

An Appraisal of Local Government Reforms in Nigeria from 1976-1991

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ABSTRACT

It is obvious to say that nothing is permanent except change. The local government system in Nigeria has gone through a series of change (reforms) since the inception of colonial rule in the country the post-colonial periods. That is why a conscious attempt has been made by the researcher to holistically examine and appraise the nature and impact of different local government reforms in Nigeria from the period of 1976-1991 reforms which had been enshrined 1979, 1989 and even 1999 constitutions respectively. Secondly, the research work will also critically x-ray the evolution of local government in Nigeria prior to the reforms. Thirdly, the research work will also extensively deal with the issue of caretaker committee in the local government administration, local government autonomy and accountability in local government administration in Nigeria. And moreover, how their operations contravene the direct and provisions of reforms under study. Therefore, Marxist political economy approach as a theoretical framework is viewed as the best framework of analysis in the project work and it shall be adopted. Finally, considering the nature of the topic, we adopted secondary source of data collection using observation method and the analysis was basically rooted on content of the cited materials (content analysis).

Keywords: Government, colonial, reforms and Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Prior to 1976 local government reforms in Nigeria, there had been various kinds of local administration following the military intervention in government in 1966 and the subsequent civil war which has a lot of impact on the organization and administration of local authorities in the country [1,2]. Twelve states were created out of the former four (4) regions and each state government practiced the brand or type of local government administration that is best preferable to them [3]. As a matter of fact, there were many variations in the organization and practice of local government administration as there were state governments. Due to these variations in the local administration in the country, all the local government structures were abolished and their functions and staff

were all transferred to the state government [4].

Though, some of the state retained the former structures, organization and power of the erstwhile native authorities. Thus, it becomes so imperative that three different organizational structures and practices in the different state should be streamlined coordinated and made uniform if the local government system most not go into oblivion [4]. It was as a result of this fear that led the military government of Murtala, Obasanjo into the unification of the local government structure and practice in the country in 1976, which is otherwise called: The Local Government Reforms of 1976 launched on August that year with a total of 299 local government areas. Later, this number was increased to 301 and subsequently to 303

before the military handed the realms of power to the civilians in October 1979.

These 1979 nationwide local government reforms ensured that various systems of local government administration operation in Nigeria were overhauled and made uniform nationwide. According to [5] they were re-organized into single tier multi-purpose elective councils". This accorded local government, the third tier statue of government behind the federal and state government.

Consequently, in his desire to reposition local government for greater effectiveness and efficiency, Ibrahim Babangida regime set up a twenty one member panel headed by Alhaji Ibrahim Dasuki to look into, and review the affairs of the reformed local government system in the country which generally, the report by the committee on the review of local government administration in Nigeria known as the Dasuki committee report, so name after it chairman, Alhaji Ibrahim Dasuki, did not see much wrong with Dasuki, did not see much wrong with the intentions and provisions of the reforms of 1976 [6].

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Local government reforms in Nigeria played very significant roles in moulding of the structure, practices and functions of local government system. The 1976 local government reforms were intended to rationalize and reorganized governance at the local level for more effective and efficient performance in the provision of services to the communities. Another objective of the reforms according to [8] was the stimulation of democratic participation of the local level through the institutionalization of popular participation of the best local levels.

The subsequent reforms of 1988/1991 promoted the local government autonomy. Revenue allocation to councils was increased from 10% to 15% in 1992. Generally, the ambition of the reforms

Moreover, there were other reforms in the local government called the civil service reforms of 1988 which also constituted a great change in the system, followed by the 1991 local government reforms in Nigeria. The reform promoted the autonomy of local government became truly a third tier of government. Besides administrative innovation, the 1991 system of government of the local government level. As a result, the chairman became the chief executive and the accounting officer of the local government. The legislature arm of the council was formed with all the elected councilors as members [7].

Indeed, it was the need to strengthen the local government towards efficient and effective grassroots development that necessitated the local government reforms in Nigeria. Attempt would be made in this research in ascertaining whether these aims are been actualized, and at the same time, identify some of the obstacles confronting the realization of these aims.

were to grant to councils the much desired autonomy, remove councils from excessive state control and ensure rapid development of local area. The 1985 local government also provided structure that made for accountability within the local government system in Nigeria.

