

ALTERNATIVES TO THE PREDATORY LOCAL GOVERNMENT SYSTEM IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

A critical aspect of the social science discipline has to do with the inherent debates surrounding conceptual exactitudes. The concept of local government is not immune to these social science disputations. In the case of Local Government however, strongmen in developing political systems have carried the conceptual debates too far, by consequently presenting local government practice as rocket science, obscured by elite greed and everyday predation. The local government system in Nigeria is immensely characterized by this obscurity, greed and hands-on predation. Hence, the major problem of this study borders on the relationship between a predatory local government system and the shape of national development in Nigeria. In this paper, we have made attempts to suggest alternatives to the predatory system of local government in Nigeria, whose aim of serving as vehicles for service delivery, are widely believed to have been largely defeated.

KEYWORDS: Alternatives, Predation, Local government, Local government system, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

A critical aspect of the social science discipline has to do with the inherent debates surrounding conceptual exactitudes. The concept of local government is not immune to these social science disputations. In the case of Local Government however, strongmen in developing political systems have carried the conceptual debates too far, by consequently presenting local government practice as rocket science, obscured by elite greed and everyday predation. The local government system in Nigeria is immensely characterized by this obscurity, greed and hands-on predation. But let us return to core conceptual explication. Hence, the existence of local government is a universal phenomenon (Onah, 1995:33). The central government cannot possibly attend to every detail of local administration; giving full weight to local preferences and prejudices in every issue. This is why national governments all over the world, irrespective of the system of government, attempt to make use of its citizens' local loyalties, by delegating local functions to local administrative bodies (Onah, 1995:33). Furthermore, in a highly philosophical and covertly sophisticated note, Onah (1998:59) posits that local government is the government of a particular place. On such studious plane, we surmise that local government might as well be the government of a local area.

Critically however, the problem of this study borders on the worry that the local government system in Nigeria has refused to be deeply impactful. Tonwe (2012:75) agrees that the performance of local governments in Nigeria has been largely below expectation. In this regard, while the impacts of the central and state governments may be positively or even negatively felt by the citizens, the existence of the various local governments in the country have largely remained uneventful. Gambrell (2011:1) highlights: Nigeria inherited local governments from British colonialists and kept the system in place after gaining independence in 1960. Little changed under Nigeria's military dictatorships and even when democracy took hold in 1999. The governments, run by council members and overseen by a chairman, remain responsible for road maintenance, sewage systems and markets, as well as assisting in health care and education in their areas. Yet in Nigerian local government areas, even on Ikoyi Island in Lagos, which once housed the nation's federal government, potholed roads with little asphalt run past some of the most expensive real estate in all of Africa. Public schools remain dilapidated and overcrowded. Passers-by relieve themselves in open drains (Gambrell, 2011:1).

According to Akinola (2004:47), the Local Governments, designed to be centrifugal points of socio-economic emancipation and welfare propagation for the citizens have morphed into diversion of public resources into private pockets - embezzlement, inflation of contracts, corruption, position consolidation, etc. The political leaders at the local level could be described as predators of public resources, meant for the benefits of all (Akinola, 2004:47). In addition, Akinola (2006:12) highlights as follows: Nigerian local government system has no interactive links with the community for which it was designed and created. Though the government is located at the local level, it is run by elites who are alienated from the culture of the people. Thus far, the Local Government and the communities that ought to be partners in progress have been operating on parallel lines. According to Okam (2013:2), the third tier of government whose objective is to ensure effective, measurable and efficient service delivery to the people, has become oppressive structures standing in-between the people and the central government. According to Okeke (2013:84), the local government is government at the grass roots. It is a basic government, near to the people and so localized in order to meet the basic social and economic needs of the beneficiaries – the local people. Uzuegbunam (2004:163) opines that the crucial role of local government in shaping national development is universally known and widely acclaimed.

