

## Local Government and Alienation of the Grassroots in Nigeria's Fourth Republic

O. Celestine JOMBO<sup>1\*</sup> & Omololu FAGBADEBO<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Public Administration, Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba-Akoko, Nigeria.

<sup>2</sup>Department of Peace Studies and Conflict Resolution, Osun State University, Osun State, Nigeria

\*Corresponding Email: [celestine.jombo@aaua.edu.ng](mailto:celestine.jombo@aaua.edu.ng)

### ABSTRACT

*Local government as the third tier of government in Nigeria is commonly conceived as the government closest to the people at the grassroots. However, the current status of local government in the fourth republic indicates they are so-called only in nomenclature. Evidence abounds that the present structure and operation of local government in Nigeria are not only far away from the people but are substantially disconnected from the grassroots. In many states of the federation, elections for the choice of leadership for local governments are largely influenced by state governments with little or restricted inputs from the local population. This practice seems to negate the very essence of participatory local government as catalysts for rural development and bulwarks of popular participation at the grassroots. The study utilised data from both primary and secondary sources to examine and analyse the present status of local government in Nigeria covering their leadership ascendancy and grassroots portfolios. The findings revealed a gradual alienation of the grassroots people from the activities of their local governments as they continually lose faith in the capacity of local government to bring about the much-desired popular participation and grassroots development. The paper, therefore, canvassed for inclusive and structural reforms in the administration of local government in Nigeria most especially redefining the interface between local councils and their respective state governments.*

**Keywords:** Alienation, Grassroots Development, Democracy, Local Government, Popular Participation

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Local government creation all over the world often stems from the need to facilitate development and galvanise inclusive participation of the people in governance at the grassroots. In other words, the main agenda for creating a local government in Nigeria and elsewhere is to meet the peculiar aspirations of the people at the grassroots through effective participation in their own affairs. This notwithstanding, the extent to which local governments can go in accomplishing this set agenda depends not only on the volumes of revenues available to such local governments but principally on the institutional design that governs the operations of local authorities. This institutional design provides the template for local governments to either succeed or fail in the discharge of their constitutional responsibilities. This is because, the constitutional design specifies procedures for the creation, control and operation of local government but the institutional design determines the level of compliance with such procedures (Salvador *et al*, 2021; Bulmer, 2017).

In a related development, it is apparent that no single government can effectively

govern a nation. This is mostly true of large, heterogeneous and complex societies such as Nigeria with asymmetric political cleavages and character. This necessity often underscores the rationale for the creation of local governments, which are often positioned to reach out and cater for the socio-economic and political well-being of the grassroots (Odo, 2014). On this basis, the all-important role of local governments in galvanising grassroots development cannot be underestimated. Moreso, there seemed to be a general consensus among scholars that local governments by virtue of their proximity and closeness to the people occupy a vantage position than any other tiers of government in initiating and driving genuine development at the grassroots level (Ansell et al., 2022; Awofeso and Ogunne, 2020; Sikader, 2015).

As Torney (2018) has argued, given the areas of limited jurisdiction, local governments find it easier to plan and carry out programmes having direct impacts on every member of their small communities. Moreover, local council's leaders and officials are mostly people who live in their local communities with immense knowledge of their immediate environment. They are much aware of the needs, aspirations and utmost preferences of the people in their localities. Given these plausible credentials, local governments are by no means the most effective agent of grassroots development (Amakihe et al., 2017; Knill et al., 2020).

However, in spite of these numerous advantages, local governments in the present republic have not lived up to expectations in promoting the socio-economic and political wellbeing of the people at the grassroots level. Most of these failings have been attributed to the apparent disconnection between local government administration and grassroots populace (Awofeso and Ogunne, 2020; Obamwonyi and Aibieyi, 2015; Ademola, 2009).

In recent times, one of the issues of critical importance to Nigeria's pretentious democracy is the widespread political disenchantment and citizens' declining confidence in governments at all levels. Majority of Nigerians who live mostly at the grassroots are also caught up in the web of this horrendous agitation as they are becoming increasingly critical of government near complete abandonment and deliberate politics of exclusion in the choice of political decision makers at the local government level. A situation that has further resulted into increasing alienation of the people from the activities of their local councils (Bulmer, 2017; Miller, 2017).

