

Local Government: Effective Tool for Socio-Political and Economic Development in the South-East

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Abstract

Local government (LG) is an extension of government from the central to the local communities. Significantly, the instrumentality of local government in the sustainability of the socio-political and economic development of a state is considered very essential. Local government is purposefully established to promote development owing to its closeness to the people at the grassroots level, therefore, enhancing its ability to easily articulate and aggregate the socio-political and economic demands of the people. The basic thrust of this paper is to x-ray local government as an effective tool for the socio-political and economic development of the southeast. The paper utilized the secondary method of data collection and adopted descriptive analysis. It further adopted the Administrative decentralization theory. It was established in the literature that local government is a political/administrative therapy for sustainable rural development in the southeast but has failed owing to some socio-political and economic factors, ranging from corruption, bad leadership etc. The paper found that the existence of local government has been recognized as fundamental to the rapid socio-political and economic transformation of localities where national/state governments may not be able

to reach as an administrative mechanism and further designed to facilitate development at the grassroots. Hence, recommends among others; to make LG more fulfilling as the third tier of government, there is a need for constitutional reforms separating its powers from the state/federal government, there is a need to reduce the level of LG being over-dependent on the states so as to make them more viable and capable and for effective development to take place at the grassroots level, accountability must be promoted and Corruption discouraged

Keywords: *Local government; South East; Socio-Political and Economic Development*

Introduction

The instrumentality of local government to the sustainability of socio-political and economic development of a state is considered very important. Local government as the third tier of government debatably, is purposefully established to promote development owing to its closeness to the people at the grassroots level, therefore, enhancing its ability to easily articulate and aggregate the socio-political and economic demands of the people. The local government system in Nigeria has undergone various transformations to make it more productive and responsive to the expectations of the people principally, at the grassroots. The first major step towards achieving this (making it more productive) was the execution of the 1976 local government reforms. Due to the perceived success recorded in 1976, the Nigerian government upgraded the Local government system to a third tier of government through the 1979 and 1999 constitutions, thus making it more effective (Ogunna, 1996; Odo, 2014; Avanti, Onyekwelu and Madubueze, 2015). Local governments have been recognized as fundamental to the rapid socio-political and economic transformation of localities that national and state governments may not be able to reach (Ezeh & Muanya, 2013). Hence the creation of local government, constitutionally hinged on the sustainability of developmental purposes which invariably is to meet the socio-political and economic needs of the people at the grassroots.

From the above therefore, the 1999 constitution guarantees the existence of a democratically elected local government system, like the 1979 constitution which gave the states the responsibility to handle issues of organization and structure. This resulted in the inconsistency of most of the state governors within the South East to handle the affairs of the local government in a way and manner that suits their operation, most of them upon assumption of office, their first assignment is dissolution or re-constitution of the local government officials whether elected or appointed to secure grassroots support by hook or crook (The Nation, 2012).

The imposition of undemocratic structures to run the affairs of local government by the state government is illegal, one of the major indexes of social change in Nigeria is rural development, hence, the creation of local government according to Ezeh, (2013) 'the creation of local government did not occur in error'. Among scholars, it is believed that no state can boast of having achieved development if a large chunk of its rural inhabitants is still deficient in all elements of development. The idea of local government is to bring governance closer to the people at the grassroots for participation in governance, and service delivery to enhance socio-economic development and good governance (Ugwu, 2002).

