

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE CHALLENGES OF SERVICE DELIVERY:  
THE NIGERIA EXPERIENCE**

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**ABSTRACT**

Nigeria is a Federation of thirty-six States and a Federal Capital Territory located in Abuja. It consists of 774 Local Government Councils. The Constitution recognizes Local Government as the third tier of government whose major responsibility is to ensure affective service delivery to the people, and also enhance sustainable development at the grassroot. The incapacity to generate its own revenue sources leads to its continued dependence on federal allocation, the result of which makes it a stooge rather than a partner in developmental process among the tiers of government in Nigeria leading to little evidence of performance at local level. This study examines the constitutional/functional roles of local government councils in Nigeria in relation to service delivery. It provides a prospect of identifying the factors that has hampered the effectiveness of this institution at grassroots governance in Nigeria. The paper, however provide recommendations in form of solutions to these challenges at the local level.

**Keywords:** Local Government, Services Delivery, Centralization, Decentralization, Fiscal Federalism, Citizen Centered Local Governance, Sustainable Development:

## INTRODUCTION

Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa, with a population of 140 million (Amakom, 2009), 64 percent of whom live in rural areas. In the pursuit of development at the grassroots, local government was created to provide level of measurable services to rural dwellers.

In Nigeria, local government is the third tier of government whose major responsibility is to provide commensurate services to the rural dwellers. Everywhere in the world, irrespective of the system of government, local government is created to ensure efficient services at local level.

Local government as an agent of development is to use the fund made available to them by both central and state government and the internally generated revenue (IGR) to improve on the lives of the people at the grassroots within the local government council's area of operation by initiating and attracting developmental projects to the local councils such as provision of access roads, water, and rural electricity; communal services such as the construction of roads, bridges, and personal welfare in such area as education, housing, and health care service delivery system. The importance of local government is a function of its ability to promote sense of belongingness, safety and oneness among the people. Whatever is the mode of government; local government has been essentially regarded as the path to, and guarantor of, national integration, administration and development (Arowolo, 2008).

In line with the above the 1976 Nigerian Local Government Reform Guideline stated the principal aims of local government as follows:

- (a) To make appropriate services and development activities responsible to local wishes and initiatives by developing or delegating them to local representatives bodies;
- (b) To facilitate the exercise of democratic self government close to the local levels of our society, and to encourage initiative and leadership potential;
- (c) To mobilize human and material resources through the involvement of members of the public in their local development;
- (d) To provide a two-ways channel of communication between local communities and government (both state and federal).

From the objectives above, the essence of creating local government is to provide services using human and financial resources at its disposal to facilitate development at the grassroots.

Local government is the lowest in the governmental hierarchy within the concept of federalism. The federal government is the sovereign national, the state government, a quasi-sovereign and local government, infra-sovereign. It is infra-sovereign, subordinate and subject to the control of the state government; yet it is a separate legal unit being a body corporate having a common seal, with powers to sue and to be sued, mainly providing obligatory municipal services (Samihah and Adelabu, 2011:139).

Nigeria's experience in local government administration, whether in military regimes or in democratic era, has clearly shows that local government is faces with daunting challenges in their mandate to promote development and provides essential services to the rural dwellers. Sadly, local government which is statutorily established to be the closest tier of government to the people is not doing its bidding coupled with the fact that resident population in it is denied the benefits of its existence. The failure of the local governments in the area of services delivery has made the citizens to lose their trust in government as an institution. In some areas, council officials are better known for the harassment of citizens than service delivery (Ajibulu, 2011). It is common knowledge that local government has the weakest capacity to initiate and manage rural development programme. This is due to the fact that the quality of human resources available at local government level is seriously insufficient. Most of the officials are performing their function without the relevant qualification to perform effectively. As a result, the available resources for accelerated and sustainable rural development are inefficiently utilized for the purpose intended (Ocheni, et al, 2012:131).

In the view of the above, this paper, therefore examines the essence of local government in provision of services. It also looks at the factors militating against the performance and recommends the ways of making local government a viable service delivery institution.