Ever since 1999, Nigeria's ceaseless attempts at democratisation even from the grassroots level had been held back by covert conspiracy of the elites, which is often manifested as orchestrated disregard of citizens' electoral choices through manipulative and pretentious election rituals where people vote without choosing; unfettered institutional arbitrariness, lacklustre and mediocre leadership as well as state-sponsored human right abuses (Torney, 2018; Zanna, 2015). For these reasons, citizens have come to see Nigerian elites as political merchants who will stop at nothing to acquire or retain political power. This is often demonstrated through their vagary and diminutive actions that "political power should be pursued legally, if possible, extra-legally if necessary and illegally if unavoidable" (Obiorah & Chiamogu, 2014, p. 60)

For instance, abuse of governmental power, especially in the ways and manners leaders are selected for local councils by state governors, coupled with excessive overbearing control over local government funds, has been identified as one of the damaging factors responsible for the increasing rate of apathy and political alienation gradually being witnessed between government and the people at the grassroots level. This calls for serious concern because political alienation arising from distrust between the government and the governed often leads to a lack of confidence in political authorities and can ultimately degenerate into dysfunctional local government community relations (Mierina, 2014).

In light of the foregoing, this paper seeks to interrogate the present status of local governments in Nigeria, using Ondo state as a case study with a special focus on what value proposition, strategy or policy options that is available to improve the linkage between Nigerians and their local councils. The paper is organised into five sections. Section one is the introduction. Section two provides clarification of concepts and creates the context for theoretical explications while section three discusses the methodology. Section four presents the findings and discusses their implications for grassroots development in Nigeria. This is undertaken through a contextual explication of the three main hypotheses enunciated for the study. The fifth section concludes the discourse and proposes policy options for improving the linkage between local councils and their grassroots constituents.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This section is devoted to providing explanations of major concepts as well as theoretical constructs employed in teasing out the main issues relating to the research problematic. This is considered necessary to provide clarity to the meanings ascribed to their usage in this paper. Special attention is given to describing the very sense in which concepts such as local government, decentralisation, alienation and citizen participation are used in the discourse, particularly their significance to the real issues under review.

### 2.1 Local Government as a Variant of Decentralisation

Local governments are commonly portrayed as approximating the highest form of decentralisation when they operate principally as drivers of local self-expression rather than agents of the 'outside government' (Sikader, 2015). This is essentially so because the phenomenon and/or process of decentralisation can take several forms; ranging from de-concentration, and delegation to devolution, depending on the degree of dispersal of power from the central authority.

In practice, deconcentration represents a transfer of functions or responsibilities from the central agency to a regional or sub-national office. This simply indicates that the centre which decentralises can re-centralise whenever it so wished (Elazar, 1976). On the other hand, delegation is a term often used to describe the transfer of statutory function from one government body to another over which limited control is permitted. In a related development, devolution encapsulates a significant shift of real governmental powers and responsibilities from the centre to the sub-national levels with considerable autonomy to exercise controls over certain defined spheres or issue areas (Mayne *et al*, 2020; Elazar, 1976).

As Amakihe *et.al* (2017) has noted, devolution as a form of decentralisation presents the most promising opportunity for actualising the goals of grassroots development through the active participation of the local inhabitants. By bringing government operations closer to the people, true devolution of powers reduces alienation and engenders a strong collaboration between local councils and their grassroots constituents. In recent times, it is becoming increasingly recognised that effective participation of the locals in the administration of local communities has innumerable potential for ensuring and promoting inclusive, equitable and sustainable socio-economic growth and development of the grassroots (McMann, 2014). For this reason, local governments have long been considered as training grounds for inculcating democratic ethos and values. It offers veritable platforms for citizens to contribute meaningfully and effectively to the process of decision-making that has a direct impact on their lives (McDonnell, 2021).