Since the inception of democracy in Nigeria in May 1999, the states in the South East have not consistently adhered to the development plan of the local governments in terms of democratically electing a local council chairman who sees to the affairs of the rural people as assigned to them. When democratically elected the chairman feels close to the rural people, taking care of the rural community projects, making the impact of the central government felt by the rural people. In as much some local government in the South East region (Anambra, Imo, Abia, Enugu, and Ebonyi) has contributed to the provision of health care services, educational services, and rural network in some rural areas of the community. Notwithstanding, the effort put in place by the South East governors in the contribution to the grassroots development has not been enough, seeing the rate of poor infrastructural services in many rural communities by the reality on the ground, one is left to say that the practice of local governance failed to bring the much-expected dividend of democracy to the grassroots. This was partly due to some critical internal and external shortcomings within the local councils. More so, factors like transparency and accountability in Nigeria's local government are rhetoric most local government officials display provocative wealth gotten through criminal institutionalized stealing and corrupt practices. It is in the light of the above, the paper adopted a qualitative research method, and content analysis was applied to analyze the data collected which helped to make interpretations coherently.

Conceptual Clarifications

This review focused on some related terms with an attempt to locate a gap in literature and establish a relationship between the key variables within the study.

- (a) South East Zone
- (b) Local Government and Development
- (c) Socio-Political and Economic Development

South East Zone

The South East sometimes hyphenated as the South-East, represents the country's geographically and politically delimited area. Five states make up this region: Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, and Imo. The zone is bordered on the west by the River Niger, on the south by the riverine Niger Delta, on the

north by the level North Central, and on the east by the Cross River. It is separated between the Guinean forest-savanna mosaic in the dry north and the Cross-Niger transition forests Eco regions in the south. Culturally, the vast bulk of the zone is part of Igboland, the indigenous cultural heartland of the Igbo people, the biggest ethnic group in the southeast with over 80% of the population. With more than twenty million residents, the zone has 85 local governments, with over eleven commercial cities in the zone. In addition to agriculture, the area is also referred to as a commercial and trading zone because it is home to small and medium-sized indigenous businesses that provide goods and services. Yam, cassava, rice, cocoyam, and other agricultural goods are the principal exports from the region. The region is rich in natural resources and solid minerals, including bauxite, iron ore, lignite, clay, coal, tin, and columbite. The zone has recently been in conflict as a result of Nnamdi Kanu, the movement's leader, calling for secession and the establishment of the State of the Independent People of Biafra (IPOB).

The zone came as a result of Alex Ekwueme's recommendations led to the creation of the South East, which was originally known as Eastern Nigeria or simply East when the country was split into three regions in the 1950s. It was divided into three under the Gowon Administration (1967–1975) in 1967. More states, notably Imo and Anambra, started to form in 1976.

Local Government and Development

The term local government has been defined in different ways, depending on the orientation and experience of its users. For instance, Awa (1981) sees local government as “ a political authority set up by a nation or state as a subordinate authority for the purpose of dispersing or decentralizing political power”. Wraith (1984) sees local government as ‘the act of decentralizing power, which may take the form of deconcentration or devolution (Adeyemo, 2005). Deconcentration involves delegation of authority to field units of the same department and devolution on the other hand refers to a transfer of authority to local government units or special statutory bodies such as school boards for instance. From this perception, one can see local government as a lesser power in the national polity. It is an administrative agency through which control and authority relates to the people at the grassroots or periphery (Adeyemo, 2005).

Emezi (1984) on the other hand perceived local government as ‘system of local administration under local communities that are organized to maintain law and order, provide some limited range of social amenities, and encourage cooperation and participation of inhabitants towards the improvement of their conditions of living. It provides the community with formal organizational framework which enables them to conduct their affairs effectively for the general good (Adeyemo, 2005)’. Deriving from the

definition postulated by Awa, wraith and Emezi, the definitions have some developmental undertones. For instance, Emezi emphasized more on maintenance of law and order and provision of limited range of social services. In essence, the conceptual view of local government is basically a function of space and time. For example, the maintenance of law and order is a veritable substance for any meaningful development; be it political, social, economic or cultural development.

