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LOCAL GOVERNMENT, COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT – THE NEXUS

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ABSTRACT

Development remains a core objective of every meaningful political dispensation and sovereign state. Scholars had debated that the rationale for creation of local government is to bring governance nearer to the people and foster grassroot development. This paper examines the nexus between local government administration, community development and national development in Nigeria. While local government are established to foster grassroots development, political interference, financial dependency, and top-down bureaucratic control have rendered them ineffective; turning their potentials into a 'paper tiger'. The research adopted the use of qualitative research design based on secondary data and thematic document analysis and the author development framework; the research opines that national development is structurally reliant on the development of local governments through community development. Achieving National development will be a 'paper tiger' if community development championed by the local government administration does not happens. Findings reveal that systemic corruption, capacity deficits, lack of true autonomy severely undermine grassroots governance. To achieve a meaningful national development, the study provides future directions among which are; enhancing local autonomy, local capacity building, participatory grassroot governance system, collaborative community-private partnership, constitutional reforms and strengthened anti-corruption frameworks.

Keywords: Development, Community Development. Local Government, and National Development

1.0 INTRODUCTION

A country is considered to be developed if she meets considerable factors of development which includes but not limited to quality education, human capital development, reduced inequalities, reduced unemployment rate and provides qualitative life for her citizenry which encompasses social security and rule of law. Unfortunately, over the years, or let say since 1960 till date, Nigeria has not been able to meet above criteria despite her naturally endowed nature in term of human and mineral resources.

With the country's endowment in natural and human resources, and population of over 200 million people; the country developmental state is moribund. The decline and under-utilization of the country's potentials keep her below per. Nigeria is a federation which comprises of 3-tier system of governance with each having its constitutional responsibility. Time in memorial, the poor performance of local government across the federation, even after the 1976 local government reforms till date has been a state of serious concern for scholars in the field of local government, advocators of grassroot development and even citizens at grassroot level.

Orewa and Adewumi, (1983) cited Igwebuike and Ugwu (2014), indicated that Nigeria in her quest to improve rural lives and opportunities among others, maintain a system of local government which is borne out of the general agreement that no government can satisfactorily conduct administration wholly from the capital through the civil servants based at the headquarters.

Community development at the grassroots in Nigeria is in a state of crisis. This crisis stems from the obvious neglect of the areas in service delivery and infrastructural development. Since Nigeria's independence in 1960 till date, the vast rural communities of the country are in a deplorable state. The inhabitants of the communities mostly are battling with illiteracy, disease, neglect, inadequate provision of social service to mention a few. (Igwebuike & Ugwu 2014).

According to the constitutional provisions of 1999, as amended, Section 7(I) and II as well as the Fourth Schedule created the local government system and their functions respectively. Various studies had placed local government as a veritable agent of community development due to its closeness to the people and therefore serves as communication channels between the grassroot and the other levels of government.

Extensive literature in public administration and development studies pioneered by the likes of Olowu (1988), Gboyega (1987) and others, and later expanded by the likes of Asaju (2010), Fatile and Adejuwon (2011) and others, has interrogated the local government system in Nigeria, predominantly focusing on structural impediments, political interference, state-local joint accounts, and administrative inefficiency. Scholars have repeatedly analyzed local governments either as passive administrative

extensions of the state or as isolated units of rural intervention. However, there remains a notable scholarly gap in conceptualizing the direct, systemic interdependency among local government functionality, community-led grassroots development, and overarching national progress. Existing studies frequently fail to articulate how grassroots development serves as the essential micro-foundation for macro-level state survival and national growth.

This paper baseline argument is that there will be no meaningful development nationally or across board, if local governments are not strengthened to focus on community development and development of every community is invariably development of local government which will aggregate to national development. By establishing that the socio-economic advancement of individual communities directly constitutes the aggregate development of local government areas, this paper demonstrates how local capacity building serves as an indispensable prerequisite for driving macro-level national development.

1.1 Objectives of the study

i. To develop an understanding of community development as a core component of development at grassroot level

ii. Establish that the development of local government is a veritable tool to national development

iii. To examine the connection of community development, local government administration and their roles in national development.

1.2 Research Methodology

The researcher used qualitative research design to gain insight into and creates a nexus between local government, community development and national development in conjunction with developmental framework developed by the researcher. For reliability and validity of the study, multiple secondary sources were utilized to minimize the risk of error.

Reviewed literature was selected based on thematic relevance, validity and authority, and credibility of source. Thematic relevance selected literature directly addresses local government administration, community development, national development and intergovernmental relations from a peer-reviewed academic journals and credible online directory, government policy documents, digital databases and archives. Research databases such as google scholars, ResearchGate, sage journals, and various credible Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ).

The study prioritized literatures and policy frameworks published between 2000 and 2026 to reflect contemporary public administration challenges. However, foundational historical text, foundational constitutional documents such as 1976 Local Government

Reform, 1999 constitution as amended were consulted. Excluded were unverified reports, and academic research which lack rigorous methodology and empirical citations.

This study relies exclusively on secondary data sources, utilizing qualitative content and document analysis to examine the research nexus. While secondary sources offer broad longitudinal coverage and access to various publications and empirical studies, the absence of primary fieldwork; such as direct field surveys, localized interviews, or key informant engagements with local council officials and community members is considered as limitation of the study. Future research could enhance these insights by combining this thematic framework with primary empirical fieldwork across diverse local government areas in Nigeria.

The qualitative data analysis followed a rigorous 6-phase thematic framework; Data familiarization, coding of the familiarized data, theme searching, theme reviewing and mapping, defining and naming the theme, and narrative synthesis

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 LOCAL GOVERNMENT REFORMS IN NIGERIA (1976 TILL DATE)

The establishment of local government system in Nigeria was to provide and carter for the needs of the rural setting and grassroots communities with the basis of expanding social services to them. Every history has its antecedents, before 1976 local government reforms in Nigeria, there had been different form of local government administration in practice with different variations. The 1999 constitution of federal republic of Nigeria in its fourth schedule allocated some functions to local government. Prior to that, the 1979 constitution has legally recognized the establishment and existence of local government as a third tier and mandating democratically elected local government councils by entrenching the provisions of 1976 local government reforms.

2.1.2 Local Government Reforms of 1976

The period 1976-1979 under Murtala-Obasanjo regime was the beginning of restructuring of local government administration in Nigeria. The 1976 reforms focused on structuring and repositioning of local government, given them responsibilities, addressing issue of finances, their relationship with traditional rulers, inter-governmental relations among others. For the first time in Nigeria, local government administration was structured to a multi-purpose single-tier local government council. It abolished the old system where local councils were mere administrative extensions or appendages of regional or state governments.

Adeyemo, (2005) in John et al (n.d) noted that the arrangements of the 1976 reform were incorporated into the 1979 Constitution with the presentation of presidential arrangement of Government. The 1976 reform defined local governments and changed

their direction from field administrations of the state governments to being simultaneous local government structures that were responsible to the electorate.

