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LOCAL GOVERNMENT FINANCIAL AUTONOMY IN NIGERIA: A MYTH OR REALITY

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Abstract

This study critically interrogated the financial autonomy given to local government in Nigeria both in the past and in the present Administration of President Mohammadu Buhari, GCFR. The main objective of the study is to examine and ascertain whether the financial autonomy granted to the local government council is a "Myth" or "reality'' the study relied heavily on secondary data from in-depth desk review of books, journals, magazines, government documents, internet publications, newspapers etc. also, the study made use of primary data from personal interactions and interviews of some key stakeholders in the local government service such as the chairman, Head of Service (HOS), Head of Personnel Management (HPM), treasurer and supervisory councilors. The major findings of the study reveals that autonomy to local government in Nigeria whether administrative or financial in nature is a "Myth", a "mirage", a "shifting sand" and not actualizable in "practice and reality". The reason is because the Governors, through the instrumentalities of the state government have devised means and strategies to enforce all kinds of administrative, Judicial, Legislative and financial controls over the local government councils in their domain. Consequently, based on the findings of the study, it is recommended that for the local government councils in Nigeria to become vehicle for efficient and effective services delivery at the grassroots and rural areas; there should be constitutional amendment as is the case in all the federal system of government in the world today, for local governments in Nigeria to be the creation of the state government and sub-ordinate to them. This is necessary to make the local government accountable to the state government who will have the sole authority to organize structure, monitor and manage the councils to become result-oriented and efficient in services delivery as envisioned by the founding fathers and the 1976 Local Government Reforms.

Keywords: **Local Government, Financial Autonomy, Myth, Reality, Nigeria.**

Introduction

Conceptualization of the meaning and Definition of Local Government

The term local government refers to a political authority set up a nation or state as a subordinate authority for the purpose of dispersing or decentralizating political power. The act of decentralizing power may take the form of deconcentration or devolution. Deconcentration involves delegation of authority to field units of the same department and devolution on the other hand refers to a transfer of authority to local government units or special statutory bodies such a school boards for instance (Awa, 1980, Wraith, 1973).

From legal perspective, local authorities or local government in Nigeria as they are called, are corporative personalities with perpetual succession. They all have common seals of the councils, they can enter to any contact, and they can sue and be sued in court. They are created by instruments and they do exist for as long as the instruments creating them are still subsisting, thus they are normally not affected by the causal changes that do take place among their members and they are also conceded powers to acquire land, hold and dispose of land. From all these aforementioned points, and because of their corporate nature one can readily deduce that local authorities or local governments are "persona jurdica" i.e they are artificial

persons and have existence of their own which is independent of , and separate from the members composing the councils. They are, therefore, capable of incurring legal liability in tot, contract or under criminal law. It must equally be noted that since the councils are body corporates, all their actions will continue to bind them even when the composition in the membership have been completely changed (Oyewo, 1980).
Local government generally can be conceptualized as that tier of government closest to the people, which are vested with certain powers to exercise control over the affairs of people in its domain. There is no nation in the world without a local government system except that the system differs. In some nations, local governments just exist as deconcentrated units. While in others, they are described as devolution. This characterization is informed by the amount of power they enjoy or the autonomy they exercise over their human, material and financial resources (Massoud, 2001).

A local government as mere deconcentration could be conceptualized as a sub-unit government controlled by a local council, which is authorized to pass ordinances having a local application; levy local taxes, and exact labour and within limits specified by the central government vary centrally decided policy in applying it locally.

Local government as devolution could be defined as the legal conferring of powers to discharge specified or residual functions upon formally constituted authorities. The technical difference between the two immediate definitions above is that while local governments in a deconcentration respond more to the whims and caprices of central governments, those in devolution are much more powerful because of the way they are constituted and the amount of powers they enjoy.

