

## Democracy, Local Government and Development in Nigeria: Case of Ekiti State

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### Abstract

*There is a renewed interest on emphasis for revival of local democracy around the world. This is contingent on the strategic position occupied by the local government as a tool for effective governance and development. Thus, the constitution provided for a democratically elected local government councilors and chairmen to bring about the expected development. However, of recent, true democracy at the local government has been replaced with the practice of appointing caretaker committees appointed by the Governor. This practice is usually rubber stamped through stage-managed elections usually conducted by the chief executive to achieve their personal objectives. The study considers democracy at the local government level of Ekiti State with a view to assessing its practice and attendant effects on development. It employs both primary, interview with key informants, and secondary data to interrogate democracy and the performance at the local level. This study discovers that local governments have performed below expectation and that genuine democracy is needed at the local government level to bring about the much desired development longed*

**Key Words:** Democracy, Development, Local Government, caretaker committee, Election

### Introduction

The idea of democracy at the local government level in Nigeria was motivated by the drive for development and effective service delivery. Local government was created to bring governance nearer to the people and ensure that the dividends of democracy reach them. Thus, leadership at the local government level was constitutionally democratized to ensure responsiveness, inclusiveness, participation, accountability and efficiency. Decades of administrative oversight have left scores of towns, villages and hamlets in Ekiti among the poorest and least physically developed in the whole federation (Ekiti SEEDS, 2004:14 cited in Oluwaleye, 2016):122). Only two of the twenty two (22) industries established by the then Ondo State government before the creation of Ekiti state were located in Ekiti. The industries are Road Materials and Construction Company, Igbemo-Ekiti and the Burnt Brick Works, Ire-Ekiti (Ekiti SEEDS, 2004: 14 cited Oluwaleye, 2016). Although most of the water sources serving the old Ondo State were in Ekiti State, communities in the State had little access to potable water. Electricity supply was almost non-existent while the roads were almost impassable, with some communities cut off from gainful contact with the outside world due to lack of accessible road. All these had repercussions on the health system and the economy, both of which are in complete shambles (Ekiti SEEDS, 2004: 14). All these and many more led to agitation for the creation of Ekiti State. This, in the opinion of the agitators, would ensure even development of the area, guarantee political patronage, attract federal presence and create more job opportunities (Omotoso, 2009:107). Ekiti State was created on October 1<sup>st</sup>, 1996. The immediate gains included the nearness of government to the people as Ekiti's twelve local government areas were reconstituted into sixteen in the newly created state (Ekiti SEEDS, 2004). Unfortunately, development in Ekiti had remained slow in the past 20 years of its existence as a result of lack of effective service delivery at the grassroots.

Over a decade of the existence of Ekiti State, the people at the local levels have not seriously felt the impact of local governance. The level of development at the grassroots is far from the desired level. The acts of governance became thoroughly politicized in areas of resources allocation and location of social amenities and public facilities as a result of lack of true democracy. Lack of true democracy and its attendant effects was adduced as part of the major reasons for lack of development at the grassroots. In spite of the symbiotic relationship between local government, grassroots development and service delivery at the local level, Local Governments in Nigeria have failed to perform to expectation. This is largely hinged on lack of participation, lack of accountability and corruption especially in decision making and implementation of projects, as well as financial matters which greatly hinder their development efforts at the local level. The study, therefore, examines the practice of democracy at the local government level in Ekiti State and to consider its implication for development.

### Theoretical Framework

The efficiency service theory provides more insight into the value of local government as a grassroots government. The proponents include Mackenzie and Sharpe. The Efficiency-Services School of Thought locates the rationale for local government in the provision of special services. This school of thought premised its argument on the notion that some

services such as defense and external affairs are provided by the central government for the purpose of maintaining common nation standards or because they are of immediate or of direct interest to ordinary citizen. It is argued that there are certain concerns or interests which only a section of the community has in common and it is convenient as well as advisable that only those who share this community interest should administer them. Some interests are peculiar to some localities; those will be best managed if they are under the purview of the people in the localities (Quadri, Maduabum, Okeke and Oruku, 2013:6).

**The major thrusts of the efficiency service theory include the following:**

1. The local government occupies the best position for the efficient performances of certain functions. This is made possible because of the nearness of the council of the people, and the smallness of the population.
2. Decisions on policy issues are easily and quickly arrived at since the targets of decisions can be quickly reached, consulted and responses (feedback) from them known quickly.
3. The closeness of the local government similarly make possible in depth knowledge of the nature of the problems of the people possible and invariably the appropriate solutions to the problems. Adequate understandings of the people's problems and the resultant solutions are easier to know because a large percentage of the locality are indigenes who know the local government area inside – out and have adequate knowledge of the peculiarities of the area. (Ajayi, 2011:4; BHM 667:29).