## **CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT**

The concept of local governance is as old as the history of humanity, only recently has it entered the broad discourse in the academic and practice literature (Shah, 2006:2). This concept has created excitement within the scholarship and practicing world of administration. It has attracted the attention of many scholars within the academia who have seriously analyzed and dug deep into the meaning, genesis and the need for its existence within all political arrangement of the world (Akindele, et al, 1997:12). Therefore, there is no unanimous acceptable definition among the scholars on the definition of local government.

However, Appadorai (2004:287) defines local government as government by popularly elected bodies' charges with administration and executive duties in matters concerning the inhabitants of a particular district or place.

According to Shah (2006:1-2) local government can be defined as thus:

A specific institutions or entities created by national constitutions (Brazil, Denmark, France, India, Italy, Japan, Sweden), by state constitutions (Australia, the United States), by ordinary legislation of a higher level of central government (New Zealand, the United Kingdom, most countries), or by executive order (China) to deliver a range of specific services to a relatively small geo-geographically delineated area. Local governance is a broader concept and is defined as the formulation and execution of collective action at the local level. Thus, it encompasses the direct and indirect roles of formal institutions of local government and government hierarchies, as well as the roles of informal norms, networks, community organizations, and neighborhood associations in pursuing collective action by defining the framework for citizen-citizen and citizen-state interactions, collective decision making, and delivery of local public services. Local governance, therefore, includes the diverse objectives of vibrant, living, working, and environmentally preserved self-governing communities.

Contributing further to the discourse, the Nigeria 1976 Guideline for Local Government Reform define local government as:

Government at the local level exercised through representative council established by law to exercise powers within defined areas. These powers should give the council substantial

control over local affairs (including staffing) and institutional and financial powers to initiate and to determine and implement projects so as to compliment the activities of the state and federal government in their areas, and ensure, through devolution of functions to those councils and through the active participation of the people and their traditional institutions, that local initiative and response to local needs and conditions are maximized.

All these definition put together clearly show that local government is an important institution for rapid and measurable development at the grassroot. However, from these definitions, according to Tumini (2011:83) local government can be view as thus:

- Is a sub-system playing its part within the larger national political system.
- Is the lower level government in a unitary political system and lowest level government in a federal three-level government.
- It is usually elected/selected and representative.
- It is established by law and has certain responsibilities
- It includes a certain population living within the confines of a defined territory.
- It is a legal entity of its own and can sue and be sue.

Therefore, local government in Nigeria content is established as the third tier of governance, protected by the constitution, which comprise of democratically elected representative whose purpose is to provide basic services to the people at the grassroot.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **THE PRINCIPLE OF CITIZEN –CENTERED LOCAL GOVERNANCE:**

What is local government suppose to do? Why did it come into existence? Theoretically, what were its objectives? Scholars do not have a consensus on this (Ola, 2004:175; Aransi and Adeyemi, 2012:6). Makenzie (1974:17) has explicitly stated thus:

There is no theory of local government. There is no normative general theory from which we can deduce what local government ought to be; there is no positive general theory from which we can derived testable hypothesis about what is it.

Despite this, several accepted theories have been put forward to provide a strong rationale for decentralized decision making and a strong role for local governments on the grounds of efficiency, accountability, manageability, and autonomy (Shan, 2006:3).

In formulating a theory of local government, to the understanding of the topic under study, “local government and service delivery: the Nigeria experience”. Therefore this study is conducted within the content of citizen-centered local governance principle (theory).

According to Shah (2006:15-16), reforming the institution of local governance requires agreement on basic principles.

Three principles are advanced to initiate such a discussion:

- (a) Responsive governance. This principle aims for governments to do the right things- that is, to deliver services consistent with citizen preferences.

