

**POLITICS OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT CREATION IN SECOND
REPUBLIC NIGERIA: AN EXAMPLE OF IJEBU AREA OF OGUN STATE**

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ABSTRACT

The Nigeria local government reforms of 1976 provided the succeeding second republic with ample opportunities to better the lot of local government structure. This opportunity turned out to be a basis for struggle between and among stakeholders in the affairs of local government. The democratization of the system, embedded in the reform, led to unprecedented politicking by the stakeholders. Politicians both at the centre and the periphery used such struggles over local government to score political points. No part of the country was left-out in this malady. This paper, using the Ìjẹ̀bú division of Ogun State, examines the nature of that struggle. The paper argues that political interest rather than common interest was the sole cause of the bickering that marred the period. The paper concludes that the huge opportunity provided for system in 1976 in form of democratization of the system got frittered away to the detriment of grass root development.

Introduction

The main thrust of this article is an assessment of the growth of the system of local government in Nigeria. This work does so by using existing local government areas in the Ìjẹ̀bú division of Ogun State, Southwest Nigeria as case study. The study period is the second Nigeria republic. This was the immediate period that followed the era when the system of local government was expected "...to do precisely what the word government implies i.e. govern at the grass root or local level".¹ Thus, local government being a form of governance at the grass roots implies the most basic level of organisation. It thus gives the system a way of embracing ordinary people often regarded as the main body of an organisation's membership. It thus, correspondingly, occasioned activities that give opportunity for political

power and, essentially, the machineries of government to be devolved from its ‘autonomously centralised’ nature to a more all-participatory, masses-oriented and result-driven administration.

Furthermore, Ebeku sees local government as a system that guarantees democracy at the grass roots level.² Also, Chief Obafemi Awolowo opines that

Local governments serve the dual purpose of being the foundation on which the State and Federal rest, and the agencies through which the State governments, and occasionally the Federal government as well, touch the lives of the people intimately. They do more. At their level, the practice of democracy is much nearer the ideal than either at the State or Federal level. The local government ward is, in most places, small enough for its entire membership to meet and confer regularly, and for a conscientious councillor to have personal contact with every man or woman, boy or girl...³

These definitions certainly depict the fact that local government system is for the purpose of developing the people at the grass roots. It should ensure that government is taken to the door-step of the people in order to rid the polity of bottlenecks synonymous with both the State and Federal governmental structures aimed at getting to the people. This further indicates that Nigerian political cadre does not lose the usefulness of local government as a veritable tool with which the grass roots could be administered, touched, and impacted on.⁴ The emphasis of these definitions on the ‘grass roots’ further indicates the sole target of the emolument that is embedded in the promises of governance at that level. It is nothing else than the people! Local government thus will mean a machinery set in motion to readily meet the needs, aspirations, and yearning of the ‘grass roots’.

The aim of local government, therefore, is to enable the people, its core focus, to have first-hand access to the benefits of governance. However, this vital organ of government that has always prominently featured in governance globally has not really enjoyed its rightful place in Nigerian political landscape. It has, overtime, come under various forms of anomalies. It is

not only the case that Nigerian politicians tend to use local government as a tool to play party politics, but that other stakeholders use it to strategise for inter-tribal and territorial ambitions. This significantly featured in the Nigerian Second Republic socio-political activities. Ogun State in Southwest Nigeria was not left out of this development. In the Nigerian Second Republic, the Unity Party of Nigeria, UPN, led administration in the state created 30 local councils to replace the hitherto existing ten.

This action became a tug of war between the State and the National Party of Nigeria, NPN, led Federal Government. They battled over the political control of the local government across the country. This was a categorical repeat of the Nigerian political scene of the 1950s when dominant political parties used the local governments as instruments for political control at the grass roots.⁵ This paper argues that despite the huge advantage provided for the local government system through the 1976 reforms and the consolidation of the same process in the second republic when it became a constitutional provision under a democratic government, the system was merely reduced to a tool for political vendetta during the second republic.

Another emphasis that needs our attention is that the management of local government areas should be in the hand of the 'grass roots' itself. This, however, seems not the case in Nigerian Second Republic despite brilliant and laudable promises visibly entrenched in the statutory provisions of that era. But during the period under study here, the political class, rather than use the local government to administer, to touch, and to impact on the grass roots, manipulatively sway the pendulum to their side for. This was done through the use of the statutory provisions available in the 1979 Constitution.

