

Challenges of Local Government Operations in Nigeria

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Abstract

This study examines the difficulty local governments experience in fulfilling their constitutional responsibilities as the third level of government, even in the face of government changes aimed at improving their performance and offering lessons learnt to address the issues. Local government administration, Nigeria's third tier of government, is in charge of bringing about socioeconomic development locally. Since the establishment of the nation's local governments, numerous reforms have been tried, but unsuccessfully, to achieve the goal of local government establishment. The study collected and analyzed data using a qualitative approach. According to the survey, local government is finding it more and more challenging to successfully serve the public. The study came to the conclusion that both the federal and state governments could address the institutional and attitudinal aspects of the problems. It suggested giving the local government the same level of autonomy as the other levels of government in order to enable it to function freely. A legislative framework should also be in place to prevent the state government from needlessly interfering in local governments' internal matters. Finally, human resources should be available to provide effective leadership and accountability in order to accomplish the goals outlined by the establishment of local governments in Nigeria.

Keywords: local Government, socio-economic, advancement, challenges, operation.

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INTRODUCTION

The structure of governance in Nigeria places local governments at the heart of grassroots development and service delivery. However, the capacity of local councils to fulfil this mandate has consistently been constrained due to excessive state interference and constrained autonomy (Idoko C.O, Paulinus C.M, and Festus N. N.2025). Although the 1999 Constitution recognises local governments as a full tier of government, practical governance often falls short as state governors dissolve elected councils in favour of caretaker committees and manage funds via joint state-local government accounts, undermining political, administrative, and fiscal independence (Anayochukwu & Ani, 2021). This has resulted in a significant gap between constitutional provisions and governance outcomes, limiting service impact at the grassroots (Inyokwe, 2023).

As political unit and the third tier of government, local governments deal with matters of governance, especially those which are local in nature, peculiar and central to the existence of a given population within a particular area of jurisdiction. In view of this significance, local governments in Nigeria

from colonial era to independence and post-independence civilian democratic and military regimes have been of great importance and attention with numerous creation and reforms, especially the 1976 and 1988 local government reforms, all in order to among others, achieve effective and efficient service delivery.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The Theory of Efficiency Services: This study's main idea is that this theory can be used to look at how well Nigeria's local government works. This comes from the thought that local government should have more power over the people since it is closer to them than other levels of government. This theory says that local government is a good way to provide local services, that local government exists to provide services, and that local government should be judged on its ability to provide services that meet the standards of a national inspectorate (Mackenzie in Ezeani, 2012:16).

Local governments are closer to the people they serve, so they can provide some services better than federal or state governments. Because these services work so well, having local government there is very desirable (Sharpe, 1970:168).

How the Nigerian local government structure fits with the efficiency services theory the fourth schedule of the Federal Republic of Nigeria's constitution from 1999 tells local government councils (LGCs) exactly what they need to do. This is because LGCs are the level of government closest to the people. LGCs are responsible for a lot of things, like building and maintaining infrastructure like roads and public buildings, as well as making growth plans and economic plans. Nwachukwu has said that these are the only and necessary jobs of LGCs (2000:38, 40). In addition to their main jobs, the LGCs are also in charge of developing farmland and natural resources, running and maintaining health services, and running and maintaining primary, adult, and vocational schools. Furthermore, there are activities that take resources from other countries and turn them into money that stays in the country; functions that give values and benefits to the people that live there; and regulatory and protected functions that keep the public safe and the law in order. tasks in schools that try to change harmful habits and ways of acting that help society and the economy grow.

This study says that local government councils have not shown enough proof that they are good at providing services that are useful to the area. Because of this, this theory describes an ideal situation but not the real one in Nigeria. To make this point clear, Adamolekun (2009:19) said, "Since the return to civilian rule in 1999 to date, the LGs are widely perceived as failed institutions." This was especially true when talking about how well LGCs have done in Nigeria's fourth and current republic. He said that a lot of dishonest activities, incredibly bad management, and a long-term trend of reducing local government autonomy were to blame. Federalism supporters say that the "coordinate and independent" role of sub-national units is limited by the fact that the government and public administration system has a "military hangover" that imposed military unitaristic principles and split federal practice. There is also a gap between the people and the ruling class, which shows up as a lack of services and functions that help people, which can lower the standard of living for most people. This problem with government is caused by the awful irony of Nigeria's election process and system, which puts average people in charge. One could say that LGCs should have an effect on their citizens because they are close to the people, especially when they are run by amateurs. Still, the story shows that balance sheet debit entries are caused by their top executives, policy choices, and the political and administrative situations they are in. As the above study shows, the situation in Nigeria has been brought to light, and it is unclear how well they meet the wants of the people. Using the guidelines set by the "national inspectorate" to judge LGCs, on the other hand, means local government. This gives one way to look at local government as administrative decentralisation, deco centring, or field administration. In this view, local governments act as