- (b) Responsible governance. The government should also do it right – that is, manage its fiscal resources prudently. It should earn the trust of residents by working better and costing less and by managing fiscal and social risks for the community. It should strive to improve the quality and quantity of access to public services. To do so, it needs to benchmark its performance with the best-performing local government.
- (c) Accountable governance. A local government should be accountable to its electorate. It should adhere to appropriate safeguards to ensure that it serves the public interest with integrity. Legal and institutional reforms may be needed to enable local governments to deal with accountability between elections- reforms such as a citizen’s character and a provision for recall of public officials.

A framework of local government that embodies these principles according to Shah (2006:15-16) is called citizen- centered governance. The distinguishing features of citizen-centered governance are the following:

- Citizen empowerment through a rights-based approach (direct democracy provisions, citizens’ charter)
- Bottom-up accountability for results
- Evaluation of government performance as the facilitator of a network of providers by citizens as governors, taxpayers, and consumers of public services.

The framework emphasizes reforms that strengthen the role of citizens as the principals and create incentives for government agents to comply with their mandates.

The commitment problem may be mitigated by creating citizen-centered local governance – by having direct democracy provisions, introducing governing for results in government operations, and reforming the structure of governance, thus shifting decision making closer to the people. Direct democracy provisions require referenda on major issues and large projects and citizens having the right to veto any legislation or government program. A governing for results framework requires government accountability to citizens for service delivery performance. Hence, citizens have a charter defining their basic rights as well as rights of access to specific standards of public services. Output-based intergovernmental transfers strengthen compliance with such standards and strengthen accountability and citizen empowerment (Shah, 2006:16).

## **CHALLENGES TO SERVICES DELIVERY AT LOCAL GOVERNMENT LEVEL IN NIGERIA**

Local government is the closet tier of government to the people in Nigeria, yet the resident population in it is denied the benefits of its existence. This is evident in the poor environmental state, deteriorating public school building, poor market facilities and lack of health centers (Olusola, 2011:337). It was put in place for reasonable purposes ranging from political, social, and economic reasons. These reasons are captured in section 7 (2) of the Nigeria constitution (Iguisi, 2010). It is quite disturbing over the years; that these purposes have not been fully realized. There has been a sustained argument that the 774 local government areas, which form the third tier of government in Nigeria, are contributing little to national development to justify their existence. Local government has not really facilitated rapid development at the grassroots, which is the essence of their creation (Amaechi, 2012). The concept of bringing governance closer to the people through a third-tier participatory form of government has not materialized in Nigeria. Lack of capacity of local government to fulfill the aspirations of their communities are caused by lack of adequate resources, including inappropriate fiscal base, the usurpation of its power to raise internal revenue and the manipulation of the state joint local

government account (John, 2012). This development according to Mimiko in (Aborisade, 2012) has made people to see the councils as a place where top administrators' engage in corruption and an environment where supposed professional had little or no idea of what the councils should be doing. Yovbi (2008) has also blamed the people for the failure of local government; he gave the reason as thus:

Lamentably, most Nigerians do not know the specific functions of the three tiers of government and tend to put the blame for everything on the most visible tier. Clogged drains in front of their houses are blamed on the Federal government, while the Chairman of their Local Council will makes away with federal allocations to the area and revenue generated, usually at the expense and to the discomfort of residents of the LGA. Majority of Nigerians do not see that politics at the Local Government level can be a means of honest livelihood and an opportunity to contribute effectively and meaningfully to the development of society. Therefore, they sit by while those who know even less than themselves, walk away with easy victories won with intimidation and then proceed to abuse citizens and erode the quality of our lives.

Another reason for the failure of local government in area of services delivery is the role of the state governors in the affairs of local government. The governors are found of taking over their financial allocation, taxes, counterpart funding and refuse to conduct Local Government elections, but instead ruling local governments with appointed administrators, most of whom are party loyalist and their friends and relations turning the entire process of local governments into irrelevance schemes of things (Ukonga 2012). This same view was also corroborated by Khaleel quoted in John (2012) when he observed thus:

There is no state of the federation of Nigeria where one form of illegality or the other is not committed with funds of local government, through over deduction of primary school teacher's salary, spurious state/local government joint account project, sponsoring of elections, taking over the statutory functions of local government and handling them over to cronies and consultants, non-payments of pensioners and non-utilization of training fund despite the mandatory deduction of stipulated percentages for these purposes... nine states out of the 36 states of the federation have elected representatives running the affairs of their local governments. This is central to the whole problem because it is by planting stooges called caretaker committee, who neither have the mandate of the people nor the moral strength to resist the excruciating control of the state government that perpetuates the rot... In Imo State, local government workers embark on series of industrial actions to get their accumulated salaries paid, while their five years arrears of all statutory allowances are fast becoming bad debt. The drive to maximally control the local government councils is taking another dimension now, with senior officers in the councils, who are Directors of Administration, Finance and others, being removed or deployed while lesser officers who are not qualified for such positions are appointed to replace them... In Lagos State all manners of gazette, policies and laws are being produced on daily basis with intention of taking over the collection of revenue from council's staff. In Plateau State, staff of local government are being deployed and restricted to serve only in the local government of their origin.

However, the implication of this according to Ajibulu (2012) is that local government is now considered as an extension of state's ministry. The inherent nature of this problem has caused subservience, a situation where local government waits for the next directives from states government before embarking on any developmental projects. This has made local government an object of control and directives.

## **FISCAL CENTRALISATION AND DECENTRALISATION AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT SERVICES DELIVERY IN NIGERIA**

There are basically two major sources of funds for the states and local governments. These are allocation from the Federation Accounts (including VAT, Stabilization Receipts and General Ecology) and internal revenue generation (tax and non-tax) (Odoko and Nnanna [www.csae.ox.ac/books/epon/fiscal/federalism](http://www.csae.ox.ac/books/epon/fiscal/federalism)).

Intergovernmental transfers are made from the federal account to the states. The funds serve to provide general revenue to all tiers of government to fund basic operations where their own revenue would not be sufficient to fulfill such responsibilities. The states then transfer funds to local governments. Allocation of funds in Nigeria is decided by the National Revenue Mobilization, Fiscal and Allocation Commission (NRMFAM) based on criteria to ensure that there is equity in allocation, both vertically between tiers of government and horizontally, across Nigeria (Amakon, 2009). The criteria are as follow:

- **Vertical**
  - Federal government – 52.7%
  - State government – 26.7%
  - Local government – 20.6%
- **Horizontal**
  - Equality – 40%
  - Population – 30%
  - Internally generated revenue – 10%
  - Land mass and terrain – 10%
  - Social development factor – 10%
  - Territorial spread – 1.5%
  - Rainfall – 1.5%
  - Primary/secondary enrolment – 4%
  - Hospital beds – 3%

The social development factor is used to determine states that have better literacy levels, hospital facilities, and so on.

### **Value added tax (VAT)**

- **Vertical**
  - Federal government – 15%
  - State government – 50%
  - Local government – 35%
- **Horizontal**
  - Equality – 50%
  - Population – 30%
  - Derivation – 20%

According to Amakon (2009) since the creation of the 12 states structure in 1967, states and local governments have been dependent on the federation account. The federation account is shared among the three tiers of government as detailed in the above vertical formula, which was last amended in 2004.

Amakon (2009) also reveals that there is evidence of monthly payment to all tiers of government since 2003 and the above percentage meant for local governments is usually transferred from the federation account to state accounts. However, there is no evidence that the state transfers the same percentage to local governments. In Enugu for instance, the former governor was accused of corrupt practice while in office. Embezzlement of these transfers (local government allocation) has been one of the main charges against him.

### **SERVICES DELIVERY AT LOCAL GOVERNMENT LEVEL: AN ASSESSMENT**

Development is synonymous to freedom in any society. If society is developed, the people in that society is always said to be free from diseases, hunger, poverty, illness, illiteracy, ignorance and insecurity. Sustainability could be the right word to describe development. In pursuit of development, access to resources ought to be made available for state/local government to deliver the required welfare services (Samihah and Adelabu, 2010). Therefore, development remains irrelevant if it does not positively affect the lives of people in society.

