

## **Local Government Autonomy in Nigeria: An Extensive Explication**

NELSON VC OKENE  
University of Port Harcourt, Nigeria

BENSON E. UDOMS  
University of Uyo, Nigeria

LUCKY UM ELEANYA  
Port Harcourt Polytechnic, Nigeria

### **Abstract**

The question of autonomy for local government has long divided both scholars and practitioners of the Nigerian local government system and the polarization remains. This paper looks beyond the arguments for the merits or demerits of local government autonomy as encapsulated in the dominant debate. This paper therefore joins the debate but does so by deliberately expanding the boundaries for assessing the credibility or otherwise of local government autonomy away from the issue of financial autonomy that has been at the heart of the debate. This paper makes the case that such issues as decentralization, sovereignty, democracy, accountability, constitutional provisions, and development matter in the debate. Following this extensive discussion, we recommend a change of focus to the core mandate of local government, which we suggest is service delivery rather than chasing phantoms of democracy and independence i.e. autonomy, amongst others.

Keywords: Decentralization, Sovereignty, Democracy, Accountability, Constitution, Development

### **Introduction**

The Nigerian Local government system has passed through several stages in its development, beginning as autonomous entities in village and clan governance in pre-independent Nigeria, it evolved to the Native Authority (NA) regime under Colonialism, where it operated as a structure of the colonial regime – a tool of oppression and extraction of surplus from the peoples of Nigeria. Then at various times in the evolution of post-colonial Nigeria the local government has functioned as administrative

outposts of the central government, the clientele structures of the central and regional governments, administrative structures of military governments and at other times a half-hearted trial at 'local government.' It has therefore presented a mixed bag of expectations and realities, simultaneously attracting admiration and loyalty, and disdain and rejection. However, there seems to be increasing rejection of the local government system in Nigeria especially since the return to democracy in 1999.

At the 2014 National Conference convened to address the numerous maladies plaguing the nation and to seek solutions to these problems, the controversy surrounding the local government administration in Nigeria once again came to national limelight. As the conference of Nationalities and interest groups convened outside the authority of the national assembly, in order to locate its inspirations within the ambience of civil society and beyond partisan interests, considered the local government structure and operations in Nigeria, it became obvious that the Nigerian local government system was in deep crisis. The dismal state of affairs at the local government was caused by numerous factors, among them: the rather complex history of Nigeria's Local Government development; the impact of the military intervention in Nigerian politics and the local government reforms instituted under the military; the democratic and development challenges of the Nigerian state itself; the Nigerian form of 'Federalism' (with its characteristic non conformity, being neither federal or Unitary (see Anam-Ndu, 1998) and its impact on the local government system; the illusion or rather challenges, of local democracy; constitutional crisis; corruption; 'Godfatherism' or 'clientelism', to mention but few. Scholars and informed observers of the Nigerian Local governance have rather put greater blame for the lack of progress at the feet of State and Federal authorities for their disregard of the principles of decentralization and autonomy. (Aziegbe, 1989; Osai et al 2006)

We shall join the debate by taking a closer look at the question of decentralization and autonomy and the role that the state and the federal governments have played in this regard. In order to do that effectively we shall start by looking at the principles of decentralization and autonomy. This is needful in order to lay the foundation for the ensuing debate and to better understand the extent of default, if any, by the State and Federal authorities. Thereafter we shall engage the debate on the disregard of the principles of decentralization and autonomy by the State and Federal authorities in Nigeria by looking specifically and theoretically at the 'sovereignty question', 'the accountability question', 'the 'democracy question', the 'local' and/or 'third tier' question, the role of the Constitution, and finally the stage of development of the country. Then we shall take a synoptic view of local government in Nigeria and the role of the State and Federal authorities. This of course will be done with particular bias for the issue of decentralization and autonomy but with regard to the issues raised in the debate. Then our conclusion will logically follow.

