

**GOMBE JOURNAL OF ADMINISTRATION AND
MANAGEMENT (GJAM)**

Vol. 5 No. 1

Print ISSN: 2705-3407

Online ISSN: 2714-2442

May, 2023

LOCAL GOVERNMENT REFORMS AND DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE IN NIGERIA: THE PARADOX

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Abstract

Local government reforms and the politics of democratic governance in the Nigerian local government system are issues that both academics and practitioners are interested in, making this research desirable. The primary goal of this research is to identify difficult issues in various local government reforms and analyse their impact on Nigeria's democratic governance of local governments. This study looked at a variety of local government reforms in Nigeria, from the colonial era to the current administration. The development school of thought serves as the study's theoretical framework. The documentary method was used to collect data for the study. As a result, it was discovered that before 1976, various reforms only promoted local administration, not local autonomy. The study also revealed that, despite the absence of autonomous political powers, the 1976 reforms and the 1979 Constitution formally established local governments as Nigeria's third tier of government. However, due to the unequal relationship between local governments and other levels of government in Nigeria, the reform has not promoted effective democratic governance in local governments since then. We will clearly define the powers and functions of local governments as a politically autonomous third tier of government in Nigeria in future reforms so that they can exercise effective democratic governance in their local areas.

Key Word: Democratic Governance, Politics, Local Population, Political Actors, Local Government Reforms.

Introduction

Local governments in Nigeria have implemented several reforms to reposition local governments for effective grassroots democracy and political participation of local people in state political activities. This reform dates to colonial times when the British government introduced a formal administrative structure in rural areas. However, in pre-colonial times, there were various traditional administrative arrangements due to the presence of autonomous political bodies in various communities and ethnic groups in Nigeria (Onor, 2005). Traditional administrations in various communities were a concern to the British government, as the autonomous administrative system hindered local trade. Thus, in the 1890s and 1930s, indigenous administrations in northern Nigeria, and the 1930s and 1940s, in southern Nigeria, the traditional administration of chiefs with basic responsibility for the maintenance of law and order.

Reform was needed in collecting taxes for British merchants and organizing forced labour in rural areas (Native Administration, 1944). Aboriginal government officials were made up of missionaries and representatives of British trading companies, and no nationalists were on duty. Avoni (2010) argues that the absence of nationalists serving indigenous governments sparked the agitation for indigenous government reform. The desire for reform grew, and in 1950-1955 the first widely elected Local Government Councils modelled after the Whitehall model in England, were established in the Lagos Colony and the Eastern and Western Regions. Aunor (2010) adds that the Local Government Act of 1950 promoted a modern local government system in the eastern region with county councils, district councils and local councils, except for Port Harcourt and Enugu, where city councils were located.

Ina (2000) states that the Western Regions Local Government Act of 1952 created facilities for elected local government councils, with ward councils, district councils, local councils and, in some

areas, city councils. It is stated, these buildings, located in the eastern and western parts of the city, served as the bases of local administration. In the north, the political consciousness of the population in the British colonies and the 1947 Memorandum of Understanding by the British colonial secretary to the Governor of Africa to ensure efficient and democratic local government in the colonies were educated and it has given the local elites an incentive to seek reform of local governments in the region. This riot led to the Indigenous Peoples Autonomy Act of 1954 in the Northern Regions, which stipulated administrative structures at the village, district, and central levels.

At this point, local governments were given responsibilities such as primary education, village police and security, justice, and medical care. After independence in 1960, through the First Republic (1960-1967), the ever-growing local government administration was reduced to a mere local government agency. This was accomplished by the Western Territory Local Government Act 1962 (as amended) and the Northern Territory Government Act. In 1976 Nigeria underwent a major reform of local government. Avoni (2010) points out that the federal government, in cooperation with state governments, has initiated a major reform of local governments. The Commission made her recommendations on expanding the structure and functioning of local governments in Nigeria.

The report empowered local government as a multi-purpose single-tier Government with devolutionary status, charged with the responsibility of developing the rural area and the people therein through encouraging participatory democracy, mobilizing rural development and effective two-way channel communication. In a bid to achieve the above functions, the Federal Military Government 1988 introduced the Civil Service Reforms in Local Government. The Reform (1988) centred on the professionalization of the Local Government service, creation of mandatory departments (personnel, Finance and Supply, etc) provision of the offices of Supervisory Councillor, Secretary to the Local Government, Treasurer, Auditor- General for Local Government, and clearly defined the functions of Local Government Service Commission. In addition, the 1979 Constitution recognized the Local Government as a legitimate third tier of government with functions, and the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, fourth Schedule, section 8, part 1, also recognized local government as the same with specific responsibility for the development and participation of the rural people in politics of the state.

