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CORRUPTION AND DEMOCRACY IN NIGERIAN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Fatile, Jacob Olufemi (Ph.D)

Okewale, Raheem Akanni

*Department of Industrial Relations and Public Administration
Faculty of Management Sciences, Lagos State University, Ojo.*

Phone Numbers: 08054655692, 08025616090

*E-mail Addresses: jacofem@yahoo.com,
waleokewale@gmail.com*

Abstract

Local government is created to ensure meaningful development of the grassroots through participatory approach. Democracy therefore serves as veritable avenue through which the purpose for which local government is created can be achieved. But, unfortunately in Nigeria, democracy has not thrived at the grassroots level due to endemic corruption. Some members of the Nigerian public have expressed their opinion to the effect that our anti-corruption crusade in the last twelve years has been deficient in credibility because it appeared to lack the support of the Federal Executive Council who only rarely expressed their support in public. For the purpose of this study we adopt content analysis. This study therefore examines critically the effect of corruption on grassroots democracy and development, and concludes that corruption be deterred and punished in the local government system to enhance democratic participation of citizenry and effective service delivery.

KEY WORDS: *Corruption, Democracy, Local Government, Development, Decentralisation, Accountability and Transparency.*

Introduction

The need to catalyze balanced development, maximize citizen's participation, and arouse government responsive necessitates the creation of the local government. The local government serves as a form of political and administrative structure facilitating decentralization, national integration, efficiency in governance, and a sense of belonging at the grassroots. The local government is a unit of administration all over the world (Agagu, 2004). Although it is a universal institution, it however exists in different forms and in different political systems. Whatever the form of existence, the local government has been essentially regarded as the path to and guarantor of administrative efficiency, effective service delivery and participatory development (Arowolo, 2005). It is a critical tier of government because of its closeness to the people (Gboyega, 1987). Local government appeals to both the people and government as a feedback institution that relays the opinions and demands of the grassroots to a higher government (Adejo, 2003). Aside from this feedback function, other competing functions of service delivery, promotion of democratization at local level, and mobilization of human resources for grassroots enhancement place the local government in a strategic position for sustainable development. The local government system has been a major feature of the Nigerian government and politics since colonial rule though, over the years, there have been changes in name, structure, and composition, while the system was operated differently all over the country (Agagu, 2004). It was on this premise that the rising tide of progress, growth and development experienced in the local government was based.

The 1976 local government reform, carried out by the military administration of General Obasanjo, brought about uniformity in the administrative structure of the system. The reform introduced a: multi-purpose single tier local government system for the whole country (Ajayi, 2000). Since these reforms, successive governments have tinkered with the local government structure with a view of enhancing its =capacity for good governance. Fundamentally, the local government is created to serve the rural communities. The local government is expected to mobilize and harness local resources and ensure their effective utilization, with the support of the state and the federal governments.

Unfortunately, the much needed development has continued to elude the rural communities across the nation. It has been rural poverty, rather than rural development. However, the prevalence and pervasiveness of poverty and the underdevelopment at the grassroots level is still connected with the high level of corruption and absence of democratic ethos in the local government system. In view of the above, this paper, therefore, examines the essence of the local government system to rural communities, the virtues and vices of democracy in be local government, the corruption in the local government, the causes and effects, and, finally, suggests ways of making the local government a viable service delivery institution.

Conceptual and Theoretical Explanations

Conceptual Framework

Within the disciplinary parameters of social science, the issue of definition of concepts has not been problem free. This has been largely due to the eclectic nature and paradigmatic dispositions of respective disciplines within the field (Adeyemi, 2012). It is imperative to clarify major concepts in the paper in order to situate them within the context of our analysis. Also, our

analysis should be guided by a theoretical understanding of the subject matter that will help elucidate the point we shall make. However, the three key terms of our topic demand conceptual clarification and meaningful and purposeful analyses. These are; corruption, local government and democracy.

Corruption

Anybody who can say that corruption in Nigeria has not become alarming is either a fool, a crook or else does not live in this country ... " (Achebe, 1981, in Gabriel, 2007).

Ideal democratic orientation of any contemporary society presumes citizenry participation in the governance of his or her society. In order to showcase adequate involvement of people in decision making processes and belief towards governance in the context of democratic values - grassroots government was established. As a result of the complexity of corruption, its effects on the systemic existence of its victims as does its prevalence through the efforts of its perpetrators, its definition has continued to be shrouded by value preference and differences (Akindele and Adeyemi, 2011).

