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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

### LOCAL GOVERNMENT AUTONOMY AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT: IMPERATIVE ISSUES AND CHALLENGES BEDEVILING LOCAL GOVERNMENTS IN SOUTHEAST GEOPOLITICAL ZONE, NIGERIA

Chioke, Stephen Chinedu<sup>1</sup>, Umeokafor, Chibuiké Chris<sup>2</sup> and Mbamalu, Kingsley Uchenna<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Ph.D Student, Department of Public Administration, Faculty of Management Sciences, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka

<sup>2</sup>Department of Public Administration, Faculty of Management Sciences, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka

<sup>3</sup>PhD Student, Department of Public Administration, Faculty of Management Sciences, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka

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#### ABSTRACT

South-East geopolitical zone in Nigeria comprises of Abia State, Anambra State, Ebonyi State, Enugu State and Imo State. Local governments in these States are maniacally demonized by several ugly ordeals, which include the problem of lack of autonomy in practical terms and absence of rural development. The remote cause of this problem is the undue and excess unjustifiable concentration of political power at the State level through the instrumentality of Nigeria's grundnorm. The study thus examined whether LGAs in South-East geopolitical zone have contributed to the rural development of the areas that make up those local governments and why Local Government has not lived up to expectations despite its relative autonomy. Being a Survey research, it employed Development theory as its theoretical framework of analysis. The study reveals that LGAs in South-East geopolitical zone have no iota of autonomy in practical terms and as such have not contributed to the rural development of the areas that make up LGAs of South-East geopolitical zone. The study concluded that, if local governments in Nigeria enjoy autonomy (discretion) in practical terms than what is obtainable now, the gains of democracy in terms of rural development will be delivered to the rural dwellers here and there. It recommended that LGAs should be practically autonomous to meet the yearnings of the local people in the area of rural development/transformation.

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## INTRODUCTION

South-East geopolitical zone in Nigeria comprises of Abia State, Anambra State, Ebonyi State, Enugu State and Imo State. Local governments in these states are maniacally demonized by several ugly ordeals, which include the problem of lack of autonomy in practical terms and absence of rural development. The remote cause of this problem is the undue and excess unjustifiable concentration of political power at the State level through the instrumentality of Nigeria's grundnorm. And this has by several means orchestrated the undeniable power tussle evident in the aforementioned States, which directly or indirectly affect on a negative note the performance of the local councils thereof. Significantly, Onah (2009:1) rightly captured the truth as it concerns power and democratic society when he posited that,

"Absolute power belongs to the people and a truly democratic society should be founded on the people's priority and the pre-eminence of the people's interest." Interestingly, the just cited viewpoint credited to Onah (2009) depicts the rationale for the existence of any government and local government inclusive. However, to better x-ray the matter with governance in Nigeria, we throw up some pertinent issues in form of rhetorical questions as follows:

- J Does absolute power really belong to the people at the grassroots in Nigeria?
- J Is local government truly democratic in this country where everything no matter how bad it appears is obtainable, saleable and permissible?
- J If yes, is Nigerian democracy truly founded on the interest of the people's priority?
- J Is the interest of the local people pre-eminent in Nigeria?

**\*Corresponding author: Chioke, Stephen Chinedu,**  
Ph.D Student, Department of Public Administration, Faculty of Management Sciences, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.

- ) It is only a foreigner who just migrated from a lifeless planet to Nigeria that does not know the appropriate answers to these questions. Hence, we could see that the answers are not farfetched. Undoubtedly; the situation at the grassroots is one unworthy of mention, because public administration at this level has been painted with lurid colours. As it stands and in response to this noticeable malady in administration, one cannot guarantee:
- ) The development of the rural areas.
  - ) The safety of rural people especially in this era of incessant attacks by the Fulani herdsmen and Boko Haram insurgency.
  - ) The advancement of national consciousness and patriotism stimulated by good grassroots governance and participation.
  - ) Practically, this would have been possible if there is practicable greater discretion (autonomy) granted to the local councils for local self governance. But then, the reverse is predominantly the case and as such, the centre can no longer hold. Thus, it has continuously paved the way for: *To your tent oh Israel approach*. Surely, this is a sign of disintegration fostered via reckless injection of centrifugal elements and ideas. Thus the need to rebuild the broken walls of our local government; reorganize and coordinate the system for the purpose of unifying and developing the grassroots, the pre-eminence of the entirety of the people's interest and *local politics via political participation* are indeed paramount and overtly indispensable.