The 1979 Constitution seem to have guaranteed this unconsciously as it stipulates that

The system of local government by democratically elected local government council is under this constitution guaranteed; and accordingly, the government of every state shall ensure their existence under a law which provides for the establishment, structure, composition, finance and function of such sections⁶

This shows an empowerment of the States' Government through the statutory provisions of the 1979 Constitution and it accordingly robbed the system of its assumed role in bettering the lot of the grass roots. It has been correctly noted by Nwabueze that what the Constitution did here was not "...a grant of power"⁷ to the local government, but a guaranteed domination and manipulation of the system of local government by the State Executives. This was sumptuously utilized by the latter as shall be seen in the case of Ogun State later.

On October 1, 1979, Nigeria opened another phase in her political milestone with the coming of civil rule which is popularly known as the country's Second Republic. This was after a long interregnum, or more precisely, intrusion by the military into the country's political landscape. Then, the military bestowed on Nigeria the 1979 Constitution which, among other things, made provisions for the establishment of a third tier form of government otherwise known as local government. Before then, the 1976 Local Government Reform had ensured a more robust local government structures that makes Saidi Adejumobi claims that "it was the 1976 local government reform which for the first time gave expression and meaning to the concept of local government autonomy in the post-colonial history of the Nigerian State".⁸ The 1976 exercise not only placed the system of local government in an unprecedented level of usefulness, it also gave it a legislative strength that guaranteed law-making power.⁹ The 1979 constitutional recognition of a robust local government system in Nigeria thus had a precursor in the 1976 local government reform by the Muritala/Obasanjo regime.

As a matter of fact, the model doctrine of the 1976 local government reform was essentially switched into the 1979 Constitution. This shows how viable the attempt of the military government was at local governance. However, the inability of the Second Republic political actors to transform the impressive local government policies provided by these doctrines undermined the ideal of local government in the Second Republic. The political actors in the area of study, Ogun State, like several other states of the Federation, as shall be seen soon, concentrated more on vendetta using the local government and its business as means of getting at each other; a kind of political chessboard.

It should be noted that before the 1976 local government reform, Ogun States had four local government areas namely Egba, Egbado, Ìjẹ̀bú and Ìjẹ̀bú -Remo (they were then known as

Divisions). But by the reform of 1976, these were augmented to ten. The new local government areas were as shown in the table below

#	Local Government Areas	Number of Constituencies
1.	Abeokuta	20
2.	Ifo-Otta	13
3.	Odeda	10
4.	Obafemi Owode	12
5.	Egbado North	11
6.	Egbado South	18
7.	Ìjẹ̀bù–Ode	16
8.	Ìjẹ̀bù North	10
9.	Ìjẹ̀bù–Remo	14
10.	Ìjẹ̀bù East	10

Source: Daily Times, August 26, 1976, p. 2

In addition, the reform was not only meant to democratise governance at the grass roots, it also spelt death sentence to the traditional rulers as they were pushed out of partisan politics. The reform stipulated that no salaried Oba or chief would be a member of the local government council either by election or nomination. The local government councils were to have direct link with the States' Ministry of Local Government and Information. Also, the local governments were to be structured on three standing committees. These were administration/finance/health; education/agriculture and works.¹⁰ This structural model thus gave it an outlook of presidential system of government.

The yardstick for carving out local government areas was based on a minimum of 150,000 and a maximum of 800,000 people per local government area.¹¹ The 1963 national population census result was used to determine the local government areas. This was so because the country had not conducted any population census since the 1963 exercise.

The Legalisation of the 1976 Local Government Reform

By 1979, when the Nigerian Second Republic commenced, the epistle of the 1976 local government reform was integrated into the Constitution of the Federation.¹² This provided the local government system in Nigeria the much sought legitimacy since the emergence of the entity called Nigeria. Ordinarily, one would have expected the democratic nature of the government in the Second Republic provided an opportunity for an active grass roots participation in the affairs of the local government. Rather, the states jettisoned that opportunity as the governors seized on one of the loopholes of both the local government reform guidelines and the 1979 Constitution, which reinforced the provisions of the 1976 reforms. The loophole in question here is the total control of the local government areas granted the State Government presided over by the Executive Governors¹³ The lofty ambition of the 1976 reform had thus been curtailed as the local government were no more autonomous but had reverted to the old status of local administration as it obtained in the pre-1976 reform.¹⁴ As shall be seen, the state governments, including Ogun State, used various means to undermine the autonomy granted the local government areas in both the 1976 local government reform guidelines and the provisions of the 1979 Constitution.