agents of the central government and don't have the basic features of devolution, which is what a good local government system is all about. These include legal individuality, autonomy, and independence in terms of finances and people resources. Nigeria's past of local government administration shows that these devolutionary requirements have not been met. This may help explain why LGCs have not kept their promises. Nigeria needs to recognise the important or necessary roles of the third level of government so that they can provide effective services. This will lead to the much-desired benefits of democracy, as shown by the July constitutional change that gave LGs political and financial independence but has not yet been put into action. This makes sense and is needed for the country to reach its goals for development, which should focus on people and have small affects over time. Sharpe (1970:168) can only give average Nigerians a reason to live by making these claims.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Local Government: The idea behind local government is a commitment to political participation in local government. This means that a higher level of government might legally and administratively give people, authority, and power to a community that can make its own decisions and do certain chores as part of the national framework. A local government is an organisation at the local level that is meant to meet the wants of the people who live there (Agagu, 1997). "Government by the popularly elected bodies charged with administrative and executive duties in matters concerning the inhabitants of a particular district or place" is how it is said (Appadorai 1975).

The level of government closest to the people it serves is called local government, and it has specific powers to run the things that fall under its control (Lawal, 2000:60). Akpan (1982) says that local government is when a country is divided into smaller parts, or localities, for administrative reasons. The people who live in these areas have a voice through their elected representatives, who are responsible to the national or state government but have power and duties of their own. Barber wrote in 1969 that local government is the power to make choices and carry them out within a certain area. Based on these definitions, it's clear that local governments are set up to meet the wants and goals of their communities by providing services and promoting growth. At the most basic level of society, these governments do their jobs. According to Bandhu in 1967, a local government is a group that works independently but is based on state laws and represents the people in a certain area, like a town, district, city, or urban region. Its main job is to run neighbourhood services, which is different from what the state and central governments do. Local governments only work in certain areas and are responsible for giving public amenities to the people who live there. For example, Clarke wrote in 1948 that local government is

the part of a country's or state's government that deals with problems that affect the people who live in a certain area. In 1965, Rao said that local government was the part of government that mostly dealt with local problems. It was run by officials who were officially part of the state government but were elected by eligible residents and were not controlled by the state.

Robson's full description from 1949 says that local government is a territory-based, non-sovereign community that has the legal power and organisational ability to handle its own issues. This idea means that there should be a local government that can run its own affairs without any help from outside, and the community should also be involved in running its own affairs. Gokhale, on the other hand, gives a clearer answer in 1972, saying that local government is when the people who live in an area run it through their elected officials. According to Venkatarangaiya and Pattabhiram (1969), overnment is when a group of people who represent the people in a village, town, city, or other smaller area than a state run a region. It has a fair amount of power and gets at least some of its money from local taxes. It then spends that money on services that are local and not part of the state or national government. It is the job of the local government to coordinate local development projects and promote democratic ideals in society. This project is also meant to be the main driver of the community's business and social growth. After reading the above definitions, it's clear that local governments have certain basic traits. These are them: Local Area: A local government can only work in a certain area of the country. Legitimate authority: The local government has legitimate authority because it was set up by a specific law or act. Akpan (2001:87) says that local government is when the country is split up into smaller administrative units. The people who live in these areas are fully and directly involved through their representatives, who do work and have power under the overall direction of the state national government.

According to Izueke (2010), local government is a system of local administration in local communities that is meant to keep the peace, offer a limited range of social services, and urge people to work together and get involved in order to make life better. It gives the community a clear way to organise itself so that they can run their business smoothly, which is good for everyone. It is the job of the local government to coordinate local development projects and promote democratic ideals in society. This project is also meant to be the main driver of the community's business and social growth. After reading the above definitions, it's clear that local governments have certain basic traits. These are them: Local Area: A local government can only work in a certain area of the country. The local government has a formal role because it was set up by a law.