The notion of local government and its autonomy has remained a routine discourse and similarly, the underlying issues have remained nostalgic. It was probably on this note that Akindiyo, Imoukhuede and Mohammed (2015:113-114) predicate that, "Local Government in Nigeria is crisis-ridden. The debate over the performance of its statutory functions has undermined the existentialism of local government whose authority is derived from the constitution. Small wonder or no wonder the fate of local government in Nigeria has assumed a worrisome dimension since the democratic drive in 1999." It is therefore herein stated that local governments in Nigeria are yet battling with the issues of real/complete autonomy, rural development, good governance, sustainable development and thus, living up to the expectations of the citizens has remained worrisome and seemingly unachievable. Some of these variables are what this research is geared towards finding their implications in Nigeria's local government system. Therefore, while focusing on Local Government Areas (LGAs) in South-East, this study is poised to interrogate and proffer solutions to these issues. To achieve this, it is sacrosanct to investigate: whether LGAs in South-East geopolitical zone are really autonomous; whether LGAs in South-East geopolitical zone have contributed to the rural development of the areas that make up those local governments; and why LGAs in South-East geopolitical zone have not lived up to expectations despite its relative autonomy and resources.

### Hypotheses

Ho<sub>1</sub> – LGAs in South-East geopolitical zone have no iota of autonomy in practical terms.

Ho<sub>2</sub> – LGAs in South-East geopolitical zone have not contributed to the rural development of the areas that make up those local governments.

Ho<sub>3</sub> – LGAs in South-East geopolitical zone have not lived up to expectations in spite of its relative autonomy.

### METHODOLOGY

The research design for this study is survey research design. The sample for this study was drawn from residents in South-East geopolitical zone. A total of hundred and twenty seven (127) respondents from this zone formed the sample for this study. Out of 127 questionnaires distributed, one hundred and twenty was returned, but a total of hundred and five (105) questionnaires were found properly filled and useful for the study. Thus, 94.7% is the Instrument Return Rate. Chi Square was used in testing the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

### REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Under this section, we review extant literatures on local government, local government autonomy and rural development. We start the conceptual explication of local government.

**Local Government: A Conceptual Remark:** With regard to the conceptual meaning of local government, an avalanche of definitions exists. This is arguably because of the very nature, functions and scope that local government covers. Hence the meaning of local government is different, thus, what we regard as local government in one vicinity or socio-political milieu may not really be local government owing to differences in their structure and enabling statutes. Therefore, we shall be gleaning from the following definitions of local government as presented by various authors from varied perspectives. The concept of local government denotes the breaking down of a country into smaller units or localities for the purpose of administration, in which the inhabitants of the different units or localities concerned, jointly with their representative mobilize resources, human and material, for the purpose of advancing the developmental course of the people (Abada, 2012). Put differently, Barber (1974) intones that, "Where a local authority has a legal personality with sufficient but limited powers of control over its staff, finances and functions devolved upon it by the central government, it can conveniently be called a local government." Also, "Local government is the lowest unit of administration to whose laws and regulations, the communities who live in a defined geographical area and with common social and political ties, are subject (Orewa, 1991).

Additionally, the 1976 Local Government Reform Hand Book defines local government as: "Government at the local level exercised through representative councils established by law to exercise specific powers within defined areas." However, to drive home some points, we glean from section 7(1) of 1999 Constitution which reads thus, "The system of local government by democratically elected local government Councils is under this Constitution guaranteed..." It is however, regrettably lugubrious to assert that the reverse has emerged to be the order of the day, as many local governments in South-East are not ran via