Salient Features of the reform

i. It is first time in Nigeria political landscape; holistic and comprehensive reform was initiated by federal government to restructure local government across the federations.

ii. Uniformity in local government system and practices across all the states of the federation. Uniformity here is conceptualized by Awotokun (2005 in Asani et. al. n.d) as the functions of local governments; the structure of the local governments; the financial resources of the local governments; the place of traditional institutions in the local governments; relationships with state government; and law enforcement.

iii. Define territory of local government areas with a given population range of 150,000 minimum people to 800,000 maximum people

iv. Statutory allocation was introduced for local government

v. The reform recognizes local government as a third tier of government

vi. Democratization as traditional ruler lost their relevance and were reduced to advisory roles within the local government throughout the federation.

vii. Training of local government staff as an effort between the local government and federal government became an integral part of local government management strategy.

viii. The introduction of full-time chairmanship of local government, supervisory councilors, and councilors with fixed salary payment instead of siting allowance.

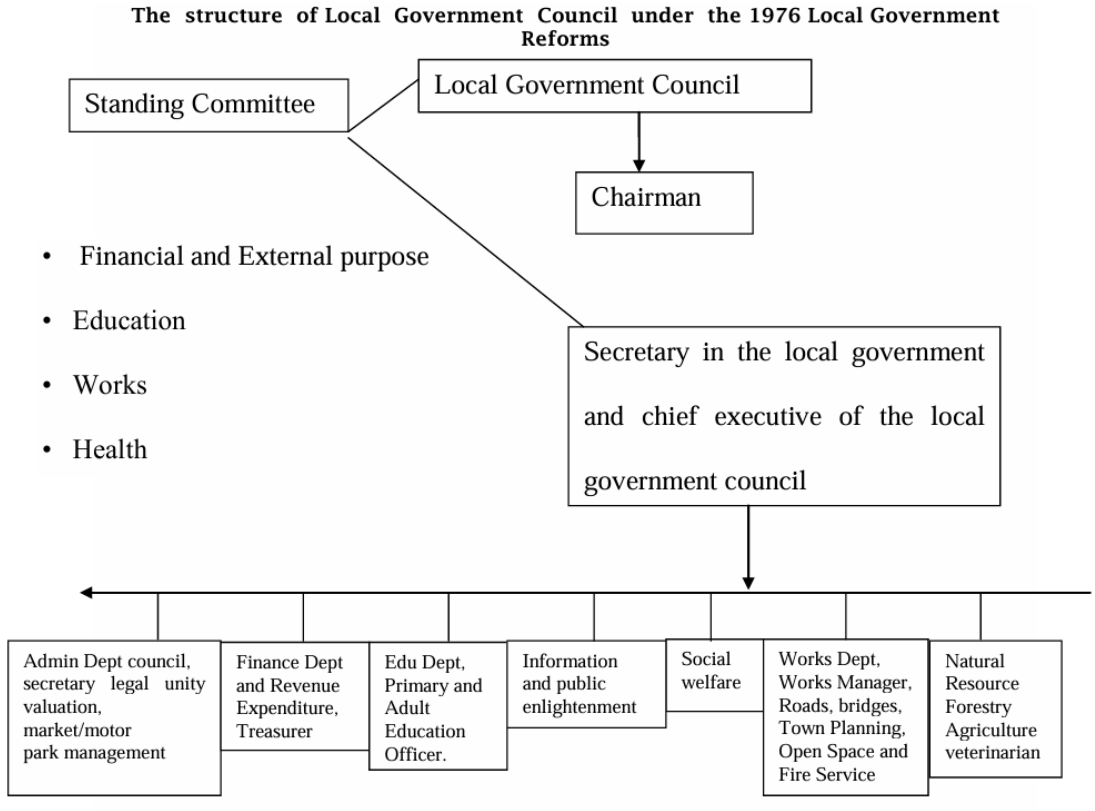
Objectives of the Reforms

According to the guideline of the reform, the following are the primary objectives.

- ✓ To make appropriate services and development activities responsive to local wishes and initiative by developing and delegating them to local representative bodies.
- ✓ Facilitation of the exercise of democratic self-government close to the local levels of our society, and to encourage initiative and leadership potential.
- ✓ Mobilization of human and material resources through the involvement of members of the public in their local development.

- ✓ To provide a two-way channel of communication between local communities and government.

Ogbete, Idam, and Olumide (2018) maintain that the 1976 Local Government Reforms, have shown that change is possible, but more needs to be done to address the current challenges.



Source: 1976 Local Government Reforms, and Eleje, (2018).

2.1.3 Overview of Local Governments in The Second Republic (1979 - 1983)

The 1979 Constitution adopted the major features of the 1976 Reform and gave Constitutional guarantee for the existence of the third tier of Government. Adewale (n.d) noted that The Constitution placed Local Governments firmly under the ambit of State Governments. The power was excessively abused by the state: there were manipulation and outright subversion. Local Governments were arbitrarily dissolved and proliferated on account of political exigencies; the Local Governments' functions and resources were wantonly usurped; no State Government obeyed the constitutional provisions granting Local Governments to be democratic. All the State Governments allowed political considerations to overshadow their constitutional responsibilities.

2.1.4 Local Government Reform of 1984 (Under Buhari)

Due to failures and below per expectations of 1976 reforms attributed to low performance, insufficiencies and the likes. Shagari led civilian administration of 1979 made efforts to reposition the local governments, however the reform proposal did not come into limelight because of the military's coup that led to Major-General Muhammadu Buhari becoming the head of state in December 31, 1983. Muhammadu Buhari led regime quashed the new local government councils created in the Second Republic, while retaining those established in 1976. The Buhari-led military administration also recognised the need to reposition the local government system as proposed by the former civilian government. He then set up a 20-man Local Government Reform Committee in 1984 chaired by the then Sultan of Sokoto, Alhaji Ibrahim Dasuki.

Objectives of Dasuki Reforms;

i. To evolve the most suitable mode of managing the Local Government within the context of the Military Government;

ii. To look into the account/management (staff) problems of Local Governments, including the standardization of the various departments of the councils;

iii. To examine the existing structures, functions and financial resources available to Local Governments for performance of those functions;

iv. To evolve a proper place for Traditional Authorities in Local Governments.

v. To propose how best to manage inter-governmental relations between Federal, State and Local Governments and also between Local Governments and ministries for Local Government, Local Government service boards/commissions, etc.

The committee, in most cases, could not find anything wrong with the *1976 Guidelines for Local Government,* but specifically with the operators of the system. Therefore, some of the recommendations made by the committee appeared to be in line with the 1976 Reform. The report placed emphasis on the following; as noted by (Adewale, n.d)

i. Manpower planning at the Local level;

ii. Training and re-training of staff for effective and efficient management;

iii. The place of Local Government service commissions in the administration of the Local Government;

iv. A system of inter-governmental relations which should bring about agreement, understanding and good relationship among the three tiers of Government – Federal, State and Local.

v. Reduction of the number of proliferated Local Government from the 800 created due to selfish political reason to the former 301.

vi. A formation of the Nigeria police force should be specifically attached to each Local Governmental to enforce the byelaw.

The Government did not wait for the committee to complete its assignment before it went ahead to implement its own decision. When the committee submitted its report, the Government was not in a hurry to publish a white paper on it because the Government considered its own implemented decision adequate.