Hence, the major problem of this study borders on the relationship between a predatory local government system and the shape of national development in Nigeria. Accordingly, the study is built on the following research questions: what is the level of predation in the local government system in Nigeria? What are the alternatives to predation in the local government system in Nigeria? The general objective of the study therefore, is to interrogate the thesis of a predatory local government system in Nigeria. The specific objectives are to: (i) determine the level of predation in the local government system in Nigeria and (ii) propose alternatives to predation, in the local government system in Nigeria. Essentially, the research hypothesis is that the Local Government system in Nigeria is predatory. The theoretical framework for the study is the elite theoretical framework. The methodology for the study is the critical mode of research.

NIGERIA'S LOCAL GOVERNMENT SYSTEM IN A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Local government in historical perspective refers to the history, evolution or development of local government in any nation (Uzuegbunam, 2004:166). In the context of this paper however, the embedded evolutionary and developmental problems, are highlighted along with the historical narrative. In the first place, let it be noted that the origin of the local government in Nigeria is as old as the nation itself (Erebo and Egbe, 2011:26). Onah (1995:33) accordingly highlights as follows: In Nigeria, local government administration can be traced to the pre-colonial times. During the period, local government administration was through the instrumentalities of traditional authorities – emirs, obas, council of elders and age grades. In the emirate system of Northern Nigeria, local government was carried out by the district and village heads appointed by the emir (Emezi, 1984:51, cited in Onah, 1995:33). Among the Yorubas of the west, the oba had the highest political authority. He was assisted at the local levels by various categories of chiefs, in addition to the bale. Among the Igbos, the traditional political system was based on the family lineage, village and town units. Consequently, local government administration was carried out at the village and family levels through the village assembly, ndichie, ozo title holders and the okparas (Onah, 1995:33). Abada (2012:173) has also highlighted as follows: The local government system of administration was a colonial heritage, which arose from a desire to take governance to the hinterland where the majority of the people resided. This is not however to suggest that prior to the advent of British colonial administration, and the consequent introduction of the local government system, there was a vacuum in the administrative lives of the various ethnic groups. They had their own traditional way of governing themselves efficiently and effectively (Abada, 2012:173).

Onah (1995:33) continues: With the advent of British colonial rule in Nigeria the chieftaincy institutions were involved in the system of local government known as indirect rule. The use of indigenous political institutions for purposes of local government was contingent on modifications of some aspects of traditional government repugnant to European ideas. Both the native administration system and the multi-tier system of local government operated under colonialism (Onah, 1995:33). During the colonial period, local administration was vested on officers appointed by the colonial administrators, the Crown Office, its later successors and then the regional governors. These appointees were called the District Officers, “DOs”, for short, who were vested with legislative, executive and sometimes judicial functions (Idike, 1995:7). Each region had its own local government system, quite different from others. Expectedly, there were as many systems of local government as there were regions and later states (Idike, 1995:7). In the post-independence era, up to the present periods, local government administration has remained a prominent feature of the governmental process.

According to Onah (1998:59), Local government in Nigeria predates her independence but the birth of modern local government was occasioned by the 1976 Local Government Reforms initiated by the Military Government then. It was the first time a uniform system of local government was introduced throughout Nigeria, and subsequently recognized as the third tier of government, the other tiers being the Federal and State governments. The *raison d'être* of local government in Nigeria, according to the 1976 Local Government Reform Guidelines, are:

- (a) To make appropriate services and development activities responsive to local wishes and initiatives by developing or delegating them to local representative bodies;
- (b) To facilitate the exercise of democratic self-government close to the local levels of our society, and to encourage initiative and leadership potentials;

- (c) To mobilize human and material resources through the involvement of members of the public in their local development; and
- (d) To provide a two-way channel of communication between local communities and the government, both State and Federal (Onah, 1998:59).

The 1976 Guidelines made provision for elective positions having the chairmen as executive head of local government with supervisory councilors constituting the cabinet. This was complemented by the bureaucrats and professionals who were charged with the responsibility of implementing policies. In 1991, a major landmark reform brought legislative arm into the system. In addition, the Babangida administration increased the number of local government from 301 in 1976 to 453 in 1989 and 589 in 1991. The Abacha regime also increased the number to 774 local councils in existence today, as the administrative structure also underwent some changes. Confusingly, the system fared better in military era than current political dispensation, owing to manipulations of various state administrations and ill-performances of their cronies imposed on people as chairmen (Okam, 2013:1).