It is based on this background that this study precedes with the following crucial questions:

1. Have local government reforms [9] really guaranteed democratic involvement of people in their local government affairs?
2. Is full fledged autonomy of local government obtainable in Nigeria in consonance with the reforms?
3. Is the doctrine of accountability functional in Nigeria local government?.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

Based on the question posed by this research, our major objectives in the appraisal of local government reforms in Nigeria would be highlighted as follows:

To investigate if there is democratic participation of local people (i.e people of the grass root in the day to day running of their government).

To examine the nature of local government autonomy and some factors inhabituate its smooth operation in accordance with local government reforms.

To ascertain the extent of the practice of principle of transparency and accountability in the local governments in Nigeria.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The important of this research cannot be quantified owing to the goals it is set to achieve in academic field, namely:

1. It aims of improving the understanding of the various local government reforms in Nigeria. Through this, we would be able to identify some of the short comings associated with the reforms under review.
2. It will permit us to apply the knowledge we gained from the research in tackling

problems that might confront the smooth application of local government reforms in Nigeria local government.

3. It will aid the local administration to know the provisions of the reforms for effective policy formulation and implementation for the well being of their people.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Local government as well as local government reforms have been defined or explained by different scholars from different angles. Accordingly, the United Nations Division of Public Administration [10] viewed local government as:

Apolitical subdivision of a nation/or in a federal system, a state which is constituted by law and has substantial control of local affairs including the

THEORETICAL FRAME WORK OF ANALYSIS

In the conduct of any meaningful social science research, the need for theory as a role of analysis cannot be over emphasized. Political and economic analysis therefore to be meaningful must be anchored on the base that would help the analyst to better organize, systematize and coordinate existing knowledge in a particular field.

The usefulness of theory in political analysis according to Duddlely lies in its ability to help the researcher conceptualized or make a sense out of the From his own perspective, [4] conceptualized the Marxist political economy theory views of local government as "predominantly an instrumental of the state and, as such, is either a direct means of securing legitimacy for the ruling class or securing protection compliance through repression".

Therefore, local government implements the ideas, objective, program and aspiration of the national government.

complexity of observation data. In this study, the Marxist political economy approach as the most desirable framework for the analysis of local government reform in Nigeria shall be adopted.

This approach (Marxists political economy) was derived from the writings of Karl Marx, a German Philosopher. In the area of local government scholars, like [2, 3] have judiciously conducted studies employing Marxist theory.

The local level Drawing from the above, it shows that local government is the agent as well as the arm of the government of the local level. In summary, local government reforms in Nigeria were carried out to actualize the ideas, objectives, programmes and aspirations of the national government of the grass root level. Local government reforms in Nigeria are, therefore, the practical realization of the ideology of the national government.

HYPOTHESIS

This research sets to examine the following hypothesis:

1. Local government reforms [4] do not really guarantee democratic involvement

of people in their local government affairs.

2. The local government autonomy has been contravened owing to bureaucratic incursion of the state governments, constitutional/decreed provisions and heavy-reliance on the external resources

and assistance from the other two tiers of government.

3. The doctrine of accountability has been relegated to the background as a result of corrupt practices perpetrated by the political office holders in the local government.

Scope of the Study

The research focuses on the examination of local government reforms in Nigeria from 1916, 1988, and 1991. It is the

enterprise of this study to examine the different forms of reforms in Nigeria.

Limitation of the Study

The research faced certain limitations. Firstly, local governments are too many in number and so it was highly impossible to go all the local government areas in Nigeria. Again, some local governments have known to have hijacked and diverted

federal government's allocation to local governments and as such, it may not be possible to generate correctly from the results of this research for all local government in Nigeria.

Method of Data Collection

Owing to the nature of this research work, the use of secondary source of data collection shall be adopted. In other words, since the study does not require the use of questionnaire and interview, we shall concentrate more on materials from books academic journals, unpublished research papers, seminars papers newspapers, magazines etc. The

items listed above would be sourced from the library and internet.

To ensure the validity and reliability of our data, we shall adapt the rigorous method of content analysis. By content analysis, we mean away of extracting and also, a way of reading meaning into these information as well as drawing inference from the available evidence in order to reach a conclusion.