Community development: Ajayi (1995) says that community development is a social process that helps people learn to live with and take charge of their local situations and how the world is changing. To guide and carry out their village or community development projects, everyone involved must take part and share their thoughts, plans, and duties in a fair and democratic way. Then there will be long-term community growth, which can't be done with force or order (Ajayi and Otuya, 2006). Orapin (1996) says that one way to promote sustainable rural development is to give the villagers, who are the main players in the community, fair chances to think about and plan for their own future. This shows how important it is to have strong local community leadership to get people in rural areas to work together for their own progress.

Community development programs usually try to do a lot of different things, such as making people more aware of opportunities in rural areas, giving people information on infrastructure, resources, and inputs, providing technical help, helping people learn new skills, improve literacy rates, make farming more productive, using the right technology in farming, and making people more aware of opportunities to donate and volunteer. The needs of the people and the supply of basic facilities like markets, schools, farm settlements, power, good roads, and health clinics should be the main focus of most community development projects in underdeveloped countries. These goals can only be reached if everyone who thinks that rural community development should be the top priority in our efforts to reduce poverty and make the country self-sufficient works together.

Leaders in rural areas must be able to inspire others to act, and this includes both people and groups. People are ready to help reach goals when there is good leadership. When it comes to rural community development, it's always the local leaders who take the lead on projects and encourage their people to get involved. For a rural community development program to work, it needs to include influential local leaders. If they're not involved, they could hurt the progress being made. Because of this, any group or agency that wants to start a community development program must first get "clear" from these important local leaders. This is called legitimization.

It's sad to think about how Nigeria's governments have ignored the growth of rural communities since the country was under colonial rule. For example, the colonial government didn't care about the rural areas at all. Instead, they built a network of roads to places where they stole our natural resources and focused development projects like roads, schools, hospitals, and piped water around the big towns. Since development programs often called "national cake" only helped towns whose sons and daughters were in government, rural neglect is still a problem for

governments that came after independence. Even well-thought-out development projects for rural areas often failed because there were no scientific or empirical studies of the rural communities they were supposed to help. Since the 1980s, there have been more protests and unrest in some rural areas of Nigeria and many other African countries. Officials couldn't solve these problems because there wasn't any reliable study on the problems these rural people were having (Ovwigbo and Ifie, 2004).

The Goals and Objectives of Community Development

The main goals of community development should be to make people more productive and give them the tools they need to be involved in their social, political, and economic lives. They would feel like they could handle their own problems and help protect the world as a result. In fact, it is the managers of the local government who have a moral obligation to do everything they can to reach the goals. Odiong (2003) The. Every community is made up of people and families who all feel like "we" and work together to reach their own goals in the areas of growth and development in all their forms. Because of this, it is a place where anyone can perfectly provide full socio-economic, political, and human development services, especially with the help of formal or informal groups.

Because the place where we live gives us peace, joy, love, happiness, and other good things, it makes sense that everyone should work to make their town better. As you can see, the main goal of community development is to improve people's lives, property, and facilities by making good use of both human and material resources and getting people in rural areas to get involved. Nigeria's local government reform in 1976 had four main goals. Two of them were to improve community development. These goals were: "to make appropriate services and initiatives by devolving or delegating them to the local Representatives." "To mobilise material and human resources by involving community members in their local development." In line with what was said above, Olowu listed the possible roles that local government could play in development, such as bringing people together politically and building a stronger country.

Rural Development: In Nigeria, there isn't a single agreed upon meaning of rural development because different academics have their own ideas about what it means. Some scholars, like Haddad (1990) and Hinzen (2000), look at rural development from the point of view of how to teach. Obinne wrote in 1991 that rural development means giving more people the chance to get an education, reach their full potential, and have a say in the things that happen in their lives. Others, like Olayide, Ogunfowora, Essang, and Idachaba (1981), see rural development as a way to give people in rural areas work