THE ELITE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK – A SUMMATIVE PRESENTATION

Okeke (2014:322) explicates as follows: Higley (2010:161) highlights that elite theory's origins lie most clearly in the writings of Gaetano Mosca (1858-1941), Vilfredo Pareto (1848-1923), and Robert Michels (1876-1936). It has however, also been posited that perhaps, the classic expression of elite theory can be found in C. Wright Mills's *The Power Elite* (Henry, 2001:299). Elites derive from a fundamental and universal fact of social life, namely, the absence in any large collectivity of a robust common interest (Higley, 2010:161). According to Arowolo and Aluko (2012:799), the elite theory is a philosophical explanation of the role of the leadership in governance as it affects public policy including all socioeconomic and political matters. Elites accordingly, dominate the formal institutions of government and are a determining factor in governance and decision-making processes. Elites are the decision makers in the society whose power is not subject to control by any other body in the society (Arowolo and Aluko 2012:799). Citing Ikelegbe (1994), Arowolo and Aluko (2012:800) further highlights as follows: The elite theory postulates that public policy reflects the values and preferences of the elite rather than demands of the masses. The elite consist of those few individuals who wield powers and hold leading positions in the strategic aspects of society. The majority, the masses, only obeys and are guided, controlled and governed by the few. Many of the elites do not hold formal or legal authoritative powers but are rather behind the scene, teleguiding and manipulating overt political and policy actions. It is on the basis of presumptions that the masses are contented and are incapable of challenging the authoritative position of the elite that the elites dominate public policy and its processes (Arowolo and Aluko, 2012:800). Henry (2001:299) further adds that usually, elites have more money, more education and more status than the masses.

DIMENSIONS OF PREDATION IN THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT SYSTEM IN NIGERIA

For purposes of clarity, predation in this study refers to where offices of the state are competed for or captured by other means and then utilized for the personal benefit of office holders, as well as their reference or support group (Emeh and Onyisi, 2011:236). Predation in the local government system in Nigeria is a multi-faceted phenomenon. At one end of the incapacitating trend, it is perpetrated by a triumvirate of the ruling political party at the local level (invariably the ruling party at the state government level), the local area "kingmakers" (the local political elite) and the incumbent Chairman of the Local Government Council. In this regard, Moyo and

Taiwo (2011:1) narrate: Local councils in Nigeria represent the third layer of government after the federal government and state governments. Federal and state government allocations to local councils are deposited into special “State Joint Local Government Accounts.” Through these accounts, local governments are supposed to finance primary, adult and vocational education; agriculture and natural resource development, as well as health services. Unfortunately, the existing joint account framework has been particularly vulnerable to abuse. Local council chairmen are typically nominated by political party “kingmakers” who help to finance their election campaigns. Because politicking in the country is quite expensive, federal allocations to local councils have become the means of paying back “kingmakers” for supporting their election campaigns. Keeping the political party happy is often at the forefront of councilmen’s agenda and addressing the needs of the local constituents - who have very little say in who stands for election - comes second. By the time the political party elites receive their share of the funds and the council chairmen remove their “entitlement,” there is very little left for local council development programs. Local council leaders are beholden to the entrenched interests of their political parties and those who refuse to “share” federal government allocations are often not nominated for re-election. Some devastating consequences of this misuse are demonstrated in the country’s high infant mortality and low literacy rates (Moyo and Taiwo, 2011:1). Considered from another dimension, State-level officials put trusted lieutenants or lackeys into local governments, who tailor their opinions and operations to suit their political “godfathers,” Those who don't obey lose out on unmonitored government money, while those who follow orders end up with Sports Utility Vehicles (Gambrell, 2011:2).

