### AUTONOMY OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN NIGERIA: ISSUES AND WAY FORWARD

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**ABSTRACT**

*This study was carried out to examine the autonomy of local government in Nigeria: issues and way forward using three local government areas in Delta State as a case study. Specifically, the study was aimed at examining if the autonomy of local government in Nigeria is achievable; study the effort of the Federal government of Nigeria in making local government autonomous; and analyze if the local government has and will have any positive effect on the populace. The study employed the survey descriptive research design. A total of 150 responses were validated from the survey. From the responses obtained and analysed, the findings revealed that the autonomy of local government in Nigeria is achievable any time soon; The Federal government of Nigeria is not making any effort to make local government autonomous; and the local government has positive effect on the populace. The study therefore recommend Federal government of Nigeria to see to accomplishing of LG autonomy in the country. LGs in Nigeria need adequate autonomy that can facilitate their operations and development of the localities. This should emanate from institutionalized democratic process of elections for representative LG councils as and when due.*

****CHAPTER ONE****

****1.0        INTRODUCTION****

****1.1        BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY****

The Nigerian government structure is made up of three tiers, which are the federal government, state government and the local government. The three of them are involved in delivering dividends of democracy to the people. They each have their roles to play as entities, but they also collaborate in certain respects, especially when it has to do with management and financing.  This ensures improvement in performance and accountability. The federal government is involved in defense, shipping federal trunk roads, aviation, railways, posts, telegraphs, telephones, police and other security services. They are also involved in regulation of telecommunications, interstate commerce and labour. Federal sees to mines and minerals resources, guidelines for minimum education standards at every level of education and water resources. Both federal and state collaborate to see to antiquities and monuments, university, technological and post-primary educations; health and social welfare; statistics and surveys; scientific and technological research; industrial, commercial and agricultural development and electricity.

State and local governments collaborate on issues related to development of agriculture and non-mineral natural resources, health services and primary, adult and vocational education.

The local government deals with issues related to roads, streets, street lighting, drains and other public facilities; sewage and refuse disposal, homes for destitute and infirm, cemeteries and burial grounds and economic planning and development.

Funding for the three is mostly being provided by the federal government. Certain percentage of the monthly allocation goes to states and the states. States and local governments presently have joint account. This means states disburse funds needed by the local governments under them. (Nigerian founder, 2017).

The National Assembly’s oversight function of amending the 1999 Constitution has once again brought the vexing issue of local government autonomy to the front seat of Nigeria’s political arena. Since independence in 1960, Nigeria has experimented with different models of local government administration (Oyeleye, 1988; Oyediran and Gboyega, 1979). From empirical evidence in extant literature, the rationale behind the declaration, principally, was to bring government closer to the people and effective service delivery to the rural areas. It is in connection with the aforementioned rationale amongst others that several local government reforms have been initiated by successive governments to ensure that they are achieved (Olowu, 1984). However, within the Nigerian context, the 1976 local government reform gave us not only the definition of local government, but also the basic rudiments of local government autonomy. The 1976 reform defines local government as:

Government at the local level exercised through Representative Council established by law to exercise specific powers within defined areas. These powers should give the council substantial control over local affairs as well as the staff institutional and financial powers to initiate and direct the provision of services and to determine and implement projects so as to implement the activities of the state and federal government in their areas, and to ensure, through devolution of these functions to these Councils and through the active participation of the people and their traditional institutions, that local initiative and response to local needs and conditions are maximized. The above definition brings out the key elements of local government autonomy. First, the local government unit should have a legal personality distinct from the state and federal governments. Second, the local government ought to have specified powers and functions distinct from the state and federal governments. Third, the local government has to operate independently of the state and federal governments. That means that the local government is not an appendage or field office of the state or federal government. Fourth, local government ought to have the ability to make its own laws, rules and regulations. Fifth, local government should have the ability to formulate and execute its own policies and the right to recruit, promote, develop and discipline its own staff. It is pertinent to note that there is never a time that local government in Nigeria has been granted the kind of autonomy expounded in our definition above. And like we earlier pointed out, in all political systems, the kind of autonomy the central or regional government entrust to the local units depend largely on the nature and character of state politics. For example, in the United States of America, the degree of autonomy granted local authorities is derived from ideals and values such as liberty, equality, democracy, individualism, unity and diversity (Akpan, 2013).

The Local Government in Nigeria can be a successful autonomous entity provided the Federal and State governments are ready to work towards achieving this.

****1.2     STATEMENT OF RESEARCH PROBLEM****

In the last few years there has been so much avoidable controversy and confusion about the local government system in Nigeria. Quite a number of challenges have confronted local governments in Nigeria, in their bid to utilize their autonomy in the task of developing the localities. These include structural, operational, financial, patron/godfather pressure, unstable democracy, constitutional provisions and corruption. However, this could be as a result of Nigeria’s socio-political context, with multiplicity of culture, diversity of languages and differentiated needs and means, the importance of local government in fostering the needed national consciousness, unity and relative uniformity as well as preservation of peculiar diversities cannot be over-emphasized. Central to the creation of local government, however, is its 17 ability to facilitate an avenue through which government and the people intermix, relate and more quickly than any other means resolve or dissolve issues that may have heated the system. Local government has been perceived as a panacea for the diverse problems of the diverse people with diverse culture. The importance of local government in enhancing the effectiveness and efficiency of service delivery no doubt contributed to the rapid creation of many local governments following the adoption of 1979 constitution. Even today, there are still agitations for the creation of additional local governments

****1.3   RESEARCH QUESTIONS****

    This work is designed to provide answers to the following questions:

1. Is the autonomy of local government in Nigeria achievable?

2. Can the Federal government allow the local government be an autonomous entity?

3. Has the Local government have any meaningful positive impact on the lives of the populace?

****1.4   OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY****

1. To critically cross examine if the autonomy of local government in Nigeria is achievable?

2. To study the effort of the Federal government of Nigeria in making local government autonomous.

3.  To analyze if the local government has and will have any positive effect on the populace.

****1.5   SCOPE OF THE STUDY****

The researcher shall restrict the scope studies to the analysis of an autonomous local government in Nigeria. The study shall focus more on how local government autonomy boost Nigerian economy.

****1.6     SIGNIFICANCE   OF   THE    STUDY****

Empirically, the study will benefit the citizens and government of Imo State on the implications of lack of autonomy of the local government. It will also help the policymakers to quickly amend the constitutional provision that weakens the autonomy of local government in Nigeria. If this is done, then local government will no doubt be perceived as a panacea for grassroots development. The study is also significant because it will enable the people of Imo State to enjoy the dividend of democracy at the local government level. Theoretically, this work is significant because it will improve the literature base on local government autonomy in Nigeria. It is also a contribution to the existing literature in the area of local government autonomy.

 ****1.7   LIMITATION OF THE STUDY****

As the case usually is, there are certain limitations the researcher will be faced with in the cause of this work. One is in the area is finance for the general research. Apart from finance, also considering the fact that research work of this nature is often done within a time bound.

However, it is believed that these constraints will be checkmated by making the best use of the materials available materials and spending more than the necessary time in the research work, therefore, it is strongly believed that despite these constraint, its effect on this research report will be minimal, thus, making the objective and significance of the study achievable.

****1.8       METHODOLOGY****

            Secondary sources of gathering data will be largely employed for our variables. This again will be based on content analysis, what these involves is the critical review of related materials, literatures, journals, magazines and textbooks, it will also involve sourcing or browsing the net for materials. Communication with authorities in the field will also not be overlooked.

****1.9     KEY WORDS****

****Autonomy****: the right or condition of self-government.

****Local Government:****this is the administration of a particular county or district, with representatives elected by those who live there.

****Economy:****this is the state of a country or region in terms of the production and consumption of goods and services and the supply of money.