and improve infrastructure, basic amenities, and agricultural productivity. Olatunbosun (1976), Williams (1978), Lele (1979), Idachaba (1980), and Ogunfiditimi (2000) all looked at rural growth from different points of view. It doesn't matter what they say; they all agree that the people who live in rural areas need to have better living situations and lives. As Olatunbosun (1976) says, rural development depends on making sure that the technical conditions are in place to speed up economic growth and that the plan and direction of government work for the benefit of both the urban and rural sectors. Adeleemo (1987) says that the idea of rural development includes things like adding new types of housing or moving towns that have been forced to move. In addition to land-use development, he says that rural development should also take into account economic factors such as the carrying capacity of each farmland area, irrigation, better farming practices, and money. The goal of the National Policy on Rural growth, according to Ogbazi (1992), was to reach a good level of rural growth. Some of these goals are to improve the social, cultural, educational, and economic well-being of people who live in rural areas and to make sure that the area's many resources are used in a steady and orderly way.

Functions of Local government in Nigeria (Constitutional Provisions)

Although Nigeria's local governments do many things, their main jobs are to help people grow and provide services. Some of these are programs for managing trash, building up infrastructure, planning communities, improving public health, education, and economic growth. In addition to making sure that marriages, births, and deaths are recorded and that different actions are legal in their area, they also help keep the law and order.

Important tasks:

The city government is in charge of preschool, elementary school, and adult education.

- **Public Health:** They do a lot to protect public health by providing basic healthcare, getting rid of trash, and keeping things clean.
- **Town planning:** This is the job of local governments and includes things like building and maintaining roads, public spaces, and drains.
- **Infrastructure:** Building and managing streets, roads, drainage systems, and other public highways is part of their job.
- **Waste Management:** Local governments are in charge of keeping the environment clean and getting rid of trash.

Important Roles

- **Economic Development:** By building and managing shopping malls and RV parks, they help the area economy grow.

- **Licenses:** The local government is in charge of giving licenses for many things, such as bikes, boats, and certain types of cars.
- **Registration:** They keep track of how many people get married, born, and die in their area.
- **Community Development:** They work on projects that help the health and growth of their neighborhoods as a whole.
- **Enlightenment of the Public:** Local governments teach and tell the public about many things. Protecting Law and Order: They help protect law and order in the areas that are under their control.
- **Financial Freedom:** Local governments have some financial freedom because they can collect taxes and fees on their own.
- **Agricultural Development:** Their job is to keep natural resources in check and help agriculture grow.

Challenges of Local Government.

There is no confusion about what the roles and responsibilities of local government offices are around the world, and especially in Nigeria. Ajayi (2000) and Gboyega (1987) say some of these are working as a decentralisation agent, speeding up development at the local level, making communication easier, and giving future leaders a place to learn how to lead. The Fourth Schedule of Nigeria's 1999 constitution makes it clear what the LGs' job is, but unfortunately, they have not lived up to standards.

There is no LG government in the world that doesn't have problems. As an example, the South African Local Government Association (SALGA) lists the following as operational challenges: creating a culture of service delivery; hiring and keeping skilled workers; making sure there are enough IT, financial, and other systems in place; and making sure that the political and administrative leaderships can work together well and that their roles are clear. These include taking care of infrastructure needs and the costs that come with them, managing budgets while income drops and service needs rise, and paying for state and federal debts that haven't been paid for yet. How each system handles these problems, though, is a big part of how well the systems work at offering services.

One of its goals is to manage the structure of the LG system in Nigeria so that it works better. In this case, "structure" refers to the Federal Republic of Nigeria's unified, single-tiered system, which is written into the country's Constitution from 1999. The LG Reform of 1976 also says that there are between 150,000 and 800,000 people living in the LG. Based on the conclusion, a single-layer layout might work for LG with a small population but not for those with a big one, like 700,000. Even if the system operators really wanted to do a good job, they would always be slow and unable to deal with problems that come up during growth. Also,

one management system might not be able to handle the specific needs of each area well. This could lead to offices being copied to fit the legal structure without giving the needs of the originals any thought. A single layer of LG has also been shown to not be enough to solve Nigeria's development problems. This is in contrast to developed systems with multiple layers, like those in France, the US, and Britain, which are designed to meet the special needs of each area.

Also, Nigeria's overbearing state government has made it hard for the LG to work at its best, which has stopped the system from being autonomous. During democratic regimes (1979–1983) and from 1999 to now, this was most clear. The state government thought that the money going to the LG through the federated account was too good to pass up. As a result, a number of dishonest tools were made available under Sections 7 (1) and (6) of the 1999 Constitution to stop the LG from taking its money.