2.1.5 Local Government Reforms of 1988-1991 (Ibrahim Babangida Regime)

The Dasuki Committee reports were never implemented before Ibrahim Babangida take over and commerce another reforms. The reforms under the Babangida administration made a far positive impact on local government administration. Adewale (n.d) noted that He restored democracy into Local Governments by conducting free and fair election into Local Governments in 1987. His government abolished the ministries for Local Government in order to liberate Local Governments from unwholesome bureaucratic constraints, in order to enhance their speed of action and put Local Governments in firm control over local affairs in order to encourage the emergencies of local solutions to Local problems. It restored functional integrity of Local Governments by directing all State Governments to stop the practice of encroaching into the functions conferred on Local Governments under the *Schedule IV to the 1979 Constitution*.

An 11-man committee headed by Professor Humprey Nwosu came up with a report that introduced a local government presidential system, separating the executive and legislative arms at the grassroots level. Other highlights are as follows;

i. Professional Local Government service in which the Local Government is structured vertically and horizontally to ensure overall management efficiency and effectiveness, high degree of specialization, job satisfaction, optimum span of control and clear lines of authority and responsibility. The service of Local Governments was politicized and professional;

ii. Personnel Management in which there was a Junior Staff Management Committee (J.S.M.C);

iii. Creation of the Office of the Director of Local Government Audit in the State.

iv. The creation of the office in (iii) above was imperative in view of the increase in financial allocation from the federation account from 15% to 20% and the 10% internally generated review from the state Governments;

v. Retention of unified Local Government service

2.1.6 Local Government Reform of 1991

The 1991 Guidelines for Implementing the Local Government (Basic Constitution Provision) (Amendment) Decree No. 23 of 1991 was aimed at extending the presidential system of Government to the Local Government, its other objectives included the following:

i. To hasten the development of the democratic culture in Nigeria and create a conducive atmosphere for meaningful political participation at all levels of Government;

ii. To strengthen the Local Government system and enhance its status and autonomy by giving it a parity of treatment with higher tier of Government thus enabling it to fully its assigned role as the third tier of Government in the federation;

iii. To streamline the practice at the Local Government level with what obtain at the higher tiers of Government thus facilitating the internalization of the principle and practice of the presidential system at the Local Government level;

The Local Government was constituted in such a way that it had two arms: the Legislative and the Executive. The Legislative arm was headed by the leader or speaker elected from among the councilors; while the Executive arm was led by the chairman of the Local Government having the supervisors as members. In other words, the separation of powers was extended to the Local Government. The 1991 Decree provided for the appointment of supervisors, instead of the former supervisory councilors, from within or outside the council by the Chairman. Those supervisors, who were more or less, commissioners at the Local Government level, were in charge of specific portfolios or responsibilities in the four operational departments of the council.

2.1.7 1997 Operational Guidelines for Local Government Councils

In 1997, the Federal Government instituted the Allison Ayida Commission to restructure the civil service. The commission came up with certain amendments which altered the status of Local Government Administration. Secretary were then accounting officers while the chairman remained as chief executive. No chairman had the power to appoint his own secretary outside the career officers. The Local Government Service Commission should appoint the secretary to the Local Government. It conformed to the presidential system of administration.

The Operational Guidelines provided that the Local Government chairman should observe,

i. Declaration of assets and liabilities;

ii. Observation of official working hours;

iii. Not holding any other office during his tenure of office

2.1.8 Local Government Reforms Under the 1999 Constitution

Section 7(1); Guarantees a system of local government by democratically elected councils. Section 162(Subsection 5–8); Mandates the establishment of the State Joint Local Government Account (SJLGA). This was the beginning of states government hijacks of local government. This constitutional arrangement created an inherent structural contradiction. While Section 7 guaranteed democratic local councils, it charged State Houses of Assembly with enacting laws for their establishment, structure, and composition. Concurrently, the SJLGA meant all statutory allocations from the Federation Account passed through state hands before reaching local councils. The flaws in the constitutional arrangement made local government structures largely intertwined with state governments.

Local government and poor performance are still inseparable and this calls for another round of local government reform by the Obasanjo-led civilian administration. Thirteen (13) member technical committee headed by the Etsu Nupe, Alhaji Usman Sanda Ndayako. Some of the core issues assigned to the committee for consideration included the review of the performance of local governments since 1999 and to advise on the desirability of retaining them as the third tier of government; an examination of the inefficiency and the high cost of governance and to provide an appropriate way out as well as the re-examination of the cost of electioneering campaigns during local government elections (Idada, 2007). The committee found that the state and federal governments were meddling in local government affairs. Other significant findings included inadequate funding, the weak commitment of state government to local government issues, particularly the delay and partial release of funds meant for the local government. Thus, parts of the recommendations were to make the local government system autonomous and make direct disbursement of local funds as well as to scrap the Ministry of Local Government and Chieftaincy Affairs (Aransi, 2017; Aghayere, 2008). Notwithstanding the federal government's acceptance of the Committee reports, the goals set for the local government reform project were defeated as the federal government later suspended the election of local government political functionaries. It then established the State Independent Electoral Commission (SIEC) that conducted local government elections in March 2004.

The Era of Dysfunction and State Governors Capture (2010–2023)

Between 2010 and 2023, local government administration in Nigeria descended into a profound operational crisis, characterized by deep-seated systemic failures and the effective capture of grassroots governance by state executives through the caretaker method.

At the heart of this dysfunction was the systemic abuse of the State Joint Local Government Account (SJLGA). Governors routinely treated federal allocations meant for grassroots development as an extension of state treasuries, imposing arbitrary administrative deductions and redirecting municipal funds to state-level projects. Stripped of financial independence, local governments were reduced to mere salary-paying entities, completely incapacitated when it came to maintaining vital public infrastructure such as primary health centers, market stalls, and feeder roads. This financial centralization went hand-in-hand with the systematic dismantling of local electoral integrity. Rather than upholding constitutional provisions for democratically elected councils, state governors regularly bypassed the ballot box, installing unelected Caretaker Committees or Sole Administrators. Where local elections were actually conducted, State Independent Electoral Commissions (SIECs) reliably delivered landslide victories for the ruling state party, fostering widespread public disillusionment and ensuring that local officials remained strictly accountable to state capitals rather than their local constituencies. Despite this bleak landscape, various stakeholders fought back through multiple avenues of reform:

- **Labor Advocacy:** The National Union of Local Government Employees (NULGE) spearheaded intense strikes and rallies to demand true financial and administrative autonomy.
- **Regulatory Interventions:** In 2019, the Nigerian Financial Intelligence Unit (NFIU) introduced groundbreaking guidelines to restrict cash withdrawals from local accounts and curb state interference, though enforcement faced fierce political resistance at the state level.
- **Legislative Roadblocks:** The National Assembly repeatedly attempted to pass constitutional amendments guaranteeing local government autonomy, but these bills consistently failed to secure the necessary two-thirds approval from the 36 State Houses of Assembly due to the pervasive influence of state governors.

The Turning Point: The Landmark Supreme Court Victory

Over the decades, many state governors exploited constitutional ambiguities to dissolve elected councils and install appointed "caretaker committees," undermining grassroots democracy.

The Nigerian Supreme Court delivered a landmark ruling granting full financial autonomy to local government councils, declaring the withholding or arbitrary

dissolution of democratically elected local government funds by state governors unconstitutional.

The 774 constitutionally recognized Local Government Areas (LGAs) struggled to function as true third tiers of government. Operating largely under the shadow of state governors, local councils frequently saw their statutory financial allocations routed through joint state-local government accounts; where funds were often intercepted, depleted, or tightly controlled. Furthermore, many states replaced democratically elected councils with appointed caretaker committees or un-elected sole administrators, violating the democratic tenets enshrined in Section 7 of the Nigerian Constitution. However, a historic legal battle fundamentally reshaped this landscape, serving as a critical turning point for local governance.

