

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATION AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA: A STUDY OF DELTA STATE

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ABSTRACT

The major aim of government is to provide services that make life worthwhile. Local government plays critical role in assuring the efficacy, availability and accessibility of amenities to the huge local residents. The local governments struggle with certain factors that affect their service-delivery as well as economic development. Autonomy, funding, corruption and leadership are central to these factors as they could be responsible for the sluggishness in the economic development of the Delta State Local Government Areas (LGAs). This study therefore examines the effect of local government administration on the economic development in Delta State. The study adopted historical research design which is qualitative in nature. The study made use of secondary sources of data such as books, journal articles, newspaper articles, periodicals, internet materials, among others. The Efficiency Services Hypothesis was adopted as its theoretical framework which is premise on the fact that local governments are created for the purpose of decentralisation of the powers of the state, therefore, efficient services at the local government level cannot be provided adequately without decentralisation of the powers and functions of government. The study finds out that service delivery in local governments in the country, including the twenty-five (25) LGAs in Delta State is tied to granting of autonomy, funding and good leadership which are the major variables that have positive and significant relationship with economic development of the local government areas. To achieve the much desired socio-economic development at each local government areas in Delta state, the local government should be given autonomy; corruption is not the major issue in the local government administration, but leadership. If leadership issues are adequately addressed, then corruption will be completely erased from the local government in Nigeria, particularly in Delta State.

Keywords: Local Government, Administration, Economic Development, Autonomy, Corruption, Delta State, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

Economic development deals with the expression of a major shift and expansion in the economic sector of many nations in the international system, including Nigeria. It is the mechanism through which a country enhances its citizens' economic, political and societal well-being. Economic development evolves as a consequence of ongoing efforts to solve concerns such as safety and long-term viability. Economic development defines the increase or growth in all aspects of a society, including education, health, infrastructure, security, leadership, government, and political stability (Edobor & Umemezia, 2018). Ugbomeh and Atubi (2010), and Edobor and Umemezia (2018) argued "that scholars, researchers and analysts alike used average income or per capital income to denote economic growth of a nation-state. From this perspective, economic growth reflects an increase in real income. The implication is that there is a consistent rise in what can be bought with one income indicating that the people experience rise in their income level, stability of employment, increased educational opportunities, improve health care system, procurement and consumption of dietary food items at affordable prices, improved shelter and availability of various public services (Edobor & Umemezia, 2018). All these

will not be possible if the governing and administrative machinery of the state is not effectively shaped.

United Cities and Local Government for Africa (UCLA) (2016), and Anayochukwu and Ani (2021) argued that "for a nation to have an effective system that can ensure sustainable national economic development, it should begin with economic development at the local government level which is coincidentally closer to the people, that is, taking a development stride from the grass root". This may be possible if there are efficient local government administration and that which is the closer to the people. Local government administration (LGA) thus should demonstrate such tendency. Mobolaji and Oriakhogba (2015) and Mtasigazya (2019) respectively argued "that local government in Nigeria was created primarily to stimulate growth at the grassroots level; therefore local government council areas should be constructed in such a way that they are sustainable and competent of fulfilling this goal". Chapter 1; Part 1, Section 3 Sub Section 6 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN) 1999 (as amended) specifically provided for the establishment of 774 local government areas in the country (The Constitution of the FRN, 1999).

Moreso, the government of any state, including the government of Delta State have as their major purpose the obligation of providing services that make life worthwhile for the people of the state. Suffice it to state that local government administration plays a critical role in assuring the efficacy, availability and accessibility of amenities to the huge local dwellers across the country. The demand for local government in any part of the globe originates first from the desire to encourage development at the local government level. As Odalonu (2015) and Anayochukwu and Ani (2021) rightly stated "every democratic structure should strives for excellent service delivery at the grass root level because the local government service delivery structure, regardless of location, has an impact on individuals' daily activities". Regardless of the form of government in place, local government has historically been recognised as a pathway to national integration and growth. In Nigeria, local government administration has matured, not really because of its performance and quality, but more because of its length and durability in the country's governance (Agbodike, Igbokwe-Ibeto & Nkah, 2014).