The council elections were run by the state governments, who wanted to make sure that their party and their carefully picked candidates won. So, the leaders of the LGs don't have to answer to the people. Instead, they have to answer to the governors of each state. The danger of legal action has also been taken away by the state government's creation of the Joint Allocation Account and the requirement that LG agents write and sign letters (Odo, 2003; ALGON, 1999). LG employees were asked to show a list of projects that were going to be done while the state government gave out contracts. This was done to show that they were part in the process. This is on top of the huge demand for money and the unrealistically high hopes of the people, especially the most powerful politicians in the area, who expect the council member to put their own needs ahead of those of development. Because of these things, the LG administration lost focus on finding a balance between what the people wanted and what the governor wanted.

In reality, the state government often gave LGs too little money to meet their needs, which meant that staff salaries were not always paid on time and there wasn't good administrative management. In 2014–2015, LG employees in most of the federation's states were not paid for up to five to ten months, which meant they needed help from the Buari government (Ovaga, 2009). This is similar to what happened in 1983–1984. As a result, the money that LGs in Nigeria have access to is woefully inadequate compared to what the constitution requires and what society expects. This has been pointed out by Chukwumeka *et al.*, (2014), Ani *et al.*, (2013), Ezeani (2012), and Ugwu (2010).

The Nigerian LG government has a problem with relying too much on statutory allocation of federated funds. Any LG in Nigeria would have a hard time working well without a monthly salary. The Fourth

Schedule of the constitution from 1999 lists LG's duties and ways to make money, but these aren't being fully utilised for the benefit of the system. As an example, the state government now owns most of the lucrative ways for the city to make money on its own, like tenement rates, street names, and big markets. Also, LG didn't always get the ten percent of the state government's income that came from inside the state. Ibok (2014) and Abada (2007) say that all of these things made it hard for LG to provide good services.

The word "corruption" is used a lot in Nigeria. It has become a strong enemy that is hard to control. Because people buy and sell votes, it threatens both political involvement and service delivery. This is the reason why, according to Ejike (2014), Kyenge (2013: 70–76), Aluko (2006), and Aina (2007), cheating is one of the biggest problems with how well local governments do their jobs. Ottenberg in Aina says that almost every council job, whether it's an appointed staff post or an elected council position, comes with a salary and extra money from bribery. Corruption and taking bribes are part of the council's political fights inside and outside the country. They actually form a significant political component of municipal administration.

Corruption in LGs includes outright fraud in financial transactions, contracts that are too big, "phantom labour," and working together with government agencies that are supposed to keep an eye on things. There are no longer 10 contracts given to each centre. Instead, paying for work that hasn't been finished is becoming more common, which is a risky move. The biggest obstacle to the state government's attempts to combat corrupt practices in the LG is that, just after a change of government, the searchlight was mostly focused on political rivals in order to settle political scores rather than on identifying the wrongdoers. It's still possible that some agents are being dishonest, but that wasn't the point. The goal wasn't to clean up the whole system. Because of this, palliative selective justice could not get rid of institutional crime in the LG system or in higher levels of government in general. Because organizations like the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and the Independent and Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) have not shown enough success in stopping corrupt practices, corruption in Nigeria has spread and actually increases transaction costs and inefficiencies. So, Akanbi (2004) says in Aina (2007:427) that widespread corruption slows down progress, weakens institutions, and leads to bad leadership—all of which are necessary for LG to exist. In addition, Animashaun (2007) says in Aina (2007) that it hurts social norms and lowers moral standards.

High levels of corruption among local government officials have been linked to the fact that local governments can't provide satisfactory public services as needed by "SERVICOM." In Nigeria,

corruption has become so widespread that it affects how local governments work and what they do. The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) arrested and is prosecuting former Enugu State Governor Chimaroke Nnamani on charges of stealing local government funds in the state. This case shows how corruption is a problem for Nigerian local governments that don't do their jobs (<http://www.articlesbase.com/leadership-articles>).

Because of corruption, Nigerian local governments don't have the money or skills to provide basic social services that will help rural communities change and bring the government closer to the people. Kolawole (2006) says that the real problems with the local government weren't a lack of money, but bad management and theft of money that was given to it. There are problems with how public projects are done and how pay are paid when there is systemic corruption. Lawal and Oladunjoye (2010) say that corruption slows down the development of skills and the workforce because chairs care more about stealing money for their own gain than about training and retraining workers.