From the United Nations point of views, a local government is "A political subdivision of a nation (or in a federal system, a state) which is constituted by law and has substantial control of local affairs; including the power to impose taxes or to exert labour for prescribed purpose. The governing body of such an entity is elected or otherwise selected." From all these definitions certain characteristics of local government could be visibly identified as follows:-

- That local government is subordinate system of government.
- It has both legal or constitutional powers to perform certain legislative, administrative and quasi-judicial functions;
- Has the powers to make policies, prepare budgets and a measure of control over its own staff;
- Its Council could be elected or selected;
- It has legal personality;
- It exercises authority over a given territory and population. There is no doubt that the Nigerian Local Government System, has at one point or the other, exhibited most or all of these characteristics, especially since 1976 Reforms and more especially under the Presidential System of Government at local level of the early 1990s (Massoud, 2001).

From Nigerian perspective and conceptualization Local Government could be defined as the third tier level of government with Representative Council, established by law to exercise specific powers within defined areas. The council has 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. Local Government by this conceptualization is supposed to complement the activities of the state and Federal Governments in their areas, and ensure, through the devolution of functions and through the active participation of the people and their traditional institutions, that local initiative and response to local needs and condition are maximized (Nwankwo, 2006).

A very important matter or issue we must consider in our definition of local government is the question of autonomy. Autonomy refers to the amount of power granted to local government by the state or a central government. This power is expressed in terms of the functions assigned to them, the extent to which they are allowed to generate revenue by themselves, the source of other revenues and the supervision of expenditure, the supervision of local council deliberations by state representatives, the relation of local councils to extra-legal institutions such as the town improvement unions and the traditional authority etc.

The aspect of local government autonomy we are concerned in this work is the financial autonomy. In other words, to what extent are local government council in Nigeria considering their enormous constitutionally assigned responsibilities and sources of revenue generation, are they free or allowed to spend their finances as deemed necessary, without interferences by the state or federal government in Nigeria. The main focus of this work is to analyze critically and ascertain the extent the constitutional provisions and the recent legislative approval by the President Mohammadu Buhari Administration for full financial autonomy to the local government councils in Nigeria is a “myth” or “Reality”.

It is important to note, that the method of financing the local government and type of expenditure control employed by the state or central agency constitute significant sources of the erosion of local government financial autonomy.

Historical Overview of the Constitutional and Administrative Provisions for Local Government Financial Autonomy in Nigeria

One of the objectives of the 1976 reforms was to create a local Government System with complete and self-contained budget that will be effective and effectual (Idike, 1995).

Before the reforms, Nigeria local government councils from their inception had suffered seriously from the perennial problem of finance. (Idike, 1995)

In a bid to ensure a sound financial base for local government, Section 149(2), 4,5,6,7 of 1979 Constitution, and subsequently 1999 Constitution (as amended), affirmed that any amount standing to the credit of the Federation Account shall be distributed among the Federal, State and the Local Government Councils on such terms and in such manner as may be prescribed by the National Assembly (The Constitutions, 1979 and 1999 (as amended). The intention of both constitutions was to give local government councils Financial Autonomy for effective and efficient services delivery at the grassroots in Nigeria.

However, prior to the 1976 local government reforms, the problem of efficiency and effectiveness in performances of the local government councils in terms of quality services delivery had remained an illusion, because of lack of financial autonomy. Therefore, the 1976 Local Government Reforms and the subsequent entrenchment of the vital provisions of these reforms in the 1979 and 1999 Nigerian Constitutions, set the stage for increased concern, about and awareness of the need for financial autonomy to be granted to local government councils in Nigeria (Nwankwo, 2006).

One major fall-out of these reforms was the emergence of local government as the third tier of government in Nigeria alongside the state and the federal governments. The subsequent Local Government Decrees of 1989, 1990, 1991 and 1992, were all intended to operationalise the third tier status of local government with full administrative and financial autonomy in Nigeria. This in effect, means the granting of a high degree of autonomy to the local governments. Decree No. 15: Local Government (Basic Constitutional and Transitional Provisions) Decrees 1989 was intended to grapple with this problem of local government autonomy, especially the granting of full financial autonomy to the councils (Ikejiani – Clark & Okoli, 1995).