****Industry****: economic activity concerned with the processing of raw materials and manufacture of goods in factories.

****Politics:****the activities associated with the governance of a country or area, especially the debate between parties having power.

**CHAPTER TWO**

**REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

**INTRODUCTION**

Our focus in this chapter is to critically examine relevant literatures that would assist in explaining the research problem and furthermore recognize the efforts of scholars who had previously contributed immensely to similar research. The chapter intends to deepen the understanding of the study and close the perceived gaps.

Precisely, the chapter will be considered in three sub-headings:

* Conceptual Framework and
* Theoretical Framework

**2.1 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

**The Concept of Local Government**

The performance of local governments has been receiving increasing attention in Nigeria over the past decades, from both academic and civil society sectors. All over the world and especially in Africa, local government is seen as a means of enhancing development and service delivery, improve governance and deepen democracy (Buccus,Hemson, Hicks and Piper, 2007). The National Guidelines for Reforms ofLocal Government (1976:1)in Nigeria defines Local Government as: Government at local levels exercised through representative councils established by law to exercise specific powers within defined areas. These powers should give the council substantial control over local affairs as well as staff and institutional and financial powers to initiate and direct the provision of services and so determine and implement projects so as to complement the activities of the state and federal Governments in their areas and to ensure through devolution of functions in these councils and through the active participation of the people and then traditional institutions that local initiative and response to local needs and conditions are maximized (cited in Bello, 1986:12). This explains the legality of local governments which has the backing ofthe fourth schedule of the 1999 constitution to enforce authority and power within its territorial boundary. It is expected to discharge duties which ensure effectiveness at the local level and this should in some ways contribute to the overall growth and development of the nation. Mabogunje (in Ibietan, 2010:32) cited some of the major expectations from local governmentswhich include:

a) Improving the living standards of the subsistence population through mobilisation and allocation of resources to achieve desirable balance over time between the welfare and productive services available to the rural subsistence populations.

b) Ensuring mass participation aimed at achieving both allocative rationality plus equity with redistributive efficiency.

c) Making the process self-sustaining: this requires appropriate skills acquisition and development; capacity building; and availability/presence of functional institutions at local, state and federal levels to facilitate optimal use of available resources and the development of the rural areas.

Nigeria operates a federal system with feeble attempts at democratic practice and has three tiers of government namely: the federal government, the state government and the local government being the third tier. It is pertinent to note that the practice of federalism inNigeria has had severalinterferenceby the military who imported their unitary command system into governance. A semblance of this unitary command still exists in the present democratic dispensation as power is concentrated in the hands of the federal government, impinging on the true practice of federalism as devolution appears shaky. The practice of federalism in Nigeria deviates from the letter and spirit of federalism as advocated by K.C. Wheare who is credited with developing a concise treatise of federalism (Ibietan, 2010:31). Onyeoziri (in Ibietan, 2010:205) further argues that the inconsistencies characterizing the logic of federal practice especially in Nigeria where each level/tier of government which is supposed to be coordinate and independent in its sphere becomes subordinated and this is contrary to the letter and spirit of federalism as advocated by K. C. Wheare (1784) who developed the original idea of federalism (Ibietan, 2010). Onyeoziri (in Ibietan, 2010:205) further corroborated that the imperfections in the state institutions also create some disabilities for the federal practice. He therefore cautioned on the lacuna in discussing federalism without backing it with “asuitable theory of state” (which is the infrastructure) onto which federalism is grafted. Thus, a mutual reinforcement of the two variables offers a reliable strategy in guaranteeing stable federal arrangements (Ibietan, 2010:206). When there is an effective federal practice, then there can be proper deconcentration and devolution of powers to subnational governments, to perform their duties.

The Nigerian federal structure allows the existence of the local government as the third tier of government. Section 7(1) of the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria specifically guarantees a democratically elected local government system. The fourth schedule of the same constitution similarly defines the roles of the local governments (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999).The Nigerian federation currently has 774 local government units created for grassroots administration and for delivering services to the people at the various local levels as well as creating a relationship with the local people through which the government can be responsive to their needs and demands. In addition, local governments also exists to ensure effective political involvement of the local people in the policy making process as well as in the affairs of government (Afrobarometer, 2013:1). Some scholars are of a contrary opinion that the local governments have not performed their functions as agents of development; rather they have attaineddisrepute for corruption, fiscal disorderliness and overall irresponsibility. The lack of uprightness, transparency and accountability at the local level of government constitute a heavy toll on the welfare of average Nigerians (Agbo, 2010:20). Local government as the name implies is the government established for the sole purpose of directly governing the local populace. This means that the government at the local level is expected to be transparent and accountable to the local people for whom it was created and the provisions of the constitution ought to be reflected through the running of this tier of government. As an aberration to good governance, corruption exists at the three tiers of government, and local governments in Nigeria are often seen as nurturing grounds for barefaced corruption and near absence of transparency and accountability in the conduct of its governance (Abubakar, 2010: 25). Gabriel(2011) argues further that corruption has become an everyday issue in the context of the Nigerian governments, as there are frequent cases of stealing, embezzlement and mismanagement of funds. “Thieving has become a major interest and diversion for Nigerians in high places. It has become a big time occupation. All arms of government are affected and the local government is not excluded” (Gabriel, 2011:19). The lack of autonomy and financial power to attract and retain qualified personnel are also major problems as local governments do not possess the necessary resources needed to formulate and fully implement programmes that arebeneficial to the communities they govern. This lack of autonomy is partly attributed to constant interference and impediments on the affairs of the local governments by the state governments. Lawal (2000) opined that local government is the tier of government closest to the people and it is vested with certain powers to exercise control over the affairs of people in its domain. A local government council is therefore expected to play the roles of promoting the democratic ideals of a society and cocoordinating development programmes at the local level. It is also expected to serve as the basis of socioeconomic development in the locality. Despite the numerous challenges it faces, local government is essentially a pathway to, and patron of national integration, organization and development (Lawal, 2000).Oviasuyi&Isiraojie (2010) averred that local governments exist in Nigeria, yet the resident populations in it aredeniedthe benefits of its existence. Local governments have however been criticisedby many local dwellers in various parts of Nigeria fornot living up to its expectation and actualising the purpose for which it was created.