Era of Mixed Fortunes for Local Government System

In the very early days of the Nigerian Second Republic, the State Governments across the country were using the local government areas to play politics rather than the anticipated democratisation of the local government practices. It should be noted that the effort at democratisation was aimed at a robust local government system that will guarantee the development of the people at the grass roots as mentioned earlier. Thus the envisaged greater opportunity for the grass roots people in the local government reformation became a mere fantasy. Some governors illogically augmented the numbers of local government areas in their states without due regard for the laid down guidelines mentioned earlier on. This is, in fact, contrary to the belief that “states are limited in their ability to intervene in local government affairs”.¹⁵

The first major challenge that confronted local government across Nigeria was the inability of Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO) and the states’ electoral bodies to conduct elections at the local government level. FEDECO blamed its inability to conduct the elections

on the failure of the body to review the voters register. It claimed that the National Assembly did not assent to the Bill requesting approval for the exercise.¹⁶ The National Assembly, through the Speaker of the House of Representatives then, Mr Edwin Ezeoke, claims that “no such bill has been received from FEDECO. Yet FEDECO did tell the nation that it has submitted the bill since last year (1980)”.¹⁷ This attitude of claims and counter-claims by both the FEDECO and the House of Representatives indicates insincerity on the issue of local government in Nigeria.

Consequently, this necessitated the need for the Caretaker Management Committee system whereby the governors appointed individuals to manage the affairs of the local government areas. As a matter of fact, this was in vogue across the country as there was the need to fill the vacuum created by the inability of the authorities concerned to organise elections. It is opined that the gimmick was employed so as to ward-off threat from opposition parties by the incumbent government.¹⁸ The implication was that the local government system in Nigeria was not democratised as required by both the 1976 reform and the 1979 Constitution. This actually gave room to the politicians, not only in Ogun State, but throughout Nigeria, to sway the machineries of local government to their side.

In 1981, the governor of Ogun State, Chief Victor Olabisi Onabanjo, increased the number of the local government areas in the state from ten to thirty.¹⁹ This was a day after the Ogun State House of Assembly approved the Bill.²⁰ This did not only encourage greater level of politicking with the Caretaker Management Committee system that was already in vogue, it, as well, engendered wrangling between the reigning Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) and other political parties in Ogun State.²¹ This may not be far from the truth as there were situations whereby communities and individuals were displeased with the restructuring of the local government areas. The opposition saw it as a means targeted, not only to compensate party loyalist of the UPN that could not get political post at the state level, but also a way to “distributing the state’s meagre resources among the ruling party in the state”.²²

An instance in this regard was the Isara community that was grouped with the Idarapo Local Government Area. The people of that community claimed that they were never a party to the agreement to be a part of the Idarapo Local Government; they urged their UPN

representatives to stop attending Party meetings; and they demanded a separate local government area on the claim that they were “able and viable enough to discharge necessary responsibilities attached to the running of a local government”. In addition, they threatened that the demand for separation “is irrevocable since Isara is not prepared to ‘*Darapo*’ with those who already agreed to “*Darapo*” in the former Remo North Local Government Area”.²³

The Isara community instance depicted above

The State Government and the local government areas ran into trouble when the Federal Government refused to remit allocations meant for the councils to the appropriate quarters. This pitched the Federal government against the affected states including our area of study Ogun.²⁴ It also marked the beginning of starving local government of their statutory allocation in Nigeria. The central government was merely using the opportunity to starve states under the influence of opposition parties of statutory allocation. That shows another angle at which local government system was used as a platform for political manipulation rather than a tool for development of the grass roots. The table below shows the thirty local government areas and their headquarters as restructured by the Ogun State Government in 1981²⁵.

