations' consent to broader political and developmental agendas, which may not necessarily prioritize local needs.

Cultural and Ideological Leadership

Local government autonomy can also be viewed through the lens of Gramsci's concept of cultural and ideological leadership, where the state or dominant groups guide the cultural and ideological state apparatuses. In Kaduna State, local governments may promote certain ideologies that align with or support the state's rural development goals, subtly reinforcing the state's hegemonic influence over rural areas.

Theoretical application

There are three (3) dimensions to which the theory can be applied: (a) the constitutional imposition of the state-joint local government account; (b) the overuse of the caretaker committee system at the expense of the democratic elective structure; and (c) the pseudo-existence of local government autonomy.

The major reason for the initiation of the State-Joint Local Government Account (SJLGA) was to promote a smooth, effective, and efficient fiscal relationship between the state and the local government that will bring about rural development and establish room for good governance, productivity, development, and transformation in the local government area. But this is not the case. The State Joint Local Government Account (SJLGA) has caused more harm than good. It has further contributed to the woes of local government administration across Kaduna State and the country as a whole.

The master-servant model of fiscal relationships is the practice across local government councils across Kaduna State. This gained access and recognition with the aid of overemphasising the caretaker management system in the local



government area at the expense of the elected democratic structure, which the 1999 Nigerian constitution allowed in sections 7 and 8. In this kind of fiscal relationship, the state dominates and controls the finances and every sphere of operation of the local government area.

The study employed a descriptive and survey research design. The research relied on surveys, interviews, and secondary data drawn from an array of published and unpublished materials relevant to the study, such as books, journals, magazines, conferences and seminar papers, newspapers, and other quantitative publications related to the problem of the study, which were all systematically analysed.

The methods for the generation of data for the study were a survey, an interview, and secondary sources. There were qualitative publications and entries on recognised official websites. Others include online versions of international dailies, books, journals, reports, seminar and conference papers, national newspapers, etc.

Being non-experimental research, qualitative descriptive analysis is employed for the analysis of the generated data. This was done through careful analysis of the formulated research questions in line with the reviewed literature.

3. Findings of the Study

During the study, we found that:

The practice of the State Joint Local Government Account has hindered the Local Government Council in Kaduna State from rendering efficient and effective service delivery to the generality of the people in the rural communities in Kaduna State. This finding is in line with Stephen, Chinedu, Chibuike, and Uchenna (2020), whose study reveals that LGAs in the southeast geopolitical zone have no iota of autonomy in practical terms and, as such, have not contributed to the rural development of the areas.

The study also revealed that the introduction and practice of the State Joint

Local Government Account have impeded the needed rural development in rural communities across Kaduna State. The findings contradict Okirika and Sokoh (2023), whose study revealed that there is a significant relationship between local government autonomy and rural areas, and as such, local government needs to be granted the needed development, both financial and freedom, to develop otherwise rural areas.

The study again indicated that the introduction or practice of the transitional system of local government councils by the state government has had negative effects on the infrastructural development of local government councils across Kaduna State over the years.

4. Conclusion

Local government experienced the highest level of autonomy in Nigeria between 1988 and 1993, with the relaxation of state control over the funding, administration, and staff of local government. The presidential system of government boosted this autonomy by increasing control over local budgets and checking excesses by the council. Irrespective of the shortfalls of this system, it provided the environment for autonomy, especially with adequate financial backing and the removal of the burden of education at the primary school level.

Since the beginning of 1993 through 1999, there has been no coordinated policymaking and implementation in Nigeria by the local government council. The institution was largely used as an instrument legitimising the sit-tight syndrome of leaders, and most councils worked for the success of such; good elections were held, and direct funding was done to sustain the financial autonomy of the local government council. Decree 7 of 1997 also reinforced local governments.

In line with the foregoing, under the current democratic dispensation, there is no pretence about autonomy. Whatever autonomy the military left for local



governments has been eroded constitutionally, economically, socially, and politically. The state governments have a duty to now sit down and decide the type of local government they intended, either a viable, autonomous, or field administration system. Each indication points to reconcentration that is not even guided.

5. Recommendations

Based on the foregoing findings of the study, the following recommendations are put forward:

1. Kaduna State government should implement comprehensive training programmes for local government officials focused on project management, financial literacy, and governance to empower them to manage resources more effectively and make informed development decisions.
2. Kaduna State government should advocate for legislative revisions to provide local governments with greater control over their finances. This could involve reforms to the state joint account system to ensure a more equitable and transparent allocation of funds that aligns with local needs and priorities.
3. Kaduna State government should implement structures and processes that ensure community participation in the planning, execution, and monitoring of local development projects. This could involve setting up local development committees or forums that include representatives from various segments of the community, including women, youth, and minority groups.

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