The powers given to local government gave them substantial control over local affairs as well as the staff, institutional and financial powers to initiate and direct the provision of services and to determine and implement projects so as to complement the activities of the state and the federal governments in their areas. These views have reinforced the idea of Okoli & Onah (2002) that local government is a process of devolution of power to the local authority to provide services of local nature. Emezi (1984), perceived local government as a system of local administration under local communities organized to maintain law and order and provide some limited variety of social amenities while encouraging formal organizational and democratic framework which enables the locals to conduct their affairs effectively for their general good or development. United Nations, Office for public administration defines local government as a political division of a nation or state which is constituted by law and has substantial control of local affairs, including the powers to impose taxes or to exact labour for the prescribed purpose (UN Report, 1960). The governing of such an entity is elected or otherwise selected.

A significant dimension to the conceptualization of local government administration relates to its developmental underpinnings. Deriving from these definitions, it can be opined that a wide range of scholars view local government from the perspective of superior/subservience relationship. Thus a summation of the definitions above points to the fact that the local government involves the conception of territorial non-sovereign community with the legal right and the necessary organization to regulate its own affairs. Local government are not sovereign unlike independent nation states. The local government per se is a subordinate government, which derives its existence and power from law enacted by superior government (Awotokun, and Adeyemo, 1999). However, the superior authority must recognize the power of local governments to exercise the right of autonomous existence to the extent contained in a constitution.

In other words, local government emanates from the decentralized process with the sole aim of ensuring development at the peripheral level. Local government provides the platform for people to conduct their own affairs in line with local needs which they alone understand better than any outside person; it provides framework for mobilizing and sustaining popular zeal and initiative in development; serves as a hedge against over-concentration of power at the center which often leads to tyranny; acts as a

two-way channel of communication between the local population and the central government; serves as a socio-economic laboratory for testing new proposals for a government organization and sound economic policies; etc.

Drawing from the above, the ultimate goal of Local government is reaching out to the grassroots with developmental strides, which ultimate goal is ensuring the overall well-being of the people, through sustained improvement in their living conditions, then people and not material things must remain at the centre of all development efforts (Gana, 1992). The fact that development is a multi-dimensional, as well as a value-laden concept (Lane and Ersson, 1997:15-16) has affected the conceptualization of development. In general terms development has been viewed from political, economic and social dimensions. Todaro (1985), for example, conceptualize development as a multi-dimensional 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. Todaro, (1989:89-90) identified three core values of development as follows: the ability to provide as many people as possible with basic needs or the ability to acquire adequate food, shelter, health care and protection. It also entails the perception of individual or group of self-worth and esteem as a respected member of the society and freedom in the sense that individuals and the society at large have an expanded range of choice.

Sen (1990) offered illuminating thoughts on the concept of development. For him, development means capacity expansion (Sen, 1990), and it is synonymous with freedom (Sen, 1999). As capacity expansion, development requires adequate empowerment of the state and the society such that they can adequately distil their complementary responsibilities. It requires an enhanced state capacity as well as institutional governmental stability. He further argues that wherever democratization is defined as the process of transition to a stable/consolidated democracy could be a harbinger of development. The reasoning here seems to suggest that without good government being institutionalized through accountability and transparency, development may be far from being achieved. Sharma (2007) notes that the institutional deficit that characterizes so many developing and transitional countries (Nigeria inclusive) coupled with inadequate regulatory and legal framework to enforce contracts and reduce transaction cost deprived these countries of needed productive investment and economic development. He maintains that democracy influences economic development; specifically, secure property rights that gives incentives to individuals to be productive institutionalization of the rule of law, especially constraints against the executive and an electoral mechanism that give citizens the ability to evict the rascals that are essential to promoting development.

Aborisade (1988) highlighted the various development programmes designed by successive government in Nigeria, which aimed at developing the rural communities, example of such include: River Basin and Rural Development Authorities established in 1975 to promote rural development. He laments that in practice the scheme bloated bureaucracies feeding on mega million naira contracts for irrigation and other agricultural projects while the rural areas for which they are meant seemed to have recorded deeper in debilitating poverty. According to Olowo (1991) described government approach to the development of the local areas as a mere sham. According to him, government has succeeded in imposing development programmes on the rural masses, such programme he argues, only benefited a few rich and powerful urban elite.

