

WILL THE SECURITY CHALLENGES IN NIGERIA TRIGGER LOCAL GOVERNMENT REFORM?

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Abstract: Since the return to civil rule in 1999, Nigeria has been grappling with distress and persistent social, economic, and political challenges that are terrifically threatening the country's corporate existence. Perhaps insecurity constitutes the most significant challenge to Nigeria's stability. The spate and spectre of insecurity in the country, ranging from the Boko Haram/ISWAP, ethnoreligious crises, kidnapping, rural banditry, cattle rustling, farmers'/herders' conflict, and the IPOB, had intensely questioned the capacity and capability of the levels of government to fulfil the very essence of the state, which is to guarantee peace, security of lives and livelihoods of individuals. Drawing on the assumptions of ungoverned spaces, the paper examined local governments' dwindled capacity to carry out governance functions, particularly in rural areas. Thus, the paper argues the essentials of bolder local government reform given the lapses in the existing structure as envisaged in the 1999 Constitution regarding the functions, status, finances, and relations between the local governments, states, and the federal government.

Keywords: Local Government; Reform; Ungoverned Spaces; Security Challenges

Introduction

Since the return to civil rule in 1999, Nigeria has been experiencing dramatic increases in numerous violent conflicts. Elaigwu (2012) indicated over 600 violent clashes in which one or more lives were lost and properties destroyed. Similarly, according to SBM Intelligence (2021), over 2,861 people were killed in the first quarter of 2021, including 346 security personnel. These violent conflicts range from election-related violence, ethnoreligious conflicts, communal and land conflicts, and economic and other violent conflicts. In addition to all these are the increasing threats from militant ethnic militias and religious/terrorist groups such as the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), with its security outfit known as the Eastern Security Network (ESN), and Boko Haram, and its faction the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), and the Egbesu boys etc. The most recent frightening and disturbing

trends are the unprecedented bloodshed, rural banditry, kidnapping, maiming and annihilation of villages by the 'Fulani herdsmen' and cattle rustlers. Not so long ago, there were rampant kidnappings of school children in almost all the states in North-West Nigeria. On 11 December 2020, over 300 pupils were kidnapped in a boarding school in Kanakara, Katsina State. A week later, 80 students were abducted in Dandume, Katsina State. Then, on 17 February 2021, about 27 students, 3 staff and 12 members of their families were kidnapped in Kagara Secondary School in Niger State. Similarly, almost 317 schoolgirls were kidnapped in Jangebe, Zamfara State, on 26 February 2021. Also, on 30 May 2021, about 136 pupils were abducted in Tegin, Rafi local government of Niger State. Aside from the mass kidnappings in many villages and highways, especially on the Abuja-Kaduna highway and Zamfara to Sokoto, countless individuals were kidnapped, several lives were killed, and properties were lost. The spate and spectre of these attacks and lives lost had extensively questioned the capacity of levels of government to fulfil the very essence of a state to guarantee peace, security of lives and livelihoods. Presently, an undisclosed number of persons, including school children, are held captive by bandits and kidnapers in many parts of the country.

The euphoria for progressive, functional, viable and vibrant economic and political structures at independence in 1960 and later at the return to civil rule in 1999 had significantly washed off. Nigerians' quest for justice, social cohesion, economic progress, and political stability have been truncated by chequered challenges that thrust the federation into a series of crises. Notably, the return to civil rule in 1999 after decades of the dictatorial military regime, citizens hoped for a Nation that would ensure equal access to public services irrespective of their places of residence, accommodation of diversity, individual and collective rights, and economic prosperity for the component units (see Aghalino 2009; Abutudu, 2010; Adejumobi, 2010; and Mohammed 2012). However, the civilian regime swept the institutions of governance, which led to a severe weakening of various institutions, especially the local governments which are the closest governance units to the citizens. For instance, Adejumobi (2010) lamented whether Nigeria was confronted with a structural problem beyond the capacity and ingenuity of the political leadership or was the political leadership was part of the problem rather than the solution. In effect throughout the almost 62 years of Nationhood, Nigeria has not been successful in managing public affairs. These challenges predominantly resonate from large-scale corruption, indiscipline, structural deficits (basic infrastructure), and institutional decline. Considerable concern and interest have been shown by policymakers, researchers, and development partners in the challenges of governance in Nigeria.