### **Principles of Decentralization and Autonomy**

The concept of decentralization evolved at the same time and pace as development administration. This came with an understanding that the centralized structures of the state that developed as a tool for colonialism was not equipped for the massive business of post-colonial development. According to Ibodje (2009:82) the need for development meant that:

The over-centralized machineries of government had to be revisited and restructured to meet the challenges of the emerging realities of development. There had to be schemes for decentralization of political and administrative structures in order to give rise to new centers of decision making about development activities at sub-national levels.

From the development point of view, decentralization was encouraged because “it was felt to have the advantage of increasing the levels of local participation and administrative efficiency, both elements being seen as necessary for achieving development goals.” (Ibodje, 2009:83) Decentralization for development generally involved “the creation of new functional units and agencies within existing ministries, as well as creating new ministries and departments with specific duties and orientations to make administration of development more result oriented in terms of project planning and implementation.” (Ibodje, 2009:83) However, most African leaders opted for decentralization through the establishment of local government institutions, following expert advice in the decades after political independence. (Ibodje, 2009) Decentralization scheme involving the establishment of local government was supported by these experts for the following reasons:

- It creates new areas of political and administrative activities at the sub-national level with the aim of bringing development activities closer to the grassroots.
- It provides incentives for cooperation among societal groups and political actors to participate in decision areas (sic) outside the national headquarters.
- There is the interest in decentralization arising from the fact that societies have become so complex and government activities have become so expanding in scope and dimension that it has become increasingly difficult for governments to plan and administer all development activities from the national capital...
- Decentralization enables national leaders to integrate areas which are isolated or lagging behind into regional economies and make it possible for administrators to monitor and evaluate implementation of development projects more effectively than could be done by central planning agencies from the capital.
- The centralized administration of scarce financial and skill resource has usually resulted in most of them being allocated to a small group of the rich and powerful; that...(third world countries chance of combatting poverty)...would be in institutions that provide for popular participation, local leadership and decentralization of authority.
- If decisions are made by local residents they are more likely to be relevant to local needs and conditions.
- For countries coming out of colonialism decentralization constitutes part of the overall trust towards democratization...

- Decentralization provides a veritable part in the accommodation of pluralism and for allowing people to play a role in the management of their own affairs.
- Decentralization helps to ensure continued political support for government programs of development at the grassroots level and firming up of political legitimacy. (Ibodje 2009:84-86)

This rather exhaustive quote tells us that the core mandate of decentralization is to achieve development, especially one that is locally motivated and oriented both in terms of decision-making, resources and personnel. It also should ensure political mobilization and democratic development. According to Conyers (1983) and Rondinelli (1983), it generally involves “the transfer of the authority to plan, make decisions and manage public functions from the central government to any organization, agency or subordinate units of government at the sub-national level.” (Ibodje 2009:87) This is not much different from the description given by Aziege (1989:37) as “a system whereby the central authority assign responsibilities to local people for local affairs, assessed with local discretion and initiative.” For the United Nations (UN), decentralization means: “The transfer of authority on geographic basis, whether by deconcentration (i.e. delegation) of authority to field units of the same department or level of government, or by devolution of authority to local government units or special statutory bodies.” (Ibodje, 2009:88)

As inferred from the above deconcentration of power can be done by delegation or by devolution. In the former the authority to plan and execute is highly limited while in the latter (devolution or autonomy) there is more freedom, as the limitation is not merely subject to the whims of superior cadres but the statutes and laws, as is the case of the Local government since 1979. We shall explore more on this in the Constitutional question. However, this suggests that both the freedom to act (autonomy) and the limitation, first and foremost is restricted to the dictates of the enabling laws and then to the discretion of the central and/or state governments. Aziege (1989:42) also infers that, “the range of functions, importance of financial resources and the nature and extent of central government control” are some of the indices used to determine the degree of autonomy.

### **Debating Decentralization and Autonomy**

The contentions over the status of local governments indicates that the failures of the local government has a lot to do with the utter disregard by the State and Federal governments of the principles of decentralization and autonomy. This is debatable, and we shall attempt to provide context by discussing the aforementioned questions and issues.