In Nigeria, the main characteristics or features of the Local Government Council Areas (LGCAs) is to carrying out activities within defined locality with certainty of populace, grassroots base level of operation, exercises variety of duties, autonomy and separate legal entity, council of elected officials, among others Anayochukwu, Ani & Nsah, 2022). Similarly, in Delta state, there are twenty-five local government areas which include Aniocha North, Aniocha South, Bomadi, Burutu, Ethiopie East, Ethiopie West, Ika North East, Ika South, Isoko North, Isoko South, Ndokwa East, Ndokwa West, Okpe, Oshimili North, Oshimili South, Patani, Sepele, Udu, Ughelli North, Ughelli South, Ukwani, Uvwie, Warri North, and Warri South West. Since local government is regarded as the second tier of government, it ensures local administration to the people at the grass roots. As the third tier of government in Nigeria's federal system, it is made up of two major arms: the executive committee and legislative council. While the executive committee or council includes the chairman, deputy chairman, supervisors (supervisory councillors) and the secretary to the local government, the legislative council on the other hand, has the duty of making laws and comprises the leader or speaker and the deputy leader or speaker of the legislative council, and other principal officers of the council including the majority and minority leaders, among others as is in the National and State houses of Assembly (Agbodike, Igbokwe-Ibeto & Nkah, 2014).

The above structure suggests that the local government areas in Nigeria and in Delta State have structural organisation purposely design to provide the needed socio-economic development at the grass root level. However, the way in which they carry out their activities makes one to imagine whether they contribute significantly to the economic development or not, particularly in Delta State. Consequently, it has become crucial to determine the causal relations between local government administration and economic development in Delta State.

Nature of the Problem

Local government administration is supposed to be a critical aspect of government through which the needs of the people within a given area is meant. Through the local government, resources are supposed to reach every individual effectively. This is arguably not the case in the local government administration system in Nigeria, particularly in Delta State. The slow pace of growth in the local government areas in Delta State begs the question. The erosion of local government autonomy, miss-management of allocations and slow decision making may have been the factors that are responsible for the sluggishness in the economic development of the Delta State local government areas. Unemployment, poverty and hunger linger despite the long decades of the establishment of local government administration in the country (Anayochukwu & Ani, 2021).

In the face of the plethora of problems that have bedevilled efficient service delivery and development at the grassroots, one may begins to imagine whether the purported services that are being rendered by the local government officers have any critical effect on economic development at the local government areas in Nigeria, especially in Delta State. A large number of studies that are related to the discourse are theoretical in perspective and have failed to establish causal relationships (Agodike, Igbokwe-Ibeto & Nkah, 2014; Odalonu, 2015). Scanty studies are empirical in nature but did not reflect the nature of local government administration and economic development in Delta state. There is therefore the need to examine the role of local government council areas (LGCAs) in enhancing socio-economic development, and the factors affecting LGCAs in enhancing socio-economic development in Nigeria, particularly in the 25 Local Government Areas in Delta state.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of the study is to examine the local government administration and its impact in the economic development in Nigeria with a focus on Delta State. While the specific objectives are to:

- i. Examine the role of Local Government Council Areas in service delivery and enhancing socio-economic development in Nigeria, particularly in Delta State,
- ii. Examine the factors affecting LGCAs in enhancing socio-economic development in Delta State, and
- iii. To suggest ways these problems can be ameliorated.

Research Questions

This study is guided by the following research questions:

- i. What are the roles of the Local Government Council Areas (LGCA) in enhancing socio-economic development in Nigeria, particularly in Delta State?
- ii. What are the factors affecting LGCAs in enhancing socio-economic development in Delta State?
- iii. What are the policy options to these problems of the LGCA in Delta State?