**Concept of Local Government Autonomy**

The debate on local government autonomy focuses on what powers and functions the central or regional or state government should grant to the local units within the political system (for more discussion on this issue see Clark, 1984). However, within the Nigerian context, the 1976 local government reform gave us not only the definition of local government, but also the basic rudiments of local government autonomy. The 1976 reform defines local government as: Government at the local level exercised through Representative Council established by law to exercise specific powers within defined areas. These powers should give the council substantial control over local affairs as well as the staff… institutional and financial powers to initiate and direct the provision of services and to determine and implement projects so as to implement the activities of the state and federal government in their areas, and to ensure, through devolution of these functions to these Councils and through the active participation of the people and their traditional institutions, that local initiative and response to local needs and conditions are maximized (p,111). The above definition brings out the key elements of local government autonomy. First, the local government unit should have a legal personality distinct from the state and federal governments. Second, the local government ought to have specified powers and functions distinct from the state and federal governments. Third, the local government has to operate independently of the state and federal governments. That means that the local government is not an appendage or field office of the state or federal government. Fourth, local government ought to have the ability to make its own laws, rules and regulations. Fifth, local government should have the ability to formulate and execute its own policies and the right to recruit, promote, develop and discipline its own staff. It is pertinent to note that there is never a time that local government in Nigeria has been granted the kind of autonomy expounded in our definition above. And like we earlier pointed out, in all political systems, the kind of autonomy the central or regional government entrust to the local units depend largely on the nature and character of state politics. For example, in the United States of America, the degree of autonomy granted local authorities is derived from ideals and values such as liberty, equality, democracy, individualism, unity and diversity. Such ideals are at the very core of their national identity and shape the nature and character of state politics. As Rogoveanu (2013) rightly argues, it also shapes the vision which Americans have upon the world. These perennial principles, which are an important part of the American psyche, have greatly influenced the way public policies and laws are made in the United States of America. Furthermore, lettering on the same issue, Rogoveanu (2013) aptly points out: The concept of liberty has been at the forefront of American political culture, and the sheer dominance of liberty-related discourses is indicative of this theory. “Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness” as the core principles of declaration of Independence are restated in the preamble to the Constitution, as “the Blessing of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity” or sublimated in an artistic form in the Statue of Liberty(p.6). These principles shape federal-state-local relations in the United States. Thus, the kind of powers and functions the federal or state government devolves to the local unit is remarkably influenced by the concept of liberty. The principle of liberty has long guided the American experiment with government during and after the American Revolution. It is also important to note that there is no political system that the local units operate completely independent of the central or regional or state government. In an intergovernmental context, there is variety of ways in which federal and state governments might contribute to the fiscal sustainability of the local government. For example, in older federations like the United States of America and Switzerland, the federal and state governments do interfere in the activities of the local councils through grantin-aid and other intervention programmes, to ensure that they meet their obligations to the citizens as a tier of government (see Gamkhar and Pickerill (2012) and Rivlin (2012) for a discussion of federal and state governments’ positive contribution to local governments in the United States). In this regard, the interference is a positive one; therefore it does not generate any negative controversies. The point being made here is that federal and state governments’ interferences in the activities of the local government can be positive or negative. It is negative when such interference impedes on the capacity of the local government to carry out its statutory functions and vice versa. It is the former that generates controversies, litigations and seminar research. Positive interferences’ lead to more effective governance at the local level and negative ones intensify crises of federalism at the sub national level. The negative genus of interference is predominant in the Nigerian federation. Scholars, including Ammani (2012) and Akindele and Olaopa (2002), commenting on this issue, have described how state governments seize federal allocations meant for local governments in their domain and misappropriate them; leaving the local governments debilitated.

**Local Government Autonomy: The Nigerian Experience**

Nigeria has experimented with various models of local government administration before and after independence. According to Ige (1996) Nigeria is the only federation in the whole world where the federal government decides how, where and when a local government council must run. In all other countries, it is the state or regional government that legislates on local government. As a matter of fact, we are not surprised because this is evident in the kind of federation the military instituted in Nigeria (for a detail discussion on this issue see Nnoli (2011) and Elaigwu, (1979)). In the colonial era, local government enjoyed a wide range of both financial and administrative autonomy. The local government system was derived from the British Whitehall model. The colonial government allowed each region to oversee the activities of local government under its jurisdiction. This means that the legal frame work for local government was provided for by each region: The Eastern region local government ordinance of 1950, the Western region local government law of 1952 and the 1954 native authority law in Northern Nigeria. According to Otive (1999), during this period, the councils were given a wide range of functions including primary education, health, police, and judiciary among others. Furthermore, the councils also enjoyed a great measure of autonomy in financial, personnel and general administration. As one analyst rightly argues, “it can therefore be said that the 1950s, was the era of pupilage for councils in modern local government throughout Nigeria”. In other words, the local governments were under the regional governments and there was relatively little or no interference in the activities of local governments by the federal government. In popular Nigerian parlance, the local governments run their own show: they were free to decide their own fate among other things, generate and spend their revenues, make laws, formulate and execute their own policies. The reason for this is not farfetched. The local governments were offshoots of the native authority system that were in existence before, or created by the British colonialists. They were formidable structures the British used to administer the country. They preceded the regional governments that were created in 1946. The dominant political culture was greatly influenced by the British ethos of governance. This explains in part why in spite of the resentment the educated Nigerians had for the native authority system and by extension the local government, it took them time to erode the powers and functions the local councils wielded in each of the regions. Thus, the nature and character of politics in the 1950s influenced the kind of local councils that were in operation at that time. The post-colonial era and specifically, between 1960 and 1965, witnessed a decline in both the financial and administrative autonomy local governments wielded in the colonial era. This was accompanied by a decline in the responsibilities assigned to local governments in the four regions: North, East, West and Mid-West. Although, the first Republic was short lived, it is not difficult to discern that the intrusiveness of the regional governments in local government affairs was as a result of the nature and character of the politics of the time. Each region wanted to be in-charge of its affairs by usurping some functions of the local councils. During this period, the federal government had very little hold on local government councils. The local councils were at the clemency of their respective regional governments. Most importantly, each region experimented with different models of local government administrative system: the Anglo-Saxon and French models were widely used. This trend continued and became worse under the military with the creation of 12 states, and other subsequent restructuring of the Nigerian federation. A major reform of the local government system in Nigeria was carried out under the military in 1976. Nigeria adopted a unified local government administrative system. Local government officially became recognized as the third tier of government. The objectives of the reform were outlined as follows:

• To make appropriate services and development activities responsive to local wishes and initiatives by devolving or delegating them to local representative bodies.

• To facilitate the exercise of democratic self-government close to the grassroots of our society, and to encourage initiative and leadership potential.

• Mobilization of human and material resources through the involvement of members of the public in their local development and

• To provide a two-way channel of communication between local communities and government (both state and federal) (1976 local government Reform).

In certain quarters, the unification policy introduced by the military is believed to be the genesis of the vexed issue of local government autonomy in Nigeria. According to Otive (1999), the 1976 reform completely eroded local government autonomy and laid the basis of interference in the conduct of local affairs of local government by military and civilian government thereafter. Furthermore, he posits that “the military laid the basis for the undemocratic nature of the local government and the erosion of local government autonomy”. But this by itself is a wrong conclusion because the 1989 Babagida reforms had cancelled all the errors of the previous reforms, both civilian and military. At best it is a paradox. This abnormality was subtly addressed by the 1999 Constitution in a phony manner. Though the Constitution allows the State House of Assembly to legislate over local governments within their domain; they are not allowed to create local governments. Section 7 of the 1999 Constitution empowers the state legislature to make laws for the administrative operation of local government areas and section 162 authorizes the existence of a state and local governments Joint Account. However, these two provisions have become the ammunition used by some state governors to incapacitate local governments within their states. It is important to note that there is never a time in Nigeria’s postcolonial political history that local governments operated independent of both the state and federal governments, which is the crux of local government autonomy. The search for this kind of local government system has been a mirage. On this issue, three contending perspectives have emerged. The first group interprets local government autonomy to mean independence from the interference of state government in the activities of local government. The Second, perceives local government autonomy as the non- interference of the federal government in the activities of local governments, and the third group, maintains that local government autonomy means independence from both state and federal governments interference in the activities of local councils. This is the dilemma facing local government in Nigeria today. At the moment, members of the National Assembly seem to be inclined to the first perspective; freeing the local governments from the loathsome interferences of state governments, which explains why they want to amend section 7 and 162 of the 1999 Constitution. In the draft amendment, they recommended the establishment of a Special Federal Account upon which the 774 local governments would draw their federal allocation; thus circumventing the abhorrent intercession of various state governments in local government finances. To be sure, this is what they describe as local government financial autonomy. What the National Assembly forgets, which they need to be reminded of, is that this method of financing local governments in the country has in the past been experimented by successive military regimes in the past. It is pertinent to note that principally, what the National Assembly did in its review of the 1999 Constitution was to merely amend the two sections (section 7 and 162 ), that places the local government areas under the control of state governments. However, the mere alteration of the above sections of the Constitution does not free the local governments from the control of the federal government. It rather strengthens it. This explains why state governors and the National Association of Local Government Employees are opposed to it. They also argued that local governments are an integral part of the state and therefore cannot be completely independent of the state government. Furthermore, they do not want the federal government meddling in the affairs of local governments. Going by the debate in the political sphere, the proposed amendment to section 7 and 162 of the 1999 Constitution is not likely to succeed, since it requires 2/3 majority votes of members of the National Assembly and 1/3 majority votes of members of the 36 Houses of Assembly (state legislatures ) in the country. The possibility of the state governments surrendering their financial control of local government to the federal government is unlikely, given the nature and character of state politics in Nigeria. In Nigerian politics, people think more of what they can benefit from the system rather than offering themselves up for service to their fatherland. This is what informs the struggle by the state and federal governments to control local government allocation from the distributive pool account or federation account. In essence, there is nothing fundamentally wrong with any of the models expounded above. However, there is something deeply wrong with the operators of the Nigerian state apparati. Thus, any of these models can suffice if the corresponding political culture prevails in the wider political system. In all political systems, the political culture defines the principles and attitudes that shape the way government is designed and the political decisions leaders make. Such political ethics are lacking in Nigeria. The characteristics which are predominantly part of the Nigerian psyche are ethnicity, nepotism and corruption. These manifestations are at the core of her national identity and shape politics and public policies at all spheres of governance (federal, state and local). The struggle to control local government by state and federal governments is simply a matter of what each of them stands to benefit from such control, rather than how such control can deliver political dividends to the people at the local level. This argument falls within the trajectory of François Bayart’s perception of African politics as contained in his book, L’Etat en Arique: La Politique du Ventre 1 . With this kind of political culture in place, nothing positive can be achieved in terms of instituting a veritable local government system in Nigeria.