Staffing of local government councils

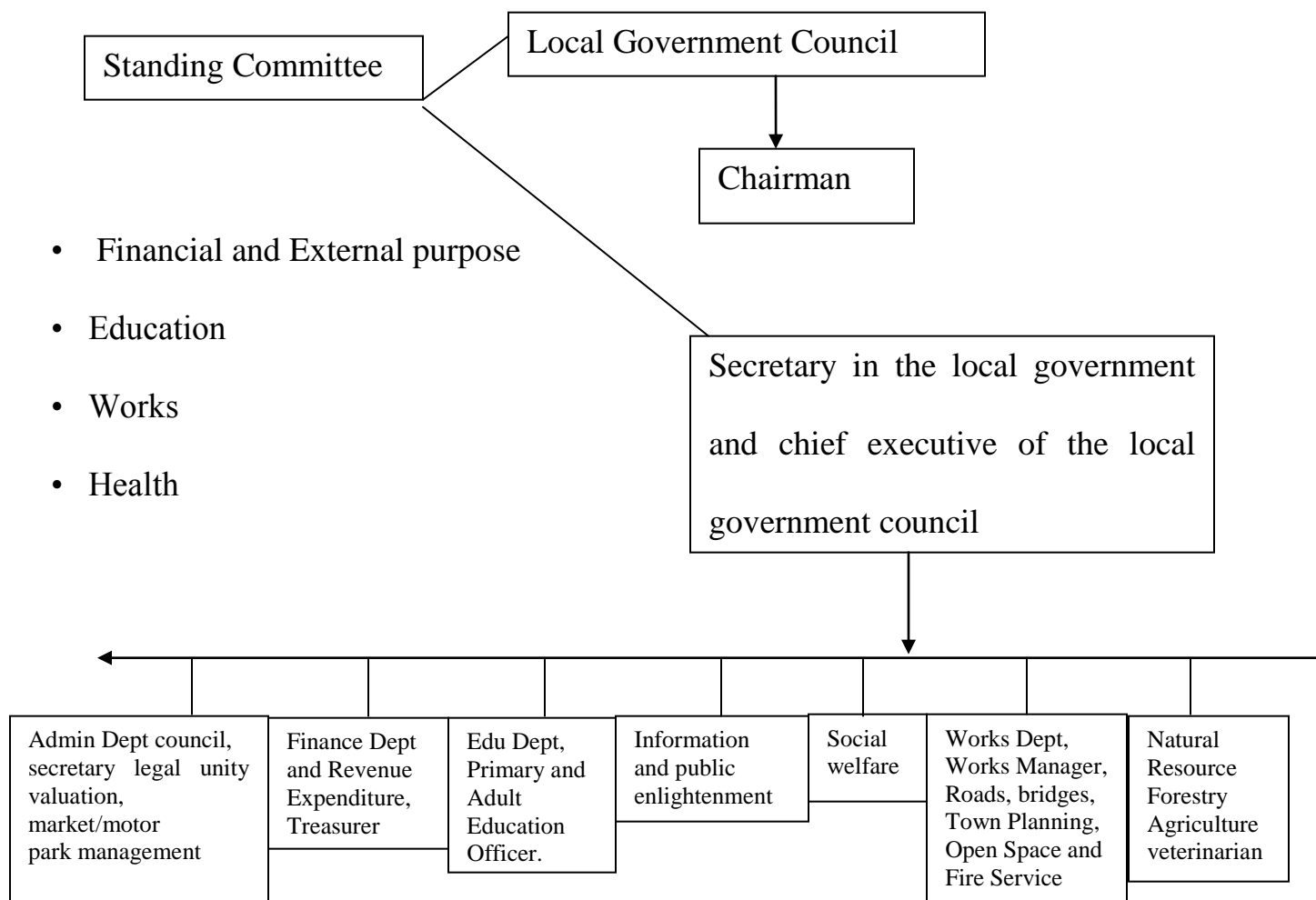
In consonance with the 1976 local government reforms, local government service was scheduled as approval service in the pension laws, and other conditions of service; such as grading of post were made for the first time in the history of local government in Nigeria, a unified local government service board was established and charged with the responsibility for appointment, discipline, promotion, posting and control of staff or salary grade 7 and above.

local government councilors could be elected directly or indirectly.

Three universities were given the mandate to organize, on a regular basis, a series of conference, workshop, seminars, etc. in order to up-grade the knowledge and information of practicing local government officials on the current state of the act in local government administration, membership of local government council.

Following the provision of the 1976 local government councils were made elective,

The structure of Local Government Council under the 1976 Local Government Reforms



Source: 1976 Local Government Reforms, Enugu State, Government Printer, 1977.