Broadly, World Bank opined dysfunctional and ineffective public institutions and weak governance are increasingly seen to be at the heart of the economic development challenge (World Bank 2000). Many contended that the disproportionate distribution of responsibilities and resources amongst the component units had resulted in a dysfunctional structure, the consequence of which is the myriad problems bedevilling the country. According to Ayua (1994), the standard of administration has created a sense of frustration to the extent that even economic development and social justice have not materialised since independence. Instead, there is insecurity and disenchantment with the nation-state which arise from deprivation and unequal opportunities. Whilst all the levels of government in Nigeria are complicit in the social, economic, and political crises that stalled the euphoria of having the biggest, strongest black Nation on earth, the state of affairs of the local

government system is desolate and horrendous. Local governments today are merely conduit pipes through which state governments with impunity misappropriate statutory revenues due to local governments. Justice Tobi (JSN) averred ‘it is a notorious fact that there are leakages here and there in local government funds, leakages caused by human beings that either operate the system or supervise the system’s operation. In essence, there are many thieves in the system (AG of Abia State & 2 Ors v AGF 2006). In the same vein, Olowu (1986) maintained that state governments are hijacking local governments’ funds or diverting them for other projects considered as a priority, without any consultation with the local governments.

There have been attempts at examining the consequences and implications of the failure of the local government system in Nigeria. Olowu (1986) opined local governments are in an even worse position of dependency. Regrettably, the position expressed by Olowu in 1986 remains the same today, if not worst, given Nigeria is now under ‘democracy’. However, quite a few studies examine the escalating security challenge in the country from the perspective of the failure of the local government system. The closest was Ebohon et al (2021), who trace the threats to state culpability regarding the centralisation of security apparatuses in a federal system. Whereas Ojo (2020) attributed the contemporary security challenges to the woeful economic situation and entrenched corruption in the public and private spheres. In view of these, drawing on the assumptions of the ungoverned spaces thesis, this paper examined how the challenges confronting the local government system in Nigeria are significantly responsible for the step-up of insecurity in Nigeria. Our discussion begins with a discourse on ungoverned spaces’ theoretical and conceptual discourse. Furthermore, the article proceeds to appraise the existing local government system and how the degree of governance in these local governments enables dark elements to exploit the deficit and local hardships to operate without fear of detection and capture.

Ungoverned Spaces: Conceptual and Theoretical Discourse

The state is defined by its ability to make domestic or foreign policy to shape the domestic realm, free of domestic social structural requirements or the interests of non-state actors (Hobson, 2000). States (however conceived) are defined based on their characteristic features. Thus, according to Ahmad et al. (2011), states have four primary features: sovereignty, government, territory, and population. Accordingly, Murphy (2002) opined that one of the most distinctive features of a modern state is its particular territory. Thus, its ability to exercise sovereignty both within the territory and externally too. Therefore, while exercising its internal sovereignty, a state must possess an absolute monopoly over all instruments of coercion including maintaining law and order and enforcing rules and regulations within its territorial integrity. Just as Marxsen (2015) opined, territorial integrity protects the sovereign state against all sorts of violations of its territory. Therefore, the ultimate function of every state is to maintain peace, order, and good governance for the welfare and well-being of its population within its territorial integrity.

However, states varied according to the form of their internal setup. The most prominent systems today are either federal or unitary. According to (Bulmer 2015), the federal system has spread worldwide and can be found on every inhabited continent. Also, it has increasingly been used as a means by which an existing state can decentralise power and, as such, has become a tool for holding large or diverse countries. Therefore, among the basic features of a federal system is the existence of different levels of government, with each level having relative autonomy within its spheres of authority. Thus, in federal

systems, there are groups of separate state governments and one central government to which each state will send a representative to a central legislature, the single policymaking body of the central government. While policy decisions made by state governments will be decided by their separate legislatures (see Inman et al. 1999). In the case of Nigeria, there are three levels of government, with each assigned specific responsibilities by the Constitution. Combining the collective efforts of these three levels of government is necessary for peace, progress, and development. On the other hand, the existing structure of intergovernmental relations in Nigeria, in *pari passu* the status and performance of local governments, given the kind of politicking, and asymmetric relationship between the state governments and their respective local governments, are enough justifications that all is not well with the local government system. Consequently, local governments in Nigeria seem to a considerable extent create the impression that there are ungoverned spaces within Nigeria's territorial integrity. In view of this, what then are ungoverned spaces?