#	Local Government Areas	Headquarters
1.	Abeokuta North	Ake
2.	Abeokuta South	Akomoje
3.	Ado-Odo	Ado-Odo
4.	Alekun-Ifesowapo	Odogbolu
5.	Ewekoro	Itori
6.	Idarapo	Saapade
7.	Ifekowajo	Oke-Odan
8.	Ifelodun	Ago-Iwoye
9.	Ifo	Ifo
10.	Ìjẹ̀bù-Igbo	Ìjẹ̀bù-Igbo

11.	Ìjẹ̀bú-Ode	Ìjẹ̀bú–Ode
12.	Ilaro	Ilaro
13.	Ilugun	Orile-Ilugun
14.	Ipokia	Ipokia
15.	Irepodun	Ogere
16.	Isokan	Ayetoro
17.	Leguru	Ala
18.	Makun	Sagamu
19.	Oba	Oba
20.	Obafemi	Obafemi
21.	Odeda	Odeda
22.	Offin	Offin Sagamu
23.	Ojowo	Ojowo
24.	Oke-Ogun	Imala
25.	Opeji	Opeji
26.	Ota	Ota
27.	Owode	Owode
28.	Waterside	Abigi
29.	Yemoji	Isonyin
30.	Yewa	Tata

Source: Daily Sketch, April 2, 1981

It will be noted from the above table that 90% of the local government areas created in 1976 were dissolved and restructured. It was only Ìjẹ̀bú -Ode Local Government Area that retained its original name. It has reduced in geographical size as three local government areas had been carved out of the former Ìjẹ̀bú-Ode Local Government Area. These were Yemoji, Leguru and Alekun-Ifesowapo. The rest have been restructured both in names and geographical sizes. Certainly, this violated the emphasis laid on the population of a local government area. The 1976 guidelines stipulated that an area becomes a local government if it has a minimum of 150,000 and a maximum of 800,000.²⁶ This regulation, however, has not been altered by the National Assembly then. And neither was there any national head count to

determine the geographical density of the created local government areas. That could have afforded the local government areas opportunities for adequate and effective planning. One may not be wrong to ask why the Ogun State Government not called the bluff of the Constitution to organise election for the local government instead of doing same to create more local government areas. It would, although, have been out of order, but at the same time common sensical since the original aim of the local governance could be realised doing so.

It must be emphasised that, again, the State governors merely capitalised on that same loopholes like its predecessor to truncate virile governance at the local level. The power granted the State Government over Local Government and its affairs were too excessive hence the gimmick to suit their purpose and desire. This becomes glarer when it is noted that the Ogun state government under the governor, Chief Victor Olabisi Onabanjo, claimed to be targeting development at “every nook and corner”²⁷ of the State. That was why members of the Caretaker Management Committees for all the local government areas were not selected from outside their localities. This however ought to have translated into meaningful contributions to the grass roots by the Caretaker Management Committee members. But the selected representatives most often danced to the tune played by the governors. One could, therefore, see that the local government as grass roots form of governance were not allowed due representations as there was no freedom to make their choice of who represented them.

The Demise of the Second Republic and its Effect on Local Government

The situation of the local government in Ogun State and other parts of Nigeria remained this way till December 1983 when the military struck. They did not only get rid of the prodigal civilian government but they also swept aside the third tier of government with its goodwill birthed in 1976. However, the military government made effort at overhauling the Nigerian general life. This was because of the high level of decadence that was noted in the socio-political and economic sphere of the nation. Thus, the local government as the third level of governance was not spared in the scheme of the rehabilitation.

The military government effort at sustaining the local government system saw the emergence of a 21 man panel on the 24th of May, 1984. The Panel was headed by the then Emir of Sokoto, Alhaji Ibrahim Dasuki. The Panel was charged with the responsibility of looking into

the problems of local government in Nigeria. This was to ensure “a virile, viable and efficient system of administration”²⁸ at the grass roots level. The Panel, at the end of its findings, recommended that the system of local government in the country after the 1976 reform had more of operational than structural problems; that the pre-1979 *status quo* should be reverted to; that new local government should be created at ten years interval, among others.²⁹ One could see that all the parts of the findings of the Panel stated above indicted those in charge of the local government system from 1979. These are the various state governments headed by civilian governors that were democratically elected all over the country.

Conclusion

This paper has examined the operations of the local government system as the third level in the hierarchy of government in the modern world. The local government in Nigeria got an opportunity to break from an old tradition in 1976. This was targeted at improving the grass roots by ensuring that there were “certain basic services which can best be administered locally on the intimate knowledge of the needs, conditions and the peculiarities of the areas concerned”.³⁰ The opportunity was further stretched when the letters of the 1976 reform was legalised by its incorporation into the 1979 Constitution. But the gesture was not appreciated by the civilian politicians of the second republic. They rather used the local government as tool for politicking.