Nwaka, (1999:33-36) on his part argued that government imposition of rural development programme on the communities have been Cog in the wheel of rural development. As he puts it, government has often set community development; priorities without the participation of the target or relevant communities. He suggests that since government, communities are the engine of growth; government should play down its excessive control in gambling out development goals and priorities for local communities.

Socio-Political and Economic Development

Socio-Political and Economic Development involves a sustained increase in the economic standard of living of a country's population. Thus, socio-economic development can generally be defined as a process of changes or improvement to social and economic conditions that affect an individual, organization, or an entire country. Development is a complex issue, with many definitions, and is defined as a permanent condition of positive growth, resulting in a higher level or condition, which is better than the previous stage or position (Iheanacho, 2012). While economic development implies more output derived from greater amounts of inputs but also greater efficiency i.e. an increase in output per unit of input and in the allocation of inputs by sector. Economic development is the sustained, concerted actions of policymakers and communities that promote the standard of living and economic health of a specific area that can involve multiple areas including the development of human capital, critical infrastructure, regional competitiveness, environmental sustainability, social and other initiatives, it is a policy intervention endeavor with aims of economic and social well-being of people (Jhinghan, 2008).

Socio-political development can be viewed as an all-encompassing endeavor; for practical purposes, in particular for policy-making and development management, the focus of the agents aiming at development is almost always on selected parts of the system or on specific features.

According to Oladeji (2014) socio-economic is the branch of applied economics, which deals with the problems such as population, unemployment, and poverty. While the Encyclopedia of Housing and National Insurance defines socio-development as the process by which a non-industrial country is usually characterized by the dominance of agriculture and low per-capita incomes developments dynamics and efficient industrial and service sectors and integrates them into a balance national economy that provides, a much higher material standard of living for the people as a whole. But for this to be achieved, the construction of a supporting network of roads, railway, and communication equipment to bind the different regions and sectors into a nation whole would be required, this means that social and economic development has an interchangeable role because solutions found for one might equally enhance the other.

For the purpose of this paper, Angahari, (2013) definition of socio-economic development which he sees as the delivery of public goods and services at the local level or the grassroots is aimed at moving the standard of living of the people to the next level and that of Balatilo and Ibrahim, (2004) as the efficient and effective provision of basic amenities as well as social infrastructures for the people at the grassroots are by a factor to the existence of any government.

Theoretical Explication

This paper is anchored on Administrative decentralization theory as promoted by Alexis de Tocqueville as a framework of analysis. Alexis de Tocqueville admires the framers of the United States Constitution for the artful way in which they separated and balanced political powers within the Union, including the ingenious manner in which they divided sovereignty between the federal and state governments—a division now known as federalism. Tocqueville attributes the ultimate success of liberty in America, however, to a feature of American political order he refers to as “administrative decentralization,” which—going beyond federalism as such—fosters the participation of citizens in “real political life” beginning at the local (sub-state) to the center.

Decentralization is the transfer or delegation of legal and political authority to plan, make decisions and manage public functions from central government and its agencies to field organizations of those agencies like subordinate units of government, semi-autonomous public corporations, area-wide or regional development authorities; functional authorities, autonomous local governments, or nongovernmental organizations (Rondinelli, 1981). The theory of decentralization expounds on the transfer of authority and responsibility from the central government to the subordinate government to function at a level the central government might not be able to reach on time. On this note, the socio-

political and economic functions and responsibilities of the central government are given to different institutions for the efficient and effective performance of the government.

Decentralization of authority and responsibility creates a great sense of ‘we-feeling’ among the people of the area. The sense of ‘we-feeling’ foster commitment to a common cause that makes the mobilization of the people possible. It, therefore, seeks to exploit, tap, mobilize, and harness the available human and material resources of local communities and local leadership potentials and patriotism for rapid community development. Local government initiative response to local needs and conditions are maximized and competition among various local governments is promoted, socio-political and economic development is highly accelerated. Local government is designed to lay a solid political and economic development foundation for optimum grassroots development.

Decentralization is a strategy for mobilizing local resources for rural development and local government is a product of decentralization therefore, is recognized as an effective tool for socio-political and economic development of the South East and Nigeria in general because of its closeness to the rural people.

Constitutional Roles and Responsibilities of Local Government

The system of local government by democratically elected local government councils is under the Nigeria constitution guaranteed; and accordingly, the government of every state shall, subject to section 8 of this constitution, ensure their existence under a law that provides for the establishment, structure, composition, finance, and functions of such councils; the person authorized by law to prescribe the area over which a local government council may exercise authority shall include: define such area as clearly as practicable; ensure to the extent to which it may be reasonably justifiable that in defining such area regard is paid to the common interest of the community in the area, traditional association of the community, and administrative convenience; It shall be the duty of the local council within the state to participate in economic planning and development of the area referred to in subsection (2) of this section and to this end an economic planning board shall be established by a law enacted by the house of assembly of the state; the functions to be conferred by law upon local government council shall include those set out in the fourth schedule to this constitution; subject to the provisions of the constitution- the national assembly of a state shall make provisions for statutory councils in the federation, and the house of assembly of a state shall make provision for statutory allocation of public revenue to local government councils within the state.

Local Government as an Effective Tool for Socio-Political and Economic Development of the South-East

Local government is a level of government that is supposed to have its greatest impact on the people at rural areas. It is the closest government to the people as it deals with the people from the grassroots, a third tier of government saddled with the responsibility of guaranteeing the political, social, and economic development of its area. Therefore, it is not out of place to stress that its importance is significant in the socio-economic and political life of the people where the majority of the teeming populace resides in rural communities. Local government plays a crucial role in the development of the rural communities in the South East and Nigeria in general. They are seen as an efficient agent for providing services that are local in character. It is designed to achieve multi-dimensional goals of economic, social, cultural, and political development of the South East. According to Ezeani (2006) 'local government exists to provide services and it must be judged by its success in providing services up to a standard measurable by a national government'. Local government can provide certain services more effectively and efficiently than the central government because of its closeness to the rural populace.

The role and responsibilities of local government cannot be over emphasized which has been clearly spelt out under the law they include; assisting the central and state government carry out their functions and policies, mostly those areas that require local knowledge and participation for successful execution; to make appropriate services and development activities responsive to local wishes and initiatives by devolving or delegating them to local representative bodies; to facilitate the exercise of democratic self-government close to the grassroots of our society and to encourage initiative and leadership potential; they serve to promote democracy at the grassroots; to mobilize material resources through the involvement of members of the public in their development; acting as a veritable instrument for development; helping people, mostly in the rural areas to organize themselves for the mobilization and effective management of community resources and central government programmes respectively (Ola & Tomve, 2009; Ezeani, 2006). Local government which is an effective tool for the development of the South East regions cannot be over-emphasized because a government that is closer to the people is more responsive to the needs of the citizens than large units of government; it is the government at the grassroots and near enough to the people, therefore is able to articulate and tackle the problem of the people and the existence of the local government recognizes the superior capacity of the local people to understand and conduct their own local affairs. The people themselves are able to secure a closer adaptation of public services to local needs than the central or state government, looking at the locality from afar. Local government encourages people to become involved in the lives of their communities. People tend to resist imposition from outside but defend what they themselves have decided and believed upon.