The understanding of corruption connotes inappropriate act of people economically, politically, socially and culturally. Irrespective- of the sectorial aspect of corruption enmeshed, its evaluation could be underscored on the premise of societal prevailing orientation that mandated ones behaviour socially, economically, politically or culturally. According to the World Bank and Transparency International (TI), a leading global anti-corruption watchdog, corruption is the abuse of public office for private gains for the benefit of the holder of the office or some third party. Viewed from these definitions, political corruption can be broadly understood as unethical behaviour, which violates the norms of the system of political order (Heidenheimer and Johnston, 1993). Nwabueze (2002:128) in his own contribution adopted a sociological approach to the definition of corruption. He conceptualized corruption in the following way:

A form of social deviance in some cases, of criminal deviances, the result of failure or lack of will to respect the norms of social interactions. It is an extra-legal or normative approach to gaining access. It is a form of mal-adaptation involving the acceptance of society's cultural goals and the rejection of the socially approved means of attaining the goals. It is an indictment on the ineffectiveness of society's socialization function; a sign of some defects in the development of citizen's personality system. It indicates the existence of weakness in agencies of social control which should punish rather than reward the perpetrator of corruption.

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 favor to personal acquaintance. It has been argued that corruption involves behaviors which deviate from the moral and constitutional requirements. Kalu (1991) conceives corruption as the conscious and well planned act by a person or group of persons to appropriate, by unlawful means, the wealth of another person or" group of persons. Corruption can also be seen as diversion of resources from the betterment of the community to the gain of individuals at the expense of the community. Odey (2002) conceptualizes corruption in Nigeria as the air which every living person breathes in and out, According to him, nobody makes any effort to breathe in the air, it comes naturally. Corruption in Nigeria has become so naturalized that' many of us simply become corrupt without making any effort and often even without knowing it.

Democracy: Diamond, Linz and Lipset (1989) see democracy as a system of government that meets three" essential conditions: one meaningful and extensive competition among individuals and groups, especially parties for all effective positions of government power at regular intervals, excluding the use of force; two, a highly inclusive level of political participation in the selection of leaders and policies, at least through regular and fair election, so that no major (adult) social group is excluded; and three, a high level of civil and political liberties, freedom of expression, freedom of the press, and freedom to form or join organization so as to ensure the integrity of political competition and participation (Diamond, et al. 1989). In a similar vein, Ake (1991) perceives democracy in terms of principles of public accountability, widespread participation, and the consent of governed.

Local Government: Local government may be viewed from two perspectives: As a process, local government refers to that organization which promotes the welfare and well-being of the people at the grassroot. To Bello-Iman (1996) local government refers to "that unit of administration with defined territory and powers as well as administrative authority with relative autonomy". This definition emphasizes the structural autonomy of local government in the areas of power and authority. It underscores the fact that local government in the context of the country's federal system is not a subordinate unit of the state ' and federal governments. This clarification becomes necessary because the United Nations, following the practice of local government systems in some unitary states, defines local government as:

.... A political sub-division of a nation (or, in a federal system) a state which is constituted by law and her substantial control of local affairs including the power to impose taxes, or exact labour for prescribed purposes.' The governing body of such an entity is either elected or locally selected (Awotokun, 1996).

We can deduce from the above assertions that what distinguishes local government from local government is what they enjoys in carrying out its activities. Such autonomy would reflect the degree of powers, functions and resources at its disposal subject, of course, to the test of, reasonableness. To drive home the commitment of the state to a true local government system, the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria at Section 7 enthuse that:

The system of local government by democratically elected local government . councils is under 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 (The 1999 Constitution).

Given these landmark innovations brought about by the 1999 constitution, what does the score-card says on the performance of local government councils in Nigeria? One would say, it has been less than satisfactory. This explains why there have been successive local government reforms. One of the major aspects of these reforms is to bring democracy to this tier of government.