As a matter of fact, increased local participation is otherwise considered as local democracy because it strengthens civic culture and promotes the imperatives of good governance through expanding public accountability (Mayne *et.al*, 2020; Miller, 2017). It is

a governance strategy directed at ensuring that local policies reflect the needs, aspirations as well as preferences of local communities. As Bulmer (2017) has pointed out, one way to achieve this is through a deliberate action to de-externalise the leadership recruitment process of local councils; and equally, ensure that powers granted to local authorities do not outstrip their capacity to deliver. However, in Nigeria, the practice of handpicking local government leadership by state governors with little or no regard to local preferences has, over the years, discountenanced active participation of local inhabitants in the activities of their local councils. The grassroots citizens are growing ever more alienated from the political and democratic process owing to their lack of trust in the government's handling of local affairs.

## **2.2 Alienation and the Demands of Citizen Participation at the Grassroots**

The most prominent version of the concept of alienation is traceable to the ideas of Karl Marx while offering his critical assessment of the eighteenth-century capitalist system in Europe. Through the famous Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844, Marx (1959) idealised the different variants of alienation subsisting in the capitalist system. He argued that the exploitative nature of the capitalist mode of production created a monstrous process through which workers are not only separated from the products of their labour and the act of production but are as well estranged from themselves and their fellow workers (McDonnell, 2021). He asserted further that, by having their work as well as themselves reduced to a mere means in the hands of the capitalists, with outrightly no control over the objects of their labour, workers became alienated from their very being and fellow human beings. Subsequent works from other thinkers such as Max Weber and Emile Durkheim adapted and replicated Marx's ideas to other social spheres (Musto, 2010).

In the course of the twentieth century, the concept of alienation found its way into political discourse to capture and describe the declining levels of citizens' participation in public affairs occasioned by their increasing levels of discontentment, disillusionment as well as distrust of the political process (Citrin, 1977). As Knill *et.al* (2020) has pontificated, the declining role of citizens in the decision-making process is responsible for the rising political alienation being witnessed in this era across nation-states. This is further heightened by the minimalist thrust of liberal democracy which reduces public life to a "soulless aggregation of interests" (Mansbridge, 1983 cited in McDonnell, 2021, p. 85).

Whereas, John Stuart Mill in one of his Essays on representative government has argued extensively from the standpoint of liberal ethos that democracy provides the needed template for making people responsible and mature citizens by allowing them to take part in decisions affecting their lives (Wood and Flinders, 2014). To Linebery *et.al* (1994, p.14), democracy provides the electorates with a means of selecting policymakers and leaders of government "so that public policy will represent and respond to people's preferences". In a similar manner, Bulmer (2017) concedes that democracy offers the people the opportunity of exercising their governing power either directly or through representatives periodically chosen by them. In other words, the gamut of representative democracy lies in its ability to provide a key ingredient of alternate or multiple choices to the citizenry in choosing their leaders, including the requisite policy options necessary for promoting the cause of their wellbeing.

Arising from the foregoing, it is evident that any process that fails to galvanise the active involvement and participation of the people in decision-making runs contrary to the fundamental tenets of democratic practice and therefore, harbours abrasive outcomes of citizens' disillusionment and alienation from the political process. In the present age, two dominant views exist on the trend of political alienation. The first identifies disengagement from the political process arising from the nature of politicking or what is otherwise

described as the content or process of politics, while the second emphasises withdrawal from public affairs that occurs as a result of a sense of powerlessness often caused by total disregard or lack of respect of citizens' electoral and policy choices (Fawcett *et al.*, 2017; Hay, 2007; Norris, 1999b). Apparently from the standpoint of public choice theoretical construct, Hay (2007) posits that the political process is gradually becoming self-serving and insensitive through removal of much of the meaningful policy alternatives from political platforms thereby disincentivising citizens from participating actively in the democratic process.