The constitution assigns service delivery responsibilities to the three tiers of government with states and local government playing the most significant role in the delivery of basic services such as education, health, housing, water, and waste disposal services (Odoko and Nnanna, [www.csae.ox.ac/books/epon/fiscal/federalism](http://www.csae.ox.ac/books/epon/fiscal/federalism)). At this junction it is pertinent to review the performance of service delivery of local government.

#### **Education**

Local governments in Nigeria are meant to supervise education at the grassroots (this put primary education and provision of libraries solidly within their purview) and to work through Local Government Education Authorities and with Departments for Adult and Non-formal Education to do this. To ensure a level of control, Secretaries of Local Government Education Authorities are appointed by Council Chairmen and ratified by council members who are elected and whose functions are similar to those of State assemblies with responsibilities for making law (Yovbi, 2008).

Under the MDGs, the major goal for education is to achieve universal primary education by year 2015; in other words, to ensure that by that year children everywhere, boys and girls alike will be able to complete a full programme of primary schooling. In line with this, one of the major objectives of national policy on education is to make education accessible to all Nigerians (Odoko and Nnanna, [www.csae.ox.ac/books/epon/fiscal/federalism](http://www.csae.ox.ac/books/epon/fiscal/federalism)). However relying on the data from the survey carried out in some selected states of the federation between 1999 to 2005 revealed thus:

Returns from the survey showed that two out of four states samples, Rivers and Enugu, have had significant increases in the total number of enrolment for both primary and secondary



schools and staff strength. The other two, Lagos and Kano, recorded just marginal increases during the period of analysis, 1999-2005. The major implication of the increases in enrolment rate and teacher strength in Rivers and Enugu is the increase in the pupil-teacher ratio from 39 and 29 in 1999 to 52 and 42, respectively, in 2005. This is an indicator that each teacher in these states is having more than pupils to cope with, a situation that might impact negatively on the performance of both the teacher and pupils. However, there is a slight improvement in the ratio in both Kano and Lagos as the ratios declined from 56 and 33 in 1999 to 30 and 32, respectively, in 2005. Also, the number of classrooms has remained virtually stagnant over the period. Indeed, the ratio of enrolment to classrooms has deteriorated significantly in Rivers and Enugu; whereas in 1999 there were on average 28 and 26 pupils to a class at the primary school, by 2005 the number had risen to 49 and 57 pupils per classroom. For Lagos and Kano, the number of pupils per class declined from 31 and 45 in 1999 to 29 and 31 in 2005. However, the adult literacy rate has changed between 59 and 88 percent among the states, with Kano having the highest range of 73-88 percent during the period. The poor state of services delivery is reflected also in the number of pupils that progress from the primary to secondary schools. The average is 25 percent. This state of affairs has led to a situation in which middle and upper classes now send their children and wards to private schools and has led to a wide gap in the quality of education between the products of two sets of schools (Odoko and Nnanna, [www.csae.ox.ac/books/epon/fiscal/federalism](http://www.csae.ox.ac/books/epon/fiscal/federalism)).

The federal government has addressed the situation through the introduction of policy of the Universal Basic Education. This is intended to increase funding and accessibility of primary education at the grassroots.

### **Water Resources**

The 2004 National Water and Sanitation Policy give Local Government Authorities (LGAs) and departments the responsibility for establishment, operation and maintenance of rural water supply schemes in conjunction with the benefiting communities. They are also responsible for the establishment, equipment and funding of the Water and Environmental Sanitation Departments. Since over 55% of Nigerians live in rural areas where waters coverage is just 31%, the key to achieving the water and sanitation MDG targets lies with rural local government (Amakon, 2009:3).