**Obstacles to Local Government Efficiency in Nigeria**

* **Corruption at the Local Government Level**

Corruption, according to Harsh (1993), is a practical problem involving the outright theft, embezzlement of funds or other appropriation of state property, nepotism, and granting of favours to personal acquaintances. One of the fundamental problems of contemporary Nigeria is corruption which has thrived, progressed, and flourished unabated in the country. Corruption has been institutionalised to the point of accepting it as part of the system. Although, corruption is universal; it is found all over the world, but the degree of its manifestation varies form system to system (Adeyemi, 2012:190). Corruption is the greatest bane of local government administration in Nigeria. At the grassroots level, corruption has been canonically accommodated, entertained, and celebrated within the system. In the local government setting, corruption is normally labeled and euphemistically referred to as “Egunje” (a slogan implying “illegal offer” in Nigeria). Regrettably, democracy, which is assumed to be the antidote to corruption, has not lived to expectations in practice in Nigeria. Consequently, the level of apathy, cynicism, and poverty is high among the community dwellers (Lawal and Abegunde, 2010). Kolawole (in Oladunjoye, 2010:232) lamented this situation when he opined that “in spite of the establishment of the Independent Corrupt Practices and other related offences Commission (ICPC), corruption still thrives in our society”. In his analysis, Kolawole is of the view that the lack of funds is no more a constraint on local government performance, but mismanagement and misappropriation of the funds accruable to it (Lawal, 2010:232). Nowadays, men and women who have been (s)elected to undertake leadership position at the grassroots level in Nigeria primarily seek means to enrich themselves as quickly as they can and ultimately run the budgets of their various localities aground without any visible developmental projects to show for it. Developmental projects, if any, are in place after being thoroughly inflated (Lawal, 2001). Most local government chairmen see their position as opportunity to enrich themselves. The following examples are quite revealing. In 2001, the chairman ofKachia LGA in Kaduna state awarded a contract of N2.5 million for the rehabilitation and completion of women's centre and no work was done. Similarly, the chairman of Sanga local government in Kaduna spent N6,495,605.70 as extra budgetary spending. He awarded a contract of N3, 171,375.00 for rehabilitation of his office which N906.044.00 would have been enough for (Aluko, 2006). In Kwara State, the Chairman of Ilorin SouthLGA claimed to have built two staff residential apartments at Fufu, the councils headquarter at an inflated price of N20 million. The chairman also claimed to have paid N19 million to a contractor for the Gaa-Akanbi and Niger roads which had been rehabilitated by the state government in the previous year. It was also reported that the chairman owned twelve personal cars, far above what his legitimate earnings can afford (Aluko, 2006). Also sentenced for corrupt practices were AlhajiGana Abbas, the former chairman of Damban local government in Bauchi, and the treasurer of the council, Alhaji Ali Abacha. They were convicted and sentenced to 17 years imprisonment for misappropriation of public funds while in office as the chairman and treasurer respectively. They awarded contracts for the drilling of boreholes in Azir and Ngwalimi villages for the total sum of N12 million. The sum of N7 million was approved as mobilization fees for the contract to Galtis Nigeria Water Services. These two officers released only N1 million to the contractor and converted the remaining sum of N6 million to their personal use (Gold, in Adeyemi, 2012:194). ICPC also interrogated, the former chairman of Bassa Local Government Area of Kogi State, Mr. Bako Shiga, who was alleged to have operated a single cash book and awarded contracts without due process which gave room for misappropriation of funds. The former chairman of Dekina local government area council in Kogi State, AdejoAkowewas alleged to have collected money for security vote twice in one month. He collected money for some sub-heads twice for the same project and conferred undue advantage on himself by virtue of his position (Sowe, in Adeyemi, 2012). The former caretaker committee chairman of Kala Balge local government council in Borno State, Mr. ZannaAbubakar was arraigned in court by ICPC for misappropriation of N23, 825,000.00 belonging to the council while serving in office (Ingobro, in Adeyemi, 2012:194). ICPC also arraigned Saidu Musa, former chairman of Awe local government area council of Nasarawa State and two top principal officers: Mr. UmaruZanuwa, Director of Works and AlhajiAsoSafiyano, the Director of Finance over various corrupt practices involving N23,503,940.00 (Ameh, 2008:6). Mr. Umaru H. Zannuwo, who was the Director of Works in the council used his office to confer pecuniary advantage upon himself by collecting the sum of N2, 430,000.00 for the electrification of Kanje/Kekura, a project which was financed and executed by the Japanese Government. He was also accused of using his office as Director of Works in the council to criminally divert for personal use the sum of N4,522,000.00purportedly for hiring a bulldozer in the name of MICGA investment (Ameh,2008:7). Local government chairmen in the country have continued to soil their hands through avarice and sundry acts of graft. For instance, in March 2010, 12 out of the 23 local government chairmen in Benue state were recommended for suspension for various financial misconducts. This followed reports submitted by three ad-hoc committees set up by the state House of Assembly. Nine of them were recommended for three months suspension and directed to refund millions of naira they allegedly misappropriated, the chairmen of Gwer East and Gwer West councils were to refund N56 million and N54 million respectively and stay out of office for six months. Their Ogbadibo counterpart, who was suspended from office in 2009, was also suspended for six months for fraudulently enriching himself (Oyelude, 2010:17). Corruption is proving to be an acceptable norm among Local Government Chairmen in Nigeria and if the trend continues unabated, the desired development will not reach the people at the grassroots. Nwanma (2008) exposed a disheartening scenario in Yobe State, Nigeria, where a man walked to the headquarters of Jakusko Local Government Area and with a knife and hacked seven people to death, due to unpaid accumulated emoluments (to him) in the face of massive corruption by the local government chieftains. The frustration that compelled the man into this dastardly act represents the failure of the country's local councils to meet the basic needs of the citizens, even in the face of generous revenues from the central government. The 17 Local Government Areas in Yobe state received a total of 72.3 billion in eight years, from 1999 to 2007, according to figures from the office of the Accountant General of the Federation (Nwanma, 2008:148). An objective analysis of the physical infrastructural and social services in the state is at variance with this enormous statutory allocation. Corruption has really denied the public the dividend of their "social contract" (Nwanma, 2008). In fact, grassroots administration in Nigeria is increasingly paling into insignificance and the fastest means of primitive accumulation. This is due to the fact that the more financial resources earned by the local governments, the less the provision of essential services to the people at the grassroots in Nigeria.

