

## CORRUPTION AND SERVICE DELIVERY: THE CHALLENGES OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATION IN NIGERIA

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### ABSTRACT

There is no gainsaying that service delivery in the Nigerian local government system has suffered serious setback because of the phenomenon of corruption. No doubt, corruption has ravaged local government system in Nigeria and has denied the third tier of government any meaningful development. This paper is however, aimed at examining the effect of corruption on service delivery in local government administration in Nigeria. It employs the use of secondary sources of data in its analysis and thereby reveals that, the challenges pose by corruption has made the people to lose hope and confidence in the Nigerian local government system. It concludes that corruption has not only weaken service delivery of the local government administration in Nigeria, it has also conditioned the minds of the locals not to believe in the system. The paper recommends that anti-corruption agencies should zoom their search light on the Nigerian local government officials as the level of corruption at that level is alarming. It strongly recommends further that the federal government should ensure the granted autonomy to local government is enforced to the fullest to allow the local governments direct access to the funds meant for the development of local areas which it is hoped will enhance service delivery in the local government system.

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

Local governments in Nigeria are third tier of government which is responsible for providing basic services to the local people. Local government has been considered world over as a system of government within the federal arrangement, as essential instrument of national or state government for the performance of certain basic services which could best be appreciated locally as the intimate knowledge of the needs, conditions and peculiarities of the areas concerned rest with the tier. It is however, fundamental to note that since the creation of local government administration in Nigeria, the system has suffered from corrupt vices despite several reforms. To this end, Oviasuyi, Idada and Isiraojie, (2010) observed that "as in all levels of government in Nigeria, corruption is predominantly widespread, undiluted and unambiguous in the local government". Egberi and Madubueze, (2014:98) agreed that, It is a fact that in the local government system, corruption has become all pervading, unabashed, uncontrolled and persistent. It has also been observed that Corruption denies the ordinary citizen the basic means of livelihood, it worsens unemployment and erodes our image as a nation and as individual (Goje, 2010:1). Corruption is known to be a universal but endemic issue. Albeit corruption is ubiquitous, it is found all over the world, but the degree of its manifestation varies from system to system (Lawal and Oladunjoye, 2010: 232). There is never any nation in the world without corruption or corrupt officials. The phenomenon has led to the inadequacies and destruction of various processes. Corruption has led to poverty of the people, hunger and starvation. It has also resulted to injustice, inequality, theft, mismanagement, looting and embezzlement of the nation's wealth. Corruption is a universal problem but the degrees of severity differ from country to country.

Its effects can seriously limit the development of national economies and undermine good governance. Corruption erodes stability and trust, and it damages the ethos of democratic governance. Corruption affects the quality of life of a people within a society. The issue of corruption has become part and parcel of the Nigerian society. Corruption undermines not only the public support for government, but also good governance, administrative capacity, and reliability of the Nigerian government (Agboola, 2017:104). Corruption has retarded the development of local governments in Nigeria owing to the fact that it affects the quality of service delivery in all ramifications at the three tiers of government in the country. Corruption is a general malaise pervading both the public and private sector organizations in Nigeria (Anifowose, 2002). Corruption now exerts a heavy cost on local government administration essentially in the aspect of service delivery. Worthy of note is that the federal government of Nigeria had made several attempts at combating corruption but the scourge has persisted due to the rate at which it has eaten into the fabrics of the society. That accounts for why Agboola, (2017:104) opined that such corrective measures have often fallen below administrative and societal expectations. In an effort to fight the monster called corruption, the administration of Olusegun Obasanjo established anti-corruption agencies such as Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and

Independent Corrupt Practices and other related offences Commission (ICPC) to not only identify corrupt persons but to also punish offenders, put in place measures to plug loop-holes that give rise ab initio to this pernicious phenomenon. However, in spite of the various strategies employed by the government to curb the menace, the art of corruption still permeate in Nigerian society. The lack of sustained campaign against bureaucratic corruption is at the bottom of the numerous failed attempts at tackling corruption in its larger context (Akhakpe, 2001). Based on the above, this paper is premise on discussing the challenges of corruption on service delivery in the Nigerian local government system.

