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# The Politics of Local Government Reforms and Democratic Governance in Nigerian Local Governments

Goddey Wilson, Ph.D

Department of Political Science, Faculty of the Social Sciences, Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Rumuolumini, Port Harcourt, Nigeria. Phone : +234 8037236862. Email – [goddey.wilson@yahoo.com](mailto:goddey.wilson@yahoo.com)

## **Abstract**

The politics of local government reforms and democratic governance in Nigerian local government system has been an issue of concern to both local government scholars and practitioners, hence the desire for this study. The main objective of the study is to identify the challenging issues in various local government reforms and analyzes their impact on local government democratic governance in Nigeria. The study ex-rayed various local government reforms from the colonial era to the present government in Nigeria. Secondary data was used for the study. The findings proved that the various reforms before 1976 only encouraged local administration, and not local government. The study further showed that it was the 1976 reforms and 1979 constitution that formally brought local government as a third tier of government in Nigeria, although without autonomous political powers. However, since then, the reforms have not encouraged effective democratic governance at the local government due to the unequal relationship between the local government and other tiers of government in Nigeria. We recommend that in future reforms, the powers and functions of the local governments should be clearly defined as politically autonomous third tiers of government in Nigeria to enable the local government achieve effective democratic governance at the local areas.

**Key Words:** Democratic Governance, Politics, Local People, Political Actors, Local Government, Reforms.

## **1. Introduction**

Local Government has enjoyed several reforms in Nigeria with the view of repositioning the local government for effective grass root democracy and political participation of the rural people in the political activities of the state. The reform dates back to the colonial period, during which the British Government brought formal administrative structure at the rural areas. Although, the pre-colonial period witnessed different traditional administrative arrangement, as autonomous political units existed at different communities and ethnic groups in Nigeria (Onor, 2005:28).

The traditional administrative institutions in various communities became source of concern to the British Government, as the autonomous administrative system discouraged easy trade at the rural areas. This necessitated the first reform of the traditional administration to the Native Administration in the Northern Nigeria between 1890s and 1930s, and to the Chiefs – in- Council in the Southern Nigeria, between 1930s and 1940s, with the basic responsibility of maintaining law and order, collection of taxes, and organizing forced labour at the rural areas for the British merchants ( Native Administration, 1944).

The Native Administration functionaries were made up of the representatives of the missionaries, and British trading company, with no nationalist in the service. Abonyi (2010:89) argues that the absence of the nationalists in the Native Administration service gave rise to the agitation for the reform of the Native Administration. The desirability for the reform became high, and between 1950-1955, there was the first largely elected local government council, modeled after the British Whitehall Model in Lagos Colony, and Eastern and Western Regions. Onor (2010:59) adds that the 1950 Local Government Ordinance encouraged modern local government system in the Eastern region with County Councils, District Councils and Local Councils, except in Port Harcourt and Enugu, where Municipal Councils were operated. Inah (2000:145) states that in 1952, the Western Region local government Law created opportunity for elected local government councils, with Divisional Councils, District Councils and Local Councils, and Municipal Council in some areas. With these structures at the Eastern and Western Regions, it became a take off ground for local government administration.

To the Northern Region, the political consciousness of citizens in the British colonies, and the memorandum from the Colonial Secretary in Britain to all African Governors in 1947 to ensure efficient and democratic local governments in their colonies motivated the educated elites to ask for the reforms of native administration to local government in the Region. The agitations gave rise to the Native Authority Law of 1954 in the Northern Region, which provides administrative structures at the village, district and central levels. At that point, the local governments were given the responsibilities of primary education, police and security at the villages, judiciary, health care etc.

Upon independence in 1960 and through out the First Republic (1960-1967), the growing local government administration was reduced to mere agents of the regional governments. This was achieved through the use of Western Region Local Government (Amendment) Law, and Northern Region Provincial Administration Law of 1962.

