



## **Examination of Local Government Financial Autonomy and its Effect on Rural Development in Nigeria: A Study of some selected Local Government Areas in North-East Nigeria**

**Yunusa Sabo Mohammed<sup>1</sup>, Usman Mohammed<sup>2</sup> and Abubakar Abdulkadir Bajoga<sup>3</sup>**

<sup>1&2</sup>Department of Public Administration, Gombe State Polytechnic, Bajoga

<sup>3</sup>Department of Public Administration, Federal Polytechnic Kaltungo

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***Abstract:** The major reason of this study is to examine local government financial autonomy and its effect on rural development in some selected Local Government Areas in the North East. The research sponsored by TETFund views local government as that government which is saddled with the core responsibility of engendering transformational changes in the rural areas of Nigeria. Although the local government is lagging far behind as a result of unwarranted interference by other tiers of government on its functioning or activities, thus, the need for local government financial autonomy for its efficient as well as effective operation. Also, the failure of the interfering tiers of government in Nigeria to meet the basics of human needs, complexities experiences rapid growth as well as changes in development, gave rise to the need and agitation for local government autonomy as a way of ensuring rural development in Nigeria. The research adopted principally a descriptive method of analysis of the general need for local government autonomy and rural development in Nigeria. This is quite necessary due to the increasing emphasis of rural development of communities and transformation. The findings of the study reveals that financial, political as well as administrative autonomy of the local government areas is desired to empower the local governments succeed in their goal for effective and sustainable transformation of rural areas in Nigeria. Thus, the research recommended that government should do the needful to grant all the local governments in Nigeria full autonomy to bring about the much desired rural development in Nigeria.*

***Keywords:** Local Government, Autonomy, Financial, Rural, Development.*

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### **Introduction**

Local government autonomy as a concept is not completely new to Nigeria; but rather, it has adopted diverse strategies. English speaking and French Speaking African nations have seen various pre-and post-war autonomies. After independence, governments across Africa kept on utilizing governments at the local levels as administrative units, and significant elements of local governments, for example, basic healthcare, construction of roads, education and local revenue collection were shifted toward central government control (Gbartea, 2011). Kiwanuka (2012) believes that African nations have additionally capitulated to the expanding wave of cities and metropolitans. Some dominant elite groups in Africa, for example, the Americo-Liberian in Liberia embraced local government autonomy as a means to bargain with local elites with secessionist tendencies, and as a remedy for political instability. Nations began truly considering local government autonomy as an option after the manifest disappointments resulting from centralized economic planning in the 1970's. Although there

was no confirmation that local government autonomy would succeed, there were adequate information demonstrating that the centralized system of governance had failed (Awortwi, 2010). As Mookherjee (2006) observes, the primary reason for embarking upon local government autonomy is that transfer of some central government powers, assets, duties, and responsibility to lower tiers empowers local institutions and associations to engage in more successful self-administration and improvement suitable to local conditions. The historical backdrop of modern local government systems in developing nations, including Nigeria, is stacked with experimentation. There have been purposeful endeavors to modernize; however, tradition is still profoundly established (Ekpe, 2007). Some eminent issues confronting local government systems in developing nations with Nigeria not an exemption include, but rather are not restricted to, basic dysfunctionality, absence of acceptable and ideal structure, capacities and duties. At the point when these are tended to, local government could be receptive to the necessities of the rural citizens who make up a large number of the populace in the developing countries (Ekpe, Ekpe, and Daniels, 2013). The Nigeria Local Government system is exceptional when contrasted with different countries in West Africa. Local Government authorities, generally, are designated by the central government, and have no characterized powers and capacities. All choices with respect to development projects and use of money are made at the central, and the local governments are compelled to do the bidding of the central government (Gbarte, 2011). In the global world, various strategies and methods have been adopted by the successful government of both developed and developing countries for the purpose of good governance and effort at distributing the state resources and implement them at the local level. The role of the local governments as vital tool for rapid socio-economic development of rural, and urban centres have taken a central stage albeit without a corresponding access to prerequisite financial resources to meet this expectation. Interestingly, the sources of funds for local council authority have continued to dwindle over the years with the ascendancy of both the central and state government as the key actors in developing country of political economy. The local government in developing countries such as Nigeria is relegated to the backstage. The federal structure of Nigeria inhibits local government's ability to mobilize and use revenue to meet their obligation in sustainable manner (Adeyemo 2005). He further acknowledges that, one of the recurrent obstacles of the third-tier system in the country is the dwindling revenue generation as characterized by annual deficits and insufficient funds for meaningful growth and viable project development. Local governments are the nearest government to the people at the rural areas in Nigeria; they are strategically located to play a pivotal role in national development. The level of these relationships between and within the nation federating units (i.e federal, State and local government) particularly as it relates to revenue sharing has continually remained issues in the front burner of the nation's polity. The encroachment of local finance by the state government has negatively affected the performance of local government in terms of its constitutional responsibilities. The setting up of state and local government joint account committee, local government service commission, ministry of local government and chieftaincy affairs and other allied agencies at the state level have made local government financial autonomy a mirage in Nigeria (Wada ;Aminu, 2014). Meanwhile, Finance and prudent management are the bedrock of effective functioning of local government administration. It is against this backdrop that Asiwaju (2010) argues the local government requires finance to perform their statutory functions; the ability of the local

government to do this is largely dependent on availability of fund, coupled with efficient management which constitutes the required catalyst necessary for timely execution and completion of their development projects. (Awotokun; Adeyemo 1999), however expresses some reservations that; in recent time, lack of funds has often been attributed as the major handicap which had hindered effective and successful execution and completion of many projects at the local government level. However, experience has shown the contrary that low finance and allocation by the federal and delay release for local government funds by the state government is the bane of local governments' inability to achieve substantial development in their jurisdiction (Okoli, 2013). Rural areas are not an exception. This research will therefore be useful to government institutions as it provides solutions to make lives of Nigerian citizens better from the grassroots.

### **Statement of the Problem**

In line with the current global trend of streamlining the role of the state, the governments of most developing countries including Nigeria have devolved power to grassroots institutions with a view to enhance development. Grassroots development is very essential to the overall development of any country. It is intended to bring development closer to the people and enhance local participation in the governance process of any country. However, this seems to be absent in Nigeria. Nigeria has been branded as under-developed after several decades of existence. The country remains inaccessible and impassable after more than a century and a half of existence. The administrative system of governance and development initiatives have been firmly situated in the state capital and in the hands of a very few people with the Governor at the center of this hegemonic authority. There seems to be lack of basic structures at the local level which leads to government employees at all levels to abandon their duties. Local government employees are seen as an extension of the government in the capital; at such, they are reportable to their bosses in the capital in every respect. Additionally, rural citizens lack control over resources and the opportunity to participate in decision making. They are not empowered to participate or engage their leaders in the development process. Development programs are planned by stakeholders at the central level; some of whom have not seen what is obtainable at the local level. Consequently, this has led the researcher to investigate the effects of local government financial autonomy on rural development in some selected local government areas in North East Nigeria.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The general objective of the study is to examine the effects of local government financial autonomy on rural development in some selected local government areas in the North East, Nigeria. The specific objectives are to:

- i. Examine the implication of centralized system of administration to rural development in Nigeria;
- ii. Investigate the factors impeding the realization of local government financial autonomy in Nigeria, if any;
- iii. Interrogate the usefulness of local government to rural development in Nigeria;
- iv. Suggest ways by which rural development can be improved in Nigeria.

### **Hypotheses**

H0 There is no significant relationship between local government financial autonomy and rural development in North East Nigeria

H1 There is a significant relationship between local government financial autonomy and rural development in North East Nigeria

### **Significance of the Study**

Research needs to be done to ascertain the applicability of decentralization in Nigeria. Unlike other studies that consider decentralization as a process in itself, the research will be unique because it seeks to assess the relationship between local government financial autonomy and the way(s) in which local government autonomy can serve as a vehicle that drives grassroots development in North East Nigeria.

As observed by the researchers, there is gamut of extant literature on local government financial autonomy. However, it seems that very few publications are available to validate the Nigerian case. The research benefitted scholars who intend to embark on similar project and add to the few literatures on financial autonomy process. This research has provided the major stakeholders including but not limited to government actors and Civil Society the requisite knowledge on the process of financial autonomy of local government.

The decentralization process is ongoing in Nigeria. As such, policy makers need to be guided to make decision from an informed position. Along with other studies in this area, the study served as a guide to policy makers on priority areas that need to be addressed. This work added to the existing, though few literatures on Nigeria decentralization. The findings provided stakeholders first hand information on what is obtainable at the local level and unearth those challenges that exist which could also prompt further research as Nigeria earnestly strives to take grassroots development to the local level.

### **Scope and Limitation of the Study**

The study covered some selected Local Government Areas in the six North Eastern states of Nigeria. The study investigated the problems caused by centralization and how those problems have hindered development at the grassroots level. Explanations were sought from extant literature on the process of decentralization and its relevance to grassroots development in Nigeria. Local government autonomy was also examined as a vehicle through which the process of rural development can be achieved. Policies have been initiated to sort out the issues of local government financial autonomy. The policy is expected to pave the way for increased local self-governance aimed at enhancing development. Unfortunately, the issue of local government financial autonomy in Nigeria as a whole has been a dream yet to come through. Additionally, the researcher considered the Fiscal Powers of Local Government. The limitation that was encountered by the research is difficulty of getting access to some data or information because some data are kept for secrecy and equally the lack of cooperation on the part of some members of the public most especially staff of the local government secretariat for the fear of victimization. Time and financial resources are also limitations to the research work.

## **Literature Review**

Local governments are geographically close to those they represent. As such, it is expected that these local authorities will exert a positive influence on the democratic life of a country; seeking after particular plans fitting to the necessities and mores of their respective locales (Bailey and Elliot, 2009). The term local government is loaded with a good number of definitions; however, these various definitions are usually contingent upon the point of view and experience of the person attempting to define it. Whatever point of view or orientation about its definition, local government is for the most part seen as the administration at the local level. For instance, Adeyemo (2005) sees local government as an element inside a country or state which is a constituent political unit with limited and constrained authority with the end goal of decentralizing political power. Moreover, Adeyemi et al (2012) depict local government as a body constituted by law to manage services and regulate functions by a locally elected body which is formally responsible to them. This body works under statutory supervision of central government; however, with, to a degree, certain financial, political and administrative freedoms to engage in local activities. Local government sets the platform for candid participation of the general population at the grassroots level in the affairs of government. People get to be distinctly dynamic citizens by associating with government and don't entertain parochial citizenship within the state. Being nearest to those they represent, local government is likewise comparatively easier to access and local individuals can genuinely anticipate making a positive impact or exerting a positive influence to a greater degree (Sikander, 2015). Watt (2006) concisely gives what could be viewed as a support for the creation of smaller units of local government through the process of decentralization. He opines that: "Small local governments are likely to be better at solving the problem that the right local public goods are produced and go to the right people. In addition, the accuracy with which local authorities are able to match their residents' preferences for local public goods is likely to be enhanced". Sikander (2015) gives four distinct reasons for the establishment of Local Government. They are: A local body is more open and faster in response to local needs. Local services and projects can be more effectively adjusted to a particular local need; Resource allocation is more efficient when the duty is duly designated to each unit or tier of government which is the closest to those that are direct beneficiaries; Local development helps reduce cost. In the event that local people feel that the money is theirs, local individuals will probably be vigilant over the use of expenditure effectively. Also, it gives greater opportunity for public commitments to supplement a local project; Development programs embarked upon with participation from the public allows for adjustment to the particular needs of local people. Individuals are prepared to contribute meaningfully even by donating cash if they are given the chance to take control and actively participate in the decision making process if they know that the particular project directly benefits them. Improvement of local people builds feeling of possession and obligation regarding the program. From the aforementioned, the fundamental basis for the establishment of local government is development. To this end, Alao et al (2015) posit that local government presence is predicated on the precept that it increments and advances participatory democracy and serves as a training ground for would-be leaders and provide network of self-government and political education at grass root levels. This as Tony (2011) cited in Ugwuanyi, Ndubuisi, and Onuoha, (2014) observes, the role of local units is intended to enhance democratic participation and delivery of effective and efficient social service which are ultimately developmental oriented.

They all, in fact, are focused at enhancing the socio-economic conditions of the grassroots individuals. Local governance is considered as the delineation of geo-political locales and administrative environments into smaller units that are seen to be closer to local communities. The two essential parts of a local government framework include: Discretion: permits the local government to engage in significant functions that gives them the authorization to represent the proclivities of the citizens making decision (World Bank, 2004). The main focus of development planning in any given society is to enhance the livelihood and improve the overall well-being of the citizens in a suitable way. In this manner, to successfully play out its role, local communities need to exercise government of inclusion. Local governance takes into account the provision of regulatory socio-economic institutions, underscores locality and accountability to local individuals (Olowu, 1989). Participation of local citizens is germane as far as leading and directing community affairs in local governance is concerned. It promotes democracy by: Building the capacity of locals politically; Producing and developing leaders at the local level and Providing a kind of check and balance vertically and horizontally to ensure accountability and transparency (Olowu, 1989). There is a high premium placed on local governance by donor agencies because of its perceived, to some extent demonstrated importance to poverty eradication and development; obviously gravitating toward the achievement of the Millennial Development Goals (MDGs) (World Bank, 2004).

Local Government Autonomy is a term that is much of the time utilized in both scholastic and popular discussions of local government; however, it is rarely conceptualized in a careful way or been operationalized and subjected to empirical consequence (Wolman, 2008). According to Chapman (2003) local government autonomy is the capacity to advance, explore, and create policies by local units. For this to be done, Bailey and Elliot (2009) posit that local authorities must have adequate power, freedom, and resources to administer in a way which is unique, meeting the specific needs of their citizenry and their prospects and acting as a stabilizer to the central administration. Secondly, the nature of local democratic system must be such as to empower the involvement of individuals, allow the receptiveness of local institutions and expel perceived or actual interference from the central government.

Local government autonomy involves sets of institutions, systems and procedures through which citizens voice their interests and needs, reconcile their disparities, and exercise their rights and duties at the local level. The building blocks of good local administration are numerous: citizens' participation, partnership among key actors at the local level, capacity of local across all sectors, multiple flows of information, institutions of accountability, and a pro-poor orientation (UNDP, 2004). At the point when viable decentralization and local government progress simultaneously, local governments and the groups they represent, gain the authority, assets, and skills to take responsive decisions and to follow up on them successfully and accountably. Advancing the capacity of local governments to act adequately and accountably requires promoting a responsive civil society organizations and individuals to assume the responsibility for their communities, participate in local need setting, aid the execution of those decision, and then monitor their viability (USAID, 2010).

Development is a concept that poses some difficulties as far as providing a holistic meaning. It is extremely elusive and hard to conceptualize because it is associated with an extensive

interpretation (Oyugi, 2000) as cited in (Hussein, 2004). Substantiating this statement, Hussein (2004) advance that most liberal economist define development in terms of various indicators-increase in the Gross National Product or per capita income of a country. For welfare economist, development encapsulates organizational and structural changes and associate development with meeting up with public welfare and the achievement of objectives like rising net salary, poverty reduction, unemployment and social disparity. In another unique circumstance, Venter (2001) as referred to by Edoun and Jahed (2009) posit that development is related to modernization, which include the attainment of services, including clean and safe water, health, education, good roads, and the level of citizen interest in basic leadership at local level. In such manner, the previously mentioned analysis embraces a more extensive perspective of development that go beyond economic growth and material changes and incorporates human attitude with respect to a spirit of enhanced human capacity development, and mass citizen participation in the decision-making process. Development from this viewpoint is seen as a process of mass social action in which local citizens organize, plan and take progressive action in collaboration with central government to enhance the political and socio-economic conditions of their respective locality (Sharma, 2000). Whereas traditional development strategies have relied on national frameworks and on the abilities of central government authorities, the success of development at the local level depends, to an large degree, on the subsistence of suitable local institutional frameworks and on the accessibility of the essential systems and skill-levels at all government levels. Without a well-functioning decentralized local authority, grassroots development is not achievable (Olsen 2007). Along these lines, the focus of development is generally concerned with ensuring that the social well-being of individuals is paramount and should be reflected in the life of the individual rather than quantitative economic growth or the state of the economy.

Rural development is generally characterized as all the development programs instituted in the rural areas. Until the 1970's, rural development was basically concerned with agricultural advancement intended toward expanding crop production (Fernando, 2008). However, this view has changed especially on account of the broadening of rural livelihood. Ellis and Briggs (2001) propose three primary components that inform the present direction of rural development. First, rural development is considered as a multi-sectorial program covering agriculture as well as infrastructure, finance and human capacity building. Second, rural development is viewed as a method for enhancing the quality of life of those at the local level which extend from income, education, and housing to health and other public services. Third, rural development is viewed as one that targets the poorest and downtrodden masses. Grassroots development is a transformation process which informs choices at the local level with the end goal of enhancing the living condition of the local society in an inclusive manner (Olsen, 2007). Grassroots development occurs when communities, government, and business typically coordinate their plans and programs to engage in activities derived from decentralization (Edoun and Jahed, 2009). Through consultations, it expects to make a more productive and feasible utilization of the existing and potentially accessible resources; aspires to build socio-economic opportunities, and tries to reinforce good local governance to enhance local economic conditions (Olsen, 2007). Grassroots development aims therefore to offer local government, the private and non-profit sectors, and the local community the chance to work together.

As Sharma (2000) contends, there is by all accounts an indistinct linkage between decentralization and development. However, there seems to be a general concurrence that decentralized local government significantly contributes to development regarding advancing participatory development policies, and the generation of strategies that are adapted to local needs. However, as Hampwaye (2008) points out, for local authorities to plan and actualize development programs, they require power and authority from the central government and the interest of the community down to the town level. Along these lines, opportunities are created by decentralization to take development into their hands. The participation of citizens in development planning and execution allow the formulation of attainable plans that are in tandem with local circumstances. Local development has a linkage with decentralization in that it happens when communities, government and business sectors generally and collaboratively begin to participate in programs derived from decentralization to enhance local economic conditions. All around the globe, as far as public administration is concerned, decentralization is the fury. Indeed, even aside from the widely contended issues of subsidiarity and devolution in the European Union, states' rights in the United States, decentralization has been a central approach of policy research in the past two decades in a substantial number of developing Latin American, African and Asian economies. The World Bank, for instance, has held onto decentralization as among the most widely accepted and popular governance reforms on its agenda (World Bank, 2000). Take likewise the cases of the two largest and most populous nations of the world, China and India. Decentralization has been seen as the landmark reforms that positively altered the major institutional framework for the outstanding modern development in the past two decades in China; generally taking root in the non-state non-private area. India introduced a revolutionary constitutional reform for decentralization around the same time as China (Pranab, 2002). Olsen (2007) declares that the importance of decentralization and local development processes and the subsequent increasing dependence on local economic development strategies has increased the need for good governance at all governmental levels and improve the local economy. It endeavors to upgrade competitiveness, and hence, to empower sustainable development that is comprehensive.

**Theoretical Framework:** The study incorporated two theories: Development Theory and The Soufflé Theory of Decentralization. The explanation that is provided for the use of two theories is that the study has two interrelated but separate concepts as independent variables. They include decentralization and Local Government autonomy.

**The Development School:** the core of this theory is that the primary reason for local government is to provide development at the grassroots level. Local governments especially in the developing world are effective agents for improving socio-economic conditions (Adeyemo, 2011). Also, local governments provide a sustained basis for those represented at the grassroots to get a fair share in the national wealth of a state. In particular, the development function of the local government incorporate nation building, social-economic and labor asset development (Ugwuanyi, Ndubuisi, and Onuoha, 2014). Basically, local government converts revenue assigned to them to physical development; thus, substantiating the need for local government. Such frameworks can encourage and ginger local people to do more for themselves and for their respective communities. Along these lines, as indicated by Olowu et al, (1991) in Ugwuanyi, Ndubuisi, and Onuoha (2014) local governments fill in as



bona fide partner with the states and national government in planning for national development and present themselves as units of development by which national development undertakings, assets and benefits saturate to the grassroots. However, the Development Theory does not consider those variables that drive development. For example, human capacity building which is a vital aspect of development is overlooked by the theory. Fundamentally, development does not exist in a vacuum; it has other attending variables which incorporate local capacity, human capacity building and vibrant civil society. Again, decentralization or devolution of government gives powers to the local governments and creates the opportunity to meaningfully get involve with development issues at that tier of government. Decentralization harnesses the energy of the general population which enhances creativity. It provides the opportunity for innovations to the sub national units (Nico, 2008). Creative policies and practices in a given local government might be changed and recreated in others as well as adopted by the state or national government. Additionally, Nico notes that by permitting space for different units not bound by a single “one-size fit-all” approach, decision making that is decentralized makes it possible for local government to experiment different designs. Again, the presence of local government helps to decongest government at the centre thereby liberating national leaders from burdensome duties and needless meddling in local issues.

**The Soufflé Theory:** The Soufflé Theory was proposed by Parker (1995) who contended that there are three noteworthy components of decentralization, specifically: administrative, fiscal, and political decentralization. Parker (1995) stressed that decentralization is a process with multiple dimensions that is accompanied with successes and failures depending on implementation procedures. The theory argues that, like a soufflé that requires the appropriate mixture of egg, milk and heat to rise, an effective decentralization program must incorporate the correct combination of fiscal, political, and institutional components in enhancing rural development results. Every one of these parts must supplement each other to create more responsive local governments that will convey efficient, effective and sustainable services and maintain fiscal discipline. This theory supplements the Development Theory since it gives the structure for viable decentralization through a responsive local government (Wagana, Iravo and Nzulwa, 2015). The theory is by all accounts based on try and error where there is no defined approach; rather, as indicated by Smoke (2003) decentralization is not naturally positive or negative and suggests that any discussion about decentralization must begin from a neutral point of view.

## **Methodology**

### **Study Area**

The study was carried out in the six North-eastern states of Nigeria comprising of Gombe, Bauchi, Taraba, Borno, Adamawa and Yobe states. The unit of analysis was community members, community leaders and local government officials in some selected local government areas of the states aforementioned.

### **Method of Data Collection**

Primary and secondary sources was used to gather the data in this study. The primary sources of information entail gathering new, previously undiscovered data. Primary data would be gathered using specially created questionnaires that would be administered to the members

of the community, community leaders and local government officials. There was also a Focused Group Discussion (FDG) with all involved in the research. The choice of the instruments is for the fact that they are very effective as proven by previous research.

#### **Method of Data Analysis**

Inferential statistics were used in this study's data analysis to draw conclusions and inferences. SPSS 23.0 was used to analyze the data that was collected. The study used Spearman Rank Order Correlation to check the relationship between the independent variable and the dependent variable.

#### **Research Findings**

##### **Research Objectives One: How has the centralized system of administration affected grassroots development in North East Nigeria?**

There were seven questions drawn in this section to solicit respondents view to the effect of centralization on grassroots development. Generally, from the responses it was gathered that the centralized system has negatively affected grassroots development in North East Nigeria. The analysis shows that 63% agreed that Nigeria has a centralized system of administration and that centralization has impeded development in North East Nigeria. Kiwanuka (2012) asserts that the disappointing results encountered by countries after a period of failed centralized planning compelled many developing countries to look for options beyond centralized planning. Centralized development planning failed drastically in the 1970's and 1980's which seriously hindered development in Africa (Devas, 2004). Respondents also agreed that political participation has been low at the local level. This is because as Awortwi (2010) posits, the centralized system of governance does not provide the environment for popular participation in the process of making decisions and development programs. Also, the respondents generally agreed the government has been overburdened because rural dwellers depend on central government for everything. The centralized system of governance allows all decisions regarding policies, programs, and the expenditure of money to be made at the center which overburdened the government amidst limited resources (Ekpe, Ekpe & Ekong, 2013).

##### **Research Objectives Two: What are the factors militating against the realization of decentralization in Nigeria?**

Decentralization in Nigeria is not an entirely new phenomenon; in fact, it started as far back as the later stage of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In 1880, G.W. Gibson initiated a program by which local communities would attain full involvement in the political process in exchange for increased agricultural production. As Nyei (2011) asserts, there have been significant reform instituted by the Ellen Johnson led government aimed at decentralizing the state. Most respondents aggregately constituting 69.2% of the respondents agree that the Local Government Area Development Agenda (LGADA) and the Local Service Centers (LSC) are a good step toward full devolution of power.

Despite the improvements as far as the forms of decentralization practiced in Nigeria is concerned, there are visible factors that war against the full implementation of decentralization. Aggregately, 51.3 percent agree that there are lack of professionals at the grassroots level to fully implement decentralization and that some units of central

government are unwilling to relinquish their powers to local authorities. Furthermore, there is a level of uncertainty as proven by the number of respondents who remained undecided aggregating 38.8%. As Faguet (2011) observed, decentralization is one of the most important reforms of the past generation; however, its realization has been grossly affected during implementation. This is largely due to the lack of professionals to occupy the bureaucracy at the local level.

**Research Objective Three: what is the usefulness of local government to rural development in Nigeria?**

For over a decade Gonna remains impassable and underdeveloped with an onerous system of centralized government. The five questions under this section aggregated 59.4% of respondents who agreed that decentralization has positive application to grassroots development in North East Nigeria against 28.2% who disagree. Affirming the respondents' views, Awortwi (2010) posits that by decentralizing authority, there is stimulation of economic growth and significant decrease in the level rural poverty especially since most centralized governments were unable to adequately provide services and deliver on key developmental programs. Furthermore as Ribot (2004) posits, decentralization is a governance reform program that enable transfers of power closer to those who are most grossly at the receiving end of the exercise of power. White (2011) however observed that although decentralization has been applauded as a vital element that drives good governance and development, it has accompanying uncertainties. These uncertainties were expressed by 12.4% of the respondent who remains undecided as to the applicability of decentralization.

**Research Objective Four: To what extent is local government autonomy useful to grassroots development in Nigeria?**

There is gamut of extant literature on the usefulness of local government to grassroots development. Proper functioning of local government depends largely on the extent to which it is autonomous. This section solicited responses from respondents as far as local government autonomy and its usefulness to development of rural communities are concerned. A total of 77.2% of the total number of respondents agreed that the Draft Local Government Act allow for full devolution of fiscal, political and administrative authority to the counties. According to Section 3.2 of the Draft Local Government Act, full devolution of political, fiscal and administrative powers shall be granted to the local governments. This affirms the views of most of the respondents. However, it seems that are uncertainties as expressed by the 21% respondents who were undecided against the 1.8% of respondents that disagreed with the assertion.

Furthermore, there is a significant level of skepticism as to government's commitment and the political will to fully increase budgetary allocation for the decentralization process and the pass relevant legislation to facilitate the decentralization process. Aggregately, 40% rejected the claim that there is political commitment and will from the government to pass relevant legislation to facilitate the decentralization program and increase budgetary allotment for the full implementation of the process. Bailey and Elliot (2009) posit that government should commit financial resources to local authorities to enable them govern effectively and efficiently. Consequently, central government needs to commit more financial resources to local unit to promote effectiveness.

However, those who accept that government is willing and committed to support full decentralization tap from the establishment of local service centers which has created a level of ease. Nevertheless, a significant number of respondents averaging 32% remain undecided reinforcing the need for proper dissemination of information on government's policy agenda.

Considering the usefulness of local government autonomy to grassroots development. Cumulatively, a total of 85.9% of the respondents agree that quality of development is enhanced, and locals are empowered to participate when local government has the authority. Validating the respondents claims Sikander (2015) asserts that local government creates a framework for genuine involvement of the people at level of the grassroots in affairs of the government. He further went on to say that citizens become active when they associate with government and are not merely seen as subjects of any government. Their propinquity to the people they represent gives local government the democratic credentials to play a cardinal role in the lives of local individuals (Bailey & Elliot, 2009).

### **Conclusion**

One cannot overstate the fact that a high level of centralization has weakened democratic governance, diminished popular participation and stalled socio-economic development in Nigeria. Nigerian Decentralization and Local Governance policy is an institutional framework that will safeguard local participatory governance. When the citizens have a sense of inclusion, particularly the decision making process of the country, they consciously take possession of developmental initiatives. This is the fundamental goal of decentralization. There is a serious need for political actors and policy makers to be sincere in articulating and instigating wide-range of issues that will not only enhanced development but also bolster citizen participation as far as state affairs are concerned. There is a widespread demand for governance reform after the turbulent period Nigeria has gone through almost as a failed state. Amongst those reforms, decentralization seems to take center-stage and preeminence. When authority is decentralized, the governance system is strengthened which undoubtedly ensures government legitimacy and authenticity.

### **Recommendations**

The work lauds all the efforts of the Government of Nigeri and all stakeholders in their quest to enhance development through the decentralization process thereby granting local government the authority to initiate and implement developmental programs. However, as the study revealed, there are some challenges to the realization of the country's development agenda from which the following recommendations are advanced:

1. There should be concerted effort from the Legislative and Executive branches of the Nigerian Government in the form of political will to ensure the full actualization of the decentralization policy in Nigeria. This particularly involves the National Legislature that must pass the requisite legislation to facilitate the decentralization process.
2. Government needs to increase budgetary allocation to those Ministries, Agencies and Commission charged with the responsibility of implementing the National Policy on Decentralization and Local Governance.
3. This research is advancing that the government create structures at the local level along with providing handsome salaries and incentivizing those professionals that will

be situated at the local level. Additionally, there should be an investment in human resource development particularly to ensure continuity of service at the local level.

4. There needs to be more adequate and efficient way of disseminating basic information by the Ministry of Information This can be done by using jingles, dialect programs, drama and cultural performances to reach a broad spectrum of the Nigerian Society. This is because it was observed by the researcher from the findings that respondents were undecided on some of the major issues that were brought out in the questionnaire.

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