Theoretical Framework

It has become a universal phenomenon in social sciences for facts to be investigated or examined precisely within a framework, rather than in an isolated manner. According to

Goode and Hatt (1952), theoretical orientation functions mainly by bridging the range of facts, that are to be investigated. Furthermore, in an empirical theoretical base, it is necessary to develop a sound theory, which is capable of explaining the wise concepts and relationships in the study. The importance of theoretical framework in a study also lies in the fact that social science research is theory based and its operations are guided by relevant principles of human behavior (Goode and Hat, 1952). However, this paper seeks to understand the role of local government in a democracy. It is essentially a study of the impact of the local government's contribution to the grassroots development. Based on this, the paper will be situated within the ambit of the decentralization theory. Although, there are other theories that can also be used in this paper, such as development theory, structural functionalism, local state theory and pluralist theory, the fact that democracy and development must be decentralized to achieve its purpose makes the decentralization theory more suitable and appropriate for this study.

The theory of decentralization explains the transfer of authority and responsibility for public functions from the central government to the subordinate or quasi-independent government organizations and/or the private sector (Rondinelli, 1981; Heywod, 1997; Bonnal). It is concerned with how functions and responsibilities are given to different institutions from the central government for better and effective performances.

In the literature, two major forms of decentralization are discerned; namely, deconcentration and devolution (Olowu, 1995). The former alludes to the transfer of state responsibilities and resources from the center to the periphery, within the same administrative system. It indicates an internal form of delegation of responsibilities among officials of the organization. In the other hand, devolution entails the transfer of specific responsibilities and resources to the country, who are usually represented by their own leader or elected (i.e. non-appointed) official. Adedeji (2000) argued that in reality, devolution and deconcentration are, not mutually exclusive. When implementing decentralization programs, a balance of these elements is usually sought.

In the wake of widespread disappointment with the centralized state structure and the ongoing democratization process, the transfer of some power and resources from the central to the local governments and organizations has been advocated (Enemuo, 1999). Many donor agencies and international financial institutions such as the World Bank see decentralization as a means of creating an enabling environment for development and promoting accountability. For most African governments; however, decentralization is now viewed as a strategy for mobilizing local resources and an initiative for national development. Since it has become evident that federal or state governments, alone cannot guarantee development in the local areas, it then becomes imperative for the power, authority and responsibility to be transferred from the central or state government to the local government for the purpose of enhancing development in the rural areas. This is important because of the remoteness of the federal government to the rural people. It is believed that decentralization would make the local governments more competent in the management of their own affairs.

Decentralization is an initiative to support the grassroots development. It is motivated by the need to improve service delivery to large population and put in place meaningful structures to provide good governance at the local level.

Heywood (1997) argued that decentralization, as a framework for rural development could be explained using four broad variables: participation, responsiveness, legitimacy and liberty. According to him, participation entails the sustainability and effectiveness of the local or regional government in providing opportunities for citizens to participate in the political life of their community. The benefit of widening the scope of political participation includes the fact that it helps to create a better education and a more informed citizenry. Responsiveness involves the closeness of the peripheral institutions to the people and their sensitivity to peoples needs. Thus, both strengthens democratic accountability and ensures that the government responds not merely to the overall interests of the society, but also to the specific needs of particular communities. Legitimacy explains the manner in which the physical distance from government affects the acceptability or rightness of its decisions. Decisions made at 'local' levels are more likely to be seen as intelligible and therefore legitimate. Liberty- is protected by decentralization through the dispersion of government power, thereby creating a network of checks' and balances. Peripheral bodies checks the central government, as well as each other.

The local government in Nigeria is a form of devolution, local government involves the legal, conferring of powers to discharge specified residual functions upon formally constituted authorities, either in exclusive or concurrent capacity (Okunade, 1988). The local government in Nigeria is widely acknowledged as a viable instrument for rural development and for the delivery of social services to the people. It is believed that this level of government is strategically placed to fulfill the above functions because of the proximity to the rural people, which enhances its ability to easily articulate and aggregate the demands of the people. The 1976 local government reform, in particular, was aimed at decentralizing of some significant functions of the state government at local levels in order to harness local resources for refined development.

This framework will therefore, enhance scientific understanding and stands as an operational tool to further assess the role of the local government in the democratic government in Nigeria.

The Essence of Local Government System to Rural Communities

The local government is essentially created as a viable political and administrative organ for the transformation of all communities and for delivery of essential services to the citizens. The primary purpose of the local government and the basis for its existence is to create a mass development impetus to the grassroots transformation (Adeyemo, 1995).