According to Odoko and Nnana ([www.csae.ox.ac/books/epon/fiscal/federalism](http://www.csae.ox.ac/books/epon/fiscal/federalism)) the expenditure on water has been on decline or increased marginally in most of the sampled states. For instance, in Rivers the ratio of capital expenditure on water to total state expenditure declined from 1.5 percent in 1999 to 1.0 percent in 2005. That of Lagos remains constant at 0.2 percent to 0.3 percent. However, in Kano, much more money was devoted to providing water. As a result, the capital outlay in the state rose from 5.8 percent of total state expenditure in 1999 to 9.5 percent in 2005.

Amakon (2006:4) quoting Federal Ministry of Water Resources, observes that, water supply coverage in Nigeria increased from 30% in 1991 to 68% in December 2005, while sanitation coverage in 2005 stood at 63%. Joint Monitoring Programme (JMP) figure for 2004 are lower, at 48% for water and 44% for sanitation. Despite some improvement in

coverage, a recent study showed that in 2006 only 11 out of 36 states of the federation ( in which Enugu was not included had more than 20 liters per capital water supply. Seven states had below two liters per capital water supply.

In Enugu state, the report collected from three out of the seventeen local government in 2002 showed that 25% of urban households and 15% of rural households in the Igbo-Etiti local government had access to improved water supply. About 53% of the population has access to safe sanitation, while in Nkanu East local government the figure is about 10%. There are no figures on access to water and sanitation in Udenu local government, but the local government has an average of one improved water source per 35,000 people, which is less than 1%. Two communities, Amalla and Imiliki in Udenu local government, had no improved water sources at all (Amakon, 2009).

Most often at grassroot level according to Amakon (2009:6) water sanitation services are frequently lumped under Community Services, alongside rural electrification. The lack of separate department means that water and sanitation service delivery is often not prioritized.

### **Primary Health Care Services**

Every Local Government has a Primary Health Care Coordinator, usually a senior nurse (for instance, all the one in Lagos state are medical doctors) who has responsibility for delivering primary health care and coordinating health care facilities within the Local Government Area. These primary health care facilities in most other countries have grown to be full fledged hospitals and often serve as secondary referral centre's for community nursing. In Nigeria, most of the ones established have become decrepit (Yovbi, 2008).

The current National Health Policy document, revised in 1996, indicates that local governments are expected to be the main implementers of primary health care policies and programs, with the federal government responsible for formulating overall policy and for monitoring and evaluation, and state governments for providing logistical support to the Local Government Areas such as personnel training, financial assistance, planning and operation. This is better explain according to the National Health Policy in (Khemani, 2004) as thus:

With the general guidance, support and technical supervision of State Health Ministries, under the aegis of Ministries of Local Government, Local Government shall design and implement strategies to discharge the responsibilities assigned to them under the constitution, and to meet the health needs of the local community.

The Nigeria's health policy aims at providing affordable health services to all Nigerians. It focuses on preventive health care delivery through the implementation of primary health care delivery system. The system emphasizes health education, adequate nutrition, safe water, sanitation, and maternal and child health (Odoko and Nnanna, [www.csae.ox.ac/books/epon/fiscal/federalism](http://www.csae.ox.ac/books/epon/fiscal/federalism)).

However, in practice, there is little evidence to show for health services delivery at the grassroot despite of the huge allocation to this sector. For instance, a survey of 30 local governments, 252 public primary health facilities, and over 700 health care providers was carried out in the states of Kogi and Lagos in the latter part of 2002, revealed the non-payment of salaries of public health personnel in the state of Kogi – 42% of staff respondents report not receiving any salary for six

months or more in the past year at the time of the survey (Khemani, 2004). This problem appears to be an endemic one, and in one way or the other has affected the delivery of basic health services at the local governments of the Kogi state.

### **Community, Infrastructural and Rural Development**

A typical Nigerian community in the modern setting faces a number of developmental related challenges. These may be classified as physical (or infrastructural), economics, social, political and cultural (Akande, 2001:57).

The physical challenge has to do with the requirement of motorable road for a community to be able to transact its economic and social activities with other neighboring communities and the world outside its immediate vicinity. Associated with roads is the requirement of communication system that promotes information dissemination and interactions. The physical challenges also embrace the requirement for shelter or housing (Akande, 2001).