Method of the Study

The method of this study is historical research design. This design is adopted because of its consistency and reliability. Through the historical research design, researchers seek understanding by aspiring to establish facts from secondary source of data and arrive at conclusions regarding past events. The relevance of qualitative research method is crucial because it helps researchers in acquiring vital data from extant literature and assists researchers in collecting data. Secondary source of data are materials that are not originally created, started nor commenced by the researcher directly but from the surveys of textbooks, journal articles, government official documents, reports from dailies and periodicals, internet materials, among others.

Review of Related Literature

Concept of Local Government

Local government has been explained from different viewpoints. This is as a result of a lack of universal definition of the term. An earlier description of local government was made by Appadorai (1975) in which he sees local government "as a government that emerges from the popularity of electoral groups and is charged with the duty of administering and executing functions on issues that bother on the people in a given locality". Achimugu, Stephen and Agboni (2013) are of the view "that local government is a political sub-set of a country based on the constitution of the said country to have some degree of control over local matters with the inclusion of the authority to enforce taxation and make use of labour for a given reason". Mtasigazya (2019) sees "local government as that branch of public power or appointed and elected officers who operate within the local level for the promotion of democracy and development at the local or grassroots' level". Anayochukwu and Ani (2021) sees "local government as that which brings government functions closest to the people and has the advantage of understanding the main challenges in the locality". These viewpoints suggest that local government is concerned with a form of government in which the nation gives a free hand to certain locally formulated units to use their power for making decisions at local level especially on issues that concern the local community. They constituted unit can also assemble and utilise people at the local level to carry out their decisions. Those who form the government of such entity emerge from an election or may have been brought to office through local selection (Odalonu, 2015).

Adalonu (2015) and Anayochukwu and Ani (2021) respectively stated "that the main characteristics or features of local government councils, particularly in Nigeria are to: carry out their activities within define locality and to perform variety of legally defined duties". It implies that LGA in Nigeria must possess a degree of autonomy or independent, a separate legal entity that may sue and be sued in order to perform its constitutional responsibilities to the people. Every local government council in Nigeria, including those in Delta State is made up of elected officials as well as civil servants. In a unitary political structure, it is the smallest tier of bureaucracy, while in a federal three-level government; it is the least level of government or the third tier of government as evident in Nigeria's federal system (Odalonu, 2015; Anayochukwu & Ani, 2021).

The Guidelines for Local Government Reform (1976) as cited in Ahmed, Abdulkadir and Ado (2018:45) defined local government "as government at the local level established by law to exercise specific powers within defined areas and to initiate and direct the provision of services and to determine and implement project so as to complement the activities of the state and federal government in their areas, and to ensure that local initiative and response to local needs and conditions are maximized". Ola (1984) defines local government "as a political sub-division of a nation, which is constituted by law and has substantial control of local affairs including the powers to impose taxes or to exact labour for prescribed purpose".

The conceptual frameworks above, suggest that within the Nigerian context, local government is formed as a third tier unit of government and backed up by the constitution. Members of the local government councils in the country are elected through democracy to represent the people within a locality and provide them desirable services. Also, the local government is usually the third tier of government in a federal system such as Nigeria's. It usually exists as the second order government to the national level under a unitary system, such as the United Kingdom. But, if in a federal or unitary governmental system, all local governments, have in particular, is responsibilities for the most immediate needs of their inhabitants, with little or no entity behind them and the individual (Odalonu, 2015). To put it in another way, the researcher sees it as that

level of administration or governmental body that is closest to the people and that which brings development closer to the people.