Jim Sharpe suggested that the efficient performance of these services is so compelling that if local government did not exist, something else would have being created in its place (Ola, 1984:13). It is being argued that without an appropriate governance structure, developing countries will not be able to either sustain economic growth or a momentum towards rapid poverty reduction (Ghaus-Pasha,2005:28). This has been the conclusion of a number of research studies trying to figure out why, despite resource allocation and good policies, broad improvements in human welfare have not occurred and improvement in services, freedom from hunger, illness and illiteracy still remain elusive.

Grassroots inputs allows for the citizen's concerns, local needs, values, expectations and problems to be taken into account in the governmental decision-making process. It is a two-way communication process between the government and citizens, with the overall goal of better decisions, supported by the public and fostering the increased well-being of the population as well as the reduction of poverty (Gonzalez and Acuna,2001:9).

It is therefore useful to realize the importance of efficiency services theory in the delivery of services at local government level. Thus participation at the grassroots will enhance qualitative and effective service delivery and development.

**Literature Review**

**Democracy**

The Athenian leader, Cleisthenes, in the year 507 B.C., introduced a system of political reforms that he called demokratia, or "rule by the people". The system comprised of three separate institutions: the ekklasia, a sovereign governing body that wrote laws and dictated foreign policy; the boule, a council of representatives from the ten Athenian tribes; and the dikasteria, the popular courts in which citizens argued cases before a group of lottery-selected jurors. Cleisthene's invention was one of ancient Greece's most enduring contributions to the modern world (<http://www.history.com/topics/ancient-history/ancient-greece-democracy>)

According to American Government (2016), the term 'democracy' is from two Greek words 'demos' (the people) and 'kratia' (power or authority). Democracy is a form of government that gives power to the people.

The UN general Assembly reaffirmed that "democracy is a universal value based on the freely expressed will of people to determine their political, economic, social and cultural systems and their full participation in all aspects of their lives" (United Nations, 2017). Democracy, according to the United Nations' submission as described above is about people and their involvement in their own affairs. It is not a one-man or few-people domination.

To Schmitter and Karl (1991), "Modern democracy is a system of governance in which rulers are held accountable for their actions in the public realm by citizens, acting indirectly through the competition and cooperation of their elected representatives". Important elements of democracy as revealed by the definition include people, elected representatives,

accountability, competition- the citizens are to agree on a common course after listening to alternatives and weighing their merits and demerits and cooperation- actors must make collective decisions binding on the polity.

They also pointed to the 7 minimal conditions, identified by Robert Dahl, that must be put in place for democracy to exist:

- i. control over government decisions about policy is constitutional vested in elected officials.
- ii. Elected officials are chosen in frequently and fairly conducted elections in which coercion is comparatively uncommon.
- iii. Practically all adults have the right to vote in the elections of officials.
- iv. Practically all adults have the right to run for elective offices in the government.
- v. Citizens have a right to express themselves without the danger of severe punishment on political matters broadly defined
- vi. Citizens have a right to seek out alternative sources of information. Moreover, alternative sources of information exist and protected by law.
- vii. Citizens also have the right to form relatively independent associations or organisations, including independent political parties and interest groups.

However, Schmitter and Karl (1991) added two other conditions as follows:

- viii. Popularly elected officials must be able to exercise their constitutional powers without being subjected to overriding opposition from unelected officials.
- ix. The polity must be self-governing: it must be able to act independently of constraints imposed by some other overarching political system.

The aforementioned elements are expected to foster effective and efficient performance and the desired development. The fundamental principle of democracy, according to Amanning (2014) is that the governing power is exercised based on the judgement of all adult citizens, in choosing who is going to be responsible for making decisions on their behalf. This is expected to be done periodically by all qualified adults to choose their representatives into government. Democracy Barometer (2014) identified democratic principles to include freedom, equality and control. Democracy is believed to rest upon the principles of majority rule and individual rights, decentralize power government to regional and local levels, understanding that all levels of government must be accessible and responsive to the people. Democracies also conduct regular free and fair elections open to citizens of voting age. Citizens have the responsibility to participate in the political system (<https://photos.state.gov/libraries/korea/49271/dwoa-122709/Democracy-in-Brief-kor.pdf> retrieved 14/2/2017).