Similarly, another perspective on the concept of alienation especially with regard to the concerns of citizen participation at the grassroots centres on the increasing trend of delocalisation of governmental powers and activities. This continues to manifest in form of the transfer of governmental roles and functions away from the grassroots toward the state capitals, which negates the very essence of local councils in a country such as Nigeria. Local governments are so-called primarily because they are expected to be the closest to the grassroots, representing and championing the aggregate needs and interests of local communities. For instance, in present-day Nigeria, how many local government chairmen, either elected or appointed, were inaugurated within the domains of their local councils? Most of these seemingly less important but symbolic ceremonies were often conducted at the state capitals, far away from the local constituents. These practices though seen as inconsequential serve to deny the local citizens their first opportunity to engage with their leaders, which counts to reinforce the diminishing role of citizen participation in the democratic process (Fawcett *et al.*, 2017; Hay, 2007).

This concern over the alienating effect of the declining roles of citizens in the political process is shared by Norris. Norris (1999b), through empirical evidence, enunciated factors responsible for the gradual disengagement and withdrawal of the individual from public affairs and hinged such on the diminishing roles of citizens in the political process. She argues that a large number of critically-minded citizens are growing increasingly dissatisfied, disenchanted and disillusioned with the "core institutions of representative government" which they see as "unrepresentative, insensitive, and even sometimes antagonistic to their needs and aspirations (Norris, 1999b, p. 269; McDonnell, 2021).

In a related development, Stoker (2006) re-echoes the concern raised by Norris on political alienation but attributes it to delocalisation which he asserts is "turning citizens into passive, dissatisfied and cynical observers of the decision making of others" (Stoker, 2006, p. 8). When a supposedly closest government suddenly become far away on account of the undesired delocalisation of local government operations, local citizens often have no other choice than being forced into onlookers or spectators of public affairs. Whereas Norris (1999b) has identified the unrepresentative nature of core institutions of democracy as the basis for an individual's gradual disengagement from the political scene, Stoker (2006, p. 154) contends that alienation surfaces and continue to persist on account of "the new trend of delocalisation manifesting in the accumulated transfer of governmental roles and functions away from the localities". This development in Stoker's reasoning, do not only reduce the incentives for citizens to participate but "has raised the cost and barriers of participation" beyond the reach of the local citizenry (Stoker, 2006, p. 154; McDonnell, 2021, p. 86).

Overall, the narratives regarding the phenomenon of political alienation in the literature alternate principally between Hay's depoliticisation theory and Stoker's delocalisation thesis. These two represent the component parts of the overriding theme of the concept. As stated earlier, this study is situated within these planks of thought to unravel how certain practices under Nigeria's system spur alienation at the grassroots and the

consequences of such on local government-citizen participation at the grassroots.

### **2.3 Alienation in the Context of Rising Discontents among Citizens**

There seems to be no contention in the literature over the fact that Nigeria's local government system is succumbing irreversibly to the abrasive scourge of political alienation (Awofeso and Ogunne, 2020; Amakihe et al, 2017; Sikader, 2015; Zanna, 2015). However, what bears more contention hovers around the exact definition of the term. What exactly constitutes political alienation? When can it be said, albeit convincingly, that an individual is politically alienated? These and many more posers underscore the hotbed of scholarly engagements with the concept. By and large, the usual indicators of political alienation in a polity are often woven around the rates of participation of citizens in the political process. No matter the angle from which one looks at it, non-participation irrespective of what led to it, represents an important indicator of political alienation (Hay, 2007; Stoker, 2006; Norris, 1999b; Citrin, 1977; Finifter, 1970; Dahl, 1967).

In spite of the general sense that the etymology of the term portends, for the purposes of this paper, there is the need to be precise and more intentional in its usage. As noted by McDonnell (2021), the discourse on the concept of political alienation has, over the years, oscillating between two scholarly traditions. The first, as championed by Finifter (1970), draws principally from Marxian thoughts on the alienated worker as well as Durkheim's notion of normlessness. Finifter's work shares concern over the overall implication of the rising level of citizens' discontent with the political process and identify two dimensions of political alienation; powerlessness and political normlessness. The dimension of powerlessness represents an individual's feeling that he is incapable of influencing government actions while that of political normlessness raises concern over the responsiveness and trustworthiness of the political system, including the integrity of political actors in the process (Stoker and Evans, 2014; Finifter, 1970).