* **State Government Persistent Intervention in Local Government Affairs**

The imperfections in the provisions of the 1999 constitution have made almost every State Government see Local Governments as their sub-entities and therefore subjected them to various manipulations by the Executive Governors. In 2009, the Chairman of the Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC), Mrs Farida Waziri, disclosed that: The level of social infrastructural development in the rural areas does not match the huge amount of money available to local government administrators nationwide. The 774 local government councils in the country received a whooping amount of N3.3 trillion from the federation account between June 1999 and June 2007, without anything to show for it (Waziri in Akanni, n.d:9). Diversions of local government funds by the state governors have been a major problem that stunted developmental growth in most local areas across the country. For instance, in Ondo State, under the late Governor OlusegunAgagu, there was an unholy alliance between the state government and the local councils in the state, where the former constituted Joint Action Committee, tagged "JAC". Federal allocations to local government councils were first deposited into a particular ad-hoc account before calling for the committee’s meeting. This in a way created avenues for the state government to divert local government funds and release paltry sumsinstalmentally. As a matter of fact, LG allocations became slush funds for state governors’ personal activities. Practices like these are replete in this fourth republic, and this circumscribed the ability of LGCs to deliver services efficiently at the grassroots (Olaniyonu, 2007). Akanni (n.d:10) corroborated that state governors see the allocation from the federation account to Local Government Areas as their personal fund and use it to finance their political activities. Some Governors found it easy stealing from LGAs. Between 1999 and 2003, only Chief AdebisiAkande of Osun State was reported not to have tampered with the local government funds (Lawal, 2010). A particular Governor from a North Central state who was not re-elected actually took as much as N2billion from the LGAs within four years. Also, a former LGA chairman in a South-West state narrated an instance in which his state governor had given them a few million nairas each as running cost and he challenged the Governor that the money being shared was the constitutional entitlement of the LGAs which the chairman should use for development purposes. The governor told him to- keep quiet as he (the chairman) "cannot tell me how to use my money" (Oyelude, 2010). Several local government administrators confirmed how their respective Governors just give them few million naira as running cost and diverted the remaining money originally meant for LGAs. Furthermore, several expenses incurred by the State Governments were charged to the account of the LGAs (Lawal, 2010). When the local government chairmen realised that they could barely pay salaries from the stipends given to them by the Governors, they found a smart but dubious way to share the money with their councilors for personal gain and jettison the social services which the constitution set out for Local Government Areas to provide (Olaniyonu, 2007).

* **Manpower Problems of Local Government**

Observation by some scholars shows that one of the major problems confronting the operations of Nigerian local governments is shortage ofqualified manpower. Akeredolu-Ale (in Bello-Imam, 2007) observed that in Kano and Jigawa states, the local governments lacked development planners, senior administrative officers, engineers and technicians, medical staff and health auxiliaries (nurses, mid-wives, trained dispensary attendants, secretarial and clerical staff and typists). He also observed that this trend rather than being peculiar to Kano statecould be generalised. There is no comprehensive and accurate data on the manpower situation in local government councils throughout the country and this in itself is a source of concern (Bello-Imam, 2007).

* **Local Government Autonomy**

Central-local relations in Nigeria have frequently been contentious, especially in relation to the contradiction between democratisation at the grassroots and the enduring practice of central control over local autonomy. The intricate nature of this complex inter-relationship between the national and subnational (federal and state) governments is revealed in lack of fiscal autonomy occasioned by inadequate financial buoyancy at the lower tiers of government, erosion of clearly stipulated roles and functions, occasional central imposition of functions without commensurate funds to match and sometimes untidy administrative structures of the local government councils. The provisions of the 1976 Reform were entrenched in the 1979 Constitution which was operational in Nigeria’s Second Republic. However, the 1976 Reforms invariably gave the Federal Government a more domineering role. AsGboyega (in Asaju, 2010) rightly observed; "the consequences of Federal intervention and imposition of a common system of local government have been mixed from a benign role that clearly retained State dominance of local government policy-making, the federal role has gradually widened to the point where the Federal Government can initiate local government Policy reform". The Second Republic was a turbulent period in the history of local government administration. It witnessed attempts at experimenting with the provisions of the 1976 Local Government Reforms as contained in the 1979 Constitution. It was a fierce period in which the States and the Federal Government contested the control of Local Government. Attempts by the State to re-establish their primacy in local government policy-making not only created conflict with the Federal Government, but also weakened the power of the local government (Asaju, 2010:8). The States, especially, abused some provisions of the 1979 Constitution to suit their selfish desires. State governments neglected or voided aspects of the 1976 LG Reforms that they were displeased with and distorted those that were merely inconvenient. For instance, throughout the Second Republic (1979-1983), no election was held into the Local Government Councils, only Sole Administrators were appointed (Asaju, 2010). This was at variance with the 1976 Reforms and 1979 Constitution, especially (Section 7) which provides for a democratically elected Local Government Council throughout the federation. Such behaviour painted the States as villains and provoked demands for greater federal role in local government policymaking (Gboyega, 2001). The re-emergence of the military into the political scene brought about a shift of local government control from the State to the Federal government. The Babangida administration (1985-1993) initiated some reforms aimed at ensuring local government autonomy. Some of the reforms included the abolition of the Ministry of Local Government, establishment of executive and legislative arms in Local Councils, and direct allocation to local governments without passing through the State government. The statutory allocation of the local government was also increased from 15 percent to 20 percent in 1992 (Asaju, 2010:9). There is an agreement among scholars, (Gboyega, 2001, Igbuzor, 2003) that the reforms of this period were aimed at a radical transformation of the status of local government in a federal system. Thus, the Federal government's scheme of decentralisation was deliberately and consciously focused on transferring greater powers and resources to local governments rather than to state governments. Through the reforms of this period, it could be said that a greater measure of devolution was made at the expense of the state. This however, provoked negative reactions from the states and suspicion about federal government’s motives in promoting the reforms. The Abacha Administration (1993-1998) however, revised some of the reforms (Asaju, 2010). The exit of the military and the enthronement of the democratic government in 1999 brought to the fore, again, the problem of local government autonomy. The provisions regarding local government administration in the 1999 Constitution created a lot of confusion. The 1999 constitution by its provisions in sections 7 and 8 did not only recognize the local government as a third tier of government and also guaranteed it, but gives the state the autonomy to lord over the local government. Sections 7 and 8 provide that there shall be: “The system of local government by democratically elected councils which is by this Constitution guaranteed and accordingly, the government of every State shall, subject to section 8 of this Constitution ensure their existence under a law which provides for the establishment; structure, composition, finance and functions of such councils” (Asaju, 2010:10). Another dimension to this confusion created by the 1999 Constitution which affects local government autonomy is the provision that empowers the State to determine and create new Local Government Areas. Section 8 (13) provides the modalities for the creation of new local government areas and indeed vests the power to do so on various State Houses of Assembly. Section 8(6) of the Constitution however empowers the members of the National Assembly to ratify them. This provision also brought about the tussle for the control of local government administration between the States and the Federal government. Another sore point on local government autonomy has to do with finance. The Constitution empowers the State to scrutinise and approve local government budgets, and expenditure through the State House of Assembly. States do exercise arbitrary and undue control over local government finance through the establishment of the State Local Government Joint Account. The issue of State Local government Joint Account has been a thorny issue in Local Government-State relationship in the Fourth Republic. This situation underscores the need for local government autonomy. The experience with many local government areas is that their state governments starve them of their statutory grants, thus denying them the financial muscle to render essential services as required.