Noticeable Problems with the 1976 Local Government Reforms

Scholars have tried to expunge noticeable problems associated with the 1976 local government reforms. These include:

1. Enormous powers were bestowed on the secretary and the treasurer. The secretary was vested with the double functions i.e secretary to the local government as well as the chief executive of the local government. This made him to be superior to other government staffs who look up him for instruction instead of the chairman.
2. The idea of the local government chairman to be chosen by the state government could be target undemocratic and that could have led to abuse of power.
3. Intrusion of state government into the affairs of the local government was dialogued, and that local government, being third tier government; should be left alone to manage its staffs.
4. Powers between the chairman and the councilors were fused together and that made the chairman to have excess control of his supervisors.
5. There was virtually no popular election into the local government system

Accountability in Local Government

Accountability of resources, both human and financial, in public service is so imperative especially as it affects development and proper harnessing of our limited resources (Ikejiani 1995:138). Public servants are expected to give account for public resources entrusted on them. This is why accountability in the public service has always taken prime position in assessment of good governance.

The 1988 local government reforms created positions for structures that make for accountability within the local system [5]. However, [6] noted that the recent reform in the civil service initiated by the Abacha administration was informed by the observable operational defects in the 1988 civil service reforms that tended to jeopardize accountability. A serious

problem was organized by the operators of the local government system between December 1977 and October 1987, even though the intention of the reforms was to turn the local government system into a domestic instrument for rural transformation. Local government system once again became an instrument of political development at the grass root level by the state governors who, once more, fell back to the discredited practice of sole administration or management committee era that was in vogue immediately after the civil war in 1970. Also, the issue of caretaker committee became prevalent between 1999 and 2007 in fact, almost throughout the federation, and it was an opportunity whereby their loyalists to run the local government system instead of allowing the local people to choose their leaders through a democratic process.

6. Due to the interference of the state government into the local government affairs and administration, it led to the hijacking of the internal local government revenue such as community tax, jangali tax, licenses, etc. These defects were all experienced in the provisions.

problem based on the issue of accountability, and unless this criteria issue is addressed, there might never be a well deserved progress in local government administration in Nigeria. This is because corruption is admittedly generally acknowledged as one of the most debilitating vices plaguing the local government system in the country. These corrupt and fraudulent practices are perpetrated by public office holders in the local government, and sometimes in connivance with state governments.

Corruption/fraud has been defined by Wilkins (1970: iii) as "behaviour which is different from, or conflicts with, the standards which are accepted as normal within a group or social system". There is a clear indication from the above that

corruption is a departure or deviation from societal accepted standards. Corruption in local governments manifest in misappropriation of funds, bribery, kickbacks etc.

Also, Ezeji (2008) highlights that "many factors such as the sheer looking and siphoning of local council funds by the state governments (at first instance) and local government chairman (at second instance/ are on top of the problem". A request contained in a communique issued of the end of NUIGE'S National

Executive Council (NEC) specifically noted that the joint account was a channel use by the state government to siphon local council resources.

There have been incidents of corruption and allegations of such in local government in Nigeria. all these tend to attest to our argument that accountability has been eroded in local councils in Nigeria. we shall in the table below give summary of petitions against local government functionaries.

Table 1: Summary of Petitions against Local Government Functionaries

S/N	DATE	LOCAL GOVERNMENT	STATE`	NATURE OF ALLEGATION
1.	6/10/93	Paikoro	Niger	Mismanagement through contract award
2.	13/10/93	Onitsha North	Anambra	Reckless spending and disposal of L.G. prospect
3.	12/3/93	Ezza	Enugu	Gross financial mismanagement.
4.	7/7/93	Ohauku	Enugu	Reckless management of public fund
5.	16/3/93	Ahoada	Rivers	Looking of public fund
6.	11/10/93	Dekina	Kogi	Fraud and mismanagement
7.	31/1/95	Mobba	Borno	Sharing of 2.2m between chairman and treasurer
8.		Yala	Cross Rivers	Financial impropriety
9.	7/3/94	Yankun	Cross Rivers	Unfoundned allegation of breach of code of conduct of public officer
10.	6/6/94	Ikara	Kaduna	Disregard to laid down rules and regulations
11.	6/6/94	SobonGari	Kaduna	Financial recklessness
12.	25/4/94	Mokwa	Niger	Mere observation
13.	27/9/94	Egbado North	Ogun	Mismanagement of fund and abuse of operational guidelines
14.	19/9/94	Jega	Kebbi	Serious embezzlement of public fund
15.	30/6/93	Sagbama	Rivers	Cross misconduct mismanagement
16.	28/9/93	Fiture	Adamawa	Fraud/embezzlement public fund
17.	20/12/93	Uzo-Uwani	Enugu	Financial fraud/corrupt leadership
18.	24/9/94	Akoko South Ondo	Ondo	Siphoning L.G. fund through ghost contracts
19.	8/2/94	Gumin	Sokoto	Financial mismanagement
20.	11/11/93	Maradum	Sokoto	Withdrawal of money after accounts were frozen on the dissolution of Local government
21.	7/10/93	Essan North East	Edo	Financial impropriety
22.	2/8/93	Wamakko	Sokoto	Financial impropriety impeachment
23.	14/9/94	Madobi	Kano	Re-illegal payment of N1.360 754.5
24.	10/5/94	Darozo	Bauchi	Misusing of local government fund
25.	25/11/94	Rijan	Niger	Misused/accumulation of wealth