representative councils established by law to be utterly democratic. To shed more light on this, we mean that officers of the council who are supposed to be democratically elected are not elected by the people of such area, but appointed by political fathers in the State, which has paved the way for the dominance a system known as Local Administration. And this practice negates rural development in Nigeria because the so-called local administration is manned through a Caretaker Committee that serves and bows to the whims and caprices of the governor and/or a host of political godfathers. In another parallax, "Local government is a government created by an Act or Decree which is empowered to deal with matters concerning that locality. Local government also could be seen as the third tier of government. Thus, it is the government at the grass root level created for miscellaneous purposes or reasons (Chioke, 2015)." In keeping with the foregoing view of the corresponding author, it is pertinent to note that every local government has enabling statute which specifies its functions and delimitates its territorial boundary and which its functions, policies, and activities cannot exceed its boundary, otherwise it could be declared *ultra vires* and of no effect by a court of competent jurisdiction. It is on this note that we suffice it to say that, "local government is a corporate body that can sue and be sued (Chioke, 2015)." Then, what is the implication of its corporate existence? It is crucial to note that, "The implication of the aforesaid is that as a corporate body, local government has a number of powers that it enjoys and exercises through its arms/organs/structures. Among these powers or rights are: right to impose levy, license, punish, conduct legitimate business, make bye-laws, to mention but a few. By this, we could see that local government is created to perform functions that are executive, legislative or judicial in nature, as seen in the rights or powers stated above. Significantly, the executive functions are performed via the executive arm of the local government. That is, via the Chairman or his Deputy. Meanwhile, the legislative function is executed through the Local government Council, which is empowered to enact bye-laws. Finally, the judicial function is done via the customary court headed by the Magistrate (Chioke, 2015)."

#### **Local Government Autonomy: A Conceptual Overview:**

In light of argument raised by different people from different perspectives, there seems to be two opposite views on local government autonomy. It then follows that, while some scholars believe that there is local government autonomy; some scholars believe that there is no local government autonomy. While the researchers stand the chance of being countered as regards to any observed misconception, and error in the logic of the researchers' perspective and generalisation of the supposed reality of events in local governance *vis-à-vis* the annals of local governments in Nigeria; we hasten to add that the tragedy of the Nigerian condition and indifference (in terms of Local Government Autonomy), though with few exceptions that are incorporated in the *grundnorm*, that, Local Government is relatively autonomous, but not completely independent. But in practical terms, they are far from being autonomous in terms of carrying out functions without interference or having to take express permission from the State governors. Indeed, to have little does not mean not to have. Hence, the researcher's thought pattern, logic, position and/or argument aligns with those who support the view that Local Government is relatively autonomous in Nigeria. However,

when the prevailing circumstance in our locality is considered, the reasons to either welcome this position or not will be unveiled and as the story unfolds, this standpoint may look clearer and convincing, but if not, a rethink will be subsequently considered by anyone who cares including the researchers. To begin with, to be autonomous is to possess authority. Now, we first consider the question: What is authority? "Authority as I see it is a wheel of transformation and consolidation of our legal rights which bind the nation together in unity (Chioke, 2012)." Also, Nwosu (2008) put the matter thus, "the right to speak on behalf of the State and make binding decision that control the behavior of individuals and groups in the society." It then follows the logic that autonomy connotes authority. However, before we turn attention to the meaning of local government autonomy, we first regurgitate the meaning of local government.

The International Encyclopedia of Social Science (1976) as quoted in NOUN (2013) defined local government area as, "A political sub-division of national or regional government which performs functions which clearly in all cases receive its legal power from the national or regional government but possess some degree of discretion (emphasis mine) on the making of decisions and which normally has some taxing powers." *Some degree of discretion*, as stated above supports the argument that local government has a measure of autonomy. Frankly, it connotes autonomy of local government and as such local governments have little autonomy. What then is local government autonomy? "This is the extent to which local governments are free from the control of the state and federal governments in the management of local affairs (Asogwa, 2013)." Yet, in respect of the meaning of autonomy, the defunct Centre for Democratic Studies as quoted in Adeyemi (2005) said that it is, "the relative discretion which local governments enjoy in regulating their own affairs." However, we examine this puzzle, what does autonomy actually mean to some scholars? To some people especially those who would have us believe that local government has no iota of autonomy in Nigeria with regard to South East geopolitical zone, the substratum of their proposition would be centred on finances. Thus; for them, local government autonomy would mean or connote financial autonomy. In this regard, Local Governments in Nigeria have no absolute power/control over financial matters. Ideally, autonomy is not only limited to financial matters.