The second approach in this discourse as led by Almond and Verba (1963), Easton (1965) and Gamson (1968) seeks to unravel the political attitudes that engender legitimacy and lend support to "a well-functioning system" (Easton, 1965, p. 153). Unlike the previous tradition, this approach stresses "the responsiveness of governmental authorities and institutions to citizens' demand" (Fawcett et al., 2017, p.1408). It is more interested in understanding how civic attitudes coalesce, influence and reinforce the effective functioning of political systems. Nonetheless, in spite of the divergent views, what is evident from the empirical literature is that political alienation has two clear-cut dimensions: "distrust of government and sense of political powerlessness" (Stoker and Evans, 2014, p. 30).

However, the concept of political alienation is taken to mean the consequences of the growing distance between government and the governed, manifesting as the gradual disengagement of the individual from his socio-political environment. It is construed as a set of abrasive outcomes resulting from practices that disincentivise citizen participation in the political process.

## **3. METHODOLOGY**

In line with the tradition of the interpretative paradigm adopted for the study, data gathering was undertaken through the use of the qualitative method. From the interpretative perspective, society is construed as a world of meaning in which human actions occur because of 'shared understanding' (Creswell, 2009). The qualitative method serves to corroborate the interpretative ethos because the main focus of researchers in qualitative studies is often on a few individuals in the society, using methods that draw out the meanings, perspectives, and understanding which such 'individuals or groups attach to

behaviours, experiences and social phenomena' (Walter, 2017, p.16).

The authors adopted a purposive sampling technique in arriving at the choice of respondents for the research. Data were obtained through interviews of and interactions with key informants selected from community groups, market women, youth associations, rural dwellers as well as government workers and political functionaries in six local governments of Ondo State, which include; Ifedore and Ondo East, Akoko South East and Ose, Okitipupa and Ese Odo. These comprise two local governments from each of the three senatorial districts of the state with an equal number of rural and urban local councils represented in the sample. Data from secondary sources were also utilised in order to strengthen and validate data derived from the interviews through the use of simple descriptive statistics and content analysis.

#### **4. DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

It is evident from the extant literature that political alienation of grassroots citizens from the affairs of their local councils usually takes two dimensions; distrust of government and a sense of political powerlessness. This reality often informed the belief that decentralisation of decision-making authorities to the grassroots has the propensity to elicit citizens' positive responses toward governmental affairs and can invariably narrow the gap of political alienation between the government and the governed.

Decentralisation, in this context, can be offered as a strategy for reducing alienation in three ways. Firstly, by producing opportunities for the popular participation of citizens at the grassroots and eliminating barriers that stood against the active involvement of rural constituents in the activities of their local councils. This is captured as the participation hypothesis. It assumes that eliminating barriers and promoting opportunities for unhindered involvement of the people at the grassroots reduces alienation. Secondly, placing control of resources in local hands as a form of decentralising ethos creates awareness among the grassroots populace that they are close to the authority. A practice that often instils a sense of belonging capable of promoting active enlistment of citizens' interests in local and neighbourhood affairs. This is construed as the local awareness hypothesis, which emboldens the grassroots constituents to take an active part in local government affairs when local groups and leaders are the custodians of collective resources. The third in the series; the improved service hypothesis occurs when improvement in local service delivery is observed or noticed. This has the potential of reducing alienation by enlivening people's interests when they notice that their needs and aspirations can be met through their local councils.

However, all of these may be assumptions until they are subjected to definite empirical rigour and assessment in the particular social milieu. Given the data obtained from participants' interviews, these assumptions are, therefore, reviewed within the context of citizens' distrust and sense of powerlessness in directing the affairs of their local governments.

##### **4.1 The Participation Hypothesis**

This hypothesis assumes that the decentralisation of decision-making powers widens opportunities for citizens to participate actively and have a strong involvement in local affairs thereby decreasing the alienation of grassroots citizens. Such participation provides the local people with opportunities for involvement in the activities and policies of the government. This, therefore, will enable them to have greater confidence in governmental institutions and structures, including a deeper understanding and/or appreciation of the challenges and difficulties local authorities face in the discharge of their onerous responsibilities. This will not only reduce peoples' distrust and sense of

powerlessness but will also increase citizens' confidence in their own ability to influence the process that affects their lives.