Unfortunately, in spite of the elaborate provisions of the decree, and the determination of the Federal government to give teeth to local government administration, ideals did not approximate reality, autonomy for local governments became a myth, a mirage, a shifting sand. The intentions of the Decree, the ambitions of the Local Governments and the needs of the state governments did not converge. In fact, the divergence became so great that it became a chasm in need of bridge. Subsequent amendments embodied in decrees No. 25 of 1990, No. 3 of 1991 and No. 41 of 1991 etc were all intended to build this bridge (Ikejiani-Clark & Okoh, 1995).

In 1991, for example, the Federal Government issued the local government (Basic Constitutional and Transitional Provisions (Amendment) decree extending the logic of the presidential system to local government level. With this decree, separation of powers was introduced into local government administration and the local government council was regarded as the legislative organ of the local government distinct from the executive. Local government councils now has full autonomy administratively and financially to consider and approve their local government councils annual budgets and to pass bye-laws without reference to the state governments. In other words, the full financial autonomy granted to the local government councils meant that their share of the monthly statutory allocations from the Federation Accounts Allocation Committee (FAAC) were sent to them directly and the internally generated revenue are all spent without reference or interference from the state government through the office of the commissioner for local government in the Governor’s office.

Consequently, following the new “freedom” won by the local government in terms of full financial autonomy and enlarged revenue, several abuses and financial recklessness were observed. This raised doubt about the desirability of the extensive financial autonomy granted to the local government councils and provoked new restrictions being placed on them. In 1995, new guidelines were issued restricting the powers of local government especially the financial autonomy by bringing them under close supervision of state governments.

The Local government (Basic Constitutional and Transitions Provisions) Decree of 1977, which was later introduced to regulate the operation of local government councils, once again fused the council and executive arms of local government, thereby reverting to the 1976 system. The decrees, however, preserved the legislative autonomy of the local government councils to enact their bye-laws. To enhance local government administrative autonomy after whittling down the financial autonomy in 1988 the ministries for local government and chieftaincy affairs in the states were abolished and replaced by the Department of local government in Governor's office. The application of the 1988 Civil Service Reforms to local government led to restructuring of the local government's administrative structure into six departments of coordinate status (Auwal, 2004).

Although, the military government had reduced the large number of local government councils (by abolishing those created by the state governments of the second republic) to 301 in 1984, it also found it necessary to create new local government councils. Accordingly, it increased the number from 301 to 453 in 1989, 589 in 1991 and 774 in 1996. Meanwhile, despite increase in revenue allocation to local government councils, they still found it difficult to cope with the financial costs of funding primary education. Irregular payment of primary school staff salaries and accumulation of salary arrears led to frequent strikes by primary school teachers and disruptions of normal schooling. This situation could not be arrested by the state governments and so the federal government had to intervene. In 1988, the Federal Government established the National Primary Education Fund and created Funds to finance primary education. The fund, as proposed by the Dasuki Committee, was to be contributed by all three tiers of government but eventually only local government councils were saddled with the burden as government claimed to have increased their statutory allocations form the federation account to take care of the responsibility. The National Primary Education Fund proved insufficient to fund the primary education because of the failure of the federal and state governments to make their contributions towards the funds as originally planned. Many local government councils began to fall into arrears in the payment of primary school staff salaries and consequently, government decided to deduct the funds required to pay the salaries at source from their allocations from the federation account. With the commencement of this arrangement, some local government councils experienced higher deductions than were required to pay primary school teachers salaries, while many received "zero" allocations from the federation account as their deductions were equal or greater than their entitlements (Auwal, 2004).