Another problem for Nigeria's LG government is that development projects are too often politicised. Nigeria's government doesn't follow the saying that politics stop when elections are over. In fact, project allocation is often done for political reasons rather than because it's what society needs. Too many development projects have been focused on a few towns in Nigeria, hurting other towns. So, rural areas that don't have politically powerful leaders will continue to have institutions that don't care about them, while areas with teaching hospitals will continue to have state hospitals, health centres (especially in the state capital), and clinics built by the LG, even if none of them are working well.

People may say that creating jobs is an important part of good governance, but the LG's too-big staffing system has made it much more expensive for them to run their business. On the other hand, these workers were just parts of the growth machine when they weren't given enough to do. Most jobs were created officially through worker donations instead of going through a real hiring process. This is true even though all of Nigeria's states have Local Government Service Commissions and other roles that help with job problems.

Ukiwo (2006:2) says that state leaders have stepped in to stop the unchecked decentralised primitive accumulation because being a local government chairperson has become one of the most desirable and lucrative jobs to run for, third only to the governorship and fourth only to the presidency. It's not a surprise that the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) said 31 of 36 governors had stolen money from local government bodies (Ukiwo, 2006, This Day, 28/09/06).

Not having enough professional staff who are qualified and suited: A lot of people who used to work for local governments now work for private businesses, the federal government, and state governments. Both Babangida and Abacha's creation of new states encouraged many public servants from local governments to apply for jobs in the state governments. The politics of political favours have also led to the hiring of thugs and stupid people as a way to thank local governments for their political support during elections. In local governments, there aren't enough qualified engineers, doctors, accountants, statisticians, economists, lawyers, town planners, and other workers. Because of this, the councils can't provide good services in an honest, open, fair, and pleasant way because they don't have enough workers with the right training and skills.

Negative Work Attitude: It has been said that most Nigerian public servants and workers in local governments don't like bad work habits that make them less productive. Bad work attitudes include not showing up for work, lying, not following the rules, being lazy, not caring about your job, and being late (Odiaka, 1991; Akerele, 1986; Ogunrin and Erhijakpor, 2009). Absenteeism and other bad attitudes at work may be connected to low pay, unfair treatment, and job stagnation, all of which make workers look for extra money from private companies (Maduabum, 1990). Too much political interference: It is worrying and needs to be looked at again how much the federal or state governments are interfering with the work of local governments for political reasons. In Nigeria, local governments are often seen as an extension of the state office and don't have control over their own budgets. The governors of each state make choices that are then carried out by the local governments in that state. There is an ad hoc account where federal funds for local governments are kept before they are sent out. The plan is to use the money for something totally different, something that will help the governor of the state but won't affect the lives of people who live in rural areas. But too much interference has, on the one hand, made it hard for local governments to do their jobs and, on the other hand, kept ordinary people from getting the social services that Nigerian local governments are meant to provide.

In their 2001 study, Bello-Imam and Roberts found that the main reasons why local governments aren't doing their jobs well or efficiently are: (a) not enough money coming in; (b) state governments and their agencies making local functions worse, especially in places that bring in money. (c) problems with politics and administration, like a lack of technical and skilled workers, lazy local government workers, dishonest officials, and the different sizes and structures of local government; and (d) not including the right communities in the delivery of local services. There are many

problems that Nigerian local governments have to deal with that make it hard for them to serve their people well. Some of these are not having enough money, not having enough power, and injustice. Poor service delivery is caused by these issues, which impacts people's overall quality of life as well as infrastructure, healthcare, and education.

- **Not Enough Money:** Many local governments can't do their jobs because they don't have enough money. This makes it harder for them to carry out development projects, keep infrastructure in good shape, and provide services that people need.
- **Corruption:** Corruption is a big problem at all stages of government in Nigeria, including local governments. Corruption and theft take money that should be used for public services and use them for other things. This makes the budget problems even worse.
- **Lack of political and administrative autonomy:** When state governments get too involved, they can make it harder for local councils to make decisions and keep their independence. This kind of interference can get in the way of local projects and lead to decisions that are made based on politics rather than skills. Danladi and Oloruntoba (2019) used case studies and secondary data from hospitals in five local government areas to look at political authority and health care delivery in Nigerian grassroots communities. Their research showed that politically independent local councils helped primary health care centres get more resources, which improved immunisation rates and the health of mothers. However, they also said that politics at the state level sometimes got in the way of things staying the same.