The result was that the military regime of the then Lt. Generals Muhamadu Buhari/Tunde Idiagbon that unseated the Second Republic pushed aside the 1979 Constitution. This automatically spelt a death sentence on the hope the local government system got in the 1976 reforms. It would be recalled that the incorporation of the reform into the Nigerian Constitution of 1979 had granted it a legal toga and that would have enabled it fit into the era of the Second Republic along with its democratic process. As a matter of fact, the democratic process significantly featured in the local government arrangement under this dispensation. It is, however, sad that that the military regime could not do much on the recommendations of the Dasuki Panel before it was kicked out of office by another military coup in August 1985. That era thus marked the beginning of the greater woes that bedevil the third tier of government in Nigeria up to date.

End Notes and References

¹This is clearly stated in the foreword to the Guidelines for the Local Government Reform, 1976

²K. S. A. Ebeku, (1992), “The Separation of Powers in Local Government in Nigeria”, *Journal of African Law*, Vol. 36, No. 1, p. 43

³Obafemi Awolowo, (1966), *Thoughts on Nigerian Constitution*, Ibadan: Oxford University Press, p. 148

⁴E. O. Adeoti, (2011), “Local Government Reforms in Nigeria: Historical issues, Challenges and operations, *SAPHA*, Vol. 2, Nos. 1 & 2, p. 50

⁵Olufemi Vaughan, (1994), “Communalism, Legitimation and Party Politics at the Grassroots: The Case of Yoruba”, *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society*, Vol. 7, No. 3, p.429

⁶Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1979, Section 7 (1),

⁷B. O. Nwabueze, (1983), *Federalism in Nigeria under the Presidential Constitution of Nigeria*, London, p. 129

⁸Saidi Adejumobi, (1995), “The Military and the Local Government Authority: Some Reflections”, in Saidi Adejumobi and Abubakar Momoh, (eds.), *The Political Economy of Nigeria under Military, 1984-1993*, Harare: Sapae Books, pp. 282-285; also see Eghosa E. Osaghae, (1992), “The Status of State Governments in Nigeria’s Federalism”, in *Publius*, Vol. 22, No. 3. p.187

⁹Eghosa E. Osaghae, (1992), “The Status of State Governments in Nigeria’s Federalism”, in *Publius*, p. 187

¹⁰See the Guidelines on the 1976 Local Government Reforms, Kaduna: Government Printer, 1976

¹¹*Daily Times*, August 26, 1976, p.2

¹²See the Fourth Schedule of the 1979 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria

¹³Saidi Adejumobi,... p. 283

¹⁴Mac C. King, (1988), *Localism and Nation Building*, Ibadan: Spectrum Books, p. 100

¹⁵Alex Gboyega, (1991), Protecting Local Governments From Arbitrary State and Federal Interference: What Prospects for the 1990s?, *Publius: The Journal of Federalism*, Vol. 21, No. 4, p. 45

¹⁶*Daily Sketch*, March 16, 1981, p. 1

¹⁷*Daily Sketch*, March 16, 1981, p. 7

¹⁸*Daily Sketch*, March 16, 1981, p. 7

¹⁹*Daily Sketch*, April 2, 1981, p. 13

²⁰*Daily Sketch*, April 1, 1981, p. 6

²¹Interview with Balogun Adedoyin, male, community leader, aged 66, on 15/01/2007 at Atan, Ogun State

²² Interview with Mr Adesanya Tugbobo, Male, aged 68, a retired Teacher, 15/01/2007

²³An Open letter to Ogun State Government on Idarapo Local Government, Published in the *Daily Sketch*, April 13, 1981, p. 7

²⁴Interview with Professor Segun Odunuga, Male, aged about 62, a retired University Lecturer, 13/01/2007 at Ìjẹ̀bú –Ode

²⁵See the *Daily Sketch*, April 1, 1981, p. 6; also see *Daily Sketch*, April 2, 1981, p. 13

²⁶See the Guidelines on the 1976 Local Government Reforms, Kaduna: Government Printer, 1976

²⁷*Daily Sketch*, March 7, 1981, p. 9

²⁸*Daily Times*, May 25, 1984, pp. 1 and 24

²⁹A. Toriola Oyewo, (1986), “Management Problems in Nigerian Local Government – Dasuki Report and Government White Paper Revisited”, *Nigeria Journal of Local Government Studies*, Vol. II, No. 1, p. 27

³⁰Quoted from the Speech of Lt. Col. Saidu Balogun on Local government Creation in Ogun State, *Nigerian Tribune*, August 26, 1976, p. 8