Importantly, the local government is also to act. as the training ground for a higher level of administration and for, the inculcation of philosophy of people-oriented development. Its capacity is to act as training grounds for breeding the grassroots democracy and act as a catalyst for national development, which cannot be overemphasized (Adeyemo, 1995). It therefore, provides political education that ensures direct participation at the grassroots level in the issues that directly affect their lives. The closeness of local administration to the people affords them the opportunity to meet with their local representative's one on one and present their problems for possible and immediate solutions. This may not be possible at the other level of governments because of the distance and administrative bottlenecks. Essentially; the local government is saddled with the responsibility of guaranteeing the

political, social and economic development of its area and its people (Enero; Oladoyin and Elumilade, 2004).

Democracy in Local Government: Virtues and Vices

The creation of local governments in Nigeria was deliberately designed ensure maximum participation of citizens in the development process, promote balanced development so that the third tier of government will be more responsive to the developmental aspirations of local communities. This was therefore a deliberate attempt to inject a decentralized approach towards national integration, efficient and effective governance and creating a sense of belonging at the grassroots. Thus the local government system was designed to be a means for ensuring effective democracy at the grassroots level because it is the level of government closest to the people and by implication it is the most critical in engendering good democratic cultures and values, effective participation in the process of development at the grassroots with the possibility of filtering up to the national level (Bashir and Muhammed, 2012).

Democracy is a necessary ingredient in the local government system. While the local government strives to achieve unreserved access to measurable, efficient and effective development and service delivery to the people, democracy on the other hand, ensures and assures feasibility and possibility of this service delivery and development. It offers a participatory opportunity for citizen in the choice and selection through periodic elections of credible representatives, and confers inestimable avenue for psychological self-satisfaction and self-fulfillment. This is so that the electorates who participate in the electoral process eventually leads to the enthronement of a government and the political leadership can therefore lay a claim to the government as theirs, rather than being an imposition. Consequently, the mandate to govern emanates from them, while at the same time, they act as legitimizers of the governmental system. The government is seen as legitimate and therefore, not illegal (Ajayi, 1998).

To be sure, grassroots democracy and governance as an aspect of Nigeria's national polity has been and continued to be problematic. As grassroots governance continues to generate recurring concerns, the problems affecting it since independence have been that of indefinite objective direction, unstable structure, inconsistent functions, inept leadership, corruption, low leadership capacity, apathy and non-participation of local people, uncommitted and non-loyal personnel arrangements, dependent financial sources, coupled with this management and uncondusive or hostile environments due to lack of service delivery and power struggle (Irikana, 2013).

The electorate is also a veritable check on political leaders. Besides the usual checks and balances by the parliament on the executive, the entire elected personnel of government in all the branches of government have to account for their tenure at the next election. The desirability of another election to government of the individual political office seekers and political party will be subject to satisfactory performance vis-a-vis the political promises made to the people as embodied in the respective parties' manifestos at the previous election. The accomplishment of the political promises to the electorate will definitely earn the ruling party and the political leaders seeking a renewed mandate to be returned to power. Consequently, the fear of being removed from office will definitely make the elected leaders attain a reasonable level of good performance when in power with the hope for another

chance. The electorate can, therefore, not be taken for granted, while their continued support can only be guaranteed through good governance. In this way, the elected leaders are duly accountable to the electors (Ajayi, 1998).

Democracy similarly guarantees the citizenry happiness and the rule of law. The governing political party has a social welfare program contained in its manifesto, which are meant to enhance human development and people's social well being. Unlike the undemocratic government, which has no manifestos and therefore no committed agenda for human development and happiness, the entire populace in a democratic environment enjoys equality of opportunities before the law.

Democracy therefore, serves as a veritable avenue through which the purpose for which the local government is created can be achieved. Centralization, as an elusion to the grassroots development accedes to local government as a gigantic role in any responsible political system. All over the world, no nation can successfully cope with gigantism. A nation like Nigeria therefore, cannot but be decentralized for effective governance and administration. Essentially, local government is an indispensable instrument of democracy. It is an avenue for government and the people to reach each other.

It is important that people experience direct democracy through the local government system. It gives residents an opportunity to make the government responsive to their own needs and enables people to enhance public responsibility. The local government is essential in any good democratic system. It gives a scope for democratic participation.

It is instructive to note that democracy has not thrived at the grassroots level in Nigeria. The local government, rather than projecting democratic ideals in the rural setting, has been an instrument of oppression and wealth accumulation in the hand of the unscrupulous politician. It has suddenly become a breeding ground for undemocratic parties. Public accountability, the consent of the governed, widespread participation and consultation, as principles of democracy are conspicuously absent in the local government system. This is still connected with the stunted growth of democracy in Nigeria, as a whole. The manifestations of its retardation can be perceived in the collapse of two earlier Republics, 1960 - 1966 and 1979 - 1983. Human development and the promotion of the citizens' happiness which are important goals of democracy are absent in the country.

The absence of democracy in the local government system paves way for poverty due to the lack of democratic ideals. This absence of democratic ideals is caused by the nature of Nigeria politics. Politics in Nigeria is widely seen as a means of becoming affluent. It is seen as a short-cut to wealth. Besides, every contestant is also determined to rig the elections in his own favor. And where rigging is made impossible, violence, arson, kidnapping and murder of opponents are introduced into the electoral game. Electoral competition then becomes a "do-or-die" affair, as witnessed in the general elections of 1964, 1979, 1983, 2003 and 2007. All these tend to undermine the confidence the people, especially at the grassroots level, in the democratic practice as a means of ensuring popular happiness and grassroots development.

Corruption at the Grassroots: An Overview

One of the fundamental problems of contemporary Nigeria is corruption. It has thrived, progressed and flourished unabated. Corruption has been institutionalized to the point of accepting it as part of our system. Albeit corruption is ubiquitous, it is found all over the world, but the degree of its manifestation varies from system to system (Lawal and Oladunjoye, 2010). 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 (Adeyemi, 2012).

Nowadays, men and women who have been (se)lected to undertake leadership position at the grassroots level in Nigeria primarily sorted out means to enrich their purses as quickly as they could and ultimately run the budgets of their various localities aground without any visible development projects to who for it. Development projects, if any, are in place after being thoroughly inflated (Lawal, 2001). Besides, local governance was sometimes undertaken as a mean to perfect environmental inadequacies which denied them, befitting work. As noted by Jakpa (2004), it is not surprising that the first issue that spring up when local governments administrations finally settle to work are issue of revenue allocations, appointment into plum council seats and award of contracts (Jakpa, 2004). Thus, feeling the impulse of serving people and stimulating communal growth which is the real reason for local government creation do not count.

Historically, it was a taboo to find Native Authority chairmen embezzling funds entrusted into their care for the purpose of development (Lawal, 2001). Harmony, trust and implicit confidence reigned supreme between the administrators of Native Authority and the governed. These administrators charged with the responsibility of administering the Native Authority, which later metamorphosed into District Council and later the Local Government Areas, did so very credibly without any blemish on their offices and personalities.

However, the need for the creation of local government; to decentralize political administration; acceleration of rural development; enhancement of the socio-economic well being of rural populace and to bring government closer to people, have been undermined by the perverted looting idiosyncrasy of local government political leaderships. 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. According to her, 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 (Thisday, 2008).

Nwanma (2008) exposes a disheartening scenario in Yobe State, Nigeria, where a man walked to the headquarters of Jakusko Local Government Area and with his sharp matchete, hacked seven people to death. A staff of the LGA, the man was said to have been owed "several months" salary by the local government authorities. The frustration that drove 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 overflowing revenues from the central government. Yobe's 17 Local Government' Areas 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. One must have doubted this estimate if it has to be judged on the

development status of different localities in Yobe State. So, corruption has really denied the public the dividend of their "social contract" (Nwanma, 2008). In fact, grassroots administration in Nigeria is increasingly tarring into the fastest means of primitive accumulation. This is due to the fact that the more resources pumped into local government, the less the provision of essential services to the people at the grassroots level in Nigeria.