Theoretical Framework

This study is underpinned on Efficiency Services theory of local government which its major thrust is how the local government as a third tier of government can bring governance and development closest to the people. The foremost among the advocates or proponents of this theory is a French scholar, Langood (1953). He argued "that democracy was the affairs of the nation-states and issues of majority rule, equality and uniformity are the norm of democracy or democratic rule". Langood went on to opine "that it was false to see local government as a setting for political education and democracy because it is beyond this narrow perception. Moulin and Sharpe (1970) also contributed to the development of the Efficiency Services of Local Government theory. While Moulin argued "that local government is so restricted compared to the national government that has a wider goal because the local government as third tier of government is hardly appropriate national affairs in terms of experience and knowledge.

Sharpe (1970) on the other hand, argued "that local government was the most efficient way for providing services that are essentially local and beneficial to the local people". Mackenzie (1964) and Ola (1984) opine that efficient performance of services is so compelling that if local government does not exist, something else will have to be created in its place. Milan-Garcia, Rueda-Lopez and De Pablo-Valenciano (2021:1) conceive the Efficiency Services of Local Government theory as closely related to the Theory of Fiscal Federalism which its major thrust is also on how best local government as the third tier of government can perform efficiently. Milan-Garcia, et al. (2021:1) thus state that the thrust of the theory of fiscal federalism lies in its modest effort to express the pertinence of local government administration in any democracy. Local government can only achieve greater economic efficiency if its administration is decentralised (Milan-Garcia et al., 2021). It therefore implies that local government as a tier or institution of government is indispensable in any democratic system of government because it plays pertinent roles such as coordinating and fostering development at the grass root level as evident in Nigeria's federal system of government.

Amujiri (2017:109) argues "that the fact that local governments are the result of decentralisation and efficient services at the local government level, local government cannot be provided adequately without decentralisation. Because many states are huge in both territory and population, decentralisation is regarded to be required. As a result, administering all sections of the country from the national capital becomes extremely challenging. Decentralisation through local governments allowed for the formation of small units and governmental power centres that could serve an equally small population (Amujiri, 2017:109). Because the major thrust of the Efficiency Services of Local Government theory is how to bring government closest to the people, its proponents therefore strongly believe that leadership at the local government level is a breeding ground for aspiring politicians. That is to say that to engage in politics is to begin from the local government. Also, participating in local politics would imply connecting the local issues to national issues (Amujiri, 2017).

Ola (2007) as cited in Makinde, Hassan and Olaiya (2016:308) argued that "the essential function of local government is to provide services therefore local government must be judged by the success they achieve in providing services measurable by national standard". Supporters of this theory argue that the local government is in the greatest position to conduct particular responsibilities efficiently. Due to the obvious council proximity to the community and the majority's modest size, this is achievable. For starters, decisions are quick and easy to make because choice objectives can indeed be swiftly identified, discussed, and feedback received (Makinde et al., 2016).

Suffice to state that the efficiency services theory of local government is the expression of the functional pertinence and responsibilities of local government administration in any democratic system such as Nigeria. For local government administration to perform efficiently it must be decentralised. This theory thus is applicable to the twenty-five (25) local government areas in Delta State since these local government are typically and actively engaged in infrastructure development such healthcare system and educational facilities; and street, roadway, parks and marketplace upkeep; agriculture, security agencies, and energy delivery, in response to community needs. This promotes efficiency and services delivery to the people of the state. Although, there are certain challenges but the fact remains that local government system provides the needed services to the grass-root faster since it is closer to the people in town and villages across the state.

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

Local Government Administration in Nigeria

Local government administration is focused with the use of a well-established structure to bring government closer to the people at the grassroots level by providing services that are satisfying, economical, productive and appropriate. The efficient and successful availability of adequate amenities and social infrastructures for inhabitants at the grass root level is critical to every local government's viability (Anayochukwu & Ani, 2021; Anayochukwu, Ani & Ntas, 2022). Mobolaji and Oriakhogba (2015:204) conceived local government administration to be different from local administration. They attempted to distinguish between local government and local government administration. To them, local administration is perceived as arising where a local government lacks substantial autonomy and does not have legal personality, and there can be local administration without local government as the case in Nigeria's local government system under the present federal system of government that is term to quasi in structure and functions.