				using public fund
26.	14/2/94	Igbo Eze	Enugu	Fraudulent activities
27.	14/9/94	Egbado North	Ogun	Scandalous
28.	21/8/95	19 L.G. Area	Enugu	Maladministration, financial impropriety; usurpation of functions,, embezzlement of government caretaker committee chairman
29.	20/4/94	Ikorodu	Lagos	Illegal sale of 8 transit buses of council
30.	26/4/95	NassarawaEggon, Keffi, Wase, barkin, Ladi, Akwanga, Bassa and Lana	Plateau	Former chairman/2.7m made through various account
31.	28/2/95	Ile-Olusi/Oke Igbo	Ondo	Part of economic relief grant of council workers, N1.3m was put in chairman private account
32.	28/8/95	Kaduna South	Kaduna	Suspension of 20 revenue collector for diversion of councils internally generated revenue
33.	22/4/95	Kanshisha	Benue	Frauds former DPM inflated number of teachers on the pay roll to attract more funds from federal government.
34.	16/8/95	Ruji	F.C.T	Ex-local government chairman alleged theft of council mobile bus (sold vehicle)
35.	28/5/95	Boki	Cross Rivers	Allegation misappropriation of fund, misadministration and abuse of office leveled against caretaker chairman.
36.	27/9/95		Edo	Eight (8) local government officials sacked over 17 million fraud.

Source: Ministry of State and Government, 1995 as cited in [7].

Finally, drawing from the above table, which showcases the types of corruption perpetrated by council chairman and their associates, it then signifies that the principle of transparency and accountability is no more being observed at the grass root government. Therefore, lack of accountability among the state

holders at the local government level is in contradiction with the principle of accountability championed by the 198 local government reforms in Nigeria, and until something serious is done, all these vices will continue to flourish unhindered in Nigeria local governments.

Presentation of Data

In the course of research finding, I acknowledge the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis One

Local government reforms (1976, 1988, and 1991) do not really guarantee

democratic involvement of people in their local government affairs.

It was observed in chapter four (4.1) that the issue of caretaker committee violates the provision of 1976 local government reforms which stipulated that democratically elected people would run the affairs of local government. It must also be noted that section of the 1991 constitution explicitly provides for democratically elected council. On the view of Ezeje (2008) "any system that infringes upon this is an aberration of the doctrine of the rule of law.

Hypothesis Two

The local government autonomy has been contravened owing to bureaucratic incursion of the state governments, constitutional and decree provisions, and heavy reliance on the external resources and assistance from the other two tier of government.

Based on the above hypothesis, it was ascertained in chapter four (4.2) that both the constitutions of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and various government full fledged autonomy. As a matter of fact, local governments were subjected to the control of both the state and federal government reforms in Nigeria in 1976. In the view of Abada, (2007:252) "since local government is the intention of state and federal government, there is no way they could be talking of enjoying full

Hypothesis Three

The doctrine of accountability has been relegated to the background as a result of corruption practices holders in the political office.

Drawing from the table in chapter four (4:3), which showcases the types of corruption perpetrated by council chairman and their principle of transparency and accountability is not more being observed at the grass root government.