Additionally, it could also mean to some people self governance and power to *intoto* dictate local actions. In another perspective, local government autonomy is in terms of functions. In this regard, local councils have the authority to implement certain functions saddled upon it by the constitution and for this, see the fourth schedule of the 1999 Constitution of Federal Republic of Nigeria. We hasten to add that whatever degree of autonomy (liberty *per se*) that local governments enjoy in Nigeria could be deduced from the provisions of the 1999 Constitution. To buttress this, we glean from Section 7(1) of the above: The system of local government by democratically elected local government Councils is under this constitution guaranteed, and accordingly, the government of every State shall, subject to section 8 of this constitution, ensure their existence under a law which provides for the establishment, structure, composition, finance, and functions of such Councils.

The above section clearly democratized and institutionalized the institution of local government. More importantly, local government is quite autonomous as a result of its power/authority to make bye laws and consequently punish culprits within the confines of the law. It should be noted that various measures apart from the well known 1976 reform have been taken to strengthen the autonomy of local government. In fact we could recall that, "During military regime, Babangida's administration from 1985, made reasonable efforts towards strengthening local government system and its autonomy. Certain measures of autonomy started coming the way of local government in January 1988 with the scrapping of State Ministries of Local Governments throughout the Country. This was to remove the State Control over local government. Other efforts made towards local government autonomy were the approved scheme of service for local government employees, following the recommendation of the Oyeyipo Committee Report of March 1988 (Asogwa, 2013:303)."

We also add that another opposing school regarding autonomy at the grassroots is of the view that there cannot be complete autonomy at the local level. In this dimension, "This grassroots democracy is primarily aimed at giving the vast majority of the people the fullest opportunity to participate in determining their own destiny. But it is obvious that we cannot have complete autonomy or complete local self-government within Sovereign States. If local governments were completely autonomous they would be Sovereign States (Adeyemo, 2005). With the high rate of political corruption and overbearing influences of officials other than the local officials, local government autonomy is not hundred percent guaranteed in our political system. In other words, until we are ready to inject a positive change in this regard, local government in Nigeria may continue to experience meddlesomeness by officials of State/Federal government.

**Rural Development: A Conceptual Insight:** To better understand the meaning of "rural development," we dissect the notion, 'rural development' and define them separately. The word 'rural' is, "connected with or like the countryside (Hornby, 2005:1035)." Available literature opines that it is, "Pertaining to less-populated, non-urban areas." However, this is just a perspective. It went further to posit that, "Probably the first thing that springs to mind is the contrast with urban areas and the image of open spaces, either in a relatively natural state or cultivated or grazed by livestock. What about rural towns? ...Official definitions often refer to settlement with less than 5000 people as being rural, whilst those with more than 5000 people are considered urban. However, this threshold varies from one country to another, due in part to differences in the overall population density." Next is development. This is certainly a notion including economic growth, which can be measured quantitatively, for example by national income. But the meaning of "development" is distinct from that of growth, but also qualitative changes in such aspects as organisation, institution and culture in society (Hayami, 1995). From this, we hasten to aver that, growth as a term is single-faceted, while development is multi-faceted; as it connotes more than one aspect of sector of the polity in general. Significantly, "Rural in the notion of rural development meant in this context is a place where the poor live. In total, the notion of rural development has strongly been linked with the goal of

poverty alleviation, and with the framework for development strategy emphasizing not only economic growth but also distribution and equality. Such an idea of rural development appeared and rapidly spread in the 1970s as the new approach for Third World development," Shinichi (n.d) explained. Rural development is one of the most talked concerns of local government. This is because local government regarded as an instrument of rural development as it is created with the aim of bringing the rural dwellers closer to the government and to aid local participation and wide spread participation in politics before, during and after elections. No wonder IBRD (1975), defined it thus, "Rural Development is a strategy designed to improve the economic and social life of a specific group of people - the rural poor. It involves extending the benefits of development to the poorest among those who seek a livelihood in the rural areas. The group involves small-scale farmers, tenants and the landless." Indeed, "Rural development was in this sense understood as the most effective strategy for alleviating poverty (Shimichi, n.d)." It is on this note that we suffice it to opine that rural development is partly or wholly a local government oriented activity/program and as such, it is or should be designed to serve local needs.

Importantly, "the notion of rural development appeared in the 1970 and criticized severally the development policy so far applied in developing countries. The mainstream of Third World development policy in 1960s attached importance mainly to economic growth through industrialisation, which was to be achieved by the initiative of government (Harriss, 1982)." Then to understand our Nigerian side of the story, I throw up this question: How many industries have been established, promoted, managed and sustained from 1960 till date in local areas? You already know the riposte. Again in furtherance to the preceding objective (understanding the Nigerian side of the story), we align the aforesaid with the questions of Dudley Seer (1972) relating to development as follows: "The questions to ask about a country's development are therefore what have been happening to poverty? What has been happening to unemployment? What has been happening to inequality?". Applying these questions to the situation in the local government system in Nigeria, we observe that there is widespread poverty, unemployment and inequality in the rural areas and the gap between the haves and have nots is obviously humongous. Thus; the ugly ordeals here and there, are clear indications that Local Governments have not performed well since their inception. Conclusively, rural development is multifaceted, as it connotes growth (increase in population/size, income, strength, etc), the systematic method of using both established scientific knowledge and skills to attain stated rural needs; and the process of socio-economic transformation coupled with some allied matters.

**Theoretical Framework:** This study adopted the development theory as its theoretical framework. The rationale is that the theory is suitable for the study since it espouses and focuses on the need for the development of the rural areas. Development theorists placed great emphasis on how local government in the developing world can be an effective agent of political integration/nation building, social development and economic development. The proponents of the school contend that far more than in developed Western Countries, local government in developing nations can and should have the function of helping to reduce the congestion

at the centre. This it can do at the local level by socio-economic programs that attempt to reconstruct the infrastructure necessary for an improved way of life (Ola, 1984:14). Now, the point yet to be made is that autonomy would engineer rural development of the grassroots in developing economies. But how far have local councils developed vis-à-vis the autonomy given it by the constitution? The situation is messy and urgently calls for a redress. Then how can we develop the South-East LGAs in the face all the troubles brought to them by the bossy Governors at the State level? With this, development will be practically difficult or totally impossible.

This theory is the foundation for the creation of local government. Based on this, local government should and must be able to garner resources needed for the development of the local dwellers. In this sense, local government is expected to mobilize, implement and consolidate local developmental initiative in line with the local needs, interests and aspirations of the people. These positions so far form the basis for anchoring this investigation on development theory. "However, some critics have argued that this justification of local government promote sectionalism and parochial interests and therefore, inimical to political and developmental integration at the national level. In spite of this, the role of the local government in developmental efforts particularly in those programmes and activities which they help to initiate cannot be over emphasized (Covenant University Nigeria, n.d)." At this juncture, we examine predominant ordeals – the true picture aground in the *locus classicus* of this study – South East, Nigeria.

**The True Picture/Realities on ground: Imperative Issues and Challenges Bedeviling Local Governments in Southeast Geopolitical Zone, Nigeria:** First, the true picture on ground that we are concerned about is a matter of Public Administration/governance at grassroot level. Interestingly, "Public administration deals with the management of all sectors of human endeavours excluding the private sector. Based on this, the main thrust of public administration is to effectively manage all public enterprises (bureaucracies) in a manner that includes the management of man, material, and money; and create major impact on public organisations and its environment (Chioke, 2016:2)." Bearing the foregoing in mind, we ask: Can we say that LGAs in SouthEast geopolitical zone via its administrative/executive arm have effectively managed its resources (man and material)? What is the reality in our local governments? What are the gains of local government? Has local government played key role(s) in the development of South-East? Have local governments South East Nigeria lived up to the expectations of the masses? If no, why have they not lived up to expectations in spite of its little autonomy and resources? To be frank, the gains/advantages of local government portend something great for the local people and the entire locality. It is meant to usher in development if properly managed by specialists and the indigenes who know the matter/trouble with the local people and the locality in general. Hence, what is the true picture/true state of affairs/reality on ground? To examine the situation aground, we approach it from growth and development perspective and from the questions above. Growth has been defined as, "an increase in size, number, value and strength." Development on the other hand surpasses growth. We shall come to that side of the same coin later.

Now, from the aforesaid definition of growth, we throw up this puzzle – Does it mean that the increase in number of local governments in Nigeria has given rise to a corresponding development in rural areas? To answer this, we align ourselves with the views of Udentia (2009:32) as follows:

This is not about numbers, though numbers are not unimportant. From 301 Local Government Areas and several more hundreds of Development Areas and the auxiliary structures. The crux of the matter, however, is that there is yawning gap between this quantitative growth in number of local government contrivances and the quality of life of the people which revolves around service delivery. From the above views of Udentia (2009) and from a generic perspective, the answer is, NO. The picture of the local government in Nigeria is quite gloomy, as there is no meaningful increase in the number of growth in available social services and the influx of people from urban areas to rural areas. Based on this, the reality is that the reverse has been the overwhelming scenario. And as such we bear in mind that, "Nigeria is still a perfect example of underdeveloped society due to the problem of infrastructure evident in the rural areas. Attendantly, there is an upsurge in rural – urban migration and food insecurity in the country (Chioke, 2020:59)." In yet the same angle, Udentia (2009) described the growth at the local government as, "And just as the world would speak about Growth without Development, what is happening at the local government system of Nigeria is worse as it is growth with underdevelopment or even decadence – a cancerous growth." From this, those with contrary opinion are better convinced that there is no growth whatsoever in the rural areas, but a cancerous growth as Udentia (2009) rightly put it.

Instead of rural development and efficient service delivery as predicted by the efficient service theorists, we have an avalanche of all sorts of abandoned projects in the areas that make up rural areas. In an interview conducted by the researcher, an interviewee maintained that: local government of Enugu East has not lived up to its expectation. She cited one road that was stopped at the local government gate. She equally cited the deplorable state of Abakpa market and the road leading to *Ugbo Ezeji, Ugbo Oghe, Ugbo Owa* and other areas in the domain of Enugu East LGA. This further shows that local government has not played key role in the development of Enugu East LGA of Enugu State. In Awka North LGA of Anambra State, the matter is similar. For example, the road from Amansea to Ebenebe and Awba-Ofemili in Awka North is pitifully an eyesore. In rainy season, this road constitutes major hiccup in road transportation of Agricultural produce and other road users. Directly, this negatively affects the economy of rural dwellers thereof, as consumers from urban areas in the State and beyond find it extremely cumbersome to access the commodities produced in that area and has led to the severe impoverishment of the rural dwellers in Awka North LGA. It is on this note that we revisit the questions of Dudley Seer (1972) regarding development as follows: "The questions to ask about a country's development are therefore what have been happening to poverty? What has been happening to unemployment? What has been happening to inequality?" Applying the very logic of these questions (Seer's questions) to the situation in the local government system in Nigeria, we observe that there is widespread poverty in the rural

communities in Enugu East LGA, Awka North LGA cum the disgusting high profile level of unemployment which have hindered development of these areas. Apart from these woes, the masses have been plagued by the abundance of poor educational facilities, poor health facilities, no good pipe borne water and the life of masses in our local governments in South East thus appears to be brutish. Why have they not lived up to expectations in spite of its relative autonomy and resources? During the interviews conducted in Enugu East local government area (LGA), it was discovered that there are many problems/reasons that made Enugu East LGA not to live up to its expectation. Amongst these reasons are – lack of financial autonomy, fund embezzlement and negligence. In Ezza North LGA of Ebonyi State, we have the same experience with respect to lack of financial autonomy. It is apparently difficult for local government to deliver services where there is lack of financial autonomy. Therefore, finance is an important aspect that makes local government to perform its constitutional duties. Suffice it to say that; if the autonomy is not there, the reverse turns to be case. On fund embezzlement, we are aware that local government monies have been so looted local government chairmen and Caretaker Committee chairpersons to the extent that local governments have little to complete their capital projects. Thus, this ugly trend has given rise to increased number of abandoned projects in virtually all LGA in Nigeria as whole. Negligence has also contributed to the trouble with our local government. Looking at Enugu East LGA, we note that Enugu East is one of the richest local governments in Enugu State in terms of internally generated revenue, yet it is unable to play key role in the development of Enugu East. Why? Negligence! For instance what gave fillip to the deplorable condition of Ugbene 2 road for over five (5) years now is no other factor than negligence. Logically, since Enugu East is one the biggest revenue generating local government in the state, one may not plead lack of finance as a defense.

To advance this common objective that is, x-raying the reality aground, we hasten to enrich ourselves with Amical Cabral's viewpoint. Meanwhile; to better appreciate this view point, we first ask: What do the people really want from any political contrivance? "The people are not fighting for ideas, for the things in anyone's head. They are fighting for material benefits. To live better and in peace. To see their lives go forward and guarantee the future of their children: National liberation, building of peace and progress, independence. All this will remain meaningless unless it brings about real improvement in the conditions of life (Amical Cabral n.d)." Surely, the last sentence of the above aptly captured the reality of our existence and need in any political enclave or contrivance. This is where the true picture/reality aground as regards to growth and development surfaces. Secondly, on administration, the situation is pitiable. Local government cannot meet up with its statutory task of pioneering and engineering rural development demonstrated through equitable service delivery without sound technocrats with sound knowledge of local governance and the workings of local autonomy. Today, the unfortunate story is the use of glorified errand boys and thugs under the guise of local government Chairmen, or Caretaker Committee or if you like, pseudo Chairmen in piloting the affairs of the local councils. To this effect, we ask – can a blind man lead the blind? No! It is impossible.

Caretaker Committee Chairmen mostly used by governors are blind men, short sighted and unfit for the job of public administration at local level. Hence, we must abandon such aberration and cling to global best practices associated with local governance. Hence; in a bid to achieving selfish agenda, these errand boys are known for initiating old, crude, useless, and dead policies as a result of poor grip of global administrative best practices and wherewithal. In this aspect, we harvest the matter thus: "Put differently, the only area where there appears to be a positive trend is at the angles of the use of local government as an instrument of repression and for the consolidation of State power. This is a colonial Hang Over. An atavism where the colonial regimes used the Native Authorities (NAs) to watch over the Natives and hold them down. It was a tool of imperialism used to shackle the natives and beat them into line and ensure order. Today, the local governments have wittingly and unwittingly turned into instruments for the demand of the human rights of individuals considered as not belonging to the political parties that are in control at the various States (Udenta, 2009:35)." He continued this way: "This personalisation of the Local Government and its abuse as an instrument of repression reveals itself in many sad but fundamental quarters, ways and manners hence, while the Local Government Officers are able to track opposition parties and political groups and associations, they are not able to prevent and/or control communal crises. There is no gain saying that communal crisis have taken much toll on human and material resources in Nigeria (Udenta, 2009)."

Based on these obvious realities, we recognize that there is much to ventilate regarding the true picture of the poor state of rural development, but tomorrow is another day/wonderful opportunity. Hence, we maintain our cursory look and as such, we pause to REFLECT on what have been said so far.

### Test of Hypothesis

The research hypotheses formulated were test and in doing this the researcher used Chi Square Good of fit test

**Hypothesis 1:** LGAs in South-East geopolitical zone have no iota of autonomy in practical terms.

$$X^2 = \frac{(O - E)^2}{E} = 7.79$$

The assumed level of significance is 5% = 0.05; Tabulated  $X^2 = 0.05$  level of significance; Degree of freedom (d.o.f); Formula for d. o. f is, (Row-1).  
Therefore, d.o.f. = 5-1 = 4  
Expected frequency = 105/5 = 21

### Workings:

$$X^2 = \frac{(25-21)^2}{21} + \frac{(26-21)^2}{21} + \frac{(10-21)^2}{21} + \frac{(22-21)^2}{21} + \frac{(22-21)^2}{21}$$

$$\frac{(4)^2}{21} + \frac{(5)^2}{21} + \frac{(-11)^2}{21} + \frac{(1)^2}{21} + \frac{(1)^2}{21}$$

$$(0.76) + (1.19) + (5.76) + (0.04) + (0.04)$$

$$\therefore \text{Calculated } X^2 = 7.79$$

**Discussion Rule:** Reject ( $H_0$ ) where calculated  $X^2$  is greater than tabulated  $X^2$ . Otherwise, accept  $H_1$ .

**Table 1. Chi Square responses of respondents on LGAs in South-East geopolitical zone have iota of autonomy in practical terms**

Options	Observed Frequency	Expected Frequency (Fe)	Residual (O - E)	(O - E) <sup>2</sup>	$\frac{(O - E)^2}{E}$
Strongly Agree (SA)	25	21	4	16	0.76
Agree (A)	26	21	5	25	1.19
Undecided (UD)	10	21	-11	121	5.76
Strongly Disagree (D)	22	21	1	1	0.04
Disagree (SD)	22	21	1	1	0.04
Total	105				$X^2 = 7.79$