They strongly contend that local administration is different from local government and should be seen as the Federal government of Nigerian's attempt to extend government functions to various parts of the country. In such situation, the Federal government sets up offices across the country to consider and implement national policies and programmes. Similarly, the state government would use the same strategy to reach out to different parts of the state. This point of view suggests that various caretaker committees of management and sole administrator system may be considered as local administration (Mobolaji & Oriakhogba 2015).

On the contrarily, Hague and Harrop (2001) do not see any difference between local government and local administration. This view is also shared by Hart and Garner as cited in Mobolaji and Oriakhogba (2015:205) that certain characteristics may help in distinguishing local government from local administration, as explained by them. They see local government "as local authorities and local administration as local agents of the central government or of modern public corporations administering certain services on a national basis... local authorities are legally independent entities; they are popularly elected; they have independent powers of local taxation; and they are to a certain degree autonomous" (Mobolaji & Oriakhogba, 2015:205).

This study which is concerned about local government administration in Nigeria with a focus on Delta State suggests the presence of the above characteristics. In its real sense, local government councils are created typically and actively to be engaged in infrastructure projects such healthcare system, educational facilities, street, roadway, parks, and marketplace upkeep, agriculture, security agencies, and energy delivery, in response to community needs but this is not the case in recent times in the Nigeria's federal system which has given local government limited autonomy resulting to the clamour for autonomy to local government system in the country (Anayochukwu & Ani, 2021). There is however a growing desire for autonomy at the

third tier of government and mounting debate over the propriety of autonomy to local government in Nigeria (Jaiyeola, 2012; Amah, 2018). The Local government, as Nigeria's third tier of government, is supposedly intended to act as that of the institutional structure for successful service delivery to the grassroots and overall national development, as established in the constitution (Ugwuanyi, 2014).

As a general rule, a government that is closer to its residents is believed to better meet the community's needs. A major responsibility of the local government is to promote meaningful development in rural areas. Local government is envisioned as a separate tier of government with political, administrative, and financial autonomy to allow it to work properly, as evidenced by its substantial performance of the developmental responsibilities that prompted its foundation ((The Constitution of Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999; Eytayo & Alani, 2019). Nigeria's modern local government administration originated during British colonial control. However, the system was not uniform at the time. In 1976, local government administration was restructured and provided with some amount of functions, democratic existence, and money. The 1976 local government reform established a standard system of local government administration across the country, recognised local government as the third tier of government, and gave local government administration monetary and operational independence in Nigeria. The change marked a significant break from Nigeria's prior practice of local government management (Oviasuyi, Idada & Isiraojie, 2010).

Ever since 1976 local government reform, the constitutional procedures for mobilizing people and productive resources to enable sustainable grassroots development have always been in place (Anayochukwu, *et al.*, 2022). However, the quantity of resources available to the local government and the prudence with which they are used will determine whether or not this core goal is achieved (Otinche, 2014). In contemporary societies, the local governments are responsible for providing basic services to the grassroots (its local communities) in an efficient and productive way, but its inefficiency and ineffectiveness in addressing the primary needs and wants of the people at the grassroots has rendered the third tiers of government irrelevant in the country's administration (Bolatito & Ibrahim, 2014).

Nonetheless, the local governments remain strong enough for local growth and public service delivery. Public services offered by the local government are numerous and may include the provision of public utilities, security, economic development projects, and the enforcement of the law and so on. The delivery of public goods and services at the local government level or the grass root is aimed at moving the standard of living of the populace to the next level. Schools, healthcare, accommodation, food, rural power, refuse disposal system, roadways, and transportation are just a few of the services that local governments are supposed to provide (Bolatito & Ibrahim, 2014).