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 Olusegun Agagu, there was this unholy alliance between state government and the local councils in the state, where the former constitute Joint Action Committee, tagged "JAC". Federal allocations to local government are first deposited into a particular ad hoc account before calling for the committee meeting. This in a way paves the way for the state government to plan for local government and release money instalmentally. The motive behind this is to divert the money to another thing entirely which does not have impact on the lives of the rural dwellers but will be beneficial to the state governor. The governors as noted by Olaniyonu (2007) sees the allocation from the federation account to Local Government Areas as their personal fund and use it to finance their political activities. Some governors find it easy stealing from LGAs. Between 1999 and 2003, only Chief Adebisi Akande of Osun State was said not to have tampered with the local government funds. 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 southwest state narrated an instance in which his state governor had given them a few million naira each as running cost and he challenged the governor that the money being shared were 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". Several local government administrators confirmed how their respective governors will just give them few million Naira as running cost and pocket the remaining money originally meant for LGAs. Furthermore, several expenses incurred by the state government are charged to the account of the LGAs.

Local governments in Nigeria can barely pay salaries from the stipend doled out by the governor, they found a smart but dubious way and share the money with their councillors for personal gain and thereby jettison the social services which the constitution set out for LGAs to provide. This position was corroborated by EFCC Chairman, Waziri (2008) when she said "unfortunately, local government officials have not left their hands unsoiled in this regard. It is with regret that I am forced to observe that the local governments of the good old days have become a mere memory of times gone by. The paralysis that pervades local government today is wide spread. Local governments have become so far removed from the lives of the people to a point where some executives of local councils no longer reside in their domains they were elected to administer. They drive to the council headquarters in their jeeps from the state capitals or -the Federal Capital territory, pay salaries and share other monies and disappear until it is time to share the next subvention"

Corruption among Local Government Chairmen

Despite the state governors' interference in local government affairs, most local government chairmen are not left out in the development crisis that bedeviled local government in

Nigeria. Most local government chairmen see their position as handful opportunity to enrich themselves. A cursory look at the level of corruption perpetrated by chairmen of local governments under Obasanjo civilian administration till date is a monumental waste. For instance, in 2001, the chairman Kachia 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 Samga local government 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 the job. In Kwara State, the Chairman of Ilorin South LGA claimed to have built two staff residential apartment at Fufu the council headquarters at an inflated price of N20 million. The chairman also claimed to have paid N19 million to a contractor for the Ga-Akanbi and Niger roads which has been rehabilitated by the state government previous year. It was also reported that the chairman owned twelve personal cars (Aluko, 2006).

In Benue state, the Chairman of Ado LGA was reported to have spent N38,200,000.00 on maintenance of peace in the area where there was no crisis in the area since the Chairman assumed office. The Chairman also claimed to have spent N18 million on hospitality; the only LG Chairman in the country to have done so. Also, in Delta State, the Chairman of Okpe LGA was suspended by the, state House of Assembly on the allegation that he claimed have given N86 million to Niger Delta youths guarding pipeline installations. The chairman was further accused of mismanaging N400 million stabilization fund using his position to acquired 40 cars for himself and members of his family. In Zamfara state, the chairman of sale local government was suspended for allegedly stealing N53 million.

Presently, local government chairmen in the country have continue to soil their hands more. For instance, in March 2010, 12 out, of the 23 local government chairmen in the same Benue state have been recommended for' suspension for dipping their hands into the excess crude oil revenue. '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 and Gwer Nest 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 sometime last year, was also suspended for six months for fraudulently enriching himself with the excess crude funds.(The News Magazine, 2010).

In Oyo state, the level of corruption among local government chairmen is so high as observed by Lam Adeshina former governor of Oyo state recently when he averred that: "a few days ago, I got information that a chairman of local government in Ibadan city here built a hotel worth almost N400million and the state governor inaugurated the hotel for him. He further stressed, I have been saying it that most of the council chairmen in Oyo"State are corrupt. And Farida Waziri has not deemed it fit to send her officials here to probe them. I call on EFCC to send its officials to come and probe all the council' chairmen in Oyo State. The whole place is infested with corruption. There is no local government chairman in Oyo State today either the past or current who has not got one hotel, one fuel station or shopping complex. I'm disclosing this on my honour. This is a lead that I have given to the EFCC (News Star, 2010).

From the above analysis, it shows that corruption is an acceptable norm among local government chairmen in Nigeria and if the trend continues unabated, the desire development will continue to elude the people at grassroots level.