Attorney-General of the Federation, Lateef Fagbemi (SAN) filed a direct suit at the Supreme Court. The suit was against 36 state governors on the immediate policy implications for state joint accounts. Legal analysis highlighting the prohibition of caretaker committees and the court's order empowered the Federal Government to hold back allocations from un-elected councils.

On July 11, 2024, the Supreme Court of Nigeria ruled in a unanimous ruling of a seven-member panel, delivered a judgment that dismantled decades of state-level overreach, the ruling provisions where;

- **Direct Financial Disbursement:** The apex court ordered that statutory allocations from the Federation Account must be paid straight into the official bank accounts of the 774 Local Government Councils, completely bypassing the Joint Accounts.
- **Prohibition of Caretaker Committees:** Operating councils through un-elected administrators or caretaker committees was declared strictly illegal and a direct breach of the constitution.
- **Enforcement Power:** The Federal Government was legally empowered to withhold federal allocations from any state or local government operating outside of democratically elected leadership.
- **Curbing State Interference:** State governments were stripped of any legal authority to siphon, withhold, or manage funds meant for local councils.

The Supreme Court’s ruling catalysed a rapid, transformational phase across the federation, shifting both the operational and financial realities of grassroots governance, and every state Governors through their State Independent Electoral Commissions (SIECs) organize local council polls to install legitimate, elected leadership. While financial autonomy secured a strong legal footing, the ruling fueled renewed national debate over electoral integrity due to State governors party winning all local government elections in their state. Critics continue to push for the complete abolition

of SIECs, arguing that transferring local government elections to the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) is essential to completely eliminate undue incumbent state influence.

2.2 DECENTRALISATION AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA.

It is a consensus that no central government can effectively conduct administration from the centre through the civil servants based at the headquarters and this necessitated the need for decentralization to enable the central government reach out to the people at the grassroot level. The debate surrounding decentralization and national development in Africa centers on whether dispersing political, administrative, and fiscal power away from the central government fosters localized development, efficient service delivery, and democratic participation, or whether it weakens state capacity, exacerbates regional inequalities, and promotes elite capture.

Proponents of decentralisation are of the view that the more governmental authority and powers are devolved to local bodies, the better-informed, the government will be about the needs of the people (Nwosu, 1991) cited (Tobi1 & Oikhala, 2021). Brosio believes that decentralization is transforming the structure of governance in Africa. He noted that since the middle of the l980s most African countries have started a transfer of power, resources and responsibilities to their subnational governments and that the pace of transformation is very uneven across countries (Brosio, 2000).

Walter Rodney earlier noted that the rate of development differed from continent to continent, and within each continent different parts increased their command over nature at different rates. (Rodney, 1972). Development, by its nature, is not territorially equal. (Adewoyin et al, 2020), and several reasons had been given for that, some scholar holds the perspective of natural resources endowment, but to Rodney, he argues that environment in which human groups evolved, and the creation of 'superstructure' of human society. That human beings battled with the material environment, so they created forms of social relations, forms of government, patterns of behaviour and systems of belief which together constituted the superstructure and the superstructure are not the same in any two societies. He argues further, religious belief that a certain forest was sacred and should not be cultivated is one of the elements of the superstructure that affected economic activity and hinders development in Africa.

Decentralization in African focus on three key aspects as noted by scholars. Administrative Decentralization; this focus on deconcentration and delegation; its involves the transfer of management, responsibilities, and operational functions from central government agencies to field offices or semi-autonomous subnational entities (Rondinelli et al., 1983). Political Decentralization; also know as devolution: This has to do with the legal and constitutional transfer of authority and decision-making power to democratically elected subnational units or political subdivision, such as local governments and provincial assemblies (Ribot, 2002). Fiscal Decentralization; the statutory allocation of revenue generation mechanisms and expenditure authority to

local authorities, supported by intergovernmental fiscal transfers which empowers local government generate resources at grassroot level. (Brosio, 2000).

The quest for development in Africa has propelled the African Union to develop different initiatives that will foster national development through grassroot development. Some of these include the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), the African Agenda 2063, Development of African position on Post-2015 Development Agenda, and the conceptualization of the Africa Development Goals. The conviction is that there is a strong link between good local governance and local development. However, African Charter on the Values and Principles of Decentralization and Local Governance and Local Development was adopted by the AU council in 2014. There is always a one or two development policy, but the challenge has always been effective implementation.

Proponents of decentralization argue that transferring authority and resources to subnational entities yields structural developmental advantages across several key domains:

i. **Improved Local Allocative Efficiency:** Public economic theory posits that local decision-makers possess superior contextual knowledge regarding the preferences and urgent needs of their constituents compared to central planners (Bardhan, 2002). Localized resource management enables tailoring public service investments such as rural road maintenance, primary healthcare facilities, and water infrastructure to actual local demand.

ii. **Conflict Mitigation and Ethnic Cohesion;** in diverse ethnic state such as Nigeria and other post-colonial states, centralization has historically concentrated power within dominant coalitions, fueling regional marginalization. Devolution provides geographically concentrated ethnic minorities and regional populations a meaningful stake in self-governance, thereby defusing separatist tensions and territorial conflict (Faguet, 2014).

iii. **Strengthened Democratic Participation and Accountability;** the believes that devolution creates localized institutional spaces for popular participation, strengthening civic engagement and bringing elected representatives closer to the electorate. This proximity enhances political transparency and downward accountability (Rondinelli et al., 1983).

However, opponents of decentralization also exist with their arguments against, critically citing its flaws in implementations, they believe decentralization reforms can undermines national policy cohesion and development in Africa. The challenges range from inefficiency to multiplicity of bureaucratic structures, wastefulness, worsening spatial inequality and the outright hijacking of governance by local elites (Adewoyin at al, 2020).

Brosio (2000) noted that Local elite capture could exist where at local government level, institutional oversight and media scrutiny are often weaker than at the national level. Consequently, local political and economic elites can capture subnational governance structures, redirecting public resources toward patron-client networks and perpetuating inequality. Adegbami (2022) also take a stand that fiscal asymmetries exist as many local councils and municipals face acute revenue generation constraints and depend heavily on central government transfers. Without adequate fiscal autonomy and technical capacity, local councils remain administrative shells unable to deliver essential services. Unbalanced devolution can exacerbate socioeconomic gaps between resource-rich and resource-poor regions. Furthermore, strong regional political structures without robust national identity frameworks can risk reinforcing ethnic polarization (Bardhan, 2002).

Comparative Case

Country	Decentralization Structure	Development Outcomes	Key Challenges
South Africa	Three tier governance system established post 1994 (unitary system, provinces and municipals, granting constitutional autonomy to provincial and local government	Improved access to basis services such as water, electricity, housing in townships and rural areas	Fiscal disparities between municipal urban and municipal rural
Nigeria	Federal structure, comprises of the central government, 36 states and 774 local governments	Intended to accommodate multi-ethnic diversity and protect the interest of everyone, and foster grassroots development, but failed.	Corruption and administrative weakness at the LGA level due to state political influences and constitutional joint account provisions.
Kenya	Kenya's 2010 constitution created 47 county government, each responsible for local administration and service delivery with a guaranteed fiscal allocation of minimum of 15%	Transform regional development; expanded health infrastructure and rural road networks across some previously marginalized area	While the devolution has led to some positive impact on some aspects of governance, challenges of insufficient funding, corruption and political interference
Uganda	Uganga has implemented one of Africa most expensive decentralization programmes, aimed at empowering local governments. The constitution of 1995 enshrined decentralization as a binding principle of the state under article 176. Having a multi-tier structure	Succeeded in increasing local responsiveness and participation and improving service delivery in some regions	Challenges are inadequate funding, limited administrative capacity at local level and also political interference.