These imply that the various reforms empowered the local government with legal capability, human resources, and funds to enable the government to actualize its functions for democratic governance in Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

Nigeria's local government administration, from the colonial period to the present, has taken several political, administrative and it has gone through structural and financial reforms. Wilson (2011) adds that grassroots enthusiasm for democratic governance has influenced the establishment of local government as a democratic body of local government and a framework for local government governance. However, this reform does not seem to give local governments the desired capabilities as democratic institutions to achieve effective democratic governance and rural participation in local politics. Given the above, this study tends to ask the following research questions to guide the study:

- i. What are the difficult issues in local government reform for democratic governance in Nigeria?
- ii. Do such issues affect the democratic activities of local governments in Nigeria?

Purpose of the Study

This research aims to contribute to and extend existing knowledge on local government reform and democratic governance in Nigeria. Members of the academic community, as well as national policy actors and local government practitioners, should be informed of the lessons of research on pertinent issues that should be applied to local government reform to achieve effective democratic governance in Nigeria's local government system. is expected to learn from the purpose of this study, therefore, is to identify the difficult issues of various local government reforms and analyse their impact on the democratic governance of local governments in Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

The development school views Local governments should act as agents of development. This theory comes from developing countries and seeks to position local governments as development actors (Adeyemo, 2011). In Nigeria, for example, part of the 1976 Local Government Reforms included ensuring grassroots development. This school of thought has been criticized because rural areas in developing countries are still underdeveloped after many years. Also, this theory is biased because it has nothing to do with the development of people in rural areas. This undermines the advantage and purpose of establishing local governments to develop human resources at the grassroots level. These theories explained local autonomy to ensure local development. However, local governments in developed countries are a theory created by the residents themselves to develop their regions, and they are fulfilling their purpose. These are the result of a concerted effort by locals to create a government that serves their interests.

This is not the case in developing countries, especially Nigeria. In Nigeria, local governments are set up by breaking up provinces to serve the interests of the political and military elites who created them. It is practically impossible to use such local governments as development bodies. The inconsistency in the formation of local governments in Nigeria from colonial times to the present makes it possible to adapt different schools of thought aimed at explaining how Nigerian local governments work. It's getting difficult.

Methodology

A documentary method was used to generate the data for the study. The documentary method involves the study, analysis and interpretation of policies and documents and represents the fundamental method of data generation in political science (Obasi, 2000). Therefore, Nwana (1981) states that the document method includes existing documents written for purposes other than the researcher's interest. Obasi (2000) The document adds that there are public and unpublished materials relating to the activities of public and private organizations, found mainly in libraries, archives and such public institutions. They are historical documents on the nature, dynamics, and development of events. The purpose of this study is to examine various documents about local government reform and democratic governance of local governments in Nigeria from the colonial period to the present. These documents include textbooks, magazines, local statutes, newspapers, federal and state gazettes, and more. Content analysis was used to analyse secondary data.

Sheffield (2009) adds that content analysis provides a basis for comparing existing content with user needs and competitors' content and can identify potential gaps and opportunities. As a tool, it offers the possibility to determine the presence of certain words or concepts within a text or group of texts. Content is used to analyse the presence, meaning and relationships of such words and concepts and to make inferences about the message within the text. It was used to objectively analyse the generated data and achieve the research objectives.

Findings and Discussion

Local Government Reform and Democratic Governance in Pre-Independence Nigeria

The United Nations Administrative Office (1984) defines a local government as "a political subdivision of the state or state (in the federal system), constituted by law and having substantial control over local affairs, including executive powers.". The governing bodies of such bodies are elected. The above expressions describe the basic characteristics of municipalities and distinguish them from other municipalities. Based on the above, it seems difficult to establish the existence of local governments in pre-independence Nigeria. Before colonialism, communities and ethnic groups developed practical administrative practices for internal control. In the Hausa/Fulani communities, governance was centralized in the hands of chieftains, perhaps because of Islamic practices, while in the Yoruba, Igbo, and other minority nations, the government due to their specificity was decentralized.