The term ungoverned spaces now appear regularly in the discourse on governance, security, and institutional performance. It is often used interchangeably with 'failed state', 'limited statehood', 'under governed', and 'dysfunctional state' (see Clunan 2010, Risse et al. 2018). The term provides a novel way of examining the implications of dysfunctional institutions on governance. Thus, Taylor (2016) considered it as a source of serious instability, moreover, it is often equated with a security threat and all that it implies. This is because certain potential threats do certainly emerge on account of the degree of governance and the way a territory is governed (Lamb, 2008). And yet, Taylor (2016) and Rabasa et al (2007) opined that whether a territory becomes a threat depends on its attractiveness and viability or conduciveness. Therefore, what conditions or factors are responsible for the emergence of ungoverned space, and at the same time portends a security threat? As an example, the US Department of Defense holds that an ungoverned space is a place where the state or central government is unable or unwilling to extend control, effectively govern, or influence the local population, and where a provincial, local, tribal, or autonomous government does not fully or effectively govern due to inadequate governance capacity, insufficient political will, gaps in legitimacy, the presence of conflict, or restrictive norms of behaviour (cited by Taylor, 2016: 3). According to Clunan (2010), citing Palan (2003), Raab and Milward (2003), ungoverned spaces connote the ease with which non-state actors can avoid state surveillance and undermine state sovereignty. Therefore politically, ungoverned spaces are a novel and inherently dangerous threat to the security of states and the international state system (Clunan 2010). Hence, Taylor (2016) cautioned that the international state system should at all costs avoid ungoverned spaces because of their inherent powerful overtones of threat, instability, and insecurity. Thus, states should focus on exercising 'effective sovereignty' and 'good governance' in every social, political, and economic arena; since the inability to do, such will render them weak or unable to enforce their authority (see Clunan and Trinkunas, 2010:17 & 21). Similarly, Lamb (2008) emphasised effective political will by government officials, and adequate governance capacity at all levels of government (especially at the local level), in order to prevent any possible civil unrest, armed conflict, or active insurgency. Achieving this requires lots of capacity building, especially in developing countries and emerging democracies whose institutions are not only fragile but to a certain degree 'outlaw' and mostly neo-patrimonial.

From the preceding, it is succinctly demonstrated that ungoverned spaces emerged from the inability of states, to effectively perform some or all of the security, judicial, legal, regulatory, intelligence, economic, administrative, social, and political functions, and public services that an effective and legitimate government is generally expected to provide to the people residing in its territory (see Lamb 2008, and Rabasa et al., 2007). Lamb goes further to demonstrate that where these functions are not performed or not performed effectively, terrorists, insurgents, and criminals can operate without fear of detection or capture by the state and can exploit local hardships and conflicts to win resources, refuge, and recruits. Therefore, how effective are local governments in Nigeria, and how their vast territories are effectively governed? This question is addressed in the next section.

Local governments in Nigeria: A Stark reality

Local governments are multi-purpose governments serving and providing various purposes, fundamentally bringing government closer to the people and enhancing public participation in governance. Local governments in Nigeria have a long history and had evolved in the mould of Native Authorities (NAs), which administer areas possibly homogenous regarding ethnic and linguistic features of their population. The then NAs typically consist of a chief (Emir or Oba as the case may be) associated with a council. According to Yahaya (1980), the NAs were local government units, supported by a bureaucratic organisation called Native Administration and the primary function was solely the maintenance of law and order and the collection of taxes. Also, the NAs provide social services such as education, water supply, