



**Local Government and the Challenges of Community and Rural Development in Nigeria: the Way Forward**

**Akhakpe Ighodalo** (Department of Industrial Relations and Public Administration (Public Admin Unit) Faculty of Management Sciences, Lagos State University, Ojo -Nigeria)

**Fatile Olufemi Jacob** (Department of Industrial Relations and Public Administration (Public Admin Unit) Faculty of Management Sciences, Lagos State University, Ojo -Nigeria)

**Igbokwe-Ibeto Chinyeaka Justine** (Department of Industrial Relations and Public Administration (Public Admin Unit) Faculty of Management Sciences, Lagos State University, Ojo -Nigeria)

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**Author(s)**

**Akhakpe Ighodalo**

Department of Industrial Relations and Public Administration (Public Admin Unit) Faculty of Management Sciences, Lagos State University, Ojo -Nigeria.

**Fatile Olufemi Jacob**

Department of Industrial Relations and Public Administration (Public Admin Unit) Faculty of Management Sciences, Lagos State University, Ojo -Nigeria.

**Igbokwe-Ibeto Chinyeaka Justine**

Department of Industrial Relations and Public Administration (Public Admin Unit) Faculty of Management Sciences, Lagos State University, Ojo -Nigeria.

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**Abstract**

One major index of social change and development today is indeed rural development. No nation can boast of having achieved development if a large percentage of her rural inhabitants are still wallowing under abject poverty, want and adept in socio-economic penury. However, in Nigeria, empirical evidence shows that underdevelopments have continued to wage on as people are either ignorant of, or indifferent to the reasons for which local governments are created. This paper examines the impact of local government on community and rural development in Nigeria, challenges and the way forward. To scientifically and analytically interrogate the issues raised, the paper traversed conceptualizations and theoretical terrain; utilizing system and rural development theories. Yet, because of the dearth of data, it did content analysis of 466 newspapers and magazines in Nigeria published between 2007 and 2011, to determine people's feelings about the local governments' development efforts in communities. It is the position of this paper that the creation of local government in most cases were not based on viability and developmental purposes as required by the constitution but on administrative conveniences to score cheap political goals and legitimacy especially by the military rulers. The paper concludes that while the basic rationale behind the creation of local government is to meet the peculiar needs of the people at the grassroots, it is however pathetic to note that local government has demonstrated incompetence in this regard. Given the catalogue of challenges facing local government, it recommends among other measures, that while local government should remain as a third tier of government, it should be given more powers, resources and enabling environment for the development of localities.

**Key Words:** Local government, Community, Development, Challenges, Effectiveness

**Introduction**

No society can be said to be genuinely growing unless the vital indicators of better living conditions, greater control of both the physical and social environment and a greater ability, capacity and a positive change in the way of life and doing things are evident and present in the rural areas – a vital sub-sector of

the society. Indeed, one major index of social change and development today is rural development. No nation can really boast of having achieved development if a large percentage of her rural inhabitants are still wallowing under abject poverty, want and adept in socio-economic penury. The index of this mode of growth lies in rural development since up to 80% of Nigerian reside in rural areas (FOS, 1999), it is

therefore appropriate that effective and efficient local administration will aggressively and invariably engender rural development. Local government administration in Nigeria has come of age, not so much because of its efficiency and effectiveness, but primarily because of its longevity and resilience of its relevance in the administration of the country. The expediency for the creation of local government anywhere in the world stems from the need to facilitate development at the grassroots.

The importance of local government is a function of its ability to generate sense of belongingness, safety and satisfaction among its populace. All forms of government, regimes or political systems have so far ensured the attainment of this goal. Such strategy for ensuring national administrative development and political efficacy is found in the concept and practice of local government. Whatever is the mode of government; local government has been essentially regarded as the path to, and guarantor of, national integration, administration and development (Aghayere, 2008).

In Nigeria's socio-political context, with multiplicity of culture, diversity of languages and differentiated needs and means, the importance of such an organisation in fostering the needed national consciousness, unity and relative uniformity as well as preservation of peculiar diversities cannot be over-emphasized. Central to the creation of local government, however, is its ability to facilitate an avenue through which government and the people intermix, relate and more quickly than any other means resolve or dissolve issues that may have heated the system (Ikelegbe, 2005).

Local government could be defined as:

Government at local level exercise through representative council established by law to exercise specific powers within defined areas. These powers should give the

council substantial control over local affairs as well as the staff and institutional and financial powers to initiate and direct the provision of services and to determine and implement projects so as to compliment the activities of the state and federal government in their areas and to ensure, through devolution of functions to their councils and through the active participation of the people and traditional institutions, but that local initiative and response to local needs and condition are maximized (FRN, 1976).

This definition is exhaustive and tries to cover much ground in explaining the meaning of local government administration. The 1976 local government reform and the entrenchment of the vital provisions of this reform in the 1979, constitution set the stage for increased concern and the awareness of local government administration as an agent of rural development in Nigeria.

The definition of local government by the Nigerian 1999 constitution leaves no one with doubt that it is largely both theoretically sound and service oriented to the people. It talks of representative councils with substantial control over local development area affairs, for the provision of services and implementation of projects in their areas, to complement the activities of both the State and Federal governments. The definition also amply recognizes the need for local government autonomy as the substantial control of local governments is aimed at staff, institutional and financial matters, among others (FRN, 1999).

In addition to the above, the Nigerian Federal Government is one of the few governments in the world perhaps in addition to Brazil (Erero, 2008) that have elevated local governments to

a third tier of government. By so doing, the State governments do not exercise absolute controls over local governments. As we shall also observe later, there are many checks and balances that have been formulated by the Nigerian Federal Government, to facilitate the effective operations of the local government councils. Some of such checks and balances are guaranteed existence of local governments in section 7 of the 1999 Constitution, financial allocation from the Federation account and involvement of local governments in economic planning of the State governments (FRN, 1999).