Fundamentally, the predatory idiosyncrasy is not a wholly local governance tendency in Nigeria. For too many Nigerians, life is a Hobbesian, zero-sum game that adds up to an aggressive, predatory system of survival of the fittest. Nigeria is a place where life is too often a matter of who can intimidate whom. Indeed, war, crime and thuggery are the province of young males, and Nigeria's population is composed of many of them. This predatory national character plays out politically in a country that is not wholly a country -- Nigeria is an assemblage of several British-ruled territories. Nigerian politics at the highest levels is as predatory as life on the street (Kaplan and Schroeder, 2013:1). Politics in Nigeria is widely seen as a means of becoming affluent (Lawal and Oladunjoye, 2010:232). The Nigerian society is largely predatory. A predatory society presupposes the phenomenon of a captured state, a captured economy, a callous society (Okeke, 2010:6). These characterizations are all related to the elite dominance of the Nigerian worldview.

There is also the internally perpetrated predation, within the local government setting. In this regard, Saharareporters.com (2013) reveals that an audit in Nigeria’s Delta State revealed startling details of billions of naira misappropriated and embezzled by local government chairmen and heads of personnel management (HPMs) across the state’s 25 local government areas. The audit covered the period from 2009 to 2011 when elected council chairmen and heads of personnel management committed the fraud. The audit report was done by the auditor general in charge of local governments. Saharareporters.com correspondent obtained a classified document titled “Review of Report of The Auditor General (Local Governments) on the Accounts of The 25 Local Government Councils for the Year Ended 31st December 2009, 2010 And 2011 by the House Committee on Public Accounts of the Delta State House of Assembly, Asaba.” The document was signed by the chairman of the legislative committee, Olorogun Dennis Omovie, as well as its members, including Mr. Joseph Oshevire, Ms. Omawunmi Udoh,

and Mr. Oboro Preyor. The report revealed that billions of naira was siphoned into private pockets by corrupt council chairmen and the HPMs during the review period. In Ebonyi State, local government chief executives and development centre coordinators own most of the biggest mansions in the State Capital, Abakaliki, with state of the art facilities (Okam, 2013:2).

On the other hand, according to Onah (2004:195), local government functionaries both through personal interviews and seminar forums, have affirmed the fact that state governments use up part of the local government share of federal allocation, without consultation with the later. This of course is a classic predatory design to make more funds available elite needs at the state government level. Critically, the predatory problem of the local government system in Nigeria is masterminded by the Nigerian political elite. Though the local government is located at the local level, it is run by elites who are alienated from the culture of the people (Akinola 2006, cited in Oruonye, 2013:13). The local governments in Nigeria are generally believed to be non-independent, non autonomous, foisted (forced) on the people by the political elites, and therefore unaccountable and inefficient in the performance of their democratic and political duties (Ikeji, et al, 2013:1).

The predatory tendencies of the local government chairmen in the country need to be particularly highlighted; as chronic mismanagement by local government chairmen has left a number of councils irrelevant in the lives of the citizens (Punch Editorial, 2012). A culture of waste runs through most of the nation's 774 councils. Many local government chairmen have been accused of misappropriating council funds under the pretext of security votes. Most council chairmen start their period in office with the purchase of Sports Utility Vehicles. They move in a convoy of these SUVs, with the full complement of bodyguards and police orderlies. Some of the councils have filthy premises, overgrown with weeds. Some breed thugs who harass and extort money from motorists and other vehicle users in the name of asking for radio licenses and some other levies. They also kill small businesses with taxes because they need more money to satisfy their profligacy (The Punch Editorial, 2012). Paradoxically therefore, instead of formulating policies that would encourage in vertical and horizontal dimensions, the growth of small businesses, the predator Local Government Chairmen, support policies that end up killing such businesses.

DEMOCRACY, PREDATION AND THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT SYSTEM IN NIGERIA

In this section of the paper, reference to the process of democracy, contextually extends to the national political level in Nigeria. In addition, the focus on democracy and democratization refer specifically to the local government context and the practice of democracy attendant thereto. Hence, Tonwe (2012:76) argues that after more than sixty years of democratization, it is regrettable that in systemic terms, the interaction between local government and the macro system in Nigeria has only led to fluid democratic local governance, which has negatively affected the consolidation of local autonomy and the political will to undertake projects that substantially affect the lives of the people. Local government is about local self government which has its pillar in democracy and democratization (Odoh, 2004:175). However, democratic self-government at the grassroots in Nigeria is faced with a couple of problems at the local government level which continuously impede the development of democratic governance (Onah, 1998:60). Indeed, from the time of the Greek City States, debate has raged over the prospects of democratic governance (Onah, 1998:60). In the case of the local government system in Nigeria,

the prognosis of woeful failure on the home front has remained oncoming. Election period is an important segment of the democratic process. According to Okeke (2013:86), Election generally is the forerunner to democracy. It has been opined however, that races to run Nigeria's 774 local governments represent politics at its rotten core in the oil-rich nation, where crude sales prop up politicians and the neighborhood councils become their personal fiefdoms; as political fortunes are made and lost based on personality and muscle, in Africa's most populous nation. (Gambrell, 2011:1). In effect, most countries have a system of local government for two reasons; the first reason is to institutionalize local democracy and the second is for it to serve as provider of local services (Tonwe, 2012:75). In the Nigerian case, the local government system has neither facilitated the institutionalization of democracy nor served as provider of local services, except in isolated cases. Normally, the first thing that comes to mind in democracy is elections (Odoh, 2004:176). It is also during elections that the democratic process is most flagrantly abused in the Nigerian state. However, for a sustainable democracy to exist in Nigeria, it is imperative that the grassroots must experience democracy (Onah, 1998:60). The various local government areas in the country are the quintessential grassroots.

Among the three tiers of government in Nigeria, the local governments are the most undemocratic, managed mainly by unelected officials. According to the Cross River State Resident Electoral Commissioner of the Independent National Electoral Commission, Mike Igini, out of 774 LGAs, only 263 have elected councils, leaving 511 largely at the beck and call of state governors. Unfortunately, state governors' controls over local councils are exercised irrationally, incompetently or for political advantage and are, therefore, counterproductive. Most of the local government councillors, too, who should serve as a check on the chairmen, are compromised. Rather than do their jobs, they collude with the chairmen to siphon the resources of the councils (Punch Editorial, 2012).

Despite democracy, findings of this study immensely support the thesis that the local government system in Nigeria is predatory. Our findings also demonstrate that the level of predation in the local government system in Nigeria is as alarming as it is multi-faceted. What are the alternatives?

ALTERNATIVES TO NIGERIA'S PREDATORY LOCAL GOVERNMENT SYSTEM

Local government is an ancient institution with an evolving conceptualization (Tonwe, 2012:75). Hence, the evolving conceptualizations necessitate the formulation of alternative local government paradigms. In Akinola (2004), local self-governance was proposed as the alternative to the predatory local government system in Nigeria. In this study, we move beyond the position of a singular alternative, to highlight the possibility of alternatives. Where Akinola (2004) provided an alternative paradigm, our propositions extend to alternative practices. In these postulations, it is very important to highlight that critically, neither Akinola (2004) nor the present study, is specifically about an alternative structure. Predation is a negative systemic tendency. Our alternatives are offered as antidotes to the negative tendency of predation. The following alternatives are accordingly considered.

In the first place, we propose a local government system that relates directly with the central government, while retaining its local essence. According to Tonwe (2012:75), government activities when conducted from a central point and far away from the people tend to become impersonal, and against this impersonality or abstract view there is perpetual rebellion. Ipso facto, when government activities are conducted from neither the center nor from the grassroots, there is perpetual predation. In the case of rebellion, attention may be elicited and reform may

ensue. Predation is a more annihilative phenomenon. Hence, the need for appropriate reversal action can not be overemphasized. Punch Editorial (2012) describes the government at the centre as an octopus, controlling the larger chunk of the nation's resources and dispensing corruption and white elephants in return. Meanwhile, the rest of us propose that the local governments should be granted autonomy and confined to the peripheries of the country, to perform the traditional market management responsibilities which in any case, the states governments have forcefully taken over from the local government councils.

The truth remains that the Nigerian federation is center-dominated. Consequently, the socio-political, socio-economic, and the national bureaucratic environments are all centripetal. It hardly serves any purpose to position the local government system on a centrifugal foundation. Indeed, the contradictions inherent in the continuing attempts at doing so, in as much as they have been inadvertent, have largely contributed to the predatory nature of the local government system in Nigeria. Indeed, Nigeria's federation is replete with serious structural contradictions, which distort the intended functional outcomes of the existing structures of service delivery. Hence, according to Ikejiani-Clark (2004:234), since independence, the Nigerian federation has changed from having a weak center to weak states. Ikejiani-Clark (2004:199) had earlier posited that the center became more powerful than the states, of which is the current cause of the socio-political and economic problems in the country. Abuja is where the economic spoils are distributed -- the benefit of upwards of 2.5 million barrels of oil pumped daily (Kaplan and Schroeder, 2013:2). Curiously, it is to the apron strings of these weak states that the Local Governments have been constitutionally tied, in the face of national expectations of magical performance from the Local Governments. As a matter of fact, when Nigerian scholars interrogate the local governance conundrum in the Nigerian state, they look up to the central/federal government for solution. According to Oguonu (2004:30), local governments as the government at the grassroots level deserve serious attention from the federal government so as to be able to deliver essential services to the rural populace. Specifically with regards to intergovernmental fiscal arrangements, Obi (2004:105) posits that it behooves on the federal government of Nigeria, to urgently review the intergovernmental fiscal arrangements to enable it build a strong, virile and stable nation.

Furthermore, we consider highly appealing, the definition of local government by Oruonye (2013:12). According to this researcher, local government is a system of public administration at a local level, charged with the responsibility of bringing the people at the grassroots, closer to the government. Government must be understood in a generic context in this regard and not limited to government as located in the Local Government Headquarters. In addition, Ogunna (1996:1) has powerfully posited that local government is a form of devolution of the political powers of the State. The implication of this position is that local government is not an autonomous state in the making. Furthermore, Nyewusira and Nweke (2012:169) have highlighted that it is the responsibility of the local government, to implement the ideals, objectives, programmes and aspirations of the national government at the local level. It is therefore erroneous to think there should be political and administrative chasm between the local government and the national government, merely to fulfill the operational requirements of autonomy and localness.

A highly insightful contribution of Uzuegbunam and Nwofia (2014) has identified local governments as relevant institutions in the control of ethno-communal conflicts in Nigeria.

Furthermore in this regard, an organic framework of interaction among the local government areas in the country is required, for the purposes of diluting and minimizing ethno-communal conflicts and hostilities, borne out of bottled up prejudices and animosities. We propose in this regard, a constitutionally recognized forum of the 774 Local Government Chairmen in the Federation, chaired by the Minister for Internal Affairs. Nigerian leaders must begin to undertake truly rigorous but fundamentally functional responsibilities of strategic import. The principal responsibility of such a forum as suggested herein should be dispute resolution. Hence, if the state retains the responsibility for the overseeing of local governments, let the State Governor who does not want to conduct local government elections, send his cronies to such a forum of serious-minded representatives, as spectators. It will not be valid to suggest that such a forum would usually take the Local Government Chairmen away from their primary duty posts at the Local Government headquarters because; they have never even been there. Furthermore on this proposition, there is interestingly already in existence in the Nigerian state, an important and popular national union of Local Government Chairmen in the country; that goes by the appropriate name of Association of Local Governments of Nigeria (ALGON). The present ALGON is only a predatory instrumentation, in the hands of Nigerian Local Council Leaders (elected/selected and the unelected), to garner further war booties, from the elite devastation of the Nigerian state. Hence, we propose in this study, that the ostensible importance of ALGON and their apparent popularity, be converted into national profit, by constitutionally assigning a responsibility to the current pressure group.

This researcher has even subscribed elsewhere, to the viewpoint that a law should compel Nigerian Local Government Chairmen to reside in the Local Government Areas of their jurisdiction (Okeke and Udechukwu (2008:16). Furthermore in this regard, it is specifically suggested in this study, that as part of the alternatives to the current predatory system, the Local Government chairmen should be made by legislation, to reside at the Local Government Headquarters of their jurisdiction. The President of the Nigerian Federation resides officially at the Federal Capital Territory in Abuja. The various State Governors of the component states reside officially in the various State Houses in the different states of the federation. It is however, only the Local Government Chairman that may reside in any part of the federation that he chooses, including the Federal Capital Territory in Abuja and any of the State Capital cities in the federation and from there, ostensibly administers the Local Government Area, wherein he serves as Chairman. This structural-functional lacuna, of course animates the greedily debilitating tendencies of the predatory Chairman and his elite abettors. It alienates the local people from their supposed leaders and takes elite grandstanding to the very door steps of the common man. It contradicts the essence of local government and hoists on the system, a foreign element; as the chairman “visits” the Local Government Area on official duty and goes back to whence he comes. Tonwe (2012:75) argues that the essence of local government takes form on the premise that it will check the danger of absolutism. Invariably, predation and absolutism are no distant cousins.

A further alternative is to fundamentally unmask the currently so-called local governments of all the pretences to being “governments” and constitutionally ascribe everything about their existence to the state governments, which would rather operate them as local administrations, with the state governments held responsible for developments in the various locations where the citizens reside. Although local government and local administration are sometimes used interchangeably, they do not mean the same thing. (Emeh, 2011: 253). For purposes of clarity,

local administration arises where the local arrangement lacks substantial autonomy and does not have legal personality (Emeh, 2011:353). Hence, the existing arrangement in the Nigerian state is truly neither local government nor local administration. They lack substantial autonomy. This disqualifies them from full categorization as local governments. They have legal personalities, which give the impression they are local governments. Meanwhile, the political will to recognize a spade by its proper name remains lacking and the necessary constitutional amendment becomes anathema.

A central issue in all of this is service delivery. Another critical consideration is democratic representation. Where a democratically elected state government, effectively oversees the affairs of local communities, through local administrations, and efficiently provides service delivery in the process; is in the opinion of this paper preferable to a predatory system, whereby neither the state government nor the local government, provides critically needed services. In fact, according to Elekwa (2004:52), there are three essential features of government character that identify a unit of local government. For our present purposes, we only highlight the first, which relates to its office holders and requires them either to be elected by the citizenry of the unit or to be appointed by other officials who were popularly elected. Hence, the issue at stake in the mismanagement of local government opportunities in Nigeria, which finds blatant expressions in predation, is not local government autonomy in an abstract dimension. In effect, in his highly influential intervention, Ogunna (1996:351) advises that local government autonomy, in theory and practice is never absolute; that like the doctrine of separation of powers which is limited by checks and balances, local government autonomy is limited by local governments' relations with the higher levels of government. The more critical issues have to do with the legitimacy of the higher authorities to which the local governments are constitutionally affiliated. In the current dispensation in Nigeria, the ostensible local governments are only representative of the elite interests and the greed of other predatory officials at the state level. Moreover, they are not usually, popularly elected.

Indeed, the Nigerian state has continued to treat the local government entities, as replicas of the departments of antiquities. The huge allocations made from the Federation Account for local government functions are ipso facto conceived as largesse from the state for some predators, whose equivalents in the real departments of antiquities are known as curators. The real curator may decide to spend his entire allocation on repatriation from the Lugard family in Europe, the ball point pen used by Lord Lugard, as the Colonial Administrator of Nigeria. We would not question him. The local government allocations have over the years also been used for projects that bear resemblance to mirage. We do not also question the predators. Under the current amorphous practice, the Local Government Chairman is not held responsible for anything by anybody. In a way, we tend to sympathize with him by concluding that he is being prevented from being efficient, by a meddlesome State Governor, whereas in the strict sense of it, he is a very notorious accomplice in the predatory tendencies of the political elite; to which he is the local numero uno. Granted that the local government is a level of government which is supposed to have its greatest impact on the people of the grassroots (Agagu, 1997; cited in Lawal and Oladunjoye, 2010: 229), this must not be conceptualized to mean that the areas of impact has to be limited to inconsequential matters, while the local government predator, with access to mammoth financial resources, logically ignores the inconsequential matters and freely enjoys the proceeds of his predation with mere murmurings from the rest of us. According to Akam

(2013:2), with governance reduced to sharing bags of rice to widows, taking rural children to state parties like 'Father Christmas Show,' hosting the wife of the state chief executive, our local governments now spell disgust. In the meantime, part of the main functions of a local government council, according to the Fourth Schedule of the 1999 Constitution, is to construct and maintain roads, streets, street lightings, markets, toilets, drains, parks and gardens. Our local governments don't bother about these things. They don't worry about providing qualitative education and health care for their people. What an average local government does is to pay salaries and allowances. Whatever is remaining is either siphoned into private pockets or frittered away on frivolous ventures. Yet, in many advanced countries, local governments build and maintain roads, create jobs and bring government closer to the people (The Punch Editorial, 2012). Then the local governments should constitutionally be assigned functions that they must border about.