#### *The Sovereignty Question*

The Westphalian concept of sovereignty was of the indisputable power of the state not to be questioned in its internal affairs and to enjoy immunity from external interference from other states in the international system. (Magstadt, 2006) This Sovereign status was an attribute of the state but was effectively located in the King or the

executive head of the state. Consequent on this understanding of the sovereign and his inherent right to act within his state without let, interference or hindrance (from other state actors) followed the concept of autonomy, especially when looked at from the point of view of immunity. (Davidson, 2007) Autonomy also became an attribute of the sovereign within the limits of the indivisible powers of the state in its internal affairs. Some scholars have therefore used autonomy interchangeably with sovereignty, (Olasupo, 2013) suggesting the nearness or proximity of these two concepts in theory and practice.

However this concept of sovereignty has been expanded under the aegis of democracy and the interference of the international regime system made up of multi-lateral organizations and International Non-governmental organizations and civil society groups. So that the attributes or functions of the sovereign as resident in the King is now being shared internally by the Legislature, the executive as a body, the Judiciary and others acting under delegated authority from the president or the chief executive of a particular country in question and externally by institutions like the United Nations (UN), International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank (WB), the African Union (AU), to mention but few. (Goldstein & Pavenhouse 2010) One thing that has not changed is respect for the hierarchy or ascendancy of powers that locates ultimate powers within the State in the office of the Chief executive of the State (the modern Sovereign, so to say). The point of emphasis is that sovereignty and its operational correlate, autonomy is limited, even for a sovereign state. It is therefore imperative to view and discuss local government autonomy with clear understanding of its highly limited theoretical and operational applicability. (Aziegbe, 1989)

### *The Accountability Question*

Accountability by its very nature limits sovereignty and autonomy. Increasing interdependence of nations due to global warming, terrorism and the like means that nations are increasingly required to account for actions that was traditionally its internal affairs. This is not just a dictate of democracy in a unipolar world under liberal capitalist hegemony but a common sense issue necessitated by practical expediency.

The requirement for accountability imposes responsibility, limitations and consequences. This ethos is no less required for the internal harmony that is needed for national governance, or what is manifest as inter-governmental relations. This is more telling in the Nigerian case where the powers of the local government did not emerge from deconcentration but from devolution, as per the 1976 Local government reforms where the prevailing Local government system took its bearing from, and this has telling implications. This is particularly so because “a devolved government remains constitutionally subordinate to the government which gave it its power and which could in principle revoke it.” (McClean and McMillan 2003) Even when the constitution of Nigeria claims that she is a Federation, the fact that all the states of the Federation and the Local governments were, *ab initio*, creations of the federal government and not the Constitution or Sovereign assemblies pose real practical and operational constraints for the claimants of local government autonomy. (Anam-Ndu, 1998)

Another core issue in the accountability question is that local government was touted as the extension of democracy to the grassroots, at least from the liberal

tradition, to which Nigeria subscribes. Questions that beg to be answered: Is democracy in operation at the local government level? Are elected, or otherwise selected leaders at the local level accountable to the people who elected them? Is their quest for autonomy a popular one? These questions are closely related to the democracy question and so will be given more elaboration subsequently.

### *The Democracy Question*

Democracy is a very broad concept. Tom (2011) suggests that it is so vast and varied in meaning that the same terms can be used in a discussion across nations (and even within nations) while the implied meaning is different for the discussants. He further states that democracy is both a “social” and a “political” concept. Democracy as a social concept implies a constructed or evolved, shared, and spatially located construct. Thus perceived it means that it is at the same time local and universal or put differently, “a temporal and a spatial.” (Okoko and Ogali, 2009) The extent that the universal principles of democracy are aligned with local history and aspirations has implications for the acceptability and/or survival of democracy in any particular place or time. Given the contested origins and nexus of democracy, (Okoko and Ogali, 2009; Bogaards, 2009) the acceptability of any structure or process will have to combine the universal and the particular ecological or local concerns of a specific place. So we may ask, how relevant is the current local government system or structure in Nigeria conducive to democratic development? Put differently is the local government indeed a tool for the development of grassroots democracy? According to Akindele:

Grassroots democracy is that type of democracy that emerges from an inward looking set up. *It connotes that local dwellers are governed at the local level in manners conducive to feeling the impact of the existing government in terms of inputs and outputs* and, the relationship between political actors and the governed within the political culture. Through this type of democracy government is representatively brought nearer the grassroots. (emphasis ours) (cited in Awofeso, 2011:160)

In this type of democracy, and indeed in all types of democracy, as suggested by Akindele, participation, representation and accountability are core ingredients. If leaders are not accountable for whatever power they have or responsibilities they wield then democracy becomes a mirage. (Awofeso, 2011) And by extension the basis for such leaders or the institutions they represent to lay claims becomes somewhat diminished.

This goes further to suggest that a discussion of the concepts that extend and/ or localize the meaning and practice of democracy, such as local autonomy, must factor in the ecological constrain of the parent concept. Put differently, autonomy as an attribute of sovereignty and democracy cannot be properly conceived at the local level without a consummate development at the state and federal levels. This is more so since it is problematic to conceive a perfect part within an imperfect whole, especially within an interdependent system. In Africa and especially Nigeria, democ-

racy or the democratization project is generally perceived to be sailing in murky waters or at best faced with a host of challenges. (Ake, 1994; Nnoli, 1994; Berman, 2010) For Tom (2011) democracy in Nigeria has been a farce rather than a fact since Independence due to the betrayal of the Nigerian political elite. Owing to that, Tom points out that; the Nigerian masses have participated in political governance ‘only in their imagination’; as the elite turn elections into warfare, and “a weapon against democracy,” (Ake, 1994:2) leading generally to disempowerment. This position of course has implications for our discussion of the Nigerian Local government system. What is playing out could be the particular proclivities of a rogue elite in the absence of strong political institutions and loopholes in the constitution. We shall return to this shortly.

### *The ‘Local Government’ or ‘Third Tier’ Question*

As the name suggests local governments are governments at the grassroots or local level, created to address the needs of the local populace. The third tier framework was first established by the 1976 reforms when it described local government as, “Government at the local level exercised through representative council, established by law to exercise specific powers within defined areas.” (Odoh, 1988:3) The 1976 reforms became a watershed in local government administration in Nigeria because of its identification with the devolution of functions to the local government, which is statutory delineation of functions and resources. This was later endorsed by the 1979 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

The 1979 Constitution, however, makes clear the status of the local government, in spite of statutory powers and the seeming overreach of the 1976 reforms, when it stated thus:

The system of local government by democratically elected local government councils is, under this constitution guaranteed; and accordingly, *the government of every state shall ensure their existence under a law which provides for the establishment, structure, composition, finance and functions of such councils.* (emphasis ours) (Odoh, 1988:4)

The reading of this passage suggests that while local governments have been guaranteed to exist by the federal government, the extent of their powers shall be the decision of the state expressed through the laws passed by the State Houses of Assembly. This has prompted Odoh (1988:4) to state that, “the concept of third tier is actually an inter-governmental affair.” Aziegbe (1989:37) concurs, stating that “the degree of decentralization adopted by a given state is dependent upon the ‘political will and devotion of the leadership’ in its attempts to enhance the theoretical foundation on which the decentralized institution is based.” That implies that the whole idea of local government autonomy and the third tier paradigm on which it is hinged is only a little more than an idea, a suggestion or at best a guideline for action whose efficacy or practicality actually depends on so many other factors to be ‘negotiated’ between the units of government in question – namely the federal, state and local governments under it. Autonomy can also be seen both as ‘empowerment’ and ‘immunity.’ According to Davidson (2007:975) “Local government autonomy en-

compasses both *empowerment- the ability to initiate policy-and immunity-the ability to resist encroachment from another governmental entity or from a private party.*”

The aspect of autonomy that relates to empowerment is less contentious, except for constraint imposed by financial controls. The real issue is with autonomy as it relates to immunity. This is obviously less visible since this cannot be exercised by a local government that is financially dependent on both the state and the federal governments. (Davidson, 2007)The scenario so created is more conducive to an appreciation of local government as agents of deconcentration (and service tier) but not ‘autonomy’ in the strict interpretation of the word, for that might be both legally and practically problematic.