The return to civil democratic rule in May 1999 thrusts local government into new inter governmental disputes, especially on the financial autonomy granted to the councils, which the states had continued to kick against and devised all kinds of strategies to undermine the smooth functioning of local government councils since 1999 to date. The intergovernmental disputes which we are primarily concerned with in this work is the financial autonomy granted to local government prior to 1999 constitution, which the state governments, had seriously kicked against and antagonistically demanded from the Federal Government of Nigeria for the Establishment of the State Joint Local Government Account that the Constitution provides for and how disbursements could be made from it. Until 2002, local government councils received their statutory allocations form the Federation Account directly, through the Federal Accountant General's Office. However, the states agitated that the State Join Local Government Account be activated as provided in the constitution. The establishment of the account and routing of statutory allocations from the Federation Account through it has facilitated arbitrary deductions by state governments from local government funds. These intergovernmental disputes have combined with some other factors such as corruptions and poor public accountability to frustrate the constitutional intent of institutionalizing a democratic system of local government administration in Nigeria for efficient and effective services delivery. It has raised questions about what should be done to ensure a viable local government system that is capable of delivering service effectively and responsively. The solution to this seemingly intractable problem of poor financial management and the inability of the local government councils to guide jealously with wisdom the hard earned financial autonomy led to the setting up of the Etus Nupe/Liman Ciroma Committee by the President Olusegun Obasanjo, GCFR in 2003 (Auwal, 2004).

During the inauguration of the Presidential Technical Committee on the Review of the Structure of Local Government Councils in Nigeria on 25th June 2003, the President Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, GCFR said "it is critical today to address the challenges of grass root developments. Let is bear in mind that the extensive broadening of the revenue base of the local governments, has not translated into tangle development at the grassroots. This Technical Committee on the Review of the structure of Local Governments in Nigeria is to, among others things, diagnose the crisis of local government system in our country and propose viable alternatives armed at ensuring that local governments do indeed serve as agencies for grassroots development (Obasanjo, 2003).

This to us is a serious indictment and a challenge to both practitioners and professionals in the third tier of government. It has provoked a crisis of confidence in their ability to manage efficiently. The general impression was that local government councils are "Goldmines". Their existence has become questionable and this is the reason why the present work have chosen to interrogate the financial autonomy granted to local government over the years and specifically the recent one under the administration of President Mohammadu Buhari, GCFR, to ascertain whether it is a "Myth" or "Reality". In other words, were full financial autonomy actually given to the local government councils in Nigeria as envisioned by the founding fathers of the modern local government system in the country and the 1976 Local Government Reforms. If the answer is Yes, like sometimes often cited and made references to, what are the challenges that has made it difficult for these councils to deliver efficient and effective services delivery? Similarly, it the financial autonomy of the local government councils in Nigeria has been a "Myth" or a "mirage", which means that it only exists in pronouncements and theory, but in actual practices of the day to day administration, the state government through its instrumentalities such as the office of the Commissioner of Local Government and the state local government joint account etc controls and dictates the use of the finances of the local government.

Consequently, we intend to examine next the challenges which have confronted the local government operators and practitioners which have made the financial autonomy granted to the local government councils difficult if not impossible to translate in actual practice into quality services delivery at the third tier level government. This has accounted for the debates among scholars, researchers, policy-makers, practitioners and operators in the local government system, as well as the general public as to whether the financial autonomy granted to the local government councils only exists in theory (i.e a "myth" or "mirage") or in actual fact did exist in practice (i.e "Reality"). The puzzle has been that if actually local government financial autonomy is a reality, how come that with all the huge financial resources pumped into the local government system through the councils, coupled with the enabling enactments and laws to backup and protect the financial autonomy, how come that the performances of the councils in terms of quality services delivery have remained inefficient and ineffective.

Challenges against Full Actualization of Financial Autonomy at the Local Government Councils in Nigeria

The followings are some of the identified constraints against the full actualization of financial autonomy in the local government councils in Nigeria, namely:-

(1) Authority Relationship (Constitutional and Legal Provision).

The authority relationship between the national/state government and the local government is very crucial. It is the pattern of authority relationship that will determine whether what obtains is local government or local administration in the first place. Where the local unit enjoys a grant of authority over a specific area and wide range of functions, then what obtains is a devolved local government. But where, on the other hand, the unit enjoys a grant of authority just enough for the execution of specified functions and services then what obtains is a deconcentrated local government or, indeed a local administration.