While decentralization reforms have led to some improvements in citizen participation, local government administration, there is a common challenge of inadequate resources, political interference, poor administrative capacity among others that undermines development in Africa. Therefore, continuous strengthening of local governments with improved resource allocation will essentially be pivotal to national development in Africa.

3.0 CONCEPTUAL DISCOURSE

We can not be arguing the concept of development if the state or community does not exist in the first place. This paper expatiated the concept of development, followed by community development, local government and national development. However just as every other concepts are subjective and has no universal definitions, these concepts are defined using various scholarly positions, and also within the purview of the study.

Development: Development is a very ambiguous concept, multidimensional in nature and has been subject to definition pluralism. Development is a many-sided process, involving various sectors of a country economy, development can be viewed in different ways, but the most important features of any definition or explanation must be thematic to proper utilization of available resources and improvement of the citizen's standard of living.

As cited in Joseph (2014), Gboyega (2003) described development as an idea that embodies all attempts to improve the conditions of human existence in all ramifications. Development is the transformation of community into socially, economically, politically, educationally, orderly, and materially desirable conditions, with the aim of improving the quality of life of the people. To Mundi, it is a uniform distribution of resources, the integration of the people into national economy; it is a socio-economic process which seeks to bring about a more equitable distribution of resources and income within the society (Mundi, 2008).

To Walter Rodney, development in human society as many sided processes. He argued that at the level of the individual, development implies increased skill and capacity, greater freedom, creativity, self discipline, responsibility and material well being. He further stated that development are uneven across territories and for him development at the level of social groups implies an increasing capacity to regulate both internal and external relationships (Rodney, 1972).

Todaro (1981), sees development is a multi-dimensional process involving the reorganization and re-orientation of the entire economic and social system. In addition to improvement in income and output, it typically involves radical changes in institutional, social and administrative structures as well as attitude and in many cases even customs and beliefs.

Nwanegbo and Odigbo (2013) assert that development could be seen as the process of empowering people to maximize their potentials and the ability to exploit nature to meet daily human needs. It can also be seen as a process by which quality of human lives and capacity to surmount daily needs are considerably improved, cited (Joseph, 2014),

Community Development: To conceptualized community development, it is best to get familiar with the word community, before combining both together. Ogunna (2007) cited in Igwebuike and Ugwu (2014), sees a community as "a group of people that share

common geographical location, common cultural traits and traditional affinity which is normally a village or village group".

According to Obasi (2013) community development is seen as a deliberate effort made by group(s) of people with the same/common tradition, belief, custom and language, which live within a specific geographical area so as to tap available human, material and non-human resources at a given time in order to bring positive result. The essence of these collaborative efforts are to conquer life challenges and live better lives.

According to Rubin and Rubin (200l), community development is regarded as a continuous process aimed at improving the quality of life of the community. It is all about continual improvement by the people themselves to bring about change in their lives which is usually driven by its power structure. They further stated that community development occurs when people strengthen the bounds within their neighbourhoods, build social networks, and form their own organizations to provide a long-term capacity for problem solving (Rubin & Rubin, 200l).

Dhavaleshwar, (2016) "Community Development is a process designed to create conditions of economic and social progress for the whole community with its active participation and fullest possible reliance upon the community's initiative'. In view from the above scholarly positions, this paper draws out the following as essential features of community development;

i. Community development is a continuous social process.

ii. Community development is both a rural and urban exercise.

iii. Community development is multi-dimensional, embracing social, economic, political etc.

iv. Community development is built on reliance upon the community's initiative

v. Community development involves the whole community and their active participation

vi. Community development is an integrative process

vii. Community development is a collective and collaborative effort

Local Government: The Guidelines for Local Government Reforms in Nigeria of 1976 defined it as "Government at local level exercised through a representative council established by law to exercise specific powers and function within defined areas".

According to International Union of Local Government Authorities (IULA), Local Government is defined as the level of government with constitutionally defined rights and duties to regulate and manage public affairs which are also constitutionally defined for the exclusive interest of the local population (Abe & Omotosho, 2014). However,

the United Nations Office for Public Administration sees local government as 'A political subdivision of a nation or (in a federal system) state, which is constituted by law and has substantial control of local affairs, including the powers to impose taxes or to exact labour for prescribed purposes. The governing body of such as entity is elected or otherwise locally selected'. (UN, 1961)

Fajobi, (2010) defines local government "as a unit of government to maintain law and order based on range of social amenities and to encourage cooperation and participation of people at the grassroots to improve their living conditions". From the above scholarly positions of concept of local government, this paper draws out the following as characteristics of local government.

i. Local government exists at grassroot level;

ii. Local government is a distinct tier of government;

iii. Local government is established by law or legislative act

iv. Local government as certain degree of autonomy;

v. Local government as a legal entity;

vi. Local government has specific financial responsibility

vii. Local government has a defined territory and authority over its people

viii. Local government has power to generate revenue and financial functions

ix. Local government is responsible for the promotion and development at grassroot level (Rural and Community development)

x. and local government administration is administered by elected officials just has every other tier (state and federal)

And this study defined local government as a form of decentralization existing at grassroot level having a certain degree of autonomy to stand as a tier of government established by law or legal instrument, saddled with the responsibility of taken care of local needs, within its local territory and fostering sense unity and grassroot development. Here, grassroot development means both rural and community development.

National Development: National development is a very difficult concept to pin down, however this paper views it from the angle of National + Development = National Development. National, according to Longman dictionary of contemporary English, refers to a phenomenon that embraces a whole nation as opposed to a part or of its part. National means to relate to a nation as whole.

National development therefore can be described as the overall development of a nation-state which encompasses socio-economic transformation, as well as advancement in cultural, political and technological positions of the state which is achievable through development planning and strategies. National development is people oriented and its success is measured on the quality of lives of the nation-people.