1976 witnessed a tremendous reform in the local government administration in Nigeria. Abonyi (2010:90) holds that the federal government in collaboration with the state government embarked on extensive local government reforms. The committee gave her recommendations on expansion of the structure and function of the local governments in Nigeria. The report empowered local government as a multi-purpose single tier Government with devolutionary status, charged with the responsibility of developing the rural area and the people therein through encouraging participatory democracy, mobilizing rural development and effective two-ways channel of communication.

In a bid to achieve the above functions, the Federal Military Government in 1988 introduced the Civil Service Reforms in Local Government. The Reform (1988) centered on professionalization of the Local Government service, creation of mandatory departments (personnel, Finance and Supply, etc) provision of the offices of Supervisory Councilor, Secretary to the Local Government, Treasurer, Auditor- General for Local Government, and clearly defined the functions of Local Government Service Commission.

In addition, the 1979 Constitution recognized the Local Governments as a legitimate third tier of government with functions, and the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, fourth Schedule, section 8, part 1, also recognized local government as same with specific responsibility for the development and participation of the rural people in politics of the state. These imply that the various reforms empowered the Local Government with legal capability, human resources and funds to enable the government actualize her functions for democratic governance in Nigeria.

## **2. Statement of the Problem**

The local government administration in Nigeria has witnessed several political, administrative, structural, and financial reforms since colonial era till date for effective democratic governance and political participation of the rural people in the democratic activities of the area. Wilson (2011) adds that the zeal for democratic governance at the grass root informed the establishment of local government as a democratic institution and framework for the governance of the rural people. However, it appears the reforms are not giving the local governments the desired capability as a democratic institution to achieve effective democratic governance and participation of the rural people in the politics of the area. In view of the above, the study tends to pose the following research questions to guide the study:

- What are the challenging issues in the local government reforms for democratic governance in Nigeria?
- Have such issues impact on democratic activities of the local government in Nigeria?

## **3. Imperative and aim of the Study**

This study shall make contributions to, and advance the existing knowledge on local government reforms and democratic governance in Nigeria. Both members of the academia, state political actors, and local government practitioners are to learn from the lessons of the study on the appropriate issues to apply in the local government reforms to achieve effective democratic governance in Nigerian local government system. Consequently, it is the objective of the study to identify the challenging issues in various local government reforms and analyse their impact on local government democratic governance in Nigeria.

## **4. Methodology**

Documentary method was used in generating data for the study. Documentary method involves the examination, analysis and interpretation of politics and documents, and constitutes the basic method of generating data in political studies (Obasi, 2000:172). Accordingly, Nwana (1981:177) states that documentary method implies written documents that were already in use, which were written for some other purpose than the benefit of the researchers. Obasi (2000:172) adds that documents are published and unpublished materials on activities of public and private organizations, and found mainly in libraries, archives and in such public organizations. They are historical documents of the nature, dynamics and trends of events. For this study, it involves the examination of various written documents on the issues of local government reforms, and local government democratic governance in Nigeria from colonial era till date. These documents include text books, journals, local government laws and ordinances, newspapers, federal and state gazettes etc.

Content analysis was used to analyse the secondary data. Sheffield (2009) adds that content analysis provides the foundation for comparing existing content with either user needs or competitors' content, letting you identify potential gaps and opportunities. As a tool, it provides the opportunity to determine the presence of certain words or concepts within texts or sets of texts. Content is used to analysis the presence, meaning, and relationships of

such words and concepts, and make inference about the message within the text. It was used to analyse the data generated in an objective manner to achieve the objective of the study

## 5. Findings and Discussion

### 5.1 Local Government Reforms and Democratic Governance in Nigeria before Independence

The United Nations Office for Public Administration in Ola (1984) holds that local government is a “ political subdivision of a nation ( in a federal system) or state , which is constituted by law and has substantial control of local affairs including the powers to impose taxes or to exact labour for a prescribed purpose . The governing body of such an entity is elected. . .” The above expression explains the basic features of a local government, and distinguishes local government from other governments. Upon the above, it appears difficult to establish that there was a local government in Nigeria before independence. Before colonialism, communities and ethnic groups devised convenient administrative practices for their internal governance.

In the Hausa/Fulani communities, governance was centralized in the hands of the Emirs, perhaps due to their Islamic practices, while in the Yoruba, Igbo and other minority ethnic nations, governance was decentralized due to their peculiarities. Importantly, within this period there was no constituted government by law with specific functions to control the affairs of the local people in Nigeria; rather governance was based on the traditional/religious practices of the people. It is then difficult to establish the place of elected government, constituted by law in the governance of the local people.

The emergence of colonialism brought some reforms to local governance in Nigeria with the establishment of indirect rule. The indirect rule led to the formation of Native Authority in the rural areas, with the basic function of maintaining law and order. The indirect rule is a significant reform and a step for demand for democratic governance at the local areas in Nigeria. The indirect rule was embraced in the Northern region with the traditional rulers recognized as the custodian of the authority, but was faced with challenges in the Southern Nigeria. The challenges led to the reforms in 1930s and 1940s, and resulted to the formation of Chief –in- Council, and Chief –and- Council in place of the sole native authorities. These reforms resulted to the reduction of authority in the hands of sole powerful individual, as the chief – in – council is composed of the chief and members of the Council. Although, the chief heads the council, but acts in accordance with the majority opinion of the council, while chief- and – council requires that the chief has to abide by the advice of the council in totality. The significant impact of the reform is that the autocratic powers of the chief were decentralized and authority now vested on the council. This is a democratic development in the governance procedure of the rural people.

The Macpherson Constitution of 1951, which encouraged federalism through regionalism ushered in elective principle at the regional governments and gave opportunity for the first largely elected councils in Nigeria based on the British Whitehall Model in Lagos, Eastern and Western regions, while the Northern region was yet to join the process (Igbuzor, 2009). The effect is that the elective principle awakened the political consciousness and participation among Nigerians in the democratic process involving their local governance.

Local governance received more reforms with the Eastern region local government Ordinance of 1950, Western region local government law of 1952, and the Northern region Native Authority law of 1954 serving as the framework for democratic governance of local government in Nigeria. Accordingly, Amadi (2000) holds that the 1950 local government ordinance of the Eastern region brought in the British model of County Council, District Council and Local Council, except in Enugu and Port Harcourt, which operated Municipal Councils. The implication is that local governance has gone beyond the involvement of the chiefs and the councils, and now resides in the hand of the local populace, who contributes to the making of their leaders/representatives, and the leaders acknowledge the value of their local people.

The Western region enjoyed similar degree of modern democracy, with elected Councils based on 1952 Western Nigerian Local Government Law. The three tiers of Councils were the Divisional Council, District Councils and, Local Councils, with some Municipal Council in the urban areas (Inah, 2000).

In the Northern region, the Hon. Abubakar Tafawa Belewa led group in the Northern House of Assembly viewed Native Authority rule as oppressive and undemocratic, and called for reform to accommodate popular opinion of the local people. The Emirs, who were the autocrats and sole beneficiaries of the Native Authority, opposed the call for the reform. The conflict of interest resulted to a reform of the local administration, through the enactment of the Native Authority Law of 1954. The impact of the reform is that it provided for democratic governance and popular participation of the local people in their governance. Secondly, it established a defined structure of governance at the village, District, and Central Councils. Thirdly, it introduced the Chief – in – Council, and Chief – and- Council system of governance as obtainable in other regions. Indeed, the reform watered-down the powers of the Emirs, and encouraged democratic governance at the local level.