### *The Constitution as an Issue*

The Nigerian State is officially called “The Federal Republic of Nigeria” and the Constitution proclaims it as such (The 1999 Constitution). This means that she is an independent state made of federating units. The history of the State shows that the federating units which were originally ‘Regions’ and have been dissolved or devolved into ‘States.’

The local government in Nigeria is not a federating unit. A practical and constitutional problem was immediately created the moment the Federal Government reached beyond the States to create a uniform Local Government System without altering the constitutional provision that makes the local governments subject to the laws and directives of their state legislature. A critical example is the role of the State Houses of Assembly in endorsing or rejecting the impeachment of an elected local government executive. Local governments are supposed to be the creation of State governments under the federal system of government. But in the Nigerian case we see a situation where the Federal government ‘creates’ Local governments and asks the states ‘to give it life’ by making enabling laws and providing supervision. (Odoh, 1988)

The interest in ‘local government autonomy’ may sometimes appear exaggerated and misleading but it actually points to a simmering constitutional and political crisis. This crisis will endure or even deepen given the Federal Governments continued meddlesomeness in the creation of local government or its insistence on a uniform system of Local government across the States of the Republic.

### *The Stage of Development of the ‘States’ and ‘Federal’ Government*

The stage of development of the States and the Federation is very important to us here for obvious reasons. The development of the local government system, whether in governance, service delivery, local participation, representation, accountability and democratic development generally, is only likely to mirror and/or reflect the State and Federal government. For instance, William Thornhill has stated that “there is no such thing as ‘local democracy’ unique and separate from national democracy.” (cited in Aziegbe, 1989) What is evident at the local level is invariably a reflection of the situation at the State and federal level, to a more or less degree.

The Public Service Review Commission headed by Chief J. Udoji (and commonly referred to as the Udoji Commission) provides an overview of the evolution of local

government thus: "The history of local government in Nigeria has been one long episode of trial and error, of attempts to reconcile participation of people in their own administration with the needs for an efficient delivery of essential services. (Adamolekun, 1985:161)

Even though that statement was made with the local government in mind, it could very easily have applied to the State or Federal governments and where the state or federal government is in crisis the local government cannot be exempted. Ibodje (2007) agrees with Ademolekun, insisting that irrespective of the nation or system of governance, local governments are naturally uniform as tools for service delivery to the local people. The controversy surrounding various aspects of the local government system pales in the face of its mandate with respect to service delivery. (Ighodalo, 2006; Eminue, 2006; Osai, 2006) A cursory observation of the Nigerian local government system reveals its critical factor or cardinal role to be that of service delivery. This is revealed in the Institutions ability to survive all systems and forms of governance in Nigeria; from Native Authority (before Independence), to Civilian (Parliamentary system), to military regimes and back again to civilian (Presidential system). Whether the local government existed as a structure for colonial exploitation or an organ for democratic administrative governance or to humanize and/or advance the legitimacy credentials of a military junta, its unifying role remain that of service delivery. (Osai et al, 2001) However, Nigeria as a Third World nation or what is more generally referred to as developing nation, one of its critical manifestations is its weak institutional base, the absence of or low respect for rule of law and due process. This is evident in the administration of the country whether at the federal, state or local level.

### **Local Government in Nigeria: A Synopsis**

In this section, we shall present a synopsis of the evolution of the Nigerian local government (LG) system the roots of the present disillusionment. In the preceding sections we deliberately avoided a case by case assessment of what appear as infringement by state and federal governments of the principles of decentralization and autonomy. Having established a wider framework or background for this assessment, let us focus closely at the LG even if briefly.