Most of the respondents across the sample area acquiesced to the fact that they have little or no influence on how the leaders were chosen and absolutely no input in the policies and programmes of their local councils, which in a way, revealed their discontents with the operations and activities of local governments in their domains. Our findings are highlighted by the pattern of percentages of responses to a set of questions as indicated in Table 1.

*The Chairman of my local government is considered to have been chosen by the governor of the state rather than through the popular votes of people in my area as being portrayed.*

**Table 1: Citizens' Participation and Political Alienation**

<b>Response</b>	<b>LG1</b>	<b>LG2</b>	<b>LG3</b>	<b>LG4</b>	<b>LG5</b>	<b>LG6</b>
Agree	88%	82%	87%	85%	80%	83%
Disagree	12%	18%	13%	15%	20%	17%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Source: Authors' Computation (2023)**

*Policies and programmes of my local government in the last five years do not reflect expectations nor represent my interests and preferences*

<b>Response</b>	<b>LG1</b>	<b>LG2</b>	<b>LG3</b>	<b>LG4</b>	<b>LG5</b>	<b>LG6</b>
Agree	72%	83%	79%	89%	85%	81%
Disagree	28%	17%	21%	11%	15%	19%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Source: Authors' Computation (2023)**

The responses show that there is an inverse relationship between the leadership recruitment process, including the government's policies and programmes in the local area and the level of involvement of grassroots citizens. This also reveals the widening gap that exists between the leaders of the local government and their people. It also demonstrates the level of citizens' discontentment and frustration with the reality of the outcomes of local governance in the country's Fourth republic.

In addition, other similarly constructed empirical interrogations revealed there is little or no opportunity for citizens to choose their leaders at the local government levels in almost all the areas under review without the overriding dominations of state government. Most of the respondents agreed in one voice that the declining opportunity for citizens' active involvement in the selection process of their leaders is doubtlessly responsible for the decreasing lack of interest in local government activities. Many community leaders and development groups in most of the local governments identified the practice of handpicking representatives for the local people with no regard for their choices or preferences as the most potent factor disincentivising citizens' genuine interests in the activities of their local councils (Personal Interview, 2023).

The implication of these findings captures the numerous barriers deliberately created by state governments to obstruct the active participation of grassroots constituents in the management of their own affairs as envisaged by the 1999 Constitution (see section 7 of the Constitution as amended). There is no doubt that genuine decentralisation is required, in this context, to offer opportunities that promote unhindered and seamless involvement of the people in the administration of local councils in their domains. Local governments ought to be made essentially local not only in nomenclature but also in composition, operation and orientation. It is envisaged that increased participation engendered by the active involvement of the grassroots constituents' harbours innumerable potentials in addressing citizens' sense

of powerlessness thereby reducing their alienation from the political process.

#### 4.2 The Local Awareness Hypothesis

While decentralisation is assumed to create new opportunities for wider local participation, bringing the actual decisions down to the people at this level will no doubt decrease alienation tremendously. When residents become aware that decisions affecting their well-being and livelihoods are being made locally by people with much familiarity within their localities, that tends to enliven their interests and readiness for the ability of local government to serve their purposes. In addition to that, decision-making proximity can increase people's sense of local efficacy and commitment, having the feeling that they are in an advantaged position to influence government decisions locally. Our findings on peoples' preferences are highlighted in Table 2.

**Table 2: Respondents' Perceptions toward Proximity of Decision Making**

*Transfer of more resources and functions to local governments increases my confidence and expectations in their ability to meet the collective needs of local constituents*

Response	LG1	LG2	LG3	LG4	LG5	LG6
Agree	90%	79%	81%	76%	85%	83%
Disagree	10%	21%	19%	24%	15%	17%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Source: Authors' Computation (2023)**

As evident in Table 2, most of the respondents tend to agree that granting local authorities and administrators more resources and discretions over local affairs increases their confidence in the ability of local governments to improve their socio-political and economic well-being. This further indicates that the usual scepticism often exhibited by grassroots citizens downplaying the capacity of local councils to improve their politico-economic situation is hinged on the belief that local governments are more dominated by consideration for state government preferences than the concerns of local people. Hence, the awareness that decisions making have been moved closer to them increases their readiness to take their problems or concerns to the familiar local authorities.