As a result, local government authorities are obligated to serve the public interest in areas like as road building, shopping areas, treatment centres, drains, motor parks, and the construction of educational institutions, amongst many other things (Bolatito & Ibrahim, 2014). Agba, Akwara and Idu (2013) argue "that, as intermediaries of regional development, local governments need to use funds provided by both the federal and state governments, as well as internal income, to make a positive impact living in their operational areas by initiating and attracting developmental projects such as infrastructure facilities, water, and rural electricity". Local governments serve as a fertile ground for the grassroots democracy that is essential to national development, in addition to being a viable political and administrative instrument for the change of remote communities (Agba et al., 2013).

Unfortunately, Nigerian local authorities do not seem to be equal to the task of providing high-quality welfare services to the people. It might be seen in the bad status of the environment, the declining quality of public schools, the absence of commercial facilities, and the lack of access to health services (Olusola, 2011). Inside this domain of local governments, the administration of essential state programmes like healthcare and education, as well as the upkeep of roads and public utilities, are today both a fantasy and a delusion.

Role of Local Government in Enhancing Socio-Economic Development

Local governments were established to promote opportunities for rural locations (Agodike, *et al.*, 2014). Local governments are to use all the financing readily accessible to them by both the national and provincial governments, as well as their own self-generated income, to enhance the welfare of ordinary poor in their operational areas by instituting and enticing initiatives to the local government, including delivering of transportation infrastructure, water, and remote power generation; and maintaining livelihood opportunities by extending credit facilities for agricultural production, the arts, as well as other creative industries. It is indeed worth stating that no kind of favourable progression can indeed be accomplished unless the democratic structure in Nigeria is interpreted by: a proclivity to redirect social funds for personal gain; inability to confirm a consistent structure of government and law behaviour patterns amenable to progression, or unpredictability in the implementation of rules; extreme regulations, regulatory requirements, regulatory frameworks, and so on, that also obstruct real economy operation and incentivize repression (Agodike *et al.*, 2014).

Local government administration has already been chosen as the major efficient component for the advancement and sustainability of economic development in all newly independent states. Different agencies need work to encourage and motivate rural dwellers to participate actively in the development of their communities. However, encouraging people is the responsibility of local government, and this is a difficult task. This is to do with articulating growth in such a way those previous practices, historical convictions, the current, and the prospective are all logically and operationally connected. As a result, local government is commonly seen as a potential tool for rural development and the welfare services to the general public. The preceding discussion reveals that no study of development work can be complete without including the environment (Agodike *et al.*, 2014).

Furthermore, absence of local governance in remote regions will make these regions not to flourish culturally, constitutionally, financially, or technically. As a result, achieving social transformation and growth of the economy necessitates a broadening of activities so that localised groups and people may join in bringing vigour, passion, and, most importantly, localised development initiatives within optimised conditions (Agodike *et al.*, 2014). Local governments allow residents the ability to engage in local decision-making and local projects within the context of national policy, and, over all else, to serve as local hubs of effort and action that promote growth. If appropriately supported within a corrupt-free system, the local government system is the safest approach to gain the grassroots' input into planning and execution plans.

Local government acts as a practice field for officials, whereas local government administration prepares individuals for positions with wider political commitments. A lot of persons in higher-ranking public offices began their political aspirations at the grassroots level, in which they were recognised for future positions. However, local government administration aids in the promotion of growth at the grassroots level. Decentralisation of authority via local government in a culturally diverse country like Nigeria offers members of this community a greater understanding of the surroundings and possibilities, and adds to community engagement. It also assists

different aspects of government in bringing policies and programmes closer to the community (Anazodo, Igbokwe-Ibeto, Osawe & Nkah, 2014).

The management of the local government supports political mobilisation and sensitization of the people in its jurisdiction (Agodike, *et al.*, 2014). Any government project's effectiveness is built on the institutional framework of local government administration. Local government administration has been constantly maintained in the research to be an efficient and appropriate instrument for political education and socialisation of the people from the local area. Public engagement in choice and implementation of government programmes that influence their life is possible thanks to local government administration.