Rural areas are usually referred to as small, inward-looking, and idyllic communities held together by kinship relations and supporting basic agricultural occupations (Ekong, 2003). The characteristic features that differentiate rural from urban areas include: size, particularly areas inhabited by the people, low population density, homogeneity, presence of few social classes, low standard of living, presence of few/no social amenities such as electricity, pipe-borne water, low social mobility, mainly agrarian in nature - producing the bulk of food consumed in urban areas and the attendant drifting of young able-men to cities in order to benefit from the urban resources and modern life. People living in rural areas are characterized by low capital investment, low savings, and low production. The poverty level is usually very high among women than men. Rural dwellers continue to struggle with dual responsibilities of economic production and domestic labour, while most of them are confronted by poverty, illiteracy, high health risks, inadequate access to productive resources, and lack of credit/market access (Imhanlahimi and Ikeanyibe, 2009).

The local government decree of 1989, 1990 and 1992 have all intended to operationalize the third tier status of local government in Nigeria, therefore, granting it a high degree of autonomy as well as increase in their revenue allocation. Unfortunately, in spite of the elaborate provision of these decrees, the enormous benefits that the society and the rural dwellers stand to get from a sound local

government system, ideals did not approximate reality, and autonomy for local governments became a mirage (Igbokwe-Ibeto, 2003). However, while rural development should transform more easily rural areas into modern centre with social amenities leading to national growth and development, the local government councils constitute and remain the appropriate instrument through which this development strategy can be viably and effectively achieved.

Local government has been perceived as a panacea for the diverse problems of the diverse people with diverse culture. The means of achieving rural development which would have engendered national development was not visibly seen in Nigeria, from the colonial period to the year 1975. Thus, during the colonial rule in Nigeria, the colonial masters concentrated on the welfare of a minor elite population which lived in the cities (Igbokwe-Ibeto, 2003).

Several attempts and approaches have been adopted since the 1976 local government reforms to bring about genuine rural development in Nigeria. Most of these are top-down approaches which impact little on rural development. According to Ozor and Nwankwo (2008), the true success of a comprehensive economic and social development programme in Nigeria is primarily dependent upon the extent to which it contributes to the well-being of those living in rural areas. Usually, rural development programmes should aim; at creating awareness of rural possibilities; providing information on resources, inputs and infrastructure; deploying technical assistance; skills acquisition and development; increasing literacy levels; improving productivity and productive systems; adapting appropriate technology in agriculture; sensitizing potential volunteers and donors as well as focus on peoples' felt needs and basic amenities such as the provision of good roads, electricity, health clinics, markets, school buildings, and farm settlements among others. An attempt to achieve these laudable goals requires the

intervention of good leadership. When good leadership is provided, the people would participate voluntarily in the accomplishment of stated objectives.

Thus, since the 1976 Nigerian local government reforms, rural development has received considerable attention from the federal government and states government through substantial increase in revenue allocation; in spite of this increase, much is not seen on ground in local government areas in terms of development. Schools, portable drinking water, electricity, good access road, health centres markets, credit facilities etc. are not available and where they are in existence, they are poorly built and managed. As important as this tier of government is, there seems to be some impediments that have been infringing on its performance and functions in recent times. These impediments range from undue interference of the higher levels of government i.e. federal and state governments, bribery and corruption to embezzlement which has become a way of life in Nigeria and gross inadequacy of well-trained and qualified personnel to mention but a few.

It is in the light of the foregoing, that we seek to explore the relationship between local government and community and rural development relations in Nigeria; the challenges and the way forward in the context of the identified problems. While successive local government reforms have been conducted in the country – which is seen by scholars as criteria for measuring local government performance, evidences on the ground portray the opposite. There is need to investigate the extent to which local government have positively impacted on localities and rural communities using certain benchmark.

To address issues raised in this paper, it is organized as follows: The first section is the introduction while the second, explored the conceptual and theoretical terrain central to the subject of discussion. The third carried out an overview of local government system in Nigeria. The fourth, discussed the interface

between local government and rural development in Nigeria. The fifth analyzed challenges facing democratic consolidation and performance of local government system. The sixth proffer major steps to be taken to enhance local government performance and then conclusion.

### **Conceptual and Theoretical Terrain**

It is imperative to clarify major concepts in the paper in order to situate them within the context of our analysis. Also, our analysis will be guided by a theoretical understanding of the subject matter under interrogation in order to elucidate the points we shall be making.

Olojede and Afegbua (2011) quoting Aborisade and Aransi contend that, local governments are universally seen as veritable mechanism of socio-economic development. Whether it is form of devolution of power from the centre or as a form of field administration, it is the administration that is nearest to the grassroot of the polity. Also, Akhakpe (2011) quoting Bello-Imam, define local government as “that unit of administration with defined territory and powers as well as administrative authority with relative autonomy”. Yet, local government is a government at the grassroots level of administration “meant for meeting peculiar grassroots need of the people (Agagu, 2004).. Local government can also be defined as that tier of government closest to the people, “which is vested with certain powers to exercise control over the affairs of people in its domain” (Lawal, 2000). For space constraint, we cannot render the various definitions of local government as captured by scholars and writers. What we observe in many of them is that they contain words or phrases that tend to give the impression that local administration and local government are synonymous. For example, the United Nations cited in Ola and Tonwe (2005) admits of local selection of persons instead of election to constitute local government councils.

It is glaring that that local governments in Nigeria has not performed to expectation. Keen observers have since adduced various

propositions for explaining the reasons why the system has recorded abysmal level of inefficiency and ineffectiveness vis-à-vis justification for its establishment. The most fundamental rationale for creating local government anywhere in the world is to employ it to take responsibility for the development of the area directly and also contribute indirectly to the development of the nation. This development has been conceptualized from two broad perspectives: economic and holistic.

The economic perspective is concern with issues of poverty, unemployment, and inequality that must be reduced to usher in development to any area or country. If these declines in a society, the earlier version insisted, then there is development (Seers, 1969). The other, newer perspective in the conceptualization of development was blazed by writers like Todaro and Smith, (2003) who have presented a holistic definition. According to them development must, therefore, be conceived of as a multidimensional process involving major changes in social structures, popular attitudes, and national institutions, as well as the acceleration of economic growth, the reduction of inequality and the eradication of absolute poverty. Development, in its essence, must represent the whole gamut of change by which an entire social system, tuned to the diverse basic needs and desires of individuals and social groups within that system, moves away from condition of life widely perceived as unsatisfactory toward a situation or condition of life regarded as materially and spiritually better.

The modern or newer definition of development is therefore holistic, encompassing all aspects of life, including political, economic, social, cultural, religious, physical, etc. These can be further amplified to include all the good aspects of life that people cherish, make them feel relevant and enjoy their lives to the full. For example, the political aspect would include issues like political participation, freedom of choice, 'free, fair and credible' election etc (Omoruyi, 2004).

Development as recently conceptualized embraces the total development of man and his environment in all ramifications in an area, under a political organization or structure like a local government, on a participatory and sustainable basis. This is better done through governmental autonomy, which is, in turn, sustained by the council's adequate performance of the above responsibilities.

Flowing from the above, it is imperative to define community and rural development which is the central theme of our thesis. Rural development refers embracing the social, cultural and political economy of the rural dwellers that is the structural transformation of the rural economy leading to their progress. Okoye and Onyukwu (2007) defined rural development as scheme for raising the real incomes of rural dwellers, improving their environment and infrastructures and enhancing their welfare. This indeed means that rural development is a strategy designed to improve the economic and social conditions of people living in rural areas. It involves extending the benefit of development to those who seek livelihood in rural areas. Yet, rural development is improving the living standard of the mass of low-income population resident in rural areas and making the process of their development self-sustaining (Lele in Okoli, 1995).

Going by the above definitions therefore, we can deduce that rural development can be described as a process aimed at bringing positive changes with regards to initiating or actualizing improvement and increase in scope and intensity of the social, economic and political life of the rural inhabitants. In specific terms, this includes the provision and maintenance of social services such as food, water, recreational and leisure centers, health services, good roads network, educational institution and teaching aids as well as communication network. It therefore means that rural development is a creation of wide range of opportunities for private individual to realize and attain the fullest of their latent potentials through education and participation in decision making process and actions that

affect their day to day living. At a broader view, it can be seen as mass mobilization of human and material resources to achieve economic growth and national development.

In his own contribution Aziz (1978), identifies conditions necessary before we can say that rural development has taken place. They include: organization of rural producers and rural economic activities on competitive or communal basis in order to ensure a fuller utilization of available physical and human resources; an active policy of social services involving the improvement of social services and social relation; improvement in political and administrative capacity for planning and implementation of community development strategy to provide linkages with rest of the economy; more equitable distribution of land other rural resources in order to give greater opportunity to the poorest segment of the rural population to meet their basic needs; diversification of rural economy to provide additional employments and to improve the quality of rural life.

It is the firm believes and hopes of Lele (in Okoli, 1995) that a proper combination and coordination of the above reviewed factors would lead to the improvement in the lots of the rural population. But unfortunately this hope has not in been realized. This is because in most African countries, Nigeria inclusive, government policies geared towards rural development have always been to the advantage of the few individuals who constitute the privileged class. In fact, the administrative systems surrounding the implementation of rural development programmes do not usually function in the interest of the rural majority for whom such are meant for. The same thing applies to the existing institution, be they private, commercial or traditional. All the institution which are intended to function in the interest of the rural dwellers, ironically promote the interest of a few individuals who control manipulate them (Okoli and Gadzama, 1988). However, the above assertion is only meaningful in the examination of rural development programmes.

The subject under interrogation could be predicated on several theoretical platforms. These include system theory and rural development theories which consist of a number of sub-theories such as: modernization, transformation, improvement, mobilization, command-compliance, demonstration, comprehensive, community development and integrated rural development theories. While other theories may be relevant in their right, we anchor the paper on system, mobilization and integrated rural development theories because of the advantages they present in analyzing the issues raised.

A synthesis of the definitions of a system has been given by various scholars and writers such as Almond (1960); Easton (1965); Adamolekun (1983) and Offiong (1996). It is a phenomenon of whatever type, including physical, biological, social, political, etc., which is an organized whole with identifiable, interrelated structures delineating it from the environment in which it is located and with which it interacts, processing the inputs from it into outputs for it.

The general systems theory contends that every system, including political system, has sub-systems which make up the entire system. They are assigned functions and provided with enabling empowerment and environment, including resources, appropriate authority, etc. to enable them discharge their responsibilities optimally. Local governments should be well handled in terms of being fed with adequate inputs, so that they can contribute appropriately to the optimality of the Nigerian political system, as well as its stability. If the reverse is the case, two important things may happen. First is, there might be instability and secondly, there might be discontent amongst the citizenry. The two are two sides of a coin.

Therefore, it is very useful to realize the importance of the systems theory in the handling the issue of local government and rural development in Nigeria. Thus, the realization of the sub-systemic nature of local governments which are an integral part of the

overall Nigerian political system is imperative. They have their assigned responsibilities to perform to the benefit of the people, not as appendages of either the Federal or State Governments. Failure to treat the local governments as such could send frustration and wrong signal through their veins, disenchantment and inability to perform and hence dissatisfaction amongst the populace (Imhanlahimi and Ikeanyibe, 2009).

Yet, another theory worthy of mentioning here is the mobilization school of thought. Mobilization refers to the process of pooling together, harnessing, activating, actualizing and utilizing potential human and material resources for the purpose of development. It is a process where-by human beings are made aware of the resources at their disposal and also motivated and energized to collectively utilize such resource for the improvement of their spiritual and material well being (Obanure, 1988). The Operation Feed the Nation (OFN) associated with Obasanjo's military regime in 1976 and the Green Revolution of Programme of former President Shehu Shagari were based on this theory.

The utilization of integrated rural development school cannot be overemphasized. Integrated rural development theory is a multidimensional strategy for improving the quality of life of the rural people. It is based on the premise that the socio-economic framework of the traditional rural system is obsolete; therefore, integrated rural development strategies are designed to change this framework and promote structural changes in the society (Chalton in Ujo, 1999). The Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI) of Babangida's administration is a typical example of this approach to community and rural development in Nigeria

### **An Overview of Local Government System in Nigeria**

Regardless of nomenclature, local government is a creation of British colonial rule in Nigeria. It has overtime experienced change in name, structure and composition. Between 1930s and

1940s, for instance, local government was known as chief-in-council and chief-and-council, where traditional rulers were given pride of place in the scheme of things. In the 1950s, election was introduced according to the British model in the Western and Eastern parts of the country with some measure of autonomy in personnel, financial and general administration (Nwabueze, 1982). It was on this premise that the rising tide of progress, growth and development experienced in the local governments in these areas was based. The pace of this development was more noticeable in the South than in the North. During this period, heterogeneity was the hallmark of local government as there was no uniformity in the system and the level of development was also remarkably different. The introduction of 1976 reforms by military administration of General Obasanjo brought about uniformity in the administrative structure of the system. The reforms introduced a multi-purpose single-tier local government system (Ajayi, 2004)

Indeed, the 1976 reforms also introduced population criterion under which a local government could be created. Consequently, a population of within 150,000 to 800,000 was considered feasible for a local government. This was done to avoid the creation of non-viable local council and for easy accessibility. There was provision for elective positions such as the chairmen as executive head of local government council with supervisory councilors constituting the cabinet. This was complemented by the bureaucrats and professionals, such as Doctors, Engineers, etc., who were charged with the responsibility of implementing policies (FRN, 1976). Consequently, in 1991, a major landmark reform was introduced as the system had legislative arm. 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 that we have today and the administrative structure also underwent some changes (Ajayi, 2000).



The main functions of the local government council as specified in the fourth schedule of 1999 constitution as amended in 2011 include: The consideration and the making of recommendation to the state commission on economic planning or any similar body on; the economic development of the state, particularly in so far as the areas of authority of the council and of the state are affected, and proposals made by the said commission or body. The 1999 constitutional as amended have them as follows:

Collection of rates, taxes, radio and television licenses; Establishment and maintenance of cemeteries, burial grounds and homes for the destitute or infirm; Licensing of bicycle, truck (other than mechanically propelled truck) canoes wheel barrows and carts; Establishment, maintenance and regulation of slaughter houses, markets, motor parks and public conveniences; construction and maintenance of roads, streets, streets lightings, drains and other public highways, parks, gardens, open spaces or such public facilities as may be describe from time to time by the house assembly of a state; Naming of streets, roads and numbering of houses; Provision and maintenance of public conveniences, sewages and refuse disposal; Registration of all births, death and marriages; Assessment of privately owned houses or tenements for the purpose of levying such rates as may prescribed by the house of assembly of the state; control and regulation of: outdoor advertising and hoarding; movement and keeping of pets of all description; Shops, kiosks and laundries; restaurants, bakeries and other places for the sale of food to the public, and licensing, regulation and control of the sale of liquor.

The function of a local government council shall include participation of such council in the government of a state in respects of provision and maintenance of primary, adult and vocational education; the development of agriculture and natural resources other than the exploitation of minerals; the provision and maintenance of health services; and such other functions as may be conferred on a local

government council by the house of assembly of a state (FRN, 1999).

### **The Interface between Local Government, Community and Rural Development**

Community and rural development programmes are a series of interrelated activities, projects and task intended to improve to improve the living conditions of the rural population. The communities in question in this discussion are those of each local government which are therefore to be found in both the urban and rural sectors, but predominantly in the latter.

Notwithstanding the public outcry over the non performance of local governments in Nigeria, quite some work has been done on the development of community and rural areas by the Nigerian local governments. The critical aspects in the rural development issue include but not limited to availability of tarred roads network, pipe borne water, market, schools, electricity supply, health centres or cottage hospitals, skills acquisition centres, mass transit system, mass mobilization and telecommunication.

The recurrent literature on local governments' efforts to develop the local and rural areas in Nigeria indicates that the respective local governments have been showing varying concerns of developmental efforts to impact positively on the lives of the local people. The efforts may have been rather low, but all over the country, local governments have tried in varying degrees to meet the needs and aspirations of their localities within the following three contexts.

First and foremost, some local governments in the country have established Development Area Councils or Committees, so as to take governance closer to the people. Such local governments include those in Lagos State 2001; Yobe State 2003; Bauchi State 2004; and recently Imo State 2011. The second approach employed by some local governments is the appointment of Ward Committees to handle or supervise some development projects which are being

executed directly by the local governments or executed by them on behalf of the Federal or State governments. The third approach is the use of community development associations (CDAs) (Akoptor, 1995) or Town Improvement Unions as critical agents in community development even though they have been less utilized (Ikelegbe, 2005).

There are also extension workers (demonstration approach) who are located in the third category. They are used by local governments especially for agricultural purposes. They move within and between ward or village areas educating farmers, advising and assisting them on the application of newly introduced techniques, seedlings, the use of insecticides and irrigation farming. Irrigation farming is predominant in many local governments in the Northern parts of Nigeria where Fadama farming has been largely successful. Thus, taking farming to the local farmers through biotechnology of improved seedlings, insecticides, extension services, irrigation and micro credit schemes. And the local governments have been uncompromising in asking for democratically elected executive arm of local governments as part of their holistic development efforts (Aghayere, 2008; Imhanlahimi and Ikeanyibe, 2009).

In Nigeria, it is well known fact that there is a dearth of published data by the appropriate institutions such as National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) and the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) on local governments' development efforts in the communities. Stolpher (1966) and Yesufu (1996) are among other scholars who have documented the dearth of data for research in Nigeria as worrisome. So there is lean statistical evidence to argue about the development efforts of the local governments in communities in Nigeria. And because of the said dearth of data, we did content analysis of some newspapers and magazines in Nigeria to determine people's feelings about the local governments' development efforts in communities.

In utilizing the content analysis, the various newspapers and magazines published between 2007 and 2011 available to these researchers in the Lagos State University (Fatiu Ademola Akesode) Library, Ojo - Nigeria, and in their homes, were content analyzed. The copies analyzed numbered four hundred and sixty-six (466). The purpose was to determine people's feelings as reported by the newspapers and magazines about the developmental impact of the local governments in communities. People's feelings were categorized and differentiated broadly into two: praises and criticisms. Praises were identified in the newspapers and magazines by words of praise used by the communities. Pictures of jubilations about local governments' activities such as commissioning of projects, offering of direct free labour to assist local governments, and exercise of vigilance, especially at night, over local governments' facilities provided for the communities were also admitted as praises.

Also included as praises are; reportage on commencement of development projects, and public-private-partnerships (PPPs) by local governments as well as donations of parcels of land. Issues bordering on criticisms of local governments were operationalized as follows: critical statements of blame and failure of local governments as well as pictures of demonstrations against local governments. Road blockades by communities to protect the roads they claim to have repaired as a result of the ineffectiveness of the local governments, petitions and appeals to higher authorities and anti corruption agencies such as Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC), Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) on local governments' activities, sack and suspension of local government chairmen and other principal staff constituted part of the criticisms. Each praise or criticism was taken through a tally that's aggregate per newspaper and magazine.

The analysis reveals that a total of 466 newspapers and magazines were sampled. Out of the number, only 36 representing about 18.1 per cent of the people's feelings were expressed as praises for the local governments

in the period 2007-2011. The number of criticisms was 130 representing about 81.9 per cent. Although people's feelings apparently were less reported in the newspapers and magazines, nevertheless it indicates that majority were by far disappointed in local governments' performance and development efforts in the communities. This revelation tends to favour the general opinion in the literature about the unsatisfactory performance and development efforts of local governments in their communities in Nigeria (see for example, Mabogunje, 1980; Mukoro, 2001; Ikelegbe, 2005; Imhanlahimi and Ikeanyibe, 2009). It is instructive to note that the poor performance of local government in rural development in Nigeria may not be unconnected with the various challenges facing local government in Nigeria.

#### **Challenges Inhibiting Local Government Performance**

A number of challenges have confronted local governments in Nigeria, in their bid to carry out their task of community and rural development. These include structural, operational, financial, godfatherism pressure, unstable democracy and corruption. Worried by the poor performance of the local governments, in spite of their empowerment through what Ikelegbe (2005) called 'increasing autonomy' since the 1976 local government reforms. The report of Dasuki Committee set up in 1984 by the federal government expressed confidence in local government's structural, financial and personnel arrangements, among other matters. It however noted that the problems of the local governments were basically operational, 'arising directly from the behavior and attitudes of the persons who operated the system' (FGN, 1987). Yet there is quite some agreement in literature that local governments in Nigeria encounter all the above problems.

Despite the increase in the total amount of funds available to local government in Nigeria since early 1990s, its economic and financial profile is still very poor, relative to the development programme it is expected to carry out. This situation is not unconnected to the

mismanagement and embezzlement of these funds by the local councils. Local governments' financial problems appear to be more of their making as well as those of the State governments. Local governments' finances are largely sourced from the federation account, which accounts for not less than 80 per cent. The State governments also contribute a little, below one per cent, to the local governments' financial needs. Local governments have vast opportunities to increase their financial standing and hence autonomy through aggressive financial mobilization. But they hardly do, especially as they shy away from the collection of personal income tax from the citizenry and tenement rates.

Structurally, Nigerian local governments encounter some kinds of inferior recognition by the Federal and State governments. It appears that local governments, by virtue of the recognition of a federation as being generally governed by the Central and State governments, are barely recognized as a tier of government in Nigeria. Thus, in spite of the legal and constitutional provisions, local governments have been scrapped by both democratic and military regimes. The apparent structural inferiority of the local governments vis - a - vis the Federal and State governments, in spite of constitutional provisions, is a reality of disturbing importance. These belittling attitudinal relationships of the higher level governments to the local governments actually, to a degree, erode local governments' autonomy (Imhanlahimi and Ikeanyibe, 2009).

Hard-earned and limited resources accrued to and raised by local government are always mismanaged. Priorities are misplaced; projects are done not according to, or as demanded by the people but regrettably in tune with the selfish end and aggrandizement of the political leadership in collaboration with the senior bureaucrats at the local government level. Coupled with this, is the greatest bane of development in the Nigerian public service in general and local government in particular which corruption is. Recently, it was

discovered that local government councils in Kaduna State embezzled thirty billion naira (Blueprint Newspaper, 2012). Reports of probe panels at the three tiers of government have revealed the culpability of civil servants. Corruption has been rampant among the senior and junior bureaucrats to whom the public funds meant for developmental purposes are entrusted. Generally, wide-scale embezzlement by officials of the grassroots has made the needed development of the grassroots a tall dream and has rendered them financially incapable to discharge their constitutional assigned responsibilities (Imhanlahimi and Ikeanyibe, 2009).

The degree of external influence and intrusion in local government affairs by the federal and state governments is worrisome and needs re-evaluation. A situation where the state governor unconstitutionally dissolves the entire elected council's officers without proper investigations on spurious allegations is not good for the future of local government administration in the country. Sacking of all local government chairmen and councilors in Ekiti by Governor Kayode Fayemi in 2008, Governor Rochas Okorocha of Imo State did same as soon as he took office on 29<sup>th</sup> May, 2011. Yet, Governor David Jonah Jang of Plateau State recently sacked all local government chairmen and councilors. Governor Rotimi Chibuike Amechi of Rivers State recently displayed this air of arrogance and show of power drunk by sacking eleven (11) council chairmen for arriving late to a meeting he convened (Guardian Newspaper, 2012) are typical examples. Such external interference indeed subverts democratic process and undermines constitutional authority at the grassroots level. The crux of the matter is the 'almighty' power and misuse of it enjoyed by the state governments over local governments. Practically, and in true sense, local government in Nigeria lacks autonomous financial power. Local government is now considered as an extension of state's ministry. The inherent nature of this problem has caused subservience, a situation where local government waits for the next directives from state government before the

former could think of, let alone embarking on developmental projects. This has made local government an object of control and directives.

Ajayi (2004) identified political control state governors have on the local government chairmen as a major challenge. This is as a result of the fact that state governor sponsors election of most, if not all, of the chairmen. They are handpicked by the state governor rather than being elected. It is a clear case of who pays the piper dictates the tune. For instance, in most of the states, there is this unholy alliance between state government and local councils in the state, where the state government constitutes 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. The situation is so alarming and worrisome that one begins to wonder if local government truly is a third tier of government or a ministry or parastatals under its respective state government.

This in a way paves the way for the state government to plan for the local government and release the money in installments. The overall effect of this is the negative impact it has on the people of the grassroots as they are getting more and more alienated from developments. Also illustrative and instructive is the arrest and prosecution by the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) of the former Enugu State Governor, Chimaroke Nnamani, on the allegation of diverting local governments' funds in the state. Governor Peter Obi of Anambra State, whose second term tenure will soon end, is yet to conduct elections into the local governments in the state since he came to power. This shows the level of influence and control that state governors have over local governments in their respective states. This undue interference has incapacitated local government from functioning effectively and alienated grassroots people from enjoying services delivery expected of local government.

Yet, the problem of godfatherism in the local governments affects its autonomy and hence lacks the ability and capacity to make the desired development impact. The concept of political godfather is well known in Nigerian political scene (Ikelegbe, 2005; Imhanlahimi and Ikeanyibe, 2009). A political godfather is the sponsor of the political office holder, such as, the local government chairman. Therefore, the latter has little autonomy before his godfather. He takes dictates from the godfather and acts accordingly, especially if he wants a second term or peace in his office tenure. The sponsorship by the godfather is usually financially based, and so he has to recoup his expenditures from his political stooge. While the political office holder meets the demands of the godfather and his personal political interests, the funds left for development are lean.

Indiscipline is rampantly perceived and well pronounced among the workers in local government. The senior officers who travel to their families away from their offices on Friday return very late the following Monday or may decide to stay back till Tuesday; and the junior members of staff who directly or indirectly observe this more often than not are in the habit of playing truant with their jobs. Little or no commitment to duty has become a rule rather than an exception (Ajayi, 2004). Offices have been turned to marketplaces where officers hawk their goods freely. The rules that guide moral conduct and professional ethics seem to have, at worse, become cobweb that is so weak to tame the monstrous activities of the workers. Indiscriminate lustful desires are noticeable among the workers. The official's relationship between super ordinates and subordinates has been stained. Strict instructions handed down from top echelon to the bottom are either not followed or treated with levity as a result of the immoral relationship between the boss and subordinates. Official duties are seen as an extension of private leisure. Laissez-faire attitude to work has arrested the efficiency of local government and has drastically affected its performance and productivity.

Democratic consolidation process poses a problem for the local governments more than other governmental levels in Nigeria. This is because democracy has not taken firm roots. Its limiting positive effects are therefore hardly in place. Democracy is supposed to be rule-bound, respecting due process. The Federal and State governments seize the opportunity of fledgling democracy to disregard the elective representative principle and constitutionally guaranteed existence of local governments (Aghayere, 2008; Imhanlahimi and Ikeanyibe, 2009).