Local self-government is and must be the basis of any true system of democracy because democracy at the top may not be a success unless you build on the foundation from the grassroots as everyone knows everyone else, the chance for fair and open working is greater (Ugwu, 2012). The existence and functioning of local government from the grassroots level have many advantages, cases of corruption are few, as nobody would like to be exposed, some community effort and citizen participation in decision-making are higher and citizens have a stake in their own affairs. Local affairs can best be managed locally, they know its area of activity in which it can develop its competence, small population, and geographically united area to cope with.

State of the Local Government of the South-East at a Glance

The 1999 constitution guarantees the existence of a democratically elected local government system, like the 1979 constitution which gave the states the responsibility to handle issues of organization and structure. This resulted in the inconsistency of most of the state governors within the South East to handle the affairs of the local government in a way and manner that suits their operation, most of them upon assumption of office, their first assignment is dissolution or re-constitution of the local government officials whether elected or appointed to secure grassroots support by hook or crook (The Nation, 2012). The imposition of undemocratic structures to run the affairs of local government by the state government is illegal. Since the inception of democracy in Nigeria in May 1999, the states in the South East have not consistently adhered to the development plan of the local governments in terms of democratically electing a local council chairman who sees to the affairs of the rural people as assigned to them. When democratically elected the chairman feels close to the rural people, taking care of the rural community projects, making the impact of the central government felt by the rural people.

The available record shows that some local government in the South East region (Anambra, Imo, Abia, Enugu, and Ebonyi) has contributed to the provision of health care services, educational services, and rural network in some rural areas of the community. Notwithstanding, the effort put in place by the South East governors in the contribution to the grassroots development has not been significant enough seeing the rate of poor infrastructural services in many rural communities by the reality on the ground. Anambra state since the inception of the democratic regime has only in 2013 and 2017 conducted elections to the various local government councils, Imo state had conducted in 2004, 2008 and 2018, Abia state had in 2004, 2008, and 2016, Enugu state in 2004, 2007, 2011, 2013 and 2017 while Ebonyi state in 2004, 2010, 2013 and 2017 respectively.

Taking a critical look at the above shows that the South East has not been consistent in democratically electing chairmen to occupy the local government seat rather they resort to an undemocratic

appointment based on who will dance to their binding. There is no doubt about it that the caretaker committee members appointed by the different state governors within those periods while in office will obviously represent themselves and the governor that appointed them. The central purpose of local government is to make funding on governmental presence at the grassroots and the constitution expressly guarantees the existence of a system of local government by democratically elected local government councils and the same subsection of the constitution tied the local government councils to the apron strings of the state government. But as part of the governance process in Nigeria, local government chairmen and other local government officials are to be freely elected by the citizens while they are equally expected to be developmental catalysts from their various communities to the benefit of the states. Local government still remains an indispensable icon of any genuinely democratic system as they constitute a central focus of the quest for a viable socio-political and economic development of any region. They are seen as strategic institutions for the provision of the basic socio-economic environment and other services for the developmental purposes of the rural communities. They are engines of growth and drivers of rural development (Ugwu, 2012).

However, taking a short to the local governments in the South East region one will be forced to say that the state government has measured greatly in terms of urban development but looking deep into the rural areas you will but weep for the state of the local communities. Local government is a political and administrative unit empowered by law to administer a specific locality, they are created to complement the activities of both the state and the federal governments in ensuring socio-economic development of the rural areas in Nigeria therefore, the local governments need to be more committed to the idea of community participation and involvement at grassroots level which in turn will engender the needed socio-economic development of rural areas.