**Table 2. Chi Square responses of respondents on LGAs in South East geopolitical zone have not contributed to the rural development of the areas that make up those local governments.**

Options	Observed Frequency	Expected Frequency (Fe)	Residual (O - E)	(O - E) <sup>2</sup>	$\frac{(O - E)^2}{E}$
Strongly Agree (SA)	21	21	0	0	0
Agree (A)	26	21	5	25	1.19
Undecided (UD)	12	21	-9	81	3.85
Strongly Disagree (D)	24	21	3	9	0.42
Disagree (SD)	22	21	1	1	0.04
Total	105				$X^2 = 5.5$

**Table 3. Chi Square responses of respondents LGAs in South East geopolitical zone have not lived up to expectations in spite of its relative autonomy.**

Options	Observed Frequency	Expected Frequency (Fe)	Residual (O - E)	(O - E) <sup>2</sup>	$\frac{(O - E)^2}{E}$
Strongly Agree (SA)	30	21	9	81	3.85
Agree (A)	16	21	-5	25	1.19
Undecided (UD)	17	21	-4	16	0.76
Strongly Disagree (D)	23	21	2	4	0.19
Disagree (SD)	19	21	-2	4	0.19
Total	105				$X^2 = 6.18$

**Decision:** Since the calculated Chi-Square ( $X^2$ ) value of 7.79 is less than the Table Chi-Square value of 9.49 at alpha level of 0.05 and degree of freedom 4, we reject the alternative hypothesis that says LGAs in South-East geopolitical zone have autonomy in practical terms and accept the null hypothesis that says LGAs in South-East geopolitical zone have iota of autonomy in practical terms

**Hypothesis 2:** LGAs in SouthEast geopolitical zone have not contributed to the rural development of the areas that make up those local governments.

$$X^2 = \frac{(O - E)^2}{E} = 5.5$$

**Decision:** Since the calculated Chi-Square ( $X^2$ ) value of 5.5 is less than the Table Chi-Square value of 9.49 at alpha level of 0.05 and degree of freedom 4, we reject the alternative hypothesis and accept the null hypothesis that says LGAs in South-East geopolitical zone have not contributed to the rural development of the areas that make up those local governments.

**Hypothesis 3:** LGAs in South-East geopolitical zone have not lived up to expectations in spite of its relative autonomy.

$$X^2 = \frac{(O - E)^2}{E} = 6.18$$

**Decision:** Since the calculated Chi-Square ( $X^2$ ) value of 6.18 is less than the Table Chi-Square value of 9.49 at alpha level of 0.05 and degree of freedom 4, we reject the alternative hypothesis and accept the null hypothesis that

says LGAs in South East geopolitical zone have not lived up to expectations in spite of its relative autonomy.

### Summary of findings

**After the analyses, the following findings were made:**

- ) LGAs in South-East geopolitical zone have no iota of autonomy in practical terms.
- ) LGAs in South-East geopolitical zone have not contributed to the rural development of the areas that make up those local governments.
- ) LGAs in South-East geopolitical zone have not lived up to expectations in spite of its relative autonomy.

### Conclusion

Local government has no iota of autonomy in practical terms in Nigeria. Precisely, local governments in Nigeria have not performed well as regards to rural development/transformation vis-à-vis the relative autonomy accorded to them on paper and resources prevalent in the local government.

If local governments in Nigeria enjoy autonomy (discretion) in practical terms than what is obtainable now, the gains of democracy in terms of rural development will be delivered to the rural dwellers here and there.

**Conflict of interest and Funding:** We hereby state that there is no conflict of interest or funding to be declared.

## Recommendations

**In recognition of the findings and conclusion already conveyed, we recommend the following:**

- ) Local government should and must be granted autonomy that would them to meet the yearnings of the local people in the area of rural development/transformation.
- ) The task of rural development should be taken serious so as to better the lives of rural dwellers in South-East LGAs and beyond.
- ) In order to check the incessant rate of fund embezzlement, it is herein submitted that capital projects of the local government should be given to well meaning contractors.
- ) Sequel to the foregoing, it is suggested that local government councils should rise up and perform its oversight function, supervision. In this regard, local governments Chairmen should tour round the LGA and see the situation of those projects themselves so as to enable them take prompt actions against defaulters/dubious contractors who cart away with local government monies without completion of tasks assigned to them.

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