Importantly, during this period, Nigeria did not have a statutory government with specific functions to manage the affairs of the local population. Rather, governance was based on the traditional/religious practices of the people. Therefore, it is difficult to determine the position of an elected statutory government in local population governance. The advent of colonialism brought several reforms to Nigeria's local governance with the introduction of indirect rule. The indirect rule created local indigenous authorities with the basic task of maintaining law and order. Indirect governance is an important reform and a step towards promoting democratic governance in Nigeria's rural areas. While the northern regions accepted indirect rule and traditional rulers were recognized as the guardians of authority, southern Nigeria faced challenges. This challenge led to reforms in the 1930s and 1940s, leading to the formation of not only indigenous authorities but chiefs and chiefs.

As a result of these reforms, chiefs and members of parliament formed chiefs, reducing the power held by one powerful person. The chief presides over the parliament and acts according to the majority opinion of the parliament, but both the chief and the parliament require the chief to comply fully with the parliament's recommendations. The main effect of this reform was the decentralization of the autocratic powers of the chiefs and the transfer of powers to parliament. This is a democratic development in the governance process by the rural people. Advancing federalism through regionalism, the Macpherson Constitution of 1951 introduced electoral voting in local governments and based on the British Whitehall model, created Nigeria's first widely elected councils in Lagos and the Eastern and Western Regions. provided an opportunity for there are still cases in the northern region that participate in this process (Igbuzor, 2009). As a result, electoral principles have increased the political awareness of Nigerians and facilitated their participation in the democratic process involved in local governance.

Local governments underwent further reforms, with the Eastern Local Government Ordinance 1950, the Western Local Government Act 1952, and the Northern Local Indigenous Peoples Autonomy Act 1954 serving as the framework for democratic local government governance in Nigeria. Amadi (2000) therefore believes that the Eastern Local Government Regulations of 1950 introduced the British model of county, district, and local councils, except for Enugu and Port Harcourt, where city councils were located. The implication is that local government has gone beyond the involvement of chiefs and parliaments and is now in the hands of local people who support the education of leaders and representatives and who recognize the value of local people. The Western Region enjoyed a similar level of modern democracy with an elected parliament under the Western Nigeria Local Government Act 1952.

The three levels of councils were departmental councils, district councils, local councils and in urban areas there was also a city council (Inah, 2000). In the northern region, a group of Northern parliamentarians, led by Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, called indigenous authority's rule oppressive and undemocratic and called for reforms to respond to local public opinion. Chiefs who were dictators and sole beneficiaries of native sovereignty rejected calls for reform. Conflicts of interest led to local government reform through the Native Authority Act of 1954. The effect of this reform was to provide for democratic governance and local participation in that governance. Second, a clear governance structure was established in villages, districts, and central councils. Third, we have introduced the "Chairperson" and "Chief and Council" governance systems that are also possible in other regions. In effect, the reform weakened the power of the chief and promoted democratic governance at the local level.

Local Government and Democratic Governance in Nigeria, 1960-1967

Independence was greeted with high expectations by Nigerians, especially for participatory democracy at the local government level. Unfortunately, the First Republic adopted a colonial local government structure and experienced setbacks in its administrative structure, finances, and democratic operations. Setbacks in the democratic governance of local governments during the reporting period were identified through two of the regional documents:

However, Obi (2010) hypothesizes that local governments in Nigeria were regionalized at the time and had different structures from region to region. With the introduction of the State Administration Act of 1962 in the northern regions, Aboriginal authority re-emerged, with traditional rulers serving simultaneously as traditional rulers and as regional political actors, thus increasing local governments in the region. Igbuzor (2009) states that the Local Autonomy Act (Amendment) 1960 abolishes most of the powers of the Local Government Council, reduces its functions, and places the Local Civil Service Commission as the governing body of the West Region. The situation was exacerbated by the crisis in the western region of 1962-1965, which led to anarchy and administrative collapse in the region.

The Eastern Region was not left out either, with the Ministry of Local Government being used as a regional body to regulate the activities of the local councils, reducing the councils to mere regional attachments. Second, the rise of regional party politics and the over-politicization of parties in local governments has weakened Nigeria's local councils. The Local Government Agency and Ministry of Local Government were available in various regions and served as regional representatives to regulate the activities of local governments. These bodies were controlled by different political parties in power in the region – Action Group (AG) in the West, Northern People Congress (NPC) in the North, and National Council of Nigeria and Cameroons (NCNC) in the East. Obi (2010) opines that in most cases even when members of the councils were elected in the Eastern and Western regions, and appointed in the Northern region, the members of the council were answerable to the political party in power in the region and not the local people.