Most of the rural areas in South East, Nigeria is in a pathetic state of development, the available structures even in most urban local government are also deficient and left uncared for. They have not been able to significantly provide social services in all the local governments that made up the state, such services as community health care delivery, education, and basic physical infrastructural facilities such as the community farm roads, portable drinking water, motor parks, rural electrification as a result no grassroots growth has occurred. The rural communities resort to self-help. Some state of the South East has no functional local government council, though there are transition committee chairmen across the local governments within the region. They have recorded endless cycles of appointments and dissolutions of different batches of transition committee chairmen across the state, and local government roles and responsibilities have been effectively usurped by the state. Pay parade exercise in the local government is now controlled by the state with the local government rendered incapable of

executing a rural project. Revenue officers at the local government have been grounded by a recent directive allowing officials from the state to move across the local government council areas on the ground of revenue drives while the local government council area is left helpless and unfunded. The South East local governments are equally characterized by an apparent lack of health institutions as there are hardly any well-equipped hospital health centers or rural clinics and maternal homes in most of the rural areas no medical institution of any sort exists at all and where they do, the people have to travel very far to access them. Water supply in rural areas is grossly inadequate and the spread of waterborne disease is increased by the accompanying poor sanitary conditions.

Generally, as regards rural development, the following areas (economic, education, transportation, communication, health and agricultural sectors, provision of essential amenities, general security, and industrialization) have not been given adequate attention, there is apparently a lack of development of those sectors and these areas are the primary assignment of the local government but instead perform very little which is reflected in the near total lack of basic infrastructure and social services. Most local government headquarters look gloomy, bushy, and deserted as workers are ill-motivated to give their best. Those appointed to supervise lack the will to enforce discipline because workers are not paid regularly and even when the salary comes, they are underpaid. Education which is supposed to be the birthright of every child is an illusion to many poor rural dwellers. In some rural areas, there are no schools at all while in some the schools are shabby, ill-equipped, and poorly staffed. The local road network in rural areas is not left out. Large farm roads are maintained by community efforts. This cannot really be effective such that mere community efforts cannot adequately address it. There is apparently a lack of development in rural areas within the South East region as reflected in the near lack of dilapidated infrastructures in many rural communities.

Findings

From the discussions above it is obvious that the existence of local government is purposely created by law for local communities by which they manage their local public affairs within the limits of the constitution is recognized as fundamental to the rapid socio-political and economic transformation of localities where national/state governments may not be able to reach as an administrative mechanism. Accordingly, it has been established that if local government is recognized as a political/administrative therapy for sustainable rural development in South East it will be an effective tool of development if given the power to perform the roles and responsibilities as enshrined in the constitution. This will arouse socio-political and economic development at the grassroots level. Although most of the states were able to achieve developmental projects in their respective jurisdictions towards improving the standard of living, some states in the region have put enormous efforts towards rural development; some have started and finished a variety of community development projects in the communities. These

projects are insufficient in alleviating the suffering of the rural people as they are yet to experience the much-needed development. The creation of local government is for the rural communities to feel the impact of governance from the central down to grassroots has not been felt in most of the rural areas within the South East region in terms of changing the lives of the people which is one of the bedrock of the rationale for the creation of local government.

The paper also discovered that the imposition of undemocratic structures to run the affairs of local government contrary to section 7 of the constitution by the state government is illegal. This makes most of the state government manipulate the affairs of local government to their interest. It was also discovered that the inability of local government to function as provided by the constitution is a function of the political class who sees local government areas as their catchment area for votes during the election and thereby use their offices through the constitutional instrument of state joint account system to deny any local government where they had little or no vote access to the fund. State governments see only what they would benefit from rather than see what would be done to develop the grassroots.

Recommendations

To make Local Government more fulfilling as the third tier of government, there is a need for constitutional reforms separating its powers from the state/federal government, there is a need to reduce the level of Local Government dependent on the states so as to make them more viable and capable and for effective development to take place at the grassroots level, accountability must be promoted and Corruption discouraged. Secondly, the state government should be made to adhere strictly to sections 7 and 8 of the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended) stating that there shall be a democratically elected council and the government of every state shall ensure their existence under a law that provides for the establishment, Structure, composition, finance, and function of such council.

Lastly, the local people should be given the opportunity to choose their local council representatives, this will ensure that they will be answerable and close to the people and should try to fully utilize the internally generated revenue and maintain a balance in the development of both urban and rural areas.

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