In Nigeria by the constitutional and legal provisions, local government enjoys the status of devolved power which only exists in theory but in actual practice the local government status is that of a local administration because the states and Federal government exercise enormous powers over the local government councils through the exercise of administrative control, judicial control and legislative control. For example, the state government controls the local government councils administratively through their ministry of local government and chieftaincy matters with the commissioner for local government issuing policy directives and circulars which the officials of the local government both the career and political must comply with and obey. Also, the state local government service commission recruits, promotes, discipline and retire the senior staff of the local government councils and consequently, their allegiance as employees is to the state and not the local government councils in which they are deployed and work. In fact, the senior staff of the local government councils could be transferred at will by the state agents without recourse to the council authority were they work and receive their wages. Similarly, the State Auditor-General for local government is empowered by law to query or stop any expenses of the local government council deemed not to be appropriate. The states Assembly also have enormous powers to make laws to regulate the activities of the local government councils in Nigeria. In other words, no matter the constitutional and legal provisions for local government autonomy, it is on a "myth" or "mirage", because local government councils exist in actual practice under the whims and caprices of the state government as if they are local administration or field extension of the state administrative unit. This is a very serious constraint against full actualization of financial autonomy in the Nigerian local government system.

(2) Financial Relationship

The second issue to be considered in the full financial autonomy question is finance, where the local unit has adequate and independent sources of revenue for the initiation and execution of its specified functions and services, then local government obtains. On the other hand, where the local unit is not financially independent then independent action is not possible, and what obtains is local administration.

In Nigeria, whether direct allocations are made to the local government councils or through the state – Local Government Joint Account, the state government have devised ingenious means and strategies of strangulating and suffocating the local government career and political officials from spending their statutory and internally generated revenues without the approval of the state agencies authorized to oversee the affairs of the local government administration on behalf of the state. For example, our investigations revealed that when the State –Local Government Joint Accounts were in operation, once the statutory allocations for local governments are paid into the account, the commissioner for local government in the governor's office would invite the relevant career officials especially the Head of Service (HOS) and Treasurer to the local government to come and sign prepared financial documents that the money have been transferred to the local government Account and also sign prepared expenditure by the state for retiring the money. What usually goes to the local government councils are the personnel overhead costs and money for sundry expenses. The money meant for Capital Development and Sustainable Human Development by the local government councils are withheld by the state authority and diverted for their own use. This accounts for the paucity and poverty of development programmes and infrastructures in most local government councils in Nigeria.

Therefore, the collusion of the career and political officials of the local government councils of the local government councils with the state government agents to divert local government funds for unauthorized use which amounts to serious endemic corruptions in the system is responsible for the current underdevelopment and dearth of infrastructures of most local government areas in Nigeria today.

This is the reason why no matter the amount of funds made available to the local government councils in Nigeria, because of the endemic corruption they would remain inefficient and ineffective in quality services delivery. More important, because of the endemic corruptions in the system, no matter whether full or partial financial autonomy is granted to the local government councils in Nigeria, it will remain a "myth" because the strong underlying variables and factors cannot allow its actualization and translation to tangible performances for efficient and effective service delivery.

(3) Personnel Relationship

Any local government must be able to recruit and maintain its staff. The authority to "hire" and "fire" is one of the determinants of organizational autonomy and maturity. Any organization that depends on another organization for its personnel can, at best, be described as an extension of that other organization, as the loyalties of the employees will most certainly go to the organization that has control over them. The reason why the actualization of full financial autonomy for local government is a "myth" and not a "reality" in Nigeria is because the senior career staff of the councils such as the Head of Service (HOS), the Head of Personnel Management (HPM) and the Treasurer who are the signatures are appointees of the state government. These careers officials who manage the local government affairs, together with the political officials like the Chairman and Supervisory councils all owe allegiance of their office to the Governor and holds it at the whims and caprices of the state government. For instance, the State Government through directive to the Local Government Services Commission of the State could suspend or terminate the appointment of any career senior official of the council. Similarly, the Chairman or any supervisory councilor who is a political official could be suspended by the Governor through directive to the commissioner for Local Government Affairs.