## **Local Government**

### **There are many definitions of local government.**

The United Nations (UN) described the local government as a political sub-division of a nation (or in a federal system, a state) which is constituted by a law and has substantial control of local affairs, including the power to impose taxes or to exert labour for prescribed purposes. The governing body of such entity is elected or otherwise locally selected (Ola,1984:7).

Local government was identified as a sub-division of both federal and state government, it is the third tier of government established to have substantial control of local affairs.

### **Also, the Federal Republic of Nigeria has defined local government as:**

“Government at local level exercised through councils established by law to exercise specific powers within defined areas. These powers should give the councils 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 governments in their areas, and to ensure, through devolution of functions to these councils and through the active participation of the people and their traditional institutions, that local initiatives and response to local needs and conditions are maximised”( Akhakpe, Fatile and Igbokwe-Ibeto,2012).

The various definitions revealed the nature of local government; it is a sub-division of the State; it is empower by law to exercise some powers; it exists within a definite territory and it comprises of elected or appointed leaders. Active participation of the people is expected to be maximized in local government administration.

**A lot of reasons has been given for the creation of local government, these include:**

The importance of local governments was brought to the fore by the believe that it would assist in quickening the provision of the much needed developmental facilities in human and materials resources so as to enable the people at the local level feel the presence of government in order to have a sense of belonging (Obamwonyi and Aibieyi, 2015). In the same vein, Agagu (2011:21) posited that local governments are created to play some important political and socio-economic roles such as provision of some basic services to the people and communities around them. They are also to ensure better quality of life for the citizens. This, it is believed, can be done easily by local governments because of its proximity which enhanced detail knowledge required for delivering of certain services. Similarly, Ajayi (2011:2) stated that the cogent motive for the establishment of local government is the need for performance. To him, it makes government to be more responsive to the plight of the people, particularly at the grassroots level of government in terms of making quick response to their advertised needs and prevailing problems.

Local government is seeing as an avenue through which people participate in government, which is an underlying precept of democracy. This is made possible through people's participation in elections and decision making. Local government was put in place for administrative convenience to reduce the cumbersome duties of federal and state governments. It was also noted that the essence of local government is to engender development. Local governments have been positioned as agents of rural development to use the funds made available by the federal and state governments to improve the quality of lives of people within their areas of operation ([http://www.akeran.town.ng/Major reasons for creation of local governments in Nigeria.html](http://www.akeran.town.ng/Major_reasons_for_creation_of_local_governments_in_Nigeria.html) retrieved 28/09/2016).

Many scholars have enumerated the constraints of local governments in bringing about the desired development. Managa (2012) identifies the major challenges confronting local government. According to him, lack of institutional capacity, otherwise referred to as lack of expertise, has left many local government inadequately staffed, resulting in deteriorating service delivery over the years, leaving many communities with inadequate access to basic services. He noted that the scarcity is evident in managerial and technical positions. He further identified financial mismanagement. He revealed the absence of financial and managerial expertise needed to wisely spend the money allocated to service delivery and developmental projects. He further revealed the challenge of corruption coupled with lack of public participation in decision making with its after effects of lack of accountability. In the same vein, Agba (2013) reiterated the effects of corruption which has robbed local government of financial strength and ability to provide basic social services that will foster transformation of rural society and bring government nearer to the people. He, likewise pointed to lack of suitable and qualified professional staff at the local governments. This, he pointed was a result of political patronage which has led to the recruitment of thugs and uneducated to service at the local government as a means of compensating them for support during election.

The relationship between the democracy and local government was brought to the fore by the democratic participatory school of thought which posited that local government exist to bring about democracy and to afford the citizens the opportunity for political participation (Ola, 1984). Hence, where democracy is practice at the local government, it gives opportunities for citizens and communities to contribute to community development. Similarly, local government, as the closest government to the people, is seen as better positioned to deliver services efficiently to the people. According to Oviasuyi, Idada and Isiraojie (2010), local governments are established to perform functions which revolve around;

- (a) Functions in which success depends on communities' responsiveness and participation;
- (b) Functions which require detailed local knowledge for efficient performance;
- (c) Functions which are of a personal nature requiring provision close to where the individuals affected live; and
- (d) Functions in which significant use of discretion or understanding of individuals are needed.

The above essence of local governments to bring about development can only be achieved in a democratic setting. The principles of democracy such equal political rights, periodic and competitive free and fair elections and the rule of law, if put in place at the local government level, will enhance the desired development.