Some problems that local governments face are:

- **Not having enough resources:** some local governments can't run their businesses well because they don't have enough skilled staff or technical know-how. This could cause services to not be delivered well, resources to not be used well, and bad planning.
- **Bad infrastructure:** Many local governments have trouble building things like schools, hospitals, and roads that people need. This is bad for the health and well-being of local communities.
- **Weak Institutional Capacity:** Weak institutional structures and methods make it harder for local governments to do their jobs well. This includes not being accountable, not being open, and not involving the people.
- **Lack of Citizen Participation:** In many places, people don't take an active role in how their community is run, which means that the services provided don't meet the needs of the community. This could also make people not trust the institutions of local government.

- **Not Enough Planning:** Not enough planning and not having a strategic goal can lead to bad service delivery and bad use of resources.

These problems show how important it is to make changes right away to improve local government in Nigeria and make sure that local governments can serve their people well.

Lack of Fund:

In Nigeria, local governments do not have their own money. At the grass roots level, this has made them less effective at providing services. A study called Impact of local government autonomy on service delivery in grassroots areas in Nigeria was done by Ezeani and Ezeani in 2021. They used a quantitative poll method with 300 people from three Nigerian states and found that giving people more financial and administrative freedom made service delivery much more efficient, especially in the education and health sectors. The study's conclusion was that giving local governments more freedom makes them better at meeting the needs of the community and cuts down on delays caused by red tape. In 2019, Okeke and Obi looked at autonomy and service delivery: A mixed-method approach was used to look at the performance of six local governments in southeastern Nigeria. The technique included structured interviews and secondary data. They showed that political meddling and not having enough financial independence were two big problems that made it hard for local governments to do their jobs well. Their research showed that water and sanitation services were more reliable when local governments had more control over their budgets.

Local reforms in Nigeria

Nigeria has tried to improve local government by making changes to the law, like the reforms in 1976 and 1988, and by giving local governments more financial and operational freedom more recently. Some important steps are recognizing local governments as a separate level, making sure they get direct funding, setting up separate election bodies, and giving the local level control over things like basic healthcare and education.

1976 Local Government Reforms

Nigeria's 1976 Local Government Reforms created a single, uniform system, acknowledged LGAs as the third level of government, and required elected executive chairmen and supervisory councillors. The reforms also aimed for financial and functional autonomy, staff standardisation, and removing traditional rulers from direct executive roles to promote democratic growth. It set population requirements (150k to 800k) for councils to be able to stay in business, gave funds, and set up Local Government Service Boards to make staff more professional.

Important Features of the Reform Uniformity and Structure: Replaced different, multi-tiered LGA systems across the country with a single, uniform system.

Third-Tier Status: The law makes local government the third level of government, after the federal and state levels.

Leadership at the Executive Level: Appointed elected executive chairs and full-time supervisory councillors (cabinet members).

Autonomy and Finance: Aims for financial and functional independence with funds and loans from the federal government and the states.

Management of people: Local Government Service Boards and Commissions are required to make sure that working conditions are the same at the local, state, and federal levels. Traditional Rulers: Traditional rulers were taken out of direct executive roles, but they were kept on as culture and religious advisors.

Population Criteria: Set population numbers (150,000–800,000) for councils to be able to work.

Duties: In constitutional schedules, clear duties were set out for LGAs, either by themselves or with states. Why? To make government services more accessible to people and better able to meet their needs in their own communities.

To support initiative, leadership, and democratic involvement at the local level. To get people and things in the area to work together for growth.

1988 Reforms:

* Did away with state ministries of local government to make the governor's office smaller. Put primary schooling and health care under the control of local governments.

*Made the local government service more professional by making departments and officers necessary.

• The 1999 Constitution added the fourth schedule, which lists the duties of city governments.

• Recent attempts (10th House of Representatives): promised to pass laws that would give local governments more control over their finances and operations.

Financial freedom

• **Direct payment of allocations:** The Supreme Court told the federal government to pay 20.60% of the monthly allocation to local governments directly, without going through state leaders.