Even if the suspension or termination is considered unjust by the officers affected, the law court where they are likely to seek for Justice is in the State High Court, which is built, maintained and funded by the State Government. At least fifty(50%) percent of the staff, including the Judges working in the State High Court owe obedience and allegiance to the State Governor and by extension to the State Government. Therefore, no senior local Government Career official or political official will ever contemplate to protect local government full financial autonomy at the expense of his job and office considering Nigerian political environment and terrain which is replete with monumental corruptions, ethnicity, tribalism, nepotism, religionism and god fatherism. Therefore, local government financial autonomy in Nigeria remains a "myth", a "mirage" and not a "reality" no matter how it is conceptualized.

(4) Scope of Autonomy

To fully understand and appreciate the scope of autonomy, it is necessary to make a distinction between powers granted to an area on an "original" or on a "devolved" basis. When powers are granted to an area on original terms, it means that its structure and functioning exist independently of the central government, most obviously they will be spelt out in the constitution, and in most cases, will be beyond the immediate reach of the government of the day. However, when powers are granted on a "devolved" (devolution) basis, it means that it is a grant of power by the national political authorities and as such its continuance finally depends on its acceptability to these authorities (central government and the national assembly). Here the area unit has no entrenched rights. It is important to stress here that devolution of power also involves two district types of power distribution "decentralization" and deconcentration. Deconcentration of power is a simple delegation of authority from one level of the administrative hierarchy to a lower one which is spatially, remote from the centre. Decentralization, on the other hand, implies some measure of self government or at least of self-administration for the local area. It represents a sub-division of the national state. There are varying degrees of decentralization. At the minimum, local assemblies will be restricted to decisions on petty local matters, and have few financial powers. And at a higher level, regional/local councils may have little more

than advisory planning powers. However, at the maximum a whole range of government activity will be decentralized and large areas may enjoy what is virtually "home-rule"
A strong form of decentralization is usually characterized by;

a. Direct election of representatives to a local council
b. Control over the subordinate local government organs in the area
c. A local executive authority responsible to the assembly
d. An area administration under the control of the executive
e. Power to finance activities in the region /area. It is clear from the above that the scope of autonomy (administrative and financial) hovers between the outright grant of "original" powers to an area as in the case of Nigerian. Local government under the 1979, 1989 and 1999 Constitutions and the extreme form of decentralization as is contained in the various decrees and the amendments thereto, and the implication of the application of the civil service reforms to local government in Nigeria.

The limitations on the autonomy of local government in Nigeria, especially the financial autonomy are derived from the ambivalence or dilemma of the Federal Government in the face of a choice between grant of "original" and "devolved" powers to local governments in Nigeria. The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria is unequivocal on the grant of "original" powers to the local government (section 7). But the various decrees and their amendments as well as the implications of the applications of the civil service reforms to the local governments tend towards devolution of powers to local governments (Decree No.15). This dilemma or ambivalence is not altogether surprising. It stems from the different assumptions which inform the philosophy of local governments' creation in Nigeria, especially with the state actors called Governors. The State Governors strongly believe that local governments in Nigeria are simply extensions of the state administration to run an inclusive government by reaching out to the rural areas of the state through the local government councils; which ought to be created by the states to ensure participatory democracy. Therefore, Local government financial autonomy in Nigeria would remain a "myth" or "mirage", until the state Governors and government, decides to change their philosophy about local government and sees it as a third tier level government with constitutionally and legal preserved and protected rights and stop using the state assemblies under their control to stifle and strangulate their existence and operations.