Also, corruption in local government manifest in misappropriation of funds, bribery, kickbacks etc. hence, Ezeji (2008) highlights that "many factors such as the

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Equally, the continued act of the state government to appoint caretaker, transition or management committees of the expiration of the tenure of every elected local council, and the sheer inertia to conduct free and fair election of the local government of the 1991 constitution, and as well, negates the provision of local government reforms which had democratic participation of the people in their affair as its cardinal focus.

independence or absolute autonomy. They cannot be delinked from the authority that established them especially in a system where the different tier governments depend on each other for accomplishing national objectives or goals.

Also, the violation of financial autonomy of the government by the state government has gone to the extent that local governments are being intimidated to sign and hand over their statutory allocation to the state. the withholding of Lagos State local governments federal statutory allocation in 2005 by the Obasanjo administration attests to that local government are not financially autonomous in Nigeria.

sheer looking and siphoning of local council funds by the state governments (at first instance) and local government chairman (at second instance) are on top of the problem". A request contained in a communique issued at the end of NULEGS National Executive Council (NEC) specifically noted that the joint account was a channel use by the state government to siphon local council resources. Therefore, lack of accountability among the state holders at the local government level is in contradiction with the principle of accountability championed by the 1988 local government reform in Nigeria.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Firstly, the injection of caretaker committee into the local government system violates the provision of 1975 local government reform which stipulated that democratically elected people would run the affairs of local government.

All over the world today, especially in a democratic government, the masses are expected to choose their own representatives whom they can hold accountable and responsible at all time, but the reverse is the case under caretaker committee. Therefore, the local government caretaker committees are adhoc governmental agencies in the hands of the state governments who direct their operations. This caretaker committee, it was observed that the interest of the state governors who appointed them at the expense of right-full local populace.

Secondly, it was observed that the autonomy is not guaranteed. This is because of bureaucratic inclusion of the government, provision of law/decrees and

heavy reliance on the resources and assistance from the other first two tiers of government due to lack of observance of full fledged autonomy of local government, it has been regarded as being subordinate or second class to the other two tiers.

The last but not the least if corruption. Corruption is one of the most debilitating vices plaguing the local government system in the country. These corruption and fraudulent practices are perpetrated by public office holder in the local government, and sometime in connivance with state government, and sometime in connivance with state governments. Corruption in local governments manifest in misappropriation of funds, bribery, kickbacks etc. Also, many factors such as the sheer looking and siphoning of local council funds by the state governments and local government chairman are on top of the problem. Thus, it is observed that the joint account was a channel use by the state government to siphon local council resources

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

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CONCLUSION

We have attempted to assess the various local government reforms in Nigeria which connect the 1976, 1988 and 1991 local government reforms respectively. Efforts were also made to study the system of local government administration in Nigeria prior to these reforms. In the study, we noted that there had been well organized system of administration at the grass root level even before the advent of British colonialist who came and introduced their own

system from where the local government eventually emerged.

Through identification and treatment of the major problems confronting local government system in Nigeria were dealt with extensively. The implication of the above findings is that unless pragmatic system are taken to address the whole issue raised, the effective and efficient functioning of the three tier government would never be achieved.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We are prompted to proffer the following recommendations which could serve as penance to the problems that bedevil the actual implantation of the various local government reforms in Nigeria under study. They are as follows:

- 1) A caretaker committee system must be abrogated and never be allowed to replace democratically elected council despite the reasons usually given. This is because, section 7 of the 1991 constitution provides for democratically elected councils, and any system that infringes upon this is an aberration to the doctrine of rule of law.
- 2) The local councils under caretaker administration should be banned by the National Assembly from benefiting from the monthly statutory allocation since such administrative system is alien to our constitution.
- 3) The joint allocation accounts committee between state and local

- government areas negates the principle of autonomy advocated for local government system and should be abrogated since it serves as a channel through which local council funds is stipulated and located by both the state governments and local governments chairman as well.
- 4) All the bureaucratic bottlenecks and laws that tend to jeopardize the autonomy of the third tier government must be abrogated.
- 5) Local government must improve its internally generated revenue based so as to reduce over dependence on the state and federal government financially.
- 6) The office of the Auditor-General for local government must live up to expectation of auditing council's project and activities with a plan/time table scheduled.
- 7) The quality of persons emerging as chairman and councilors in our

- council must be given serious consideration, both by the government and the people, if accountability must be enthroned at the local government levels.
- 8) Finally, a special arm of anti-graft agencies such as the Economic and

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Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and Independent Corrupt Practices and other related offences Commission (ICPC) must be at the local government dedicated to and fully empowered to handle political corruption at the local government level.

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