Similarly, in this part of the world, grassroots constituents are more favourably disposed to taking active parts in the affairs of local councils when they can easily identify local groups and leaders in their domains as the true custodians of the resources required to bring about the realisation of their shared purpose and aspirations. This often serves as a catalyst for promoting citizens' genuine commitment towards local affairs.

#### 4.3 The Improved Service Hypothesis

The literature recognises improvement in service delivery as one of the most efficient ways of decentralisation of the government at the local level. This is a strategy for reducing the political alienation of citizens (Fawcett et al, 2017). This is hinged on the fact when individuals perceived an improvement in local service delivery and went further to identify reforms in favour of a better deal for local councils as the ultimate cause of such improvement, they might become less alienated and more interested in getting involved in the activities of local governments.

As part of the fieldwork for the study, respondents were asked to suggest possible practices that can get them more involved in the activities of their local governments. While a few of them identified proximity of real decision-making power as a possible incentive, a large number went for increased visibility of local government impacts on their daily lives through improvement in the delivery of services (Field Study, 2023). Overall, it is apposite

to note that people at this level often have no difficulty in getting identified easily with a process and government that serve their interests. Thus, the gap between local administrators and their grassroots constituents can swiftly be reduced or closed when local authorities are perceived as serving collective local interests and aspirations.

## 5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Local government often carry the familiar appellation of being the closest government to the people at the grassroots but the reality of governance at this level in present-day Nigeria portends mostly the contrary. The gap between what is constitutionally permissible and that which is operationally desirable and practised by state governors regarding the operation of local governments in Nigeria creates a crisis of identity and policy direction for the councils. As findings have revealed, this has not only succeeded in hampering the readiness of these entities to deliver effective service to the people but has also undermined their capacities to represent and pursue the interests and aspirations of the local population.

Moving forward, therefore, the present structure of local governments in Nigeria in terms of their institutional powers and spending profile requires structural reordering. Both constitutional and institutional reforms are necessary to insulate local governments from the vagaries of excessive controls of state governments. It is important to rework, clarify and align the leadership recruitment process, powers and responsibilities of local governments to revolve around their grassroots constituents in a manner that earns public trust, citizens' confidence and local legitimacy.

At this point, there is a need for a comprehensive re-organisation of local governments and they should be made essentially local not only in nomenclature but more importantly in composition, operation and orientation. Such re-organisation should therefore prioritise the concerns, interests and preferences of local communities by making local citizens the fulcrum of participatory governance at the grassroots. A local participatory governance approach woven around the preferences of local constituents can provide the conducive environment needed for the emergence and sustenance of a civic culture of tolerance, inclusiveness, trust and cooperation among the various segments of a local community thereby facilitating the development and adoption of home-grown solutions to local problems which help to create the right conditions for collaboration among local citizens.

Over the years, a large section of citizens in local communities suffers from increasing alienation from their local councils. This indicates the need to devise new approaches capable of rekindling the lost hope and interests of local citizens towards their local governments. Given this discovery, the paper recommends a more participatory model of governance at the local governments to engender a sense of community among citizens. Overall, there is a necessity for structural transformations that can make local governments relevant and responsive to the developmental needs of local communities. Therefore, more resources should be channelled to the administration at the local government level to help stimulate local economies that are capable of promoting local development initiatives. More resources indicate that the government at the local level would be able to perform additional functions through enhanced social service delivery, which invariably will create opportunities for indigenous resource development and enhance local capacity to manage local affairs. A locally driven development agenda has the potential to galvanise local cohesion and cooperative self-government. This is necessary as a measure to halt the feelings and perceptions of political alienation among local citizens.

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