**Impediments to Local Government Autonomy**

There exists ample evidence of statutory policies introduced by successive governments over the years to curb local government autonomy in spite of the fact that the Constitution officially recognizes local government as the third tier of government. These measures make it impossible for local government to operate independent of both federal and state governments. The policies are the institution of Ministry of Local Government, Local Government Service Commission, Caretaker Committee and appointment of a Sole Administrator to oversee the activities of local government .Others include Office of the Special Adviser to the President on local government matters, Office of the Special Adviser to the Governor on local government matters, the Senate and House of Representative Committees on local government matters, the State Houses of Assembly Committee on local government matters. Closely following the foregoing are the hijacking of local government statutory allocations from the federation account by some state Governors and none remittance of 10% internally generated revenues to local governments by some state governors as stipulated by section 162 of the 1999 constitution. A recent survey by authors on the financial subversion of local governments by state Governors shows that in Cross River state, as a rule, the allocation from the federation account is controlled by the state Governor such that in a local government where the monthly allocation is 80 million naira, the Chairman of the local government is given 4 million naira by the state Governor and is required to spend out of pocket, and submit receipt for refund. These measures contribute significantly to the non-performance of local government and the erosion of local government autonomy. It is important to note that with the exception of the Babangida reforms, all other reforms that have been made in the local government system over the years consistently decreased local government autonomy and increased the interferences of both federal and state governments in the activities of local government. The Babangida administration as earlier stated, introduced direct federal allocation to local government, abolished the Ministry of local government and established executive and legislative arms in local government. The administration also increased local government statutory allocation from 15% to 20% with effect from 1992. Rather than consolidate the gains made during the Babangida administration, subsequent governments have disrupted the floundering local government autonomy and democratic processes at the grass root, which were earlier initiated by the Babangida administration. As a result, there has been a significant reduction in the capacity of the local government in meeting its mandatory objectives. Protagonists of the policies earlier mentioned believed it is their duty to exercise close oversight over the operation of local governments. The symbolism of their argument is in line with our submission on the relationship between the nature and character of state politics and local government autonomy. It is important to note that most of these measures that impede local government autonomy were initiated based on the patronage system, which is the dominant nature of state politics in Nigeria. Political patronage pervades all levels of governance in Nigeria (federal, state and local). However, the local government suffers the most. The ruling elites at state and federal levels use local government to distribute all kinds of patronage to their supporters. In part, this explains why the ruling elites are literally at war to control the local government system in the country. It is in connection with this that it is not difficult to understand why the ruling elites at state and federal levels favour measures that will not allow local government operate as an independent third tier of government.

**Dominant Issues in LG Autonomy in Nigeria**

The important issues in LG autonomy in Nigeria started to emerge with the 1976 far reaching LG reforms. Before 1976, local administration, rather than LG, could be said to have existed in Nigeria. This is because from the colonial era up to 1975, administration at the local level was an appendage of the Regional and later State governments. This was in spite of some reforms by the Regional governments at the local level in the 1950s and in postindependence era by the State governments up to 1975 (see, for example, Gboyega, 1993; Ola, 1984; Ola and Tonwe, 2005; and Ikelegbe, 2005). It was from the 1976 LG reforms that some dominant issues in LG autonomy could be easily appreciated. These include the setting up of representative councils, determination of population size of LGs, direct allocation of funds to LGs and review of personnel administration. We briefly discuss each of these below. Representative LGs. – The guidelines on the 1976 LG reforms started the autonomy of LGCs when they stated that ‘membership of Local Government Councils should be predominantly elected either by direct or indirect elections from local communities E’ (Nigeria, 1976; para. 25). The fledging autonomy of LGs was driven into the 1979, 1989 and 1999 Nigerian Constitutions. In section 7 of each of the constitutions, there is a clause that ‘the system of local government by democratically elected local government is under this constitution guaranteed’. The constitution extended this guarantee in section 8 to ‘the establishment, structure, composition, finance and functions of such councils; by directing the States to enact a law to the above effects. And the State governments have been doing so through the enactment and amendment of LG laws since year 2000, even though scant respect has been extended to this and other enactments on LGs as we shall observe below. The importance of democratically elected LGs could only be under emphasized (Ola, 1996). Our conceptualization of democracy also supports this view. In terms of autonomy of LGs, democratically elected LGCs simply means that the councillors would no longer be the candidates of State governments as was the case in the past. It further means that councillors would be sure to serve out their terms without fear or favour, except a councillor acted unlawfully.

**Local Government Autonomy and Development of Local Areas**

The areas in question in this discussion are those of each LG which are therefore to be found in both the urban and rural sectors, but predominantly in the latter. The issue of interest to this paper here is an overview of how LG autonomy has impacted on the development of the locality, in particular the rural localities. Quite some work has been done on the development of the rural areas by the Nigerian LGs. The critical aspects in the local or rural development issue include availability of network of earth or tarred roads, electricity supply, pipe borne water, schools, health centres or cottage hospitals, mass transit system, telecommunication, political development, etc. The literature on LGs’ efforts to develop the local areas in Nigeria shows that the respective LGs have been showing varying concerns of development efforts to make positive impact on the lives of the local people. The efforts may have been rather low, but all over the country, LGs have tried in varying degrees to meet the needs and aspirations of their localities in three main approaches. First, some LGs have established Development Area Councils or Committees, so as to take governance closer to the people. Such LGs include Lagos, Yobe, Bauchi (Yobe State, 2003, Bauchi State, 2004). The second approach adopted by some LGs is the appointment of Ward Committees to handle or supervise some development projects which are being executed directly by the LGs or executed by them on behalf of the Federal or State governments. The third approach is the use of community development associations (CDAs) (Akoptor, 1995) or Town Improvement Unions as critical agents in community development even though they have been less utilized (Ikelegbe, 2005). There are also extension workers who are located in the third category. They are used by LGs especially for agricultural purposes. They move within and between ward or village areas educating farmers, advising and assisting them on the application of newly introduced seedlings, the use of insecticides and irrigation farming. Irrigation farming is predominant in many LGs in the Northern States of Nigeria where Fadama farming has been largely successful. That is, taking farming to the local farmers through biotechnology of improved seedlings, insecticides, extension services, irrigation and micro credit schemes. And the LGs have been uncompromising in asking for democratically elected LGs as part of their holistic development efforts. Using any of the approaches, the LGs, subject to the financial, personnel and other resource autonomy granted to them, have been rehabilitating earth roads, culverts, local or community markets, renovating some school buildings and erecting some new ones. They have been establishing some cottage hospitals or health centres, refurbishing pipe borne water structures, sinking or refurbishing bore holes, executing rural electrification projects, providing improved seedlings with respect to yams, cassava in particular, maize, oranges, coconut, tomatoes, rice, millet, etc. They have also been promoting political participation and governance. As already stated, these projects are executed in different localities having regard to the priorities of the people. The number of projects executed varies from one LG to another. But the literature, some interviews conducted by these writers and Table 3 show that the impact of LGs on the localities is rather sparse or lean and the people of each locality cannot but be full of complaints of inadequacies and dissatisfaction in the development strides of the LGs (Aghayere, 2008; Omoruyi, 1995; Mukoro, 2001; Ikelegbe, 2005).