Comparative Summary Table

Author Definitions	**Primary Scope and Level**	**Defining Features**	**Objectives**
Development Gboyega (2003) described development as an idea that embodies all attempts to improve the conditions of human existence in all ramifications. Mundi, (2008) it is a uniform distribution of resources, the integration of the people into national economy; it is a socio-economic process which seeks to bring about a more equitable distribution of resources and income within the society Walter Rodney (1972) sees development in human society as many sided processes. He argued that at the level of the individual, development implies increased skill and capacity, greater freedom, creativity, self discipline, responsibility and material well being.	Individual, social group, radical changes and structural levels	Multi-dimensional transformation aimed at improving human existence, increasing capacity, re-organizing socio-economic systems and empowerment	To improved human conditions, achieve equitable distribution of income and resources

Todaro (1981), sees development is a multi-dimensional process involving the reorganization and re-orientation of the entire economic and social system. In addition to improvement in income and output, it typically involves radical changes in institutional, social and administrative structures as well as attitude and in many cases even customs and beliefs.			
Community Development Obasi (2013) community development is seen as a deliberate effort made by group(s) of people with the same/common tradition, belief, custom and language, which live within a specific geographical area so as to tap available human, material and non-human resources at a given time in order to bring positive result Rubin and Rubin (200l), community development is	Locality level, community level, neighbourhood level, cultural, geographical and traditional	Is a continuous process to improve the life of a specific local population, building a long-term capacity for problem solving by creating conditions for	To solves local challenges and achieve economic and social progression with problem solving capacity through collaborative efforts

regarded as a continuous process aimed at improving the quality of life of the community. It is all about continual improvement by the people themselves to bring about change in their lives which is usually driven by its power structure. Dhavaleshwar, (2016) "Community Development is a process designed to create conditions of economic and social progress for the whole community with its active participation and fullest possible reliance upon the community's initiative.'		socio-economic progress	
Local Government The Guidelines for Local Government Reforms in Nigeria of 1976 defined it as "Government at local level exercised through a representative council established by law to exercise specific powers and function within defined areas" United Nations Office for Public Administration sees local government as 'A political	Local grassroots, political sub-division and administrative tier	A representative council, either elected or selected which as a statutory power created to maintain law and order, provide social services and encourage grassroot participation.	To regulate public affairs at local level, maintain law and order, and social services provisions

subdivision of a nation or (in a federal system) state, which is constituted by law and has substantial control of local affairs, including the powers to impose taxes or to exact labour for prescribed purposes. The governing body of such as entity is elected or otherwise locally selected' Fajobi, (2010) defines local government "as a unit of government to maintain law and order based on range of social amenities and to encourage cooperation and participation of people at the grassroots to improve their living conditions			
National Development Longman dictionary of contemporary English refers to a phenomenon that embraces a whole nation as opposed to a part or of its part. National means to relate to a nation as whole.	Macro-level, Nationally and Nation-state wide	National wide strategy, Involving states institutions	To drive socio-economic, political cum technological advancement of the state, improve standard of living for all, integrate all part into a whole, growth of state and modernization

4.0 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: DEVELOPMENTAL THEORY

The research adopts Developmental school or developmental theory as a theoretical lens against the likes of Principal-Agent Theory, Decentralization theory among others because developmental school posits that the primary justification for local government existence especially in developing or third world is to serve as the purpose of socio-economic transformation, poverty reduction, and resource mobilization at the grassroots level. It views local government not just as a services provider, but as the fundamental development driver that connects community-driven initiatives directly to national growth goals. The likes of Principal-Agent Theory focus primarily on compliance, delegation, monitoring, and bridging the communication gaps between a central authority (known as principal) and a local body (considered as agent). It treats local governance as an administrative mechanism rather than an engine room of development while decentralization theory focuses heavily on the structural, legal, and fiscal transfer of power and administrative functions from top to bottom. It explains how power is shared but doesn't inherently capture how development happens on the ground through community participation.

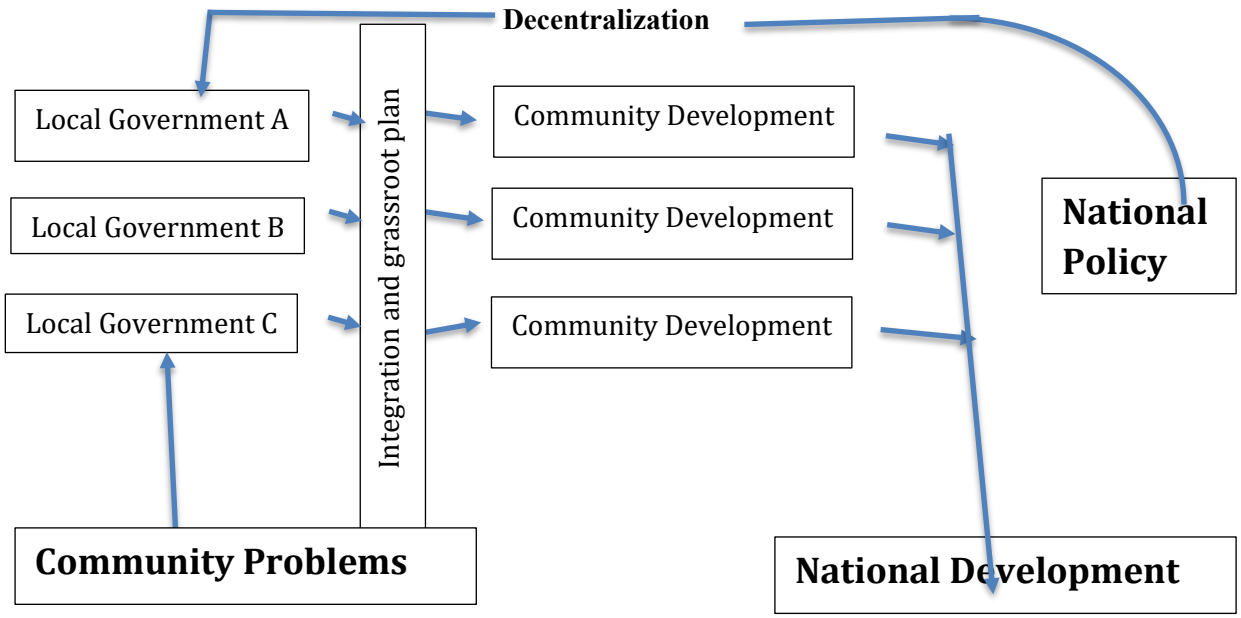
Developmental Theory (often associated with scholars like Henry Maddick, William Robson, and B.O. Nwabueze), the school of thought best capture the nexus which involved interconnectedness between the local government, community development and national development. Its analytical focus is shifted from formal structures (administrative delegation) to substantive outcomes (human capital development, improved standards of living, and socio-economic empowerment) which encourages community self-help projects, local political participation, and grassroots infrastructure as micro-level inputs that accumulate to form macro-level national development.

In Adeyemo, the school of thought combined the perspective of democratic participation and efficient service delivery, the scholars argued that development entails provision of essential services effectively and as well actively engaging the local population in democratic participation. The thrust of this school is that local government serves as the agent of development to the local populace most especially in the developing countries. The improvement of the quality of life and standard of living of the local population becomes a responsibility of the local government (Adeyemo, 2011).

Community development will not happen unless, through various effort of community participation and efficient service provisions by the local government. local governments constitute reliable basis for the local or grassroots people to get a better share in the national wealth. The developmental functions of the local government include nation building, social, economic and manpower resource development. In this light Olowu argues that local governments serve as veritable partners with the states and national government in national development issues as units of development by which national development efforts, resources and benefits percolate to the grassroots (Olowu et al, 1991). With this decentralization, the creative energy of the people or

community can be harnessed as to enhance meaningful development at the local level. The local government is the closest level of government to the people, and because of that, it knows the community yarns, aware and acquainted to the local needs and problems. Therefore, if all the local governments adhere to the developmental principles and practice, the entire nation would be built with an even national development.