The effects of corruption on democracy in the local government system include: Destruction of democratic values occurs. Corruption tends to destroy democratic ethos in the local government system. All the values of democracy, such as responsiveness, accountability, participation and human development_ are either subdued, neglected or ignored where corruption thrives; Development is hindered in a regime of corruption. Rather than utilizing the available resources for the uplift and development of the ' council, it is diverted to private use. This attitude cannot guarantee any meaningful development and that wise, local or grassroots development becomes unrealistic.

Rule of law is also subverted and replaced by muscle power. In order to successfully steal government resources, the officials in the local government system undermine the rules and regulations that guide their activities and ensure that whatever is stolen by them cannot be traced or tracked within their tenure in office. This has serious implication for service delivery as developmental projects maybe abandoned without any necessary action. Also, in this ugly capacity, contracts are bound to be inflated, bribes and kickbacks are bound to be taken, and contracts are bound to be awarded to nonexistence companies (i.e. companies that exist on paper alone). Manpower development and capacity building becomes sluggish and discouraged in the arena of corruption. The Chief Executive of the council is not thinking about the need to train and retrain the staffers, but how to corner the money meant for manpower development and capacity building into his own pocket for selfish purse. The effect of corruption in the local government system is enormous in the sense that democratic values are destroyed and development is hindered. Muscle power replaces the rule of law and Manpower development and capacity building becomes sluggish and discouraged.

What is to be done?

In this paper we have demonstrated the essence of local government to rural communities, virtues of democracy to grassroots residents and corruption as a bane to rural development and grassroots participation. In view of the above, the following recommendations arc put forth.

The local government officials should be equipped with better education and training and a sound orientation about value system and democratic cultures. Thus, they are required to be truly democratic administrators," real service providers, efficient decision makers, and dynamic grassroots transformers. They should also, endeavor to imbibe real democratic practices in order to promote value systems and democratic ethos at the grassroots level. The local government should provide special mechanisms for active and maximal participation of local residents in local government affairs. People should be allowed to participate in the initiation and implementation of the projects in the local government system.

Accountability and transparency must be encouraged and promoted in the local government system so as to attain good governance for effective development at the grassroots level. Corruption must be deterred and punished in the local government system to enhance efficient and effective service delivery at the grassroots level.

The anti-corruption agencies are lackadaisical when it comes to the issue of corruption at local government levels. Since the inception of democratically elected government in 1999 to date only one local government chairman has been jailed for corruption. In most cases when the Anti- corrupt agencies are call upon to probe the activities of some local governments' chairmen, the agencies either ignore the call or make arrest and later release the culprits unprosecuted. Furthermore, it has been observed that most corrupt local government chairmen are either suspended from office for some period or asked to refund some amount of money believed to have been embezzled or sacked from office either the governor or the House of Assembly of the State, as witness among different states across the country. This trend will continue to encourage local government chairmen to be more corrupt since there are no severe punishments melted-out to them. Therefore, both-state and federal government should make sure that all corrupt local government officials are brought to book by allowing the law to take its course on any erring officials through its anti-corruption agencies.

Furthermore, there is the need to set up a joint monitoring group comprising of representatives of both the local, state and federal government to monitor the activities of each local government in each state of the federation. This group will continue to meet on quarterly basis to access the performance of each local government in each state and any non performing local government are reported to appropriate authorities to take action on such local government. This process will checkmate the level of corruption and compel the chairmen to deliver good governance to the local people.

The Fourth Schedule of 1999 constitution need to be amended to give a clear mandate to local government as regards the local functions such as local development, planning, primary education, health services and development of agriculture and natural resources. Their role as observed by Gboyega (2003) in economic development planning is to make recommendations to a state's agency for economic planning, while in respect of primary education, health and agricultural development their role is stated as participation in the Government of a State in respects of these functions. Such role is unclear and it has made it difficult for local government to resist the state government intervention in their local activities.

Conclusion

The absence of good governance in our local areas in recent time was deliberate attempts by most local government chairmen to justify the fact that funds made available to them are inadequate. This process was orchestrated by state government undue intervention in local government affairs, and if the trends continue, the desire developments will continue to elude local people who are at the receiving end of the ills of corruption at the local government level. Therefore in order to ensure good governance at the grassroots level, all hand must be on deck by every individual, corporate bodies, civil society's organisation especially at the local level to fight against corruption by reporting and exposing any act of corruption on the part of any local government chairman in their areas.

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