The introduction of Adjustment Programme (SAP) in 1986 with ultimate goals of attaining transformation and stability of the economy only achieved some improvements in the macroeconomic indicators and also created some social problems. It was nevertheless accompanied with some serious declines in some infrastructure and access to health and education, as well as rising unemployment rate and social inequality. All these created social tensions and insecurity (Oladipo, 2001:63).

Many palliative measures were introduced to cushion the negative social cost of SAP as well as others aimed at addressing directly or indirectly various aspects of poverty. These include:

- The Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructural (DFRRI)
- The Directorate of Employment,
- The Agricultural Development Programme (ADP)
- The River Basin Development Authority
- National Agricultural and Development Authority (NALDA)
- Strategic Grains Reserve Programme
- Mass Transit Programme.
- The peoples' Bank and Community Banks Programme
- Better life Programme
- Family Support Programme
- Family Economic Advancement Programme.

Despite efforts of government, these programmes did not record the desired effect (Oladipo, 2001: 63-64). It is disquieting, however, that the part being played by the local governments in the task of community mobilization for development through self-help effort has been very minimal. The services and amenities provided by the local governments in the country are grossly inadequate in relation to the population they are expected to serve (Ola and Tonwe, 2009:275-276). In reality, Ola and Tonwe (2009) explain further that, only a handful of communities enjoy some sort to services facilities. Many communities do not feel the impact of local government institutions in term of services and facilities.

## **THE POLICY OPTIONS FOR PROGRESS**

Generally, according to Odoko and Nnena, ([www.csae.ox.ac/books/epon/fiscal/federalism](http://www.csae.ox.ac/books/epon/fiscal/federalism)) distributive policies can be optimally formulated and implemented under an efficient institutional and legal framework. Services delivery in Nigeria has suffered serious neglect because of institutional weakness. The irony of institutional weakness is that the Nigeria labour market can boast of highly qualified graduates, yet the key ministries, departments, agencies, which are responsible for distributive policy formulation and implementation, are deliberately staffed with incompetent and corrupt bureaucrats as a result of widespread practices of nepotism in the recruitment of personnel.

Local governments need to develop financial management skills for greater accountability and transparency. This can be achieved through capacity building after the official swearing-in, in the same way as at the federal level. Donor agencies have been very active and should extend such capacity building to the states and local governments. This kind of capacity building has helped equip elected officials at the federal level (Amakon, 2009:14).

The undue interference of the state governors should be eliminated to allow the council heads to govern and manage their natural resources using appropriate planning standards; opportunity to design appropriate policies, programmes and projects suited to peculiar areas; preservation of cultural heritage of communities; and effective delivery of democratic dividends to the grassroots (Amaechi, 2012).

The internal revenue base can also be enhanced, if rural inhabitants are properly educated on their civic responsibilities to support their local governments financially, by paying their taxes and rates promptly. With an increased level of understanding and awareness from them, tax and rate evasion will be virtually reduced to the barest minimum, thereby, making it easier for local governments to generate more revenues for services delivery and to facilitate development (Ovaga, <http://www.academicexcellencesociety.com>).

Local government autonomy should be considered a well thought out initiative. Because it is the most important item for consideration. Autonomy would pave way for rapid development at the grassroots (Oke, 2013:44). Rather than scrap the system, it should be reformed and made more financially independent for effective performance. According to (Lewi, 2011), there is need for continuous reforms to meet up the challenges so as to be made to improve in services delivery.

## **CONCLUDING REMARKS**

In this paper work, effort has been made to define and discuss the concept of local government, the theoretical application of the concept, evolution of local government in Nigeria. Among other things the paper also addressed the challenges to services delivery at local government level in Nigeria, fiscal centralization and decentralization in relation to services delivery. The paper also examines the role of this tier of governance in provision of services delivery at grassroots and submitted that the level of governance has done little in caring out this their constitutional responsibility. The paper finally proffers solutions which if prudently employed would make the local government improve in the provision of essential services to the people at the grassroots.

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