**2.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The theory which informs our discussion of LG autonomy in Nigeria is the general systems theory. It is a theory that has been contributed to by a number of writers, such as Almond (1960); Easton (1965); Adamolekun (1983) and Offiong (1996). A synthesis of the definitions of a system given by various writers, some of whom are listed above, can be stated as follows. It is a phenomenon of whatever type, including physical, biological, social, political, etc., which is an organized whole with identifiable, interrelated structures delineating it from the environment (supra system) in which it is located and with which it interacts, processing the inputs from it into outputs for it. The general systems theory seeks to argue that every system, including political system, has subsystems which make up the entire system. They are assigned functions and provided with enabling empowerment, including resources, appropriate authority, etc. to enable them discharge their responsibilities optimally. Where this is the case, there is said to be homeostasis (stability) in the political system. On the other hand, instability reigns in the political system where the contrary is the case and the subsystems and entire system are also unable to function optimally. Input and output analysis of a political system is very important. A political system is said to obtain its inputs (demands, supports, liberty or autonomy, cooperation, criticisms, resources, information, direct labour, etc.) from the environment. It may be pointed out that some of these inputs, such as liberty or autonomy, cooperation, and direct labour, were not specified in the original or earlier analysis of the general systems theory, but they are considered important for this paper. These inputs are what the subsystems employ to discharge their responsibilities, so that the political system can send out its outputs into the environment and obtain further inputs for its operations. Applying this brief exposition of the political systems analysis to the Nigerian LG system, the LGs in the country constitute the subsystems. They must be well handled in terms of being fed with adequate inputs, so that they can contribute appropriately to the optimality of the Nigerian political system, as well as its homeostasis. If the reverse is the case, that is, if the LGs do not have the required inputs to operate, two important things may happen. First is that there might be instability and the second is that there might be discontent amongst the citizenry. The two are intertwined, It is therefore very useful to realize the importance of the systems theory in the handling of LG autonomy in Nigeria. This means the realization of the sub-systemic nature of LGs which are an integral part of the overall Nigerian political system. They have their assigned responsibilities to perform to the benefit of the people, not as appendages of either the Federal or State Governments. Failure to treat the LGs as such could send frustration through their veins, disenchantment and inability to perform and hence dissatisfaction amongst the populace.

**CHAPTER THREE**

**RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

**3.1 AREA OF STUDY**

Ethiope East is a one of the 25 [Local Government Areas](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Local_government_areas_of_Nigeria%22%20%5Co%20%22Local%20government%20areas%20of%20Nigeria) in Delta State, Nigeria. Its headquarter is Otorhoragbon. Ethiope East LGA has three districts, namely, Abraka, Agbon and Otorhoragbon. It also has 67 villages. It has an area of 380 km² and a population of 200,792 according to the 2006 census.

Ethiope West is a [Local Government Area](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Local_Government_Areas_of_Nigeria%22%20%5Co%20%22Local%20Government%20Areas%20of%20Nigeria) of [Delta State](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Delta_State%22%20%5Co%20%22Delta%20State), [Nigeria](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nigeria%22%20%5Co%20%22Nigeria). Its headquarters are in the town of Oghara Town. It has an area of 536 km2 and a population of 203,592 at the 2006 census.

Okpe is a kingdom in [Delta State](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Delta_State%22%20%5Co%20%22Delta%20State), [Nigeria](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nigeria%22%20%5Co%20%22Nigeria). Today, it is also the name of a local government area. It is one of the many kingdoms that make up [Urhobo tribe](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Urhobo_People%22%20%5Co%20%22Urhobo%20People). Its capital is [Orerokpe](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Orerokpe%22%20%5Co%20%22Orerokpe). The kingdom plays host to the [Warri Airport](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Warri_Airport%22%20%5Co%20%22Warri%20Airport), which is actually located at Osubi and the Delta State Trade Fair Complex.

**3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN**

Research designs are perceived to be an overall strategy adopted by the researcher whereby different components of the study are integrated in a logical manner to effectively address a research problem. In this study, the researcher employed the survey research design. This is due to the nature of the study whereby the opinion and views of people are sampled.

**3.3 POPULATION OF THE STUDY**

According to Udoyen (2019), a study population is a group of elements or individuals as the case may be, who share similar characteristics. These similar features can include location, gender, age, sex or specific interest. The emphasis on study population is that it constitute of individuals or elements that are homogeneous in description.

### This study was carried out to examine the autonomy of local government in Nigeria: issues and way forward using three local government areas in Delta State as a case study. The staff of the three selected Local Government, Delta State form the population of the study.

The three (3) selected local government areas in Delta State for this study are:

* Ethiope East Local Government Area
* Ethiope West Local Government Area
* Okpe Local Government Area

Statistics derived from the Local government secretariat of the three selected local government areas in Delta State shows the population of the staff is 364.

**3.4 SAMPLE SIZE DETERMINATION**

A study sample is simply a systematic selected part of a population that infers its result on the population. In essence, it is that part of a whole that represents the whole and its members share characteristics in like similitude (Udoyen, 2019). In this study, the researcher adopted the simple random sampling (srs.) method to determine the sample size.

**3.5 SAMPLE SIZE SELECTION TECHNIQUE AND PROCEDURE**

The Taro Yamane (1967:886) provides a simplified formula to calculate sample sizes.

**Assumption**

95% confidence level

 P = .5



n= 364/1+364 (0.05)2

n= 364/1+364 (0.0025)

n= 364/1+5.5

**n=150**

Therefore, for this study, the sample size is 150

**3.6 SOURCES OF DATA COLLECTION**

The research instrument used in this study is the questionnaire. A 10 minutes survey containing 19 questions were administered to the enrolled participants. The questionnaire was divided into two sections, the first section enquired about the responses demographic or personal data while the second sections were in line with the study objectives, aimed at providing answers to the research questions.

**3.7 METHOD OF DATA ANALYSIS**

The responses were analysed using the frequency tables, which provided answers to the research questions. **3.8 VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY OF THE STUDY**

The reliability and validity of the research instrument was determined. The Pearson Correlation Coefficient was used to determine the reliability of the instrument. A co-efficient value of 0.68 indicated that the research instrument was relatively reliable. According to (Taber, 2017) the range of a reasonable reliability is between 0.67 and 0.87.

**CHAPTER FOUR**

**DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS**

**4.1 DATA PRESENTATION**

**Table 4.1: Demographic data of respondents**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Demographic information** | **Frequency** | **percent** |
| GenderMale |  |  |
| 80 | 60% |
| Female | 70 | 40% |
| Religion |  |  |
| Christian | 150 | 100% |
| Muslim |  | 55% |
| Age |  |  |
| 20-25 | 20 | 10% |
| 25-30 | 80 | 70% |
| 30+ | 50 | 20% |
| Education |  |  |
| Diploma | 20 | 10% |
| Bsc | 100 | 70% |
| Masters | 30 | 20% |
| PhD |  |  |

**Source: Field Survey, 2021**

**4.2 ANSWERING RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

**Question 1:** Do you agree that autonomy of local government in Nigeria is Achievable?

**Table 4.2:** Respondent on question 1

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Options** | **Frequency** | **Percentage** |
| Yes | 20 | 10 |
| No | 80 | 70 |
| Undecided | 50 | 20 |
| **Total** | **150** | **100** |

**Field Survey, 2021**

From the responses obtained as expressed in the table above, 10% of the respondents said yes, 70% said no, while the remaining 20% were undecided.

**Question 2:** Do you agree that Federal government can allow the local government to be an autonomous entity?

**Table 4.3:** Respondent on question 2

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Options** | **Frequency** | **Percentage** |
| Yes | 20 | 10 |
| No | 70 | 70 |
| Undecided | 30 | 20 |
| **Total** | **150** | **100** |

**Field Survey, 2021**

From the responses obtained as expressed in the table above, 10% of the respondents said yes, 70% said no, while the remaining 20% were undecided.

**Question 3:** Do you think the local government has any meaningful positive impact on the lives of the populace?

**Table 4.4:** Respondent on question 3

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Options** | **Frequency** | **Percentage** |
| Yes | 150 | 83 |
| No | 00 | 00 |
| Undecided | 00 | 16.7 |
| **Total** | **150** | **100** |

**Field Survey, 2021**

From the responses obtained as expressed in the table above, all the respondents constituting 100% said yes. There was no record of no or undecided.