Self-generated income is a source of money used by local governments to fund development programmes at the grassroots level. This is in addition to the federation account's statutory allotment. It facilitates social facilities and public services. The management of local government fosters representative government in society and this is because local government administration is the closest tier of bureaucracy towards the community hence it allows the community to learn more about progressive principles and practices. In a federalist system such as Nigeria, local government management would foster nation-building and helps to achieve national development goals if autonomy is granted the local government.

Factors that Affect Local Government Administration

A number of factors have been identified as factors that influence local government administration in Nigeria, including the 25 Local Government Areas in Delta State which include Aniocha North, Aniocha South, Bomadi, Burutu, Ethiope East, Ethiope West, Ika North East, Ika South, Isoko North, Isoko South, Ndokwa East, Ndokwa West, Okpe, Oshimili North, Oshimili South, Patani, Sepele, Udu, Ughelli North, Ughelli South, Ukwani, Uvwie, Warri North, and Warri South West. Among these factors are corruption, lack of autonomy, and lack of leadership are the most common factors. These factors have inarguably affected local government administration in service delivery and ensuring there is socio-economic development in the local government areas across Delta State, and by extension other LGAs in Nigeria:

Corruption

In Nigeria, corruption has been cited among the challenges to successful local government administration. Corruption has seeped deep into the structure of Nigerian local authorities, particularly in Delta State. It has become the country's most serious problem with the local authorities or local government system not excluded. Bolatito and Ibrahim (2014) argued "that corruption has been canonically accepted, indulged, and applauded inside the institution of the local level..... In particular, widespread misappropriation by local authorities has caused the much-needed growth of the communities a pipe dream, leaving the local government monetarily unable to carry out their constitutional tasks". Because of this immoral behaviour, the local government has become monetarily powerless hence unable to provide the fundamental requirements for the inhabitants (Ibok, 2014).

Odalonu (2015) contends that the sporadic rise in corrupt practices in the local government councils in Nigeria has made it hard to use the requisite funds for their desired purposes. Particularly, the corrupt practices has been noticed in the way the top government officials at the local level would state unrealistic figures and forge out project demands, only to realize that such projects never existed (Bolatito & Ibrahim, 2014). The local government areas council in Delta State cannot actually be exempted from this corrupt practice because there several cases of corruption involving the administrators of the local government councils in state.

Autonomy

Autonomy reflects the independence of the local government to make decisions and carry out activities at their own discretion (Adeyemi, 2013). Within the local government structure in Nigeria, including local government in Delta State, it has been lamented by researchers that a wide level of interference occurs at the local government level. The state governors have been criticized for their regular meddling over issues that require local government officials' attention. The governors have indeed been accused of taking control of their financial allocation, taxes, and counterpart funding, as well as refusing to hold democratic elections, rather governing with appointed officials, the majority who are mostly party insiders and their relatives and friends, effectively taking the entire process of local government into a sham (Odalonu, 2015).

In certain cases, state governors have undemocratically dissolved whole constituted council's officials without constitutional protections or remedy. When a current governor takes office, one of the first things he or she does is disband the current local authorities, whether they have been elected or provisional. It is at the core of the matter since the rot is perpetuated by installing sycophants known as caretaker committees, who lack both the popular mandate and the personal integrity to fight the state government's tyranny (Odalonu, 2015). On the one hand, this disproportionate meddling has hampered local government's ability to operate effectively, while on the other side, it has disconnected grassroots individuals from the public governance that is required of area councils in Delta State and beyond.

Leadership

Leadership which deals with the ability to influence people has been identified by researchers as critical for the effective running of the local governments in Nigeria (Agodike et al., 2014). Through the right display of leadership, the local government officials in Delta State and beyond are able to put the interest of the people first before their personal interest. Leadership implies that the top officials will be able to articulate ideas on how to render effective services to the people within their local governments. It also deals with how the government would address the mal-functions such corrupt tendencies and other unethical practices within the local government areas.