National Development Framework (NDF)



Local Problems, Issues, Local Needs **etc.**
Source: Developed by the Author

The provided image illustrates a structural model titled the *National Development Framework (NDF);* it is developed by the author to conceptualizes national development as an aggregated, bottom-up movement driven by local governments and community development. The National Development Framework presents pragmatic paradigm shift from other theories of development. It posits that a nation cannot genuinely develop until its communities thrive. It is a synchronization of grassroots reality with central government aspiration. This is not a top-down mandate but a bottom-up movement, structured around seven interlocking principles that create a symbiotic relationship between local initiatives and national success.

NDF Logic and Flow Analysis

National Policy & Decentralization; the framework originates top-down from National Policy. National policy is a central government policy statement, decisions which are decentralize as policy power and structural guidance and are channelled directly into all local governments (Local Government A, B, and C and others represent the total number of local governments within the country). Community Problems are situated

at the base are divergence community problems peculiar to each community belonging to the local government (encompassing local problems, issues, and local needs). These ground-level realities feed directly into the local governments, ensuring governance responds to localized challenges. Integration and Grassroot Plan; here each local governments channel both top-down national directives and bottom-up local needs into a central filtering process conceptualized as *Integration and grassroot plan*. Here, broader national goals are aligned with community specific conditions to formulate localized action plans and solutions. Operationally, the integration and grassroot plan here also encompasses the seven-core theoretical or framework principles which was later clarified.

Localized Community Development; the implementation of these tailored grassroots plans leads to tangible Community Development outcomes within each respective local administrative area. Lastly National Development: The localized community development outcomes converge, demonstrating that true National Development is the aggregate result of successful, decentralized community-level achievements.

NDF Framework Principles or Core Theoretical Principles Underlying the NDF Model as developed by the Author.

The below seven core principles serves as the fuel that powers this framework. They are interconnected pillars that must operate simultaneously as a system.

I. **Resource Mobilization and Partnership:** True development is resource intensive. This principle recognizes that while communities possess the energy, knowledge, and will, they often lack sufficient capital or technical expertise. Rather than waiting for central government handouts, this principle mandates a multi-pronged approach to generating resources. It encourages local governments and communities to mobilize their own resources through local taxes, voluntary contributions, profit from engaging in commercial enterprises, charges among others. Simultaneously, it demands the creation of strategic partnerships where government acts as a broker, connecting the community with the private sector, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and central government funds. By combining local knowledge with external capital and expertise, development projects become better funded, more expertly designed, and more resilient.

II. **Prioritizing Local and Community Initiative:** This principle is the cornerstone of the bottom-up approach. The author believes that change must come from within. A project that is imposed from outside rarely gains long-term traction. Development begins when community members identify their own needs and, critically, propose their own initiatives for resolving them. This principle demands that local governments respect and encourage these community-led sparks. Whether it is a proposal to build a small clinic,

pave a market road, or start a youth training workshop, the starting point of any development journey within this framework is the localized desire and initiative for change.

III. **Local and Community Oriented Projects and Programmes:** Flowing directly from the prioritization of initiative, this principle mandates that the resulting actions must be designed for and by the locality. A 'local and community oriented' project is not a scaled-down version of a national project; it is a bespoke or custom-made solution to a specific local problem. Its design is influenced by the landscape, the culture, the economy, and the unique demographic profile of the community. This principle will ensure that projects are culturally appropriate, economically viable, and practically maintainable by the people they are intended to serve.

IV. **Local and Community Participation:** The author believes this is a non-negotiable principle. Participation must occur at every stage: from initial needs assessment and planning to resource mobilization, implementation, and long-term management. Under this principles, community members are not only 'beneficiaries'; but also, the 'principals.' Their active involvement ensures that the process is transparent, that resources are managed efficiently, and that the final project truly solves the intended problem and must develop sense of ownership. Citizens are engaged in identifying needs and implementing solutions.

V. **Empowerment and Human Capacity Development:** This principle views human beings as the ultimate driver of development, because even when there is surplus food, it can not cook itself. It strengthens local government administrative capacity and community self-reliance. Development requires technical skills such budgeting, construction, agriculture and organizational skills such as leadership, conflict resolution, management etc. A true grassroot plan includes active human capacity development. When community members are trained to build their own school or manage their own water system, they are not just getting infrastructure; they are also becoming empowered. The principle focuses on strengthening the 'muscle' of the community itself.

VI. **Peculiarity of Problems and Peculiarity of Solutions:** Acknowledges that local challenges vary across localities and require distinct, non-uniform solutions. This principle also acknowledges the diversity of human experience and physical reality. It rejects a 'one-size-fits-all' solution. This principle is a direct rejection of standardized national blueprints. It encourages creative, localized experimentation. The local government and the grassroot plan must respect these unique circumstances and be flexible enough to adopt solutions that have never been tried elsewhere but are precisely what the community needs as right solutions

VII. Integration of Community Problems, Needs, and Issues with National Policy: This principle is the final link, transforming localized success into national impact. It ensures that grassroot development does not occur in a vacuum but is strategically aligned with the country's broader goals. Local government acts as the integrator. While the grassroot plan is customized, its objectives must be linked to national priorities. Blends micro-level community needs with macro-level national goals to achieve sustained progress.

5.0 BOTTLENECKS AND CHALLENGES TO THE NEXUS

Adedeji (in Khalil, 2011) blames the ineffectiveness of local government administration on the following reasons: lack of mission or lack of comprehensive functional role; lack of proper structure (i.e. the role of local governments in the development process is not known); lack of autonomy; low quality of staff; and low funding. He further averred that these problems lead the local governments into a vicious circle of poverty, with inadequate funding circumscribing powers/functions, which result in the employment of low skilled and poorly paid staff. cited (Ibietan & Ndukwe, 2014)

I. **Financial Constraints and Challenges:** The financial control over local governments funds through the instrument of Joint State-Local Government Accounts, delays in fiscal transfers, and limited revenue-generating power reduce local governments to administrative extensions of higher tiers of government rather than autonomous local actors. As observed by Chukwuemeka, there is a problem with this arrangement as the fund from the federation account is huge but it doesn't go directly into the coffers of the local government rather it flows through a State-Local Government Joint Account which the state governments has override access to (Chukwuemeka et al., 2014).

II. **Lack of Autonomy and Undue Interference:** One of the greatest challenges the local government face in the country is the lack of autonomy and undue interference in the affairs of the local governments by the state governments. Lack of autonomy in finance perspective, administrative perspective, political perspective, and socio-economic perspectives. Adeyemi (2013) observed that the local governments have become subservience to the state governments where they have to wait for directives before they can embark on any project or assignment. It, therefore, tells on one hand in the operations of the local government thereby rendering it incapacitated to deliver socio economic goods to the people at the grassroots

III. **Local Elite Capture and Political Interference:** Local political dynamics are often subject to elite capture, where localized elites divert resources meant for community development toward private gain or political

patronage. This erodes public trust and discourages community participation.

IV. **Inadequate or lack of skilled Workers coupled with capacity deficits:** Many local government administrations lack skilled personnel in project management, fiscal planning, and data analytics leading to capacity deficits as unskilled staffs could not be able to plan and execute plans that will enhance and shape community development. Many bureaucrats, technocrats, specialists and professionals often run away from local government jobs due to low salary and others related staff welfarism issues. On the other hand, community members or based organizations (CBOs) often struggle with structural settings and long-term planning, leading to abandoned projects.