**CHAPTER FIVE**

**CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION**

**5.1 CONCLUSION**

In this study, our focus was to examine the autonomy of local government in Nigeria: issues and way forward using three local government areas in Delta State as a case study**.** The study specifically was aimed at examining if the autonomy of local government in Nigeria is achievable; study the effort of the Federal government of Nigeria in making local government autonomous; and analyze if the local government has and will have any positive effect on the populace.

The study adopted the survey research design and randomly enrolled participants in the study. A total of 150 responses were validated from the enrolled participants where all respondent are active workers in the three selected local government areas sin Delta state. The findings revealed that the autonomy of local government in Nigeria is achievable any time soon;

The Federal government of Nigeria is not making any effort to make local government autonomous; and the local government has positive effect on the populace.

**5.2 RECOMMENDATION**

These dominant recommendations are made to promote the LG institution that the Political Bureau Report (Nigeria, 1987: 120), a foremost report that the vast majority of well meaning Nigerians contributed to, called ’Local Government for development’. LG areas in the country are in dire need of real development.

**Autonomy -** LGs in Nigeria need adequate autonomy that can facilitate their operations and development of the localities. This should emanate from institutionalized democratic process of elections for representative LG councils as and when due. This should be in line with what obtains at the State and Federal government levels where elections are timely conducted. More will be said about democratic consolidation below. Adequate autonomy should be manifestly accorded LGs in other areas such as finance, revenue generation and expenditure, personnel administration and development matters. The literature that has largely, if not indeed entirely, agreed about poached LG autonomy will recognize adequate LG autonomy when it is granted by higher level governments. Adequate LG autonomy will forestall the current alibi that LGs make with inadequate autonomy for their diminutive development impact in their areas. In this study, LG autonomy for development has been taken as an independent variable, an overriding factor.

**LG Finances -** Three aspects of LG revenue need representation in our recommendation here. First is that State governments should extend the rightful financial allocations to LGs as the Federal government does. State governments should also totally eliminate all forms of interference with LGs’ revenue from the federation account, an interference documented by many writers (e.g., Aghayere, 1997; Omoruyi, 1995; Ola and Tonwe, 2005). LG autonomy is no doubt promoted by such policy adherence. The second aspect is that LGs must work hard to share up their autonomy themselves through more internal revenue generation (IRG). This recommendation agrees with the recommendation of the Political Bureau Report (Nigeria, 1987). The ripple effect of this recommendation could be that the citizenry would have more stake in governance. They would be more sensitive to governmental activities and developmental efforts. This increased sensitivity could also encourage the LGs to engage in more development of the localities through enhanced transparency. All this in turn could culminate in more appreciation from the people and greater autonomy from higher level governments.

**Action-not verbal-** institutionalization This recommendation dove–tails into the last one above. The concept of ‘action – not verbal- institutionalization’ is meant to strongly remind the LGCs in Nigeria about their developmental responsibilities to the people. This is because positive or development responsibilities are the raison d’ etre for the creation of LGs. A popular slogan says “by thy fruits, ye shall be known”. As at now virtually all the LGs in Nigeria try to institutionalize themselves verbally and in the media, especially in the electronic. They marginally institutionalize themselves through sparse or lean developmental impact on ground. Road works (rehabilitation or construction), pipe borne water, electricity, health care delivery, good learning environment and functional education are few and far apart in the LG areas. Hence the importance of this recommendation that LGs should do less of verbal, but more of action, institutionalization. A lot of advertisement, jingles, posters, political solidarity rallies, etc. rather than developmental activities as conceptualized in section two of this paper are carried on by the LGCs. There should rather be more developmental activities on ground at the local area, which would constitute the bastion of action institutionalization. The latter actually carries with it the verbal one in the spirit of the popular adage that “action speaks louder than voice”. In deed, any developmental action for a community is known by the community concerned and hardly needs any advertisement on television for the locality to know about it. Development activities, in fact, advertise LGs to the host community as well as to other communities and persons more than LGs do electronically. Action-institutionalization would earn the LGCs all the respect, protection and autonomy they need from the locality, the people and higher level governments. It may completely eliminate the spate of dissolution of LGCs in Nigeria. To be able to earn the above, the LGCs can hardly succeed through sycophancy or abiding by the whims and caprices of the higher level governments. Such has been the situation which has not taken LGCs far. To be sure, more developmental activities from the LGCs will, no doubt, do the trick.

**Need for Democratic Consolidation-** Nigeria needs democratic consolidation as a formidable partner with the rule of law that can help to entrench the constitutional provisions on LGs. As we have seen in this study, there are many provisions in the 1999 Constitution that are disregarded. For example, section 7 of the 1999 Constitution guaranteeing, ‘The system of local government by democratically elected local government councils’ has not been respected by the State and Federal governments. Such provisions, including that on the establishment of a joint State – Local government account, can have easy recognition, acceptance and utilization by the Federal and State governments if a democratic culture is in vogue in the country. In it, the political leaders or elite will be afraid or respect democratic tenets. This is because they realize that failure to do so will earn them the wrath of the electorate who can exercise the right to change their leaders. The power of the electorate is weak in a non-consolidated democracy, the type which presently operates in Nigeria as at 2007. It is the one in which the political leaders select rulers instead of the electorate electing their leaders. The strengthening and application of largely acceptable democratic culture, in line with our conceptualization in section two of this paper will reduce arbitrariness. It will enhance respect for orderliness, the rule of law to the advantage of the LG system and hence its autonomy. All this is expected to have a rippling effect on the development of the locality by the LGCs to the benefit of the people.

**Corruption, Discipline and Rule of Law-** The great deal of corruption in Nigerian LG system should be properly handled by the appropriate institutions, including the ICPC and EFCC. The grand corruption described by the World Bank as not cohabiting with development is the intolerable type that should be excised from the LG system. Discipline should also be emphasized. The Political Bureau Report had emphasized discipline in the polity as a necessary ingredient for development (Nigeria, 1987). Discipline helps to eliminate corruption and, of course, any LG functionary who is corrupt and infringes on the law should be dealt with according to the law. This is the symbiotic relationship between corruption, discipline and rule of law. Corruption must reduce through discipline and operation of the rule of law. These and sustainable democratic process can also eliminate the canker worm of patron/godfather politics in the LG, to the enhanced development of the localities and great autonomy of the LGs.

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**APPENDIXE**

**QUESTIONNAIRE**

**PLEASE TICK [√] YOUR MOST PREFERRED CHOICE (s) ON A QUESTION**

**SECTION A**

**PERSONAL INFORMATION**

**Gender**

Male [ ] Female [ ]

**Age**

18-25 [ ]

20-30 [ ]

31-40 [ ]

41 and above [ ]

**Educational level**

WAEC [ ]

BSC/HND [ ]

MSC/PGDE [ ]

PHD [ ]

Others……………………………………………….. (please indicate)

**Marital Status**

Single [ ]

Married [ ]

Separated [ ]

Widowed [ ]

**Duration of Service**

0-2 years [ ]

2-5 years [ ]

5 and above [ ]

**Section B**

**Question 1:** Do you agree that autonomy of local government in Nigeria is Achievable?

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Options** | **Please tick** |
| Yes |  |
| No |  |
| Undecided |  |

**Question 2:** Do you agree that Federal government can allow the local government to be an autonomous entity?

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Options** | **Please tick** |
| Yes |  |
| No |  |
| Undecided |  |

**Question 3:** Do you think the local government has any meaningful positive impact on the lives of the populace?

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Options** | **Please tick** |
| Yes |  |
| No |  |
| Undecided |  |