• **Budget and tax approval:** New rules let local governments make their own budgets and taxes and get them approved without help from the state government.

- **Distribution of revenue:** In 1981, a new method for distribution of revenue was put in place to give local governments direct access to the Federation Account.

Changes to operations and administration

- **Independent electoral commissions:** To make sure elections are free and fair, there have been calls to set up independent election commissions or make State Independent Electoral Commissions (SIECs) stronger.
- **Direct management of services:** Cemeteries, homes for the poor, and nursing homes are just a few of the services that local governments will be able to directly handle.
- **Including traditional rulers:** allowed traditional rulers to be involved in local government matters and kept politicians from getting in the way.

Problems that need fixing

- **Resistance from state governors:** In the past, state governors have fought against efforts to give local governments more power, which makes enforcement harder.
- **Constitutional ambiguity:** The Constitution of 1999 has some problems that make it harder for local governments to run and be controlled.
- **Applicability of Supreme Court decision:** There are still concerns about how applicability of the Supreme Court decision is because it might not align with the Constitution's requirement for a joint state and local government account.

Steps taken by the Government of Nigeria to address local government problems.

To help local governments in Nigeria deal with the problems they face, the government has implemented a number of measures, including programs to build their skills, better ways to share income, and changes to the constitution. These steps are meant to make sure that people at the local level are involved in democracy, improve service delivery, and strengthen local government management.

1. Changes to the Constitution:

- **Making sure local governments have the freedom to do their jobs:** The major goal of reforms, especially the reforms of 1976, has been to give local governments more freedom and autonomy so the federal government doesn't get in the way too much.
- **Guaranteed Democratic Existence:** Work has been done to solidify the democratic system of local governments, which includes the terms of council members. The law from 1999 set the rules for how local governments should run and handle their money.

2. Better Distribution of Revenue:

- **More Funding:** The government has worked to improve how money is given to local governments so that they have enough resources to do their jobs. The goal of fiscal reform is to improve the way money is managed and give local governments more control over their own money.
- **Getting money from different places:** To make it so that local governments don't have to rely so much on state aid, people have been working to get their money from different places.

2. Building institutions and capacity:

- **Human capital development:** To encourage good governance at the local level, programs have been set up to help local government officials get better at what they do by giving them training and building their skills.
- **Institutional Strengthening:** Work has been done to make local government agencies better at offering services.

4. Pay attention to how the service is given:

- **Improving Public Service Delivery:** The government has stressed how important it is for local governments to provide their people with useful and quick services that address issues like education, health care, and building up the country's infrastructure.
- **Dealing with Key Problems:** To improve general performance, efforts have been made to deal with problems like corruption, inefficient processes, and a lack of public trust.

5. Getting the public involved

- **Community Involvement:** Encouraging people to be involved in the decision-making processes of their local government to give them a feeling of responsibility and ownership.
- **Accountability and Openness:** To gain the public's trust, moves have been taken to make local government administration more open and honest.

6. Putting plans into action and making strategic ones:

- **Making Strategic Plans:** Helping local governments make detailed strategic plans that fit their specific needs and goals was considered.
- **Tracking and measuring performance:** putting in place ways to check on and rate the work of local governments to see if they are getting closer to their goals.

FINDINGS

The study revealed that; There is undue political interference in the affairs of local government, by both the Federal and State governments, which is responsible for the failure of local government to carry out its statutory functions effectively.

The federal government has carried out various reforms with a view to improving the performance of local government in Nigeria but to no avail.

Lack of trained personnel affects the performance of local government in Nigeria.

Lack of fiscal autonomy affects the performance of local government in Nigeria.

Corruption affects the performance of local governments in Nigeria.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to remove the challenges of local government and improve its performance in Nigeria, the following steps must be followed;

Stoppage of undue political interference from the federal and state governments is necessary to create enabling environment for local government to carry out its statutory functions.

Local government service commission should be empowered to implement the reforms introduced by the federal government.

Local government should be adequately funded, to enable it meet all financial obligations.

Adequate budgetary provisions should be made for the training of local government staff.

Local government should be granted financial autonomy to enable it carry out its statutory function.

Corruption should be discouraged at the local government level. To achieve this, the economic and financial crime commission (EFCC) should beam its search light on the activities of local government in Nigeria, with a view to exposing corrupt officials.

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