## 2. CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL REVIEW

Corruption manifests itself in different forms and in different environments and even in contexts and it is therefore, impossible to have a universal conception of it. However, corruption has widely been defined as abuse or misuse of public office and funds for personal gain (Maina, 2013:3). Furthermore, Vittal (2003) defines corruption as the use of public office for private gains. Agboola, (2017:105), buttress that, Public servants, which includes both the political executive and the bureaucracy, are in a special position to practice corruption because of the public office they occupy. World Bank (2002) describes corruption as the abuse of public office through the instrumentality of private agents who actively offer bribes to circumvent public policies and processes for competitive advantage and profit. Corruption is a vice which is international in scope, monstrous in nature, crudely rampant in developing economies and unconstructively devastating and pervasive in virtually all less developing countries of the world (Bello-Imam 2005) cited in Agboola, (2017:105). According to Nye (1967:966) corruption is, 'behaviour which deviates from the normal duties of a public role because of private – regarding (family, close private clique), pecuniary or status gains; or violates rules against the exercise of certain types of private – regarding influence.

According to Kivoi (2012) corruption is motivated by the spirit of private gain at the expense of public interest. Lawal (2007) adds that where corrupt practices have become entrenched, large scale corruption co-exists with petty corruption by which officials at almost every level request payment to perform tasks or provide services. Nyaga and Theuri (2011) ascertain that corruption undermines government ability to provide basic services such as healthcare and education and leads to wastage of public resources.

Gboyega quoted in Olasupo (2009:188) and cited in Adeniyi (2012:184-185) opined thus:

*Corruption involves the giving and taking of bribe, or illegal acquisition of wealth using the resources of a public office, including the exercise of discretion. In this regard, it is those who have business to do with government who are compelled somehow to provide inducement to public officials to make them do what they had to do or grant undeserved favour. It is therefore defined as officials taking advantage of their offices to acquire wealth or other personal benefits.*

The definition above cuts across three dimensions which include social, political and economic dimensions. For Otite (1986:12) in his submission, sees corruption as:

*Perversion of integrity or state of affair through bribery, favour or moral depravity, it involves the injection of additional but improper transaction aimed at changing the normal course of events and altering judgments and positions of trust. It consists in doers and receivers' use of informal, extra-legal or illegal act to facilitate matter.*

The above scholarly opinion suggests that there is corruption in Nigeria not because of absence law and sanction, but the system itself provides shield for corrupt public officers. Thus, the corruption in Nigeria is the act of taking undue advantage of one's official position for the purpose of personal gratification without regards to its impact on service delivery.

### 2.1 Conceptualizing Local government

Local government is a third tier of government in Nigeria that is dependent on the state government for financial, administrative and political control which has made service delivery nearly impossible due to the fact that it is ravaged by corruption. Service delivery in this paper connotes the use of the instrumentality of government to formulate policies and programmes, and implementing the same for the greatest happiness of all and sundry. Thus, since the essence of local government is to bring government closer to the rural poor, those in the executive and legislative arms of local government ought to render services or/and perform their statutory functions so as to add value to the locals without been corrupt. In other way, corrupt attitude of local government workers particular the senior civil servants could hinder service delivery.

### 2.2 Service Delivery and the Dilemma of Corruption in the Local Government System

Service delivery at the local government level in Nigeria has suffered a huge setback as a result of high level of corruption. The monster has crippled the third tier of government in terms of both human and infrastructural development. It is fundamental to note that corruption has made local government administration in Nigeria very weak, and ineffective and no meaningful development can be recorded in a society riddled by corrupt public officials. Suffice it to say that corruption has been a major cause of comatose state of local government administration in Nigeria.

Also, corruption has been regarded as one of the major problems confronting effective local government administration in Nigeria, there is also the challenge of non-adherence to provisions of the financial memorandum (FM), conspicuous consumption on the part of the local officials' lifestyles that are not commensurate with official sources of income, imposition of leaders on the local government through corrupt political process and low wages of local government officials (Ali, 2008). That is to say, the rate at which services are delivered in the administration of the local governments in Nigeria is very poor. Corruption in the Nigerian local government administration has resulted in the appointment of incompetent staff and local administrators who hardly understand their functions. As a result of this, the effectiveness and quality of service delivery is no longer practicable in the Nigerian local government system. There are a number of ways in which corruption has affected the level of service delivery and the general function in the administration of local government in Nigeria. These include political

interference of state government, poor funding and financing, poor staffing and lack of accountability. Aluko (2006:73 in Nwaoduke, 2016:8) highlighted forms of collusion on corruption visible in the local government system. These include,

- i. funding of political parties
- ii. inflated contract prices or quotations
- iii. connivance between external auditors and government functionaries
- iv. connivance between supervisory ministries/bureau and local government chairmen
- v. Connivance with citizens who benefit from stolen public funds.

from the above ways in which corruption occur in local government, corruption revolves and around within the context of reckless spending, misappropriation of funds, lack of accountability and lack of political will to ensure effective and efficient service delivery to the citizenry.