In the Western region, elected local government councils were dissolved by the ruling party - Nigeria National Democratic Party (NNDP) in 1965 led by Samuel Ladoke Akintola due to the Councils support for AG led by Obafemi Awolowo during the crisis of 1962-65, and replaced with care-taker committees made up of the supporters of the ruling party - NNDP (Meredith, 2005). Similarly, Nwosu (1992) opines that in the Eastern region where the political actors were not members of the party in power at the regional level, such local governments were deprived of their statutory functions, as the issue of NCNC government at the regional level led by Dr Okpara against Dr Okezie's Republican Party at Umuahia Ibekwu Local Government Area in the region was a good example. In the Northern region, Onor (2005) adds that as an attempt to destabilize democracy in the local government councils, the councils were used to manipulate the electoral process in favour of the ruling party – NPC.

Indeed, it is important to note that the over politicization of local political parties and the regionalization of local governments undermined the democratic governance of local governments throughout the reporting period. This led to the argument that there was no functioning local government council in Nigeria at the time, but rather a functioning political interest at the grass-root.

Local Government Reform

Impact on Democracy in Nigerian Local Government, 1967-1999. During this period, local governments underwent fundamental changes in their structure, functions, revenue distribution and democratic activities. The focus of this research is on reforming the structure and functioning of local government in Nigeria and its impact on democracy. Gen. Johnson Thomas Okonkwo Agui Ironsi became the first military head of state following the emergence of a military government in Nigerian politics on 15 January 1967 in a coup d'état led by Major Chukuma Nzeogwu. Obi (2010) claims that when the military government took office, it dissolved the existing local government councils and replaced them with supervisory committees to manage the affairs of the national councils. Egurube (1991) added that local government political actors are accountable to the governor of the military rather than to the local population. As a result, local councils have lost their democratic structures and functions, leading to undemocratic local autonomy.

Locals have no say in who governs them and are deprived of democratic action. Authority was given to the military governor, and the local population were forced to comply. In 1976, the military government led by General Obasanjo initiated a sweeping reform of Nigeria's local governments. This reform was based on the Federal Military Government's observation that local governments had been

severely deprived of their democratic powers by other governments over the years (FRN, 1976). As a result, the Federal Military Government established a Local Government Reform Commission on 19 August 1976, chaired by Alhaji Ibrahim Dasuki. After touring the country for proper consultation, the Commission submitted a report entitled "Guidelines for Local Government Reform, 1976." This guideline has been approved by the Federal Military Government. This reform had multiple objectives aimed at repositioning local governments for effective service delivery and participatory democracy in rural areas.

Significantly, the 1976 Local Government Reforms made some provisions and impact on local government democratic governance in Nigeria as stated below:

- a. The introduction of a widely accepted definition of local government in Nigeria as stated by FRN (1976) as follows: "Government at the local level exercised through representative Council established by law to exercise specific powers within defined areas. These powers should give the council substantial control over local affairs; as well as the staff and institutional and financial powers to initiate and direct the provision of services, and to determine and implement projects, to complement the activities of the state and federal government in their areas, and to ensure through devolution of these functions to these council and through active participation of the people and their traditional institutions, that local initiative and response to local needs and conditions are maximized". By this definition, local government became recognized as a third-tier government at the local level in Nigeria. It marks the end of provinces, districts, and native authority, and the beginning of democratic government at the local level in Nigeria.
- b. The reform introduced, for the first time in Nigeria's history, a unified system of local governments with defined functions and structures to achieve democratic governance independent of the state in Nigeria.
- c. The reform created 301 local governments for the first time in Nigeria to carry out democratic activities at the local level.
- d. The provisions for the election of local government political actors through a non-partisan secret ballot system have given hope to a participatory democracy of the local population in Nigerian politics. Locals are supposed to be involved and decide who will rule when and the principal will be held accountable to the people.
- e. The reform provided for the allocation of 5% of funds to local governments to strengthen their financial independence and the viability of their democratic activities in Nigeria.
- f. The reform introduced nationwide electoral guidelines for conducting both direct and indirect elections in local councils. As a result, a council was established in January 1977, based on secret ballots, to reflect local participation in the election of leaders.
- g. Structure, Wapmuk (2005) considers that the reform stipulated that political control of local government should be given to the council and exercised through its councillors, known as governors. This is a step towards political development and democratic growth of local governments in Nigeria.
- h. However, this reform is incompatible with the development and stability of democracy, as it stipulates local governments as the third tier of government while stipulating the Local Civil Service Commission (LGSC) as a regulatory body for the state and local governments. The challenge is that when policy disagreements arise between state and local governments, local government officials responsible for enforcing local government policies can be manipulated or thwarted by the LGSC, and there as a result, local governments may be deprived of opportunities to effectively implement policies.
- i. Remarkably, the reform provided an opportunity for debate on the development of democracy and local government in the 1977-78 Constituent Assembly and was also enshrined in the 1979 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Obike & Nuwaodu (2010) add that this is the first time that a local government appears in the Nigerian Constitution with clearly defined status and functions as a third-level government as provided for in Article 7(1) of the 1979 Constitution:

“The system of democratically elected local government councils is guaranteed by this Constitution, and therefore each state government shall, through laws governing the establishment, structure, composition, funding and operation of such councils, its survival must be ensured.” The impact of the above reforms speaks volumes for developmental democracy in Nigeria's local government system. Unfortunately, despite local government reforms and constitutional mandates, the 1979-1984 government led by Alhaji Shehu Shagari destabilized democratic activity in the parliament. The Second Republic abused constitutional provisions regarding local democracy. State governments established more local governments, but these were not approved by the federal government, thereby exposing local governments.

A system that furthers democratic and constitutional instability in Nigeria. Second, the regime was unable to hold democratic elections in any of Nigeria's parliaments during its term. Councils were run by appointed sole administrators or oversight boards, which deprived residents of the opportunity to participate in the election of leaders. The military's revival in politics in 1984 led to a further series of reforms to local governments, with the following impacts on Nigeria's local government democracy:

- i. More municipalities were established, 453 in 1989 and 500 in 1991. Newly created local governments were recognized by the federal government and encouraged more democratic participation of residents in state politics.
- ii. The introduction of the presidential system in local governments promoted the separation of powers and the practice of democracy in local governments. The Executive Council was separate from the Legislative Council and provided democratic powers to administer its affairs.
- iii. Council elections were held during this time, and the elected Chairman became the council's treasurer and was accountable to the local population. To increase local participation in democracy, the Abacha government created more local governments in 1996, bringing the number of local governments to 774. Unfortunately, the administration replaced the presidential system with a parliamentary system. The parliamentary system was intended to reduce the administrative costs of local governments but did not encourage emerging democracies in local governments to practice separation of powers politics. Local governments underwent further reforms during the administration of General Abdulsalami Abubakar (1998-1999). The military government converted the parliamentary system of local governments to a presidential system and successfully held elections for all local councils in December 1998.

In addition, the government recognized and incorporated local governments into the 1999 Nigerian Constitution for the second time, as provided for in Article 7 of the Constitution. The above impacted Nigeria's rural democracy in terms of increased local participation in democracy through the presidential system and successful elections that allowed locals to elect parliamentary leaders. The provision for local government in the 1999 Constitution allows local government to function as a third tier of government with a specific constitutional timetable for democratic development. Instead, the 1999 law gave state governments several powers to manage local governments within their jurisdiction.

Local Government Reform and Democratic Governance in Nigeria from 1999 to 2012

The analysis in this section will focus on the provisions of the 1999 Constitution and their impact on Nigeria's democratic local government. The 1999 Constitution recognized local governments as a third tier of government with specific powers and duties to develop rural areas and promote their participation in the country's democratic activities. On the contrary, in these republics, there is a contradiction in the exercise of local governments' democratic powers in the state. Onor (2005) argues that the 1999 constitution has embroiled local governments in separate intergovernmental disputes, undermining the democratic functions and activities of local governments in Nigeria. Local governments suffered from constitutional disputes over "who should manage what and how" and power struggles between the federal and state governments. As a result, our research identified the following areas as key areas of conflict and abuse in the local government system that led to the breakdown of local government democracy in Nigeria.

Establishment of Local Governments in Nigeria

Undoubtedly, creating more local governments means increasing opportunities to bring government closer to rural people so that they can participate in democratic activities in their regions. Unfortunately, the move by state governments to establish local governments under the provisions of the 1999 Constitution has resulted in an abuse of the powers of local governments as democratic institutions. Some state governments have created as many governments as they wish under the provisions of Article 8(3) of the 1999 Constitution, which provides for the power to create local governments. But their immediate aim was to generate more revenue from federal spending through newly established local governments, not to increase democratic participation in the region. This contradiction of intentions created a rivalry of primacy between state and federal governments in the creation of local governments. State governments include Bayelsa, Ebony, Enugu, Lagos, and others.