(5) Autonomy and Accountability

From the foregoing discussions, it is clear that there exists a dialectical relationship between autonomy and accountability. Rights and benefits carry with them their corresponding duties and obligations. The right to act as an agent implies an obligation to the principal. The right to exercise delegated authority carries with it the expectation of a rendering of an account of stewardship to the tone of authority. In the same way, a grant of power, whether on an "original" or "devolved" basis, implies an expectation of "bounded rationality" on the part of the delegate. Hence, there can neither be autonomy without accountability nor accountability without autonomy (Panter Brick, 1954; Ikejiani-Clark & Okoli, 1995).

The clamour for autonomy especially full financial autonomy by the local government in Nigeria must be seen within the context. This is the reason why full financial autonomy to local governments in Nigeria is a "myth" and not a "reality", because in a Federal System of Government as currently been operated in Nigeria, local government councils are under the control of the states, and as far as the state Governors are concerned, they are subordinate units of the state administration and therefore accountable to the state government for all their actions and activities. This is the reason why state governments in Nigeria has devised various means and strategies to monitor and control effectively the administration of the local government councils under their jurisdictions including, ensuring that the political party in power in the state win all the seats in the state local government elections. This is to ensure that only their party loyalists emerge as local government political party officials for easy directive and control through state policies and programmes.

Methodology

The study essentially was based on data generated from secondary sources which includes books, journals, magazines, newspapers, internet publications, etc. The qualitative data generated from the indepth-desk review of the secondary sources were analyzed using the content analysis method.

Also, the study made use of primary data from personal interactions and interview of some key stakeholders in the local government service such as the Chairman, Head of Service (HOS), Head of Personnel Management (HPM), Treasurer, and Supervisory Councilors. The essence of the personal interactions and interview of some key stakeholders in the local government councils is to complement the information and finding from the content analysis of the secondary data.

Conclusion

The facts on ground supports the view that the financial autonomy granted to the local government councils in Nigeria in-order to ensure efficient and effective services delivery at the grassroots is a "myth", a "mirage" and not actualizable in "reality". In fact the pursuance of the actualization in reality of the financial autonomy by some key career and political officials of the local government councils had been met with strong resistance from their state Governors in Nigeria.

Consequently, Local government financial administration for sustainable development had been demonized and denuded by the state governors with systemic corruptions, the results of which is the present pandemic poverty and infrastructural decays which are reminiscent of the local government areas in Nigeria.

Recommendations

The facts on ground and the findings of the study from the content analysis of the qualitative data generated reveals that it is not so much on whether local government should be more or less autonomous, but instead and, perhaps, more importantly, to whom or which level of government (State or Federal) must local governments be accountable to in Nigeria. All over the world, local governments are accountable to the state governments in a Federation or the central/national government in a unitary government. To make local governments accountable to the federal government in a federation makes local governments Parallel competitors with the state governments (Okoli, 1990). Such a situation will not only be clumsy, it will also detract from the state-wide implementation of integrated programme at the local government level.

The general practice in all federations, however, is to subordinate local governments to the state governments. However, given the nature of our political culture, political integration and tolerance, such a course of action emasculates local governments, especially those controlled by an opposing political party to the one controlling the state government. Therefore, the issue is not so much the extent of autonomy whether administrative or financial given to the local government councils, but on the location of accountability. That is, to which level of government in Nigeria whether that state or federal should local governments be truly and fully accountable to. This is the challenge of the future for local government administration in Nigeria.

It is the recommendation of this study based on the findings that local government councils should be the creation of State governments for accountability, efficient and effective management for quality services delivery. The present arrangement where local governments were arbitrary created and enshrined in the constitution by the past military regimes who mid-wifed the transition to democracy in 1999, in the Nigeria's fourth Republic had made their existence and performances ineffective and inefficient.

Consequently, the objectives of the founding fathers for the creation of the local government system in Nigeria, especially the 1976 reforms, have remained elusive, a delusion, a "myth", a "mirage" and a "shifting sand".

This is why the financial autonomy for the local governments in Nigeria is said to be a "myth" and not a "reality".

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