### **Development**

Development, according to Agbodike, Igbokwe-Ibeto and Nkah (2014), involves a departure from the past to the new situation, which is reflected in the economic, social, educational and political aspects of a nation.

From the sociological perspective, Shah (2016) defined development as “improvement in country’s economic and social conditions”. He specifically pointed to improvements in a way of managing an area’s natural and human resources with the aim to create wealth and improve people’s lives.

Todaro and Smith (2012:22-23) identified three main objectives of development which are:

1. to increase the availability and widen the distribution of basic life-sustaining goods such as food, shelter, health and protection
2. to raise levels of living, including, in addition to higher incomes, the provision of more jobs, better education, and greater attention to cultural and human values, all of which will serve not only to enhance material wellbeing but also to generate greater individual and national self-esteem
3. to expand the range of economic and social choices made available to individuals and nations by freeing them from servitude and dependence not only in relation to other people and nation-states but also to the forces ignorance and human misery.

In view of the above, Shah (2016) pointed to the need for a direct and participatory democracy where the state gives up its paternalistic and welfare role in favour of a facilitator in enacting and consolidating people’s solutions flowing from below. He calls for a departure from the top-bottom approach where there is little possibility of popular participation and decision making. Hence, the practice of democracy at the local government level is the avenue expected to bring about the needed participation and the attendant development. In the same vein, IDEA (accessed, 2016), noted that local government as the tier of public authority that citizens first look to for solution to their immediate social problems and the level of democracy in which the citizen has the most effective opportunity to actively and directly participate in decisions made for all society. To corroborate this, Manyi (2007), revealed the essence of local government to bring the administration closer to the people, thereby improving the standard of living of the population. He posited that local communities stand out to be the principal pools of local development and the political laboratories that are inevitable in the fight against poverty and the implantation of democracy.

### **Democracy and Development at the local government level in Ekiti State.**

Recent debates on a rights-based approach to development have focus on participation, accountability and other elements that are very similar to those values underlying substantive forms of democracy (Menocal, 2007:3). One of the major purposes of creating local government is to ensure development at the local areas. Revenue allocated from federal and state governments as well as internally generated revenue are expected to be used by the local government to meet the needs of the people at the grassroots.

Okafor and Orjinta (2013:114) pointed to the deficit of democracy at the local government level during the Second Republic despite the constitutional provision for such. They noted that the Governors of some states of the Federation exploited the loopholes created in Sections 7 and 8 of the 1999 Constitution, the failure of the Constitution and the electoral laws or even the National Assembly to state the tenure of elected council officials to inhibit the development of grassroots democracy. They further revealed that 25 out of the 36 states of the Federation (then) had local governments run by caretaker committees appointed by the relevant governors. Hence, 617 out of the 774 local governments in Nigeria were run by caretaker committees, while the remaining 157 have elected councils (Okafor and Orjinta, 2013).

Hence, the dearth of true democracy at the local government level of Ekiti State has in no small way affected the development at the grassroots of government. Representatives at the local levels had either been appointees of state governments in form of appointed caretakers committees or through kangaroo elections to ensure emergence of candidates of the government of the day. (Ogunsemi, 2010; Daily Trust, 2016). The result of the above is the lack of democratic ethics needed to bring about development. For instance, two weeks after Governor Fayemi was sworn in as Governor on October 16, 2010, he sacked all the 16 council chairmen and 177 councillors elected on the platform of PDP who were elected on December 2008 for a three-year tenure when they still have one year to hold their respective offices. (Alao, 2017; Obono-Obla, 2016; Obamwonyi and Aibieyi, 2015:154; Ogunsemi, 2010). No successful local government election was held under Governor Fayemi 4 years’ administration (Ekiti247.com, 2015). Also, in 2014, Governor Fayose sworn in 16 local council caretaker chairmen to steer the affairs of the 16 constitutionally recognized local government in the state before conducting local government election in 2015 all won by PDP (<http://ekitistate.gov.ng/2011/11/fayose-swears-in-3-commissioners-16-ig-caretaker-chairmen/>; Oluwole, 2015).

The process of democracy does have its own intrinsic value and it should be expected to arrive at policy decisions in a way that is inclusive, participatory, broadly representative of different societal interests, transparent and accountable (Sen cited Menocal, 2007:4). According to Menocal (2007), the importance of participation in one's development through open and non-discriminatory democratic processes is fundamental. The implication of the caretaker committees in place of democratically elected leaders through a competitive election was that the caretaker chairmen owed their allegiance to their godfather-governors rather than the people at the grassroots. Hence, the serious work towards development would be taken as personal privileges for self-enrichment. Interview with one of the traditional rulers revealed such lapses as a chairman of his local government sought to paint an existing town hall while the preferred project was the completion of an on-going building project (Field Work, 2014). To a relevant question on whether the projects carried out in a particular community commensurate with people's need, a traditional ruler responded 'I would have prefer comprehensive health Centre instead of town hall' (Field Work, 2013).