They went further to state that, at the least opportunity, for example, in 1980, 2002 and 2007, local governments have either been scrapped by higher level governments or had their democratic elections delayed. In their place, all manners of bodies such as development Committees, Sole Administrators and Caretaker Committees had been set up. Such policy reversal situations have had implications for the development of the localities, including loyalties to the State governments by the appointed functionaries, alienation of the people from unrepresentative governance, and diminutive development of communities. Of course, all of the above smack of corruption, which is a big challenge of local governments in Nigeria. The literature is replete with screaming headlines about alarming corruption in the Nigerian local government system (Vanguard Newspaper, 2007; Blueprint Newspaper, 2012). They carry headlines of massive corruption and quizzing of local government functionaries by the respective anti-corruption bodies in the country. But very unfortunately, the local government corruption in Nigeria is the type that the World Bank (2001: xiii) has called 'grand corruption'. It does not cohabit with development.

Problem of participation and involvement is among challenges facing local governments in Nigeria. Over the past decades, more euphemistic phrases have since been employed to justify people's participation at the grassroots. They include: "Development from Below", "Bottom-up Approach to

Development”, “Popular Participation”, Bringing Government Closer to the People” and other catchphrase to argue for people’s involvement in the affairs that directly affect them (Okoli, 1995; Lawal, 2000). From all indications and convictions, research and physical observations have shown that there has been more hue and cry than action. Local government prepares estimates for its revenue and expenditure without proper recourse to, and due consultation with, the people for whom the exercise is being carried out to know their needs, their problems and potentials. A number of factors are responsible for non-involvement of people in their own affairs. These include: Loss of interests in the project that will not benefit the chairmen and their cohorts. The age-long belief by the officials that people are ignorant, illiterate and unenlightened, lack of political will by the leadership to run an administration due again to selfish interest, poverty of socio-political philosophy for change (Ajayi, 2000).

#### **Local Government, Community and Rural Development: The Way Forward**

These recommendations are made to promote the local government institution that the Political Bureau Report (FRN, 1987), a foremost report that the vast majority of well meaning Nigerians contributed to, called ‘Local Government for development’. Local government areas in the country are in dire need of real and genuine development.

The present consensus on the critical importance of the local government for development purpose provides an opportunity to redesign the local administration system in Nigeria. The most important requirement is to improve the capacity in the third tiers of government; their institutional capacity should also be upgraded. The required critical resources include: human, material, financial and policy or procedures. Reform in whatever capacity should focus on how to increase these resources at this level of governance and more so the Federal and State should carry along these tiers of government in the formulation of policy. In line with this, it is recommended

that the following crucial strategies should be looked into:

The need to re-assert meritocracy by paying a living wages and provision of good incentive package so as to attract best hands and professional into the service; merit systems should not preclude the application of representative from ethnic, racial or gender balance reasons, but they must not be at the expense of merit.

Local governments in Nigeria need adequate autonomy that can facilitate their operations and development of communities. This should emanate from institutionalized democratic process of elections for representative local government councils as and when due. This should be in line with what obtains at the State and Federal government levels where elections are timely conducted.

In Nigeria, redirecting the ship of state in the positive direction appears to have failed. This calls for re-strategizing even by using the same method(s). The first port of call in this regard is to demand for re-orientation of leadership in all facets of societal life. The deficit in positive leadership has been so glaring that it finds expression in the decay in all aspects of the country’s life. Yet, no country aspires to greatness without a critical mass of men and women of integrity, zeal and enthusiasm for their nation. The sooner the country throws up this crop of leaders the quicker the country’s dream of greatness could be realized.

It is only when positive leadership is in place that the developmental crisis of the local governments can be tackled and resolved. Developmental crisis is an inevitable outcome of the capitalist model of organizing any economy. Nevertheless, it is not immutable, only if the country’s leadership can discipline itself and cut down on wasteful spending. If the native authorities could perform without borrowing, with petrol dollars local governments today can do better. Yet, no system can enjoy stability without economic growth and development. This is not to make a case for the modernization “ripeness”

argument but to affirm that economic stability create room for peace and order in the polity.

Yet, the citizenry on their part should demonstrate more patriotism in dealing with issues that affect local governments in Nigeria. They should build more confidence in the system rather than be despondent and critical of its prospects. They should see themselves more in terms of duties and obligations to their communities than what they can get from the local government as units. Going back to the past, will be a fundamental step to ensuring stability and sustenance of good governance in the local governments. One significant aspect of the pre-colonial political system that could be relevant to the present dispensation is the group solidarity basis of the state in Nigeria. This draws similarities with the social contract theories but with important variation (Akhakpe and Igbokwe-Ibeto, 2012).

The need to improve accountability as higher pay alone will not lead automatically to higher productivity. The enforcement should start from the top level down the level and citizen should be empowered to pressurize their political representatives to exact higher level of accountability from those who manage the civil service. Yet, state governments should extend the rightful financial allocations to local governments as the federal government does. State governments should henceforth eliminate all kinds of interference with revenue accruing to the local governments from the federation account, an interference that have featured prominently in works of many scholars and writers (see for example, Aghayere, 1997; Ola and Tonwe, 2005).

There should be regular and effective institutionalized training in policy management and implementation for political, executive and administrative managers at the local government level. There should also be total overhaul of accounting and auditing system, this will not only enhance performance, but also improve transparency of the local governments. Local governments must work hard to justify their autonomy through more and aggressive internal revenue

generation. This recommendation agrees with the recommendation of the Political Bureau Report (FRN, 1987).

The need for democratic consolidation as a formidable partner with the rule of law that can help to entrench the constitutional provisions on Nigerian local governments cannot be overemphasized. There are many provisions in the 1999 Constitution as amended in 2011 that are disregarded. For instance, section 7 of the 1999 Constitution as amended guaranteeing, 'the system of local government by democratically elected local government councils' has not been respected and adhered to by the State and Federal governments. Indeed, such provisions, including the establishment of a State – Local government joint account, could only have easy utilization by the Federal and State governments if a democratic culture in a country is in vogue.