V. **Top-Down Bureaucratic Imposition:** National planning frameworks frequently treat local communities as passive consumers of development rather than active partners. Interventions designed at the national capital without local consultation often result in white-elephant projects that fail to meet localized needs.

VI. **Corruption:** Over the years just like every other level of government, the local government have also been accused of corrupt practices, in conjunction with mismanagement. Accounting for this pervasive corruption in the local government, Ogbuene (in Chukwuemeka et, al. 2014) notes thus; local governments in Nigeria exist within the socio economic and moral milieu of Nigeria where the preponderant attitude of Nigerians towards public office is that of personal aggrandizement, indiscriminate materialism, nepotism and decadence. Local governments as products of this environment equally manifest traits akin to this as they are not divorced from the larger society.

Analytically, the above stated six challenges form a self-reinforcing systemic cycle rather than a set of isolated administrative cum political failures. Financial control via the State-Local Government Joint Account and severe political interference (I, II) strip local governments of operational autonomy, reducing them to subordinate arms of state leadership. This structural helplessness invites elite capture and top-down bureaucratic impositions (III, V), as higher-level actors and local political elites hijack resource allocation without accountability to the grassroots. Starved of independent funds and meaningful authority, local governments cannot offer competitive compensation or career advancement, directly triggering a severe brain drain of skilled professionals (IV). The resulting capacity deficit creates an opaque, fragile administrative environment where pervasive corruption (VI) thrives unchallenged; which state governments then weaponize as justification to retain tight financial and administrative control (I, II), perpetuating the institutional paralysis which completely severs the nexus between local governance, community empowerment, and national development.

6.0 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Community Development as a Micro-Foundation; community development cannot succeed through top-down mandates. The findings reveal that when national planning frameworks treat grassroots communities as passive beneficiaries rather than active partners, interventions consistently fail or turn into abandoned "white-elephant" projects. Furthermore, local elite capture and a lack of structural project planning among Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) erode public trust and limit the sustainability of grassroots initiatives.

Local Government as the Functional Engine; Local government administration serves as a viable engine for national growth only when granted operational and financial independence. In practice, local government capability is constrained by a structural "vicious circle of poverty" (Adedeji, in Khalil 2011; Ibietan & Ndukwe, 2014). The Joint State-Local Government Account allows state governments to divert funds (Chukwuemeka et al., 2014), rendering local governments subservient (Adeyemi, 2013). This financial strangulation—combined with low pay that drives away qualified technocrats—prevents local governments from building the infrastructure necessary to catalyze broader development.

The Tripartite Nexus (Community x Local Government x Nation); a direct causal connection exists across all three tiers: national development is the aggregate sum of functional local governments empowering their respective communities. However, in Nigeria, this nexus is broken by systemic institutional bottlenecks. Pervasive public-sector corruption and nepotism (Ogbuene, in Chukwuemeka et al., 2014) decouple local governance from community priorities. When local governments are financially paralyzed and administratively constrained, they fail to translate community needs into national progress, undermining national stability and economic growth.

6.0 CONCLUSION

Development at Local government level is sine qua non to national development, and the crux of local government development is community development through effective service delivery. As observed by Bello Imam (cited in Akinboye 2006), the creation of local government is based on the assumption that the people of a locality possess the fuller awareness of their needs than outsiders. Every local set up has its peculiar social, economic and physical characteristics as well as its unique historical traditions, which are better understood and appreciated by its people. He then opines that local government exists to bring about democracy, to serve as a base for political participation and political education, to provide services as well as serve as a vehicle of development. The path to sustainable national development depends on the strength of a nation's local governance frameworks and the vitality of its communities. Community development provides grass-roots mobilization and relevance initiatives, local

government offers institutional governance and technical capacity, and national development policies provide strategic direction and resource frameworks. Neglecting this interconnectedness will continue to create uneven development if not under-development of a nation.

This study has critically examined the interdependency between local government administration, community development, and national development in Nigeria, the relationship conceptualized as 'the nexus'. The study met its first objective by establishing that community development serves as the indispensable micro-foundation of socio-economic progress. The findings demonstrated that true grassroots development cannot be realized through top-down bureaucratic impositions or passive development models. Instead, it requires active local participation, self-driven ownership, and the empowerment of Community-Based Organizations (CBOs). Furthermore, the study identified localized elite capture and CBO technical capacity deficits as primary obstacles that erode public trust and destabilize community-led initiatives.

In addressing the second objective, the study confirmed that local government is theoretically the most viable institutional mechanism for driving aggregate national growth due to its proximity to the population. However, the analysis established that local governments in Nigeria are currently constrained by a structural poverty trap or poverty circle. Systemic bottlenecks, most notably fiscal strangulation via the State-Local Government Joint Account, overbearing state political interference, pervasive corruption, and an inability to attract skilled technocrats have reduced local authorities to subservient administrative extensions rather than autonomous agents of development. The study fulfilled its third objective by demonstrating that national development is structurally impossible without functional local governance catering to community needs. National progress is not an abstract macro-level occurrence; it is the aggregate sum of socio-economic advancement realized across individual local communities. The findings established that when local government administration is paralysed, the pipeline connecting community needs to national planning is severed, directly producing the widespread infrastructure deficits, poverty, and socio-economic stagnation observed in contemporary Nigeria.

Ultimately, the study concludes that unlocking Nigeria's national development potential requires a fundamental re-engineering of its governance architecture. National development will remain elusive as long as the grassroots remain neglected. This nexus demands uncompromising constitutional reform to grant local governments genuine political and fiscal autonomy, severe legal safeguards against state-level interference and local corruption, and continuous capacity-building initiatives aimed at empowering local administrators and community organizations alike.

7.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

Local Government serves as a foundational institution of National Development and its continuous impact in community development will enhance national development, local governments should aggregate diverse community issues and problems into a comprehensive grassroot plan, and this cumulative aggregate is sinews of war for development across local level leading to overall nation's development. This paper recommends;

1. **Enhancing Autonomy:** Autonomy is multidimensional, which ranges from fiscal, to administrative, to political among others. Local governments should be guaranteed statutory revenue allocations and independent revenue generation powers to fund local development projects and programmes without political interference from other levels of government. This can be enhanced through legislations and reforms.

2. **Local Capacity Building:** Capacity building is multidimensional, which ranges from administrative capacity, financial capacity, political capacity to mention few. In area of administration, local governance administrative staff and workers should possess adequate technocrat skills required to carry out developmental projects and programs, effective planning and implementation of projects. Establishing training and orientation programs for local council employees, community member and community leadership in project management and maintenance culture.

3. **Participatory Governance Structures:** Through formal and informal means, such as town hall meetings, ward by ward development committees, and participatory budgeting, direct community engagement and participation in grassroot decision making.

4. Strengthen and collaboration of local councils and private organizations and community partnerships to fund public projects where necessary or situation demands, ensuring that communities, and private organizations within the local government contribute meaningfully to the development of the communities.

5. **Constitutional reform;** enhanced decentralizations, elections into the local government should be done independent of the state government. The people at the grassroots should be able to vote independently for their leaders and choices. This will further strengthened community mobilization and participation in the works and affairs of the local government and promote national development from the grassroots.

6. Strengthen Anti-corruption framework, Transparency and Accountability frameworks; corruption is a known social vice in Nigeria with is carried out in multiples fold across every governance or public sector. Through rule of law

and strengthen of anti-corruption frameworks, funds for development will be used for its purpose.

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