The first point of emphasis is that the LG system in Nigeria has passed through inglorious as well as glorious phases due largely to designs of Regional and later State and Federal Governments. In pre-colonial Nigeria for instance, the traditional administrative system could be said to have exercised autonomy. (Ola and Tonwe, 2005; Ighodalo, 2006) It was essentially communalistic and self-oriented but the advent of colonialism changed all that: "It destroyed the traditional village autonomy and broke down the delicate balance of native politics in many places." (Aziegbe, 1989:41) The native authority (NA) system instituted under the colonial regime not only turned the LG into a tool of British imperial exploitation but also turned the chiefs against their people and vice versa as the norm rather than an exception. From 1954, when the Nationalists took over, there was a very unhealthy rivalry between them and the Chiefs/Paramount rulers empowered by the British. The Regional governments (in the East and West) initially sought to make a difference in the type of local governments they created but "soon reduced them to mere

pawns in their political chess boards.” In fact they soon became extensions of the ruling party and tool for settlement of party loyalists. (Aziegbe, 1989:41)

In post-independence Nigeria the fortunes of the local government system continued to suffer reverses both in the hands of civilian and military governments. Sole Administrators and Caretaker governments became the order of the day even as the functions, structure and finances of the local government continued to be whittled down. It was not until 1976 that a comprehensive and uniform reform was instituted in the Nigerian Local government system. This reform, undertaken by the Olusegun Obasanjo military regime, expanded and standardized the functions of the local government, made it a ‘democratic institution’ with elected officers and a specific tenure, it also increased and made the financial resources available to the local government statutory. (Okoli, 2005) For Akpan and Ekanem (2013:194),

The Babangida [LG] reforms initiated from 1986-1992, is the most remarkable of all the reforms. The reforms comprise the Dasuki Report initiated by the Buhari administration of 1983-1985 and the Political Bureau Report, which the Babangida administration initiated in 1986 “to search for a viable political future” for Nigeria. The reforms were remarkable for a number of reasons. First, it did not only introduce, but also amplified the issue of [LG] financial autonomy by ensuring that [LGs] got their share of the “national cake” directly from the federation account. Second, it abrogated the Ministry of Local Government and third, introduced the legislative and executive arms of government to the [LG] system in Nigeria.

Prior to this time the local governments had no constitutional recognition or backup whatsoever. (Ola & Tonwe, 2005) Olasupo (2013) provides an interesting summary of the reforms thus:

The autonomy of Local Government councils in Nigeria was expressly stated by the 1976 landmark Local Government re- form; entrenched subsequently by the 1979 Constitution and by the Dasuki Report of 1984. Other Local Government reforms are 1987 (vesting the authority to conduct Local Government election in the National Electoral Commission); 1988 (the ex-tension of Civil Service Reforms to the Local Government Service); 1989 Constitution; the 1990 (empowering the Chair-men to appoint the Secretaries at their pleasure); the 1991 re-form that introduced separation of powers to Local Government; and reinforcing the autonomy of Local Government. (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1985)

The 1976 Reforms and others following it, including the 1979 and 1999 Constitutions which almost completely endorsed the reforms, still recognized “the principle that local government is the responsibility of the state governments,” (Aziegbe, 1989:52) as such the power to conduct local government elections now rests with commissions appointed by the state. In addition the state governments continue to retain the power to dismiss elected officials if it is determined, according to state

edicts, that they are unable to discharge their functions effectively, and then Caretaker committees can be appointed in their stead. (Adamolekun, 1985)

With respect to local government finances, the state and federal governments in Nigeria continue to play a pivotal role. Statutory allocations to the local governments are rooted through the state governments and these are sometimes withheld, not remitted in full, diverted or simply shared between the state government, the party leadership and their cronies at the local level. But grants from both the federal and state governments continue to be sources of control and manipulation of local autonomy as the level of their discretionary powers is limited. (Adamolekun, 1985) The financial and other controls are even more elaborate given the extent of state approval for the local government budget, both before and after budget approval, operational controls, supervisory control, power of review, etcetera. (Alu, 2006)

All things considered, "it is a truism that there is hardly anywhere in the world local government has complete autonomy but the relative autonomy which local government is assumed to enjoy through its legal framework has always been circumvented through political and administrative maneuvers." This is particularly true of Nigeria. (Aziegbe, 1989:40) We should not also lose sight of the fact that the autonomy that the local governments have been able to garner have come as a result of federal and state laws. (Davidson, 2007)

Sometimes the status of local governments is made worse as a result of supremacy tussle between the Federal and State governments A good example is the conflict that arose when the Lagos State government under the leadership of Sen. Bola Tinibu decided to create new local governments which they called 'development centers', claiming that as a federating unit they had power to do so. The Federal government under the leadership of President Olusegun Obasanjo, thought differently, as a result the Federal government ceased all statutory allocations accruing to the entire local governments in Lagos State. The FG demanded that the Lagos State government return to status quo before she can get the seized funds. In consequence of this the Lagos State government went to court. While the case lasted, local governments in Lagos State were denied of much needed funds for its developmental projects. At the end of the day however, the Lagos State government reclaimed the funds through the Court of Law.