Accountability is one of the cornerstones and core elements of good governance and development. It is a means for the participating public or communities to hold public authorities accountable for service delivery (Adesopo, 2011). The World Bank (<http://www.1.worldbank.org/publicsector/decentralization/adm.htm#4>) identified methods that can be employed for accountability to include the word of mouth, at the immediate neighborhood level as perhaps sufficient to transmit such information, but at any higher level some form of media becomes essential. Accountability at the local level in Ekiti is relatively poor. The local representatives seldom account for their stewardship to the local populace. For instance, in response to interview, one of the traditional leaders noted the case of a councilor representing ward 2 in his community who after coming for his prayer in his election bid, never return to him. He submitted that he cannot recognize him if he sees the 'honorable' (Field Work, 2014). To corroborate this, a one- time caretaker chairman in one of the local governments, in response to interview question on giving account of his stewardship, revealed that 'it was done every three Months at the State Assembly. You will explain to the House Assembly members who will evaluate' (Filed Work, 2013). This can be attributed to the failure of democratic process at the grassroots in Ekiti State for most years of her democracy. Local governments' representatives were appointees of successive governments and as a result they saw no need to be accountable to people that did not elect them. A rare case of accountability recorded was that of one time chairman who revealed (in response to interview) that he engaged the media on Monthly basis to account for his stewardship (Field Work, 2013).

Public meetings can be an effective mechanism for encouraging citizens to express their views and obliging public officials to answer them. Such avenues have not been employed at the grassroots except when out on campaign to canvass for votes. A major comment of the rural populace was that they only see the local representatives only when they are looking for votes while they fail to resurface after election (Field Work, 2014).

From interviews and extant literature, undue interference by State government in the affairs of the local government was identified as another major hindrance to effective service delivery at the local governments. The Joint Account Committee (JAC) was viewed by some as infringement of State Government on the power and benefits of local governments. For instance, a former Caretaker Chairperson for Ise/Orun local government in the state opined that money should be given directly to local government from the federal government and should not be through the State government which usually deduct part of it and also dictate the projects to be carried out at the local governments. Similarly, in response to interview on challenges to effective service delivery at the grassroots, another former chairman highlighted the interference of state government in hijacking most of the sources of income to local government, specifically market, which he learnt was given to consultants by the state government (Field Work, 2013). He also pointed to tight control of state government on projects to be carried out at the local governments. According to him, "there were more things we have love to do but for tight control from state government. We cannot carry out any project above N500,000 and we have to write for permission which may take 3, 4 to 6 Months and it may not be approved. Throughout my tenure, none of about 20 such letters received approval". He also pointed to other problem like embarking on projects that are not relevant, loading the voucher, inflation of contracts, tight grip on Ministry of local government Affairs, unnecessary demands by masses at local level, attitudes of local government workers who may not come to work, political appointees who are political professionals who saw the privilege as avenue to enrich themselves, lack of autonomy is a great problem.

Democracy is a rule by the people through free and fair elections and other forms of participations. Any government that denies the people the right to decide the membership of the councils that make vital decisions on community development is not encouraging democracy and development and by implication local government but rather such government encourages local administration which negates the essence of local government and grassroots development.

### **Conclusion**

The study discusses the need for true democracy at the local government level. The factors necessary for development, such participation, accountability and other democratic principles, cannot be in place under caretakers committees and kangaroo elections. It has been identified that lack of participation and popular consensus, lack of accountability and state government interference and tight control on local governance has prevented the local governments from performing its constitutional roles of grassroots development. In order to enhance development at the local governments, popular participation in governance is imperative. Election of credible candidates as councilors and chairmen should take pre-eminence above caretaker system which is not only undemocratic but also hinders responsiveness and accountability of the leaders to the populace. Transparency and accountability will be ensured if the available resources are judiciously utilized. There should be avenue for public audiences for accountability. Corruption must be stamped out of the system. Workable measures, such as imprisonment, confiscation of property of corrupt officials should be employed to discourage embezzlement and misappropriation of resources. Honest and people of proven integrity only should be given the privilege to serve at the grassroots.

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