The dispute led to a Supreme Court case between Lagos' federal and state governments over the creation of local governments, resulting in a court ruling on the issue. Iwilade (2012), despite conflicting supreme court decisions on this issue, argues that the Supreme Court decisions to date have been: "Unless Congress enacts appropriate amendments to the list of additional 37 Lagos Local Council Development Areas (LCDA) as local government areas under the 1999 Constitution, Lagos residents will continue to legally create new local government areas. The democratic implications were that Lagos and other state governments involved in the creation of local governments during this period decided that the newly established Local Government Councils would be held without democratic powers. It was reduced to just a development centre/council. Locals were denied close government and participatory democracy.

The Uncertainty of the Term of Office of Local Government Councils in Nigeria

Determining the terms of politicians in local assemblies has been a point of contention between state and local governments. Local government as a level of government has been hampered by state means of determining the term of office of politicians. In several instances, states such as Edo, Imo, Ondo, and Rivers ended the term of their democratically elected councils and replaced members of the state's ruling political party as executive committee members. In most cases, state governments even decide not to hold local council elections, as has been the case for more than six years in Anambra state. This is detrimental to the development of Nigeria's democracy and local government system. The election of council leaders is no longer a decision of the local population, but of the parties in power through the state legislatures.

Misuse of Local Government Funds by State Governments

The question of who controls local government funds is a major concern for local government autonomy and democracy. Various state governments have used provisions of the 1999 Constitution to misuse local government funds by establishing Joint Accounts and Allocation Commissions (JAAC) headed by state government representatives. JAAC will take away the authority to control local government funds. As a result, local governments have become dependent on the leadership of state governments, which affects their democratic activities.

The Impact of Local Civil Service Commissions on Local Government

Currently, the Local Government Service Commission (LGSC) manages local government personnel services, and the LGSC is appointed by the state government. State governments use commissions to regulate local government policies, sometimes by placing incompetent officials in certain local governments to interfere with local government policies, including democratic activities. The result is the poor implementation of parliamentary democratic policies. In some cases, as in Delta State, the LGSC exercises political control of the legislature. In Delta State, the Human Resources Manager (HPM) is appointed by the LGSC through the Delta State Legislature to direct the affairs of the legislature. May 2011 – November 2012, following the expiry of the term of the state legislature elected

in 2011. Worst of all, the HPM was replaced by an additional 20 caretaker committee members per council. The members of the committee are elected by the state government from among the members of the ruling PDP after being approved by the State House of Assembly and have been leading parliamentary affairs since November 2012. What this means is that in 2011-2012 democracy was crucified at the altar of local government in Delta State's LGSC and state legislatures. This leads to a democratically disadvantageous situation for the state's local population.

Conducting Local Elections

Local elections during this period were conducted by the state Independent Electoral Commission (SEC). A state government appoints and administers her SIEC. As a result, local elections are almost always dictated by the political parties that hold state power and do not satisfy the democratic will of the local population. Political parties in power use state power to manipulate and abuse the electoral process to elect political actors in local governments, thereby depriving residents of the opportunity to achieve democratic representation in government.

Conclusion

Nigeria's local governments are implementing several reforms aimed at giving parliaments the powers necessary for effective democratic governance, but the process of implementing them is far less than the prospects for democratic governance in local governments. These challenges have contributed in several ways to the democratic backlash against local government administration in Nigeria. In most cases, local government is reduced to local administration, fostering the authoritarian intent of state actors, and depriving residents of the ability to elect government leaders. Therefore, as the Nigerian Constitution remains a contentious issue regarding the autonomy and powers of local governments, future reforms and constitutional amendments will clearly define the powers and autonomy of local governments as the third tier of government in Nigeria. recommended. Furthermore, the process of implementing reforms should be clarified to avoid doubts and misunderstandings about the underlying principles of the reforms. This will allow local governments to enjoy a degree of autonomy from other levels of government and exercise appropriate powers for effective democratic action and governance in Nigeria.

Recommendations

For effective local government reforms and democratic governance in Nigeria, the following recommendations need to be adhered to:

- a. Strengthening connections with local communities on projects that have a direct bearing on their lives.
- b. Fostering a sense of community, local identity, and pride as indigenes (sense of belonging).
- c. More opportunities for citizens to get involved in how things are run (politics of inclusion).
- d. Better public resources and public services in terms of infrastructural developments.
- e. Citizens influence how public funds are spent through probity and accountability.
- f. Community groups are better supported financially and otherwise for self-initiatives in rural areas to foster development.

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