In the Nigerian state therefore, it has come to be constitutionally and generally accepted that local governments may only construct toilets, build drainages, give names to streets and pay the salaries of their workers, whenever they can. And thereafter, wait for the next monthly allocation from the Federation Account, as may be released to the Local Government Councils by the State Governor, after obtaining the monthly flow of funds from the center. Indeed, 21st century local governments must assume responsibilities that are more profound than these constant matters, particularly in states like Nigeria, with immense growth and developmental challenges. For instance, every local government in Nigeria should be able to own and run on a sustainable basis, a polytechnic of about 500 students; convert a majority of the underemployed local government workers, into the Polytechnic staff and give to each of the polytechnics, a local hue, aimed at building a technological base for each of the 774 local government areas in the country. It is not any outsider that would run the polytechnics but the same set of people that loot the resources of the local government areas, that would sit down and run on productive basis, their own institution and use the technological education platform to transform the local government areas and indeed, the Nigerian state into a 774 units of complexly productive linkages, that no other state in the world can deride. Any of the current contraptions that go by the nomenclature of Local Government Area, that can not run such a school on sustainable basis, had no claim in the first place of being a Local Government Area in Nigeria. Their inclusion among the 774 LGAs might have been one of those stealthy creations of the ruling elite, to bestow dubious advantages on certain areas of the country, to the disadvantage of the rest of their fellow citizens. That there may be such caricatures of Local Government Councils, does not stop the ones who can undertake such endeavours as running polytechnics, from embarking on such ventures. Nigerian local government councils must be freed from the mentality of being toilet facility agencies and liquor license vendors.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Odoh (2004:175) has highlighted that modern local government appeared on the Nigerian scene with the advent of the 1951 MacPherson Constitution. This constitution provided for a quasi Federal system of government, giving individual regions some autonomy to control the affairs of their regions (Odoh (2004:175). Parenthetically, nearly six and a half decades after; the modernity characterization of the local government system in Nigeria has become extremely tenuous. According to Ezeani (2012:14), one question that keeps reoccurring among Nigerians is "why is local government important?" "Do we really need local government?" this question

keeps reoccurring among Nigerians largely as a reaction to the debilitating effects of predation, in the local government system in Nigeria Emeh (2011:345) declares; the local government councils were conceived as the third tier of government and intended to serve as vehicles for rural and community development. Events of late however suggest that the aim may have been defeated, as there is not much to show for the huge allocations for the sector. What obtains in many local governments in Nigeria today is a cocktail of waste, neglect and underdevelopment (The Punch Editorial, 2012). The huge allocations for the sector we opine; have been siphoned away by predators. In the final analysis, the local government is like a cell; while state government, like a tissue and the Federal Government, like an organ in a general system of administration in Nigeria. Each of these component parts in a system of administration provides essential services to the people (Okeke, 2013:84).

The impact of local government on the community is so crucial in the determination of whether it is relevant or irrelevant. Where it has no intervention approach – an avenue through which problems are either solved or prevented, its existence is called to question or its relevance subjected to doubt (Okeke, 2013:84). The relevance of the local government system in Nigeria, to the well-being of Nigerians is currently, highly doubtful. The basic reason is attributable to predation. A corollary reason is a national orthodoxy to divorce the local government worldview from the national macro-economic structure and national socio-political realities. This curious phenomenon has been highlighted in this study as a tendency of the Nigerian state to treat the local government entities as replicas of the departments of antiquities. Finally in this paper, we have made attempts to suggest alternatives to the predatory system of local government in Nigeria; whose aim of serving as vehicles for service delivery in the local areas, are widely believed to have been largely defeated.

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