Realizing that failure to do so will earn them the wrath of the electorate who can exercise the right to change their leaders; political leaders could be afraid and respect democratic tenets. The power of the electorate is weak in a non-consolidated democracy, the type which operates in Nigeria between 1999- 2007, a situation where the political leaders select rulers instead of the electorate electing their leaders. The strengthening and application of acceptable democratic culture, in line with the best practices in the World will reduce arbitrariness. Although, Independent Electoral Commission (INEC) under President Goodluck Jonathan seen to have deviated from the past, however, States Electoral Commissions are still a private estate of their respective governors. A situation where the party in power wins almost all seats at the local government pools attest to this fact. Democratic consolidation will enhance respect for orderliness, the rule of law and local government autonomy. Doing so will have a rippling effect on the development of communities by the local governments councils.

One of the greatest challenges faced by local governments in Nigeria is the monster called "corruption". The issues of corruption in the system should be properly handled by the appropriate institutions, In line with this, the Independent and Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) and Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) should be giving free hand to operate rather than be tools to witch hunt opposition by the government in power. The grand corruption described by the World Bank (2001) as not cohabiting with development is the intolerable type that should be excised from the local government system in Nigeria.

The need for discipline cannot overemphasize. The Political Bureau Report had emphasized discipline in the polity as a necessary ingredient for development (FRN 1987). The need to redesigning local government reform to give teeth to this report is very important. The three arms of government: the Executive, Legislative and the Judiciary should be proactive so that they can take the poorly performing local government chairmen to task and penalizing culprits. Discipline helps to eliminate corruption and, of course, any local government functionary who is corrupt and infringes on the law should be dealt with according to the law. This is the symbiotic relationship between corruption, discipline and rule of law. Corruption must reduce through discipline, transparency and accountability and operation of the rule of law. These and sustainable democratic process can also eliminate the canker worm of godfatherism politics in the local government system, to the enhanced development of the communities and great autonomy of the third tier of government (Imhanlahimi and Ikeanyi, 2009).

The concept of 'action – not verbal - institutionalization' should be the watch words of local governments in Nigeria. This will strongly remind the local governments about their social contract and developmental responsibilities to the people. Yet, positive impact on lives of its immediate inhabitants is the *raison d'etre* for the creation of local governments in Nigeria and elsewhere. As at

present virtually all the local governments in Nigeria try to operationalize themselves verbally and in the media, while noting is seen on ground. They need to match words with action. Road networks, pipe borne water, electricity, health care delivery, good learning environment and functional education are few and far apart in the local government areas. Hence the importance of this recommendation; that local governments should do less of verbal, but more of action (Ikelegbe, 2005).

Local governments should have less of advertisement, jingles, and posters, political solidarity rallies, etc. and move into the business of developmental activities as captured in 1999 constitution as amended. Indeed, any developmental action for a community is known by the community concerned and hardly needs any advertisement on television for the locality to know about it. There is the popular adage that "action speaks louder than voice", as well as "by their fruits, we shall know them". In fact, development efforts of any local government advertise itself to the host community and beyond. Matching words with actions would earn the local government system all the needed respect, and autonomy from the stakeholders. This could to a certain degree eliminate the spate of dissolution of local government executives in Nigeria. However, for the local governments to earn this respect and recognition from the people, they must do away with sycophancy and extricate themselves from the whims and caprices of the higher level governments.

### **Conclusion**

We commenced the paper by having a look at the meaning of local government, development in general, and community and rural development in particular, relying on the views of various authors. We are relying on the various definitions of the authors because the summarized views taken together isolated two aspects of development i.e. societal and individual. At the societal level, the indices of development includes; provision of welfare facilities such as pipe born water, good roads, schools, health care centers and facilities, markets, electricity, industries, sanitary



facilities etc. At the individual level, the indices include; level of education, standard of living, poverty, death rate, birth rate etc.

The definition of development based on these theories enable us have basis for accessing local government performance as regards development in local communities or rural areas in Nigeria. What constitute rural or community development which our literature review examined is also relevant because our venue of study is rural area. A brighter picture of the development in this area which is the concern of the paper was presented through a combined use of the system theory in general and rural development theory specifically. Efforts at conceptualizing the theories and approaches of the past administrations help us to have an insight into the problems of rural and community development which is the central theme of this thesis.

To scientifically undertake the purpose of the study, this paper traversed theoretical framework, conceptualizations, and discussed dominant issues in local government relations with community and rural development. These were followed by analysis of critical issues in development of local areas. These issues bordered on some of the achievements of the local governments, such as roads construction, provision of health facilities, and pipe borne water. The paper established that local governments in Nigeria have only made marginal impact in the localities. The paper took a deep look into the challenges that might have contributed to the lean impact of local governments, and dealt with the dominant ones for space constraint. These included the structural problems which arise from domineering relationships between the local governments and the federal and state governments as well as leadership and attitudinal problems. Other challenges to local governments' performance that identified in the paper are godfatherism and fledgling democracy. Democracy, which is supposed to be due process-bound, is easily brushed aside in Nigeria local government system, culminating in unconstitutional sack of local governments executives from time to time.

Some of the suggestions to move the local governments forward include but not limited to adequate autonomy to local governments, proper re-orientation of leaders and sense of patriotism by the citizenry, intergovernmental relations and constitutionalism. The local governments should be proactive in internally generated revenue and overt development impact in the localities, rather than sycophancy and propaganda in the media. Democratic consolidation and reduced corruption were also canvassed in the recommendations.

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