However, the continuous interference of state governments and their agencies in the affairs of local government jeopardizes the autonomy of the third tier of government. It is however worthy of note that when the autonomy of the local government is threatened, effective service delivery will continue to be a mirage. That is to say, the rationale for local government autonomy is to guarantee the third tier the freedom to operate freely without interference from either state or federal governments. It is by so doing that good service delivery to the citizens would be guaranteed. It worrisome to note that some state governments compel local government administrators to carry out joint projects which may have little or no benefit to the people at the rural areas instead of allowing the local governments to come up with projects capable of ameliorating the sufferings of the rural dwellers. In most cases, these projects are abandoned without completion which results to waste of resources that could be channeled towards developing the local settings. One other challenge confronting effective service delivery at the local government level is engagement of illegal staff which is popularly called "ghost workers" in Nigeria which purely corruption. This accounts for why Nwaodike (2016:9) opined that other form of corrupt practices in local government is through the use of illegal staff popularly known as "ghost workers". He opined further that, the number of workers on the pay roll of a council is much more than the legitimate number of workers actually working in the council. Sometimes these ghost workers are regarded as consultants, liaison officers etc. In his opinion, the effect of corruption in local government administration to deliver credible services has led to the manifestation in areas such as the failure of local government to carry out developmental projects at the grassroots, irregular and at times, non-payment of salaries and allowances of local government functionaries, inability of local governments to have financial and administrative autonomy, failure to allow existing local governments to function effectively in their duties, overbearing the influence of the state government, unnecessary deductions from local government account by the state government, uneven distribution of dividends of democracy, inability of elected political office holders to fulfill their promises to the masses in local government areas. All the aforementioned now making local governments to be at the mercy of state governments and as such, going all about cap-in-hand begging for funds. Aside the above challenges of corruption at the local government administration level in Nigeria, some other effects of the menace include the following;

**Destruction of democratic values:** corruption of any kind is capable of destroying democratic culture in any local government setting. All the values of democracy, such as responsiveness, accountability, participation and human development are either subdued or neglected where corruption thrives.

**Development is denied:** instead of utilizing the available resources for the upliftment and development of the local council, the resources are diverted into personal use while the development of both human and capital are neglected.

**Rule of law is subverted and replaced by authoritarianism.** In virtually all local government councils in Nigeria, rule of law is completely ignored by the officials of the local government system by not following due process in whatever they do thereby undermining the rules and regulations that guide their conducts and to ensure that whatever they steal cannot be traced to them. Most local government executives are fond of inflating contracts sum, bribes and kickbacks are taken and contracts are most times awarded to non-existing companies.

### 3. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

There is no doubt saying that corruption has not only hampered service delivery in the administration of local governments in Nigeria, it has also incapacitated the tier of government and conditioned the minds of the locals not to have hope and confidence in the system. Since the creation of local government administration in Nigeria, corruption has always been a monster threatening the effectiveness and efficiency of service delivery at that level of government. In spite of the fact that a number of reforms had taken place in Nigeria to reform and reposition local government system for effective service delivery, it is disturbing to note that no meaningful development has occurred due to the fact that corruption has dominated virtually all aspects of that level of government. It is based on the findings of this paper that the following recommendations are made: there is the need to checkmate all the exogenous and endogenous factors breeding corruption in the local government administration in Nigeria. The functions of local government as enshrine in the constitution should be strictly adhered to and emphasized by the National Assembly. There is also the need for devolution of power for efficient and effective service delivery. This is because devolution of power encourages responsibility, transparency and accountability to the local people, and service delivery to the rural areas. Importantly, there is every need for anti-corruption agencies to zoom their searchlight on local government executives to ensure that all corrupt local government executives and legislators are prosecuted to serve as deterrence to others. Finally, federal government of Nigeria should ensure the autonomy granted to local government is enforced to the fullest to allow the local governments direct access to the funds meant for the development of local areas which it is hoped will enhance service delivery in the local government system.

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