## **Conclusion**

We have taken a rather holistic approach in analyzing the issue of the disillusionment in local government administration in Nigeria: While the poor performance of the local government in Nigeria is an attribute of the disregard by the state and federal governments of the principles of decentralization and autonomy (even when limited to that which is provided for in the statutes), much more and seemingly external issues are often ignored in the ensuing debate on local government autonomy.

We have carefully shown that the ecological and / or external factors surrounding the debate on decentralization and autonomy must be carefully considered in order not to take the issue of decentralization and autonomy of local government in Nigeria beyond reasonable limits. Our discussion reveals that decentralization and autonomy are not end-goals in themselves but tool for development administration, local democracy enhancement and development. Our discussion on the 'principles of

decentralization' reveals that decentralization and autonomy (decision making powers at sub-national levels) evolved out of administrative expediency even before it became fashionable as democratic ethos.

### **Recommendations**

We therefore recommend a change of focus to the core mandate of local government, which we suggest is service delivery rather than chasing phantoms of democracy and independence i.e. autonomy. We also deduce from the above discussions that solution to the issues surrounding decentralization and autonomy will gain currency as the state of governance improves generally and democracy is consolidated at all levels. But the road to this end will be shorter if the constitution is respected and conflicts arising from it are subjected to the due process of the law. Perhaps this would create another ground breaking reform that will deal with all the issues thrown up by the 1976 local government reforms. It could also deal with all the constitutional issues that hinder decentralization and 'local government autonomy', in full consideration of all the other ecological factors. Therefore rather than the present over emphasis on local government autonomy, emphasis should rather be placed on enhancing inter-governmental relations, which will of course be a blend of legality and expediency.

### **Correspondence**

Nelson VC Okene  
Department of Political and Administrative Studies  
Faculty of Social Science, University of Port Harcourt  
Email: dokinta2002@yahoo.com  
Tel.: +234: (0)8036771974

Benson E. Udoms  
Department of Political Science & Public Administration  
Faculty of Social Science, University of Uyo  
Email: bensudoms@yahoo.co.uk  
Tel.: +234 (0)8038657835

Lucky UM Eleanya  
School of Foundation and General Studies  
Port Harcourt Polytechnic  
PMB 5936, Port Harcourt, Nigeria

### **References**

Aborishade, O. (1985) "Some Aspects of Administration at federal, State and Local Levels" in L. Adamolokun (ed) *Nigerian Public Administration 1960-1980: Perspectives and Prospects*. Heinemann Educational Books Limited, Ibadan