## **5.2 Local Government and Democratic Governance In Nigeria, 1960-1967.**

The independence was greeted with high expectations from Nigerians, particularly the desire for participatory democracy at the local government level. Unfortunately, the First Republic inherited the colonial local government structure and witnessed a set back in their administrative structure, finances, and democratic activities. The set back in the democratic governance of the local government during the period were noted through two regional instruments as follows:

Firstly, Obi (2010:37) holds that local governments in Nigeria during this era were regionalized, and operated with different structure at different regions. The establishment of Provincial Administrative Law of 1962 by the Northern region crippled the powers of the local government in the region, as the Native Authority re-emerged with the traditional rulers doubling as the traditional rulers and regional political actors. In the Western region, Igbuzor (2009:5) states that the local government (amendment ) Law of 1960 abolished most powers of the local government councils, and reduced their functions, with the Local Government Service Board as a supervising agent of the region. The Western region crisis of 1962-65, which resulted to anarchy and collapse of the administrative structure in the region, worsened the matter. The Eastern regions was not left out of the net, as the ministry of local government was used as a regional organ to regulate the activities of local government councils, and reduce the council to mere appendage of the region.

Secondly, the emergence of regional party politics and over politicization of the party in the local governments weakened the local government councils in Nigeria. The local government service board and ministry of local government as obtainable in different regions were serving as regional agents to regulate local government activities. These bodies were controlled by different political parties in power at the region – Action Group (AG) in the West, Northern People Congress (NPC) in the North, and National Council of Nigeria and Cameroons (NCNC) in the East. Obi (2010:38) opines that in most cases even when members of the councils were elected as in the Eastern and Western regions, and appointed in the Northern region, the members of the council were answerable to the political party in power in the region and not the local people. In the Western region, elected local government councils were dissolved by the ruling party - Nigeria National Democratic Party (NNDP) in 1965 led by Samuel Ladoke Akintola due to the Councils support for AG led by Obafemi Awolowo during the crisis of 1962-65, and replaced with care-taker committees made up of the supporters of then ruling party - NNDP ( Meredith, 2005:195). Similarly, Nwosu (1992:287) opines that in the Eastern region where the political actors were not members of the party in power at the regional level, such local governments were deprived of their statutory functions, as the issue of NCNC government at the regional level led by Dr. Okpara against Dr. Okezie's Republican Party at Umuahia Ibekwu Local Government Area in the region was a good example. In the Northern region, Onor (2005:71) adds that as an attempt to destabilize democracy in the local government councils, the councils were used to manipulate the electoral process in favour of the ruling party – NPC.

Indeed, it is important to state that over politisation of the regional political parties and regionalization of the local governments weakened the democratic governance of the local governments within the period under review. Thus, leading to the argument that there was no functional local government council in Nigeria within this period, rather what was in operation was local administration.

## **5.3 Local Government Reforms: Implications for Democracy in Nigerian Local Government Administration, 1967-1999.**

Within this period, local governments witnessed fundamental changes in their structures, functions, revenue allocations, and democratic activities. For the purpose of this study, emphasis shall be based on the reforms of the structure and functions of the local government and its impact on democracy in Nigeria.

The emergence of military rule in Nigerian politics on 15<sup>th</sup> January, 1967 via the coup d'état led by Major Chukuma Nzeogwu brought General Johnson Thomas Unonakwo Aguyi-Ironsi as the first military Head of State. Obi (2010:39) holds that on assumption of office, the military government dissolved the existing local government councils and replaced them with care-taker committees to run the affairs of the councils in the country. Egurube (1991) adds that the local government political actors were answerable to the state military governors, and not the rural people. The implication is that local government councils lost their democratic structures and functions, thereby leading to deprivation of democracy in the local government administration. The local people were deprived of democratic activities, as they had no say on who rules them and how they were ruled. Authority flows from the military governor and the local people were forced to comply.

In 1976, the General Obasanjo led military government embarked on a more significant local government reforms in Nigeria. The reforms were based on the observation of the federal military government that the local governments had over the years suffered severe deprivation of its democratic powers by other governments (FRN, 1976). Upon the above, on 19<sup>th</sup> August, 1976, the federal military government instituted the local government reforms committee, under the headship of Alhaji Ibrahim Dasuki. After the tour of the country for due

consultation, the committee submitted her report tagged “Guidelines for Local Government Reforms, 1976”. The guidelines were approved by the federal military government. The reforms had several objectives aimed at repositioning local government for effective service delivery and participatory democracy in the local areas. Significantly, the 1976 local government reforms made some provisions and impact on local government democratic governance in Nigeria as stated below:

1. The introduction of widely accepted definition of local government in Nigeria as stated by FRN (1976:1) as follows:

“Government at the local level exercised through representative Council established by law to exercise specific powers within defined areas. These powers should give the council substantial control over local affairs; as well as the staff and institutional and financial powers to initiate and direct the provision of services, and to determine and implement projects, so as to complement the activities of the state and federal government in their areas, and to ensure through devolution of these functions to these council and through active participation of the people and their traditional institutions, that local initiative and response to local needs and conditions are maximized”.

By this definition, local government became recognized as a third tier government at the local level in Nigeria. It marks the end of provinces, districts, native authority and administration, and the beginning of democratic government at the local level in Nigeria.

2. The reform brought for the first time in the history of Nigeria a unified local government system with defined functions and structure to achieve democratic governance irrespective of the state in Nigeria.
3. The reform resulted in the creation of 301 local governments for the first time in Nigeria to exercise democratic activities at the local level.
4. The provision for elections of the political actors of the local government through secret ballot system on a non-party basis gave hope for participatory democracy of the local people in politics of Nigeria. The local people are to participate and determine who rules them at what point, with the actors to be answerable to the people .
5. The reforms provided for 5% federation allocation to the local government to enhance local government financial independence and viability for democratic activities in Nigeria.
6. The reform resulted in the introduction of nationwide election guidelines for the conduct of both direct and indirect elections in the councils. The effect was that by January, 1977 councils were constituted based on the secret ballot elections, which was manifestation of the local people participating in the election of their leaders.
7. Structurally, Wapmuk (2005:243) opines that the reform provided for the political control of the local government to be vested on the council, and exercised through the councilors known as the supervisory councilors. This is a step towards political development and democratic growth of the local government in Nigeria.
8. However, there was a contradiction to democratic development and stability in the reforms , by providing for local government as a third tier of government in one hand , and providing for local government service commission (LGSC) as an agent of the state to regulate local government personnel services on the other hand. The challenge is that the local government staff, who are charged with the responsibilities of enforcing the local government policies could be manipulated or frustrated by the LGSC on event of policy disagreement between the state and local governments, thereby depriving the local government the opportunity of achieving effective implementation of democratic policies in the area.
9. Remarkably, the reform created an opportunity for discussion of local government democracy and development in the 1977-78 Constituent Assembly, and further enshrined in the 1979 Constitution of Federal Republic of Nigeria. Obike and Nwaodu (2010: 60) adds that this is the very first time local government appeared in Nigerian Constitution , with defined status and functions as a third tier government , as contained in Section 7 (1) of the 1979 Constitution as :

*“The system of democratically elected local government councils is under this constitution guaranteed and accordingly, the government of every state shall ensure their existence under law, which provides for the establishment, structure, composition, finance and function of such councils.”*

Indeed, the above impact of the reforms speaks volume of the development democracy in Nigerian Local Government system.

Unfortunately, despite the reforms and constitutional powers of the local government, the Alhaji Shehu Shagari led government of 1979-84 destabilized the democratic activities in the councils. The second republic abused the constitutional provisions for local government democracy. State governments created more local governments, but such local governments were not recognized by the federal government, thereby exposing the local government

system to more democratic and constitutional insecurity in Nigeria. Secondly, the regime could not conduct democratic election in any council in Nigeria through out their tenure. Councils were operated by either appointed sole administrators or care-taker committees, thereby depriving the local people the opportunity of participating in choosing their leaders.

The re-emergence of the military in politics in 1984 witnessed another set of reforms for local government with effects on local government democracy in Nigeria as follows.

1. There was creation of more local governments to 453 in 1989 and 500 in 1991. The newly created local governments were recognized by the federal government, and it encouraged more democratic participation of the local people in politics of the state.
2. The introduction of presidential system of government at the local government encouraged the practice of separation of power and democracy in the local government. The executive council was separated from the legislative council, with defined democratic mandate to run the affairs of the council..
3. Within this era, there were local government elections, and the elected chairmen became the accounting officers of the council, and answerable to the local people.

As an attempt to increase local participation in democracy, the Abacha regime created more local governments in 1996, bringing the number of local government to 774. Regrettably, the regime replaced the presidential system with parliamentary system. The parliamentary system was aimed at reducing cost of administration for the local government, but was not encouraging to the nascent democracy in the local government in terms of applying the policy of separation of power.

The local government experienced another reform during the era of General Abdulsalami Abubaker government (1998 – 1999). The military government reversed the parliamentary system to presidential system in the local government, and conducted successful elections in all the local government councils in December, 1998. The government further recognized and included local government for the second time in Nigerian Constitution of 1999, as contained in the section 7 of the constitution. The above had impact on local government democracy in Nigeria in the areas of increasing local participation in democracy through presidential system, and the successful elections, which gave local people the opportunity to elect their leaders in the councils. The provision of the local government in the 1999 constitution empowers the local government to function as a third tier government with specific constitutional schedules for democratic development. On the contrary, the 1999 gave a lot of powers to the state governments to control the local governments within their domain.

#### **5. 4 Local Government Reforms and Democratic Governance in Nigeria, 1999-2012.**

This is an era another civil rule known as the Third – Six Republic in Nigeria and operated based on the provisions of the 1999 Constitution. On that note, our analysis in this section shall focus on the provisions of 1999 constitution and aftermaths on local government democratic governance in Nigeria. The 1999 Constitution recognized local government as the third tier of government with defined powers and mandate to develop the rural areas and encourage rural participation in democratic activities of the state. On the contrary, these republics witnessed a contradiction on exercise of local government democratic powers in the state. Onor (2005) holds that the 1999 constitution brought local government into another inter-governmental dispute that undermined the democratic functions and activities of the local government in Nigeria. The local governments suffered constitutional tussle and power conflict between the Federal and State Governments over “who controls what and how” in the local government. Consequently, our study noted the following as the vital areas of conflict and abuse on local government system, resulting to democratic decay in the local government governance in Nigeria.

##### **A. Creation of Local Governments in Nigeria.**

No doubt the creation of more local governments means creation of more opportunities of bringing government closer to the rural people for participation in democratic activities in the area. Regrettably, the quest for creation of local governments by the state governments based on the provisions of the 1999 constitution resulted to the abuse of local government powers as a democratic institution. Several state governments acted on the provisions of Section 8 (3) of the 1999 constitution, which deals with the powers to create local governments, and created as many as they so desire. However, their immediate intension was to attract more revenue from the federation allocation through the newly created local governments, and not to enhance democratic participation in the area. This contradiction of intension resulted to conflict of supremacy between the state and federal governments on local government creation. Among the state governments were Bayelsa, Ebonyi, Enugu, Lagos etc. The conflict resulted in Supreme Court case between Federal and Lagos State Governments on local government creation, and the court ruling on the matter. Iwilade (2012) holds that till date, despite the conflicting opinions on the Supreme Court ruling on the matter, the Supreme Court ruling still stands as follows: “Unless the National Assembly enacts a consequential Amendment Act to list the additional 37 Lagos Local Council Development Areas (LCDAs) as

Local Government Areas under the 1999 constitution, Lagosians cannot validate the new Local government Areas they have lawfully created”

The implication on democracy is that Lagos and other state governments involved in the creation of local governments within the period reduced the newly created local government councils to mere Development Centres/Councils without democratic powers. The local people were deprived of the closer government and participatory democracy.

#### **B. The insecurity of tenure of Local Government Councils in Nigeria.**

The determination of tenure of office of political actors of local government councils became an issue of dispute between the state and local governments. Local government as a tier of government has been hampered by the instrument of the state in determination of the tenure of their political officers. In several occasions, the Edo, Imo, Ondo, Rivers states, etc terminated the tenure of the democratically elected councils and replace them with members of ruling political party in the state, as care-taker committees. In most cases, the state government even resolves not to conduct elections into the councils, as in the case of Anambra state for over six years. This is inimical to democracy and development of the local government system in Nigeria. The choice of leadership in the council is no longer the decision of the local people, but the decision of the political party in power through the State House of Assembly.

#### **C. Abuse of Local Government funds by the State Government.**

The issue of who controls the local government funds has been a great concern to the local government autonomy and democracy. Various state governments take advantage of the provisions of the 1999 constitution to abuse local government funds through the establishment of Joint Account and Allocation Committee (JAAC) headed by a state government representative. The JAAC deprives the local government the powers to control their funds. In most cases, through the instrument of the JAAC, the local government is starved of fund for her democratic activities. The effect is that the local government is now dependent on the state government command, and this affects local government democratic activities.

#### **D. The influence of Local Government Service Commission on Local Government.**

Today, the Local Government Service Commission (LGSC) control the local government personnel services, while the LGSC is the appointee of the state government . The state governments use the commission to regulate local government policies, and sometimes frustrate local government policies including democratic activities by deploying the incompetent caliber of staff to a particular local government, resulting to poor implementation of the democratic policies of the councils. Sometimes, the LGSC even take over the political control of the councils, as in the case of Delta State where the Heads of Personnel Management (HPMs) were mandated by the LGSC through the Delta State House of Assembly to run the affairs of the councils from May 2011 – November, 2012, following the expiration of the tenure of the elected councils in the state in 2011. Worst still, the HPMs were replaced with another twenty (20) member Care – Taker Committee per Council. The committee members were selected by the state government on approval of the State House Assembly from members of the ruling political party- PDP to run the affairs of the councils from November , 2012. The effect is that democracy in local government is crucified on the alter of the LGSC and State House of Assembly in Delta State in 2011 - 2012 . This results to democratic deprivation of the local people in the state.

#### **E. The Conduct of Local Government Elections.**

Local government elections within this period were conducted by the State Independent Electoral Commission {SEC}. The state government appoints and controls SIEC. The impact is that in most cases, the local government elections are conducted based on the dictates of the party in power in the state, and not to satisfy the democratic will of the local people. The political party in power uses the state power to select the local government political actors through the use of rigging and abuse of electoral processes, thereby depriving the local people the opportunity of achieving the democratic representation in the government.

#### **6. Conclusion**

Obviously, the local government in Nigeria has experienced several reforms with the intention of empowering the councils with necessary powers for effect democratic governance, but the implementation process created more challenges than prospects for the democratic governance of local government. These challenges have in several measures contributed to democratic set-back to the local government administration in Nigeria. In most cases, the local governments were reduced to local administration, thereby encouraging the autocratic intensions of the state actors, and depriving the local people the access to choice of leadership in the government. It is therefore our recommendation that since Nigerian constitution has been the source of controversy on autonomy and powers of the local government, in future reforms and constitutional amendments, the powers and autonomy of local

government should be clearly defined as a third tier of government in Nigeria. Also, the implementation process of the reforms should be explicit to avoid doubt and misconception of the underlining principles of the reforms. This will enable the local government enjoy some degree of autonomy from other tiers of government and exercise adequate powers for effective democratic activities and governance in Nigeria.

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