Although experts acknowledge that Nigeria's leadership crisis is a nationwide problem, local government systems have indeed been heavily blamed for lack of service delivery and inadequate leadership overtime. Owing to the favouritism style of government, the local government officials often find themselves relying on the state government for making major decisions. This often causes diverted attention from the needs of the people in the local government to the need of the state governor or appointed local government officials (Anazodo, et al., 2014).

Funding

While funding is considered the life-blood of every structured society, the local government is not an exception. Within the local government, the provision of adequate funds has remained a serious issue. Despite what has been stated in the constitution, and the provision of financial supports from the federation accounts, it is surprising that the local governments functions jointly with the state government through joint accounts (Anayochukwu, et al, 2021). This implies that the local government both in Delta State would have to rely on the state government for major matters. This over-dependence in no small measure diminishes the local government officials' initiative and slowness in decision making on whether to use funds for a pressing need in the local government or not.

It is lamentable to observe that the state government would readily provide funds for local government workers' salary than for other purposes as the case in Delta State and beyond in the Furth Republic. What this implies is that the payment of salary is considered as the most

important need to the government, while project issues are often not given serious attention (Agodiye *et al.*, 2014). The majority of local officials tend to be satisfied with their federal and state funding. As a consequence, it serves as a passive delivery platform for federal and state-generated funds.

SUMMARY/CONCLUSION

The study examined the effect of local government administration on the economic development in Delta State. The findings revealed that:

- i. Local government services delivery, autonomy, and leadership were the major variables that had positive and significant relationship with economic development of the local government areas in Delta state.
- ii. Local government services delivery had the highest positive coefficient, while corruption had the least positive coefficient.
- iii. Funding in the local government was found to have a negative and significant effect on economic development of the local government areas in Delta state.
- iv. Corruption had a positive and non-significant effect on economic development in economic development of the local government areas in Delta state.

To recapitulate, research and evidence have shown that legislative and constitutional provisions, no matter how robust, cannot ensure genuine autonomy for the local authorities as a tier except if the leader really does have the democratic willpower and sustain this key aspect of government. Although the state and Federal governments often see the local government tier as a juvenile who requires patriarchy in the moments, the findings of the study have revealed that the autonomy of the local governments is critical to their economic growth and development. As shown in the study, corruption is not the major issue in the local government administration, but leadership. If leadership issues are adequately addressed, there is the tendency that corruption will be completely erased from the local government.

From the findings, it can also be deduced that the local governments suffer from funding as they often cannot rely solely on the revenues that accrue from taxes and fines within the local government areas. The allocations from the federal account appear to have resulted in large gains in local revenues. Nevertheless, when we analyse the demand on local governments' financial resources, we can see that governments still lack sufficient revenue. Their financial stability has been harmed by recurrent population growth caused by decentralisation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

In order to improve the ability of the local government to deliver their services more effectively and impact more significantly on the economic development within the local governments, there should be an emergency assessment of the constitution. This will make it possible for the government to separate those aspects that create misunderstanding between the state and local government structure. Issues relating to the funding of the local government should be put into serious consideration. For this to be possible there should be accountability of the local government officers. There should be regular audit of revenues and expenditure that accrue to the local governments. This will help to track down the sectors that contribute more to the local government and those that contribute less. This will further help the top officials to make decisions that would help the local governments.

Taking into account local government's insufficient fiscal position as a third-tier government, state governors should not encroach on the lucrative responsibilities of local governments or misappropriate local government funds in any way. Correspondingly, local governments could perhaps innovatively develop wealth creation opportunities to prevent unnecessary relying entirely on statutory appropriations. The state-local government combined accounts should indeed be abolished. Illegal deductions, extra-budgetary impositions, under-allocation, and other

issues will indeed be reduced, and it will be easier to pin the responsibility for poor results and financial malpractice directly on someone's shoulders. Perhaps the consideration of the stated recommendations would assist the government in improving the local government administration in Delta State.

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