- Ake, C. (1994) *The Democratization of Disempowerment in Africa*. Cass Occasional Monograph No. 1. Malthouse Press Ltd, Lagos.
- Akpan, F. and Ekanem, O. (2013) "The Politics of Local Government Autonomy in Nigeria Reloaded" *European Scientific Journal*, 9(35).
- Alu, F. O. (2006) *Nigerian Local Government Finance: A Political Approach*. John Jacob's Classic Publishers Ltd, Enugu
- Anam-Ndu, E.A. (1998). *The Leadership Question In Nigeria: A Prescriptive Exploration*. Geo Ken Associates Limited, Lagos.
- Awofeso, O. (2011) "Local Government and Grassroots Democracy in Nigeria: Myth or Reality" in: O.A Bamisade and O. Awofeso (eds) *Democracy and Democratic Practice in Nigeria: Issues, Challenges and Prospects*. McGrace Publishers, Lagos
- Aziegbu, S. A. (1989) "Local Government Autonomy in Nigeria: A Critical Appraisal." Proceedings of Annual National Conference of the Nigerian Political Science Association.
- Berman, B.J. (2010) "Ethnicity and Democracy in Africa: Policies for Harmonious Development." JICA Working Papers, No. 22, November 2010. JICA Research Institute. Assessed online 03.14.2013.
- Bogaards, M. (2009) "How To Classify Hybrid Regimes? Defective Democracy And Electoral Authoritarianism" in *Democratization* Vol. 16, No.2, April 399-423.
- Davidson, N. M. (2007) *Cooperative Localism: Federal-Local Collaboration in an Era of State Sovereignty*. Available online at: [http://www.ir.lawnet.fordham.edu/faculty\\_scholarship/157](http://www.ir.lawnet.fordham.edu/faculty_scholarship/157). accessed on: 10.26.2014 1.13am.
- Eminue, O. (2006) "The Theory of Local Government: The Indispensability of Local Governance in Operationalizing the Fundamental principles of Peoples-Centeredness" in A.N. Ekpe (ed) *The Substance of Local Government Administration In Nigeria: Theory and Practice*. Lagos-Nigeria: Abbot Graphics.
- Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999) *The 1999 Constitution*. Abuja: Government Printers.
- Federal Republic of Nigeria (1979) *The 1979 Constitution*. Abuja: Government Printers.
- Goldstein, J.S. and Pavenhouse, J.C. (2010) *International Relations (9<sup>th</sup> ed.)*. New York: Longman-Pearson.

Ibodje, S.W.E. (2009) *Administration of Development: Issues and Problems*. Warri: AMEKATIC Research Publishers.

Ibodje, S.W.E. (2007) *Comparative Local Government*. Port Harcourt: Kemuela Publications.

Ighodalo, A. (2006) "Third-tier of Government and Democracy" in Emmanuel O. Ojo (ed) *Challenges of Sustainable Democracy in Nigeria*. Ibadan: John Archers (Publishers) Ltd.

McLean, I. and McMillan A. (eds) (2003) *Oxford Concise Dictionary of Politics*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Magstadt, T. (2006) *Understanding Politics*. Canada: Thomson Wadsworth.

Nnoli, O. (1994) *Ethnicity and Democracy in Africa: Intervening Variables*. CASS Occasional Monograph, Lagos: Malthouse Press.

Osai, O.J. (2006) *Governance At The Grassroots of Nigeria: An Experiential Explication*. Port Harcourt: Ulamba Publishers.

Osai, O.J. Isinka, J.N. Anyekere, S.T. (2006) "Local Government in Nigeria: A Historical and Developmental Overview" in O.J. Osai *Governance at the Grassroots of Nigeria: An Experiential Explication*. Port Harcourt: Ulamba Publishers.

Osai, O.J. Eleanya, L.U.M and Isinka, J.N. (2001) Local Government in Nigeria: Functions and Challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century" in O.J. Osai (ed) *Introduction to Political Science: A Nigerian Perspective*. Port Harcourt: Osia International Publishers

Ola, R.O.F. and Tonwe, D.A. (2005) *Local Administration and Local Government in Nigeria*. Lagos: AMFITOP Books.

Olasupo, F.A. (2013) "The Scope and Future of Local Government Autonomy in Nigeria" in *Advances in Applied Sociology*, 3(5): 207-214.

Odoh, A. (1988) "Local Government as Third Tier of Government: Roles, Functions and Challenges" (unpublished).

Okoli, M.U. (2005) *Local Government Administrative System: An Introductory and Comparative Perspective*. Onitsha: Abbot Books Ltd.

Okoko, K.A.B and Ogali, M.D. (2009) "Democracy is a Temporal and a Spatial" in KAB Okoko (ed) *Nigerian Journal Of Oil And Politics*. Vol. No.2, April.

Tom, E.J. (2011) "Democracy in Nigeria's Fourth Republic: Problems and Prospects" in: O.A. Bamisade and O. Awofeso (eds). *Democracy and Democratic Practice in Nigeria: Issues, Challenges and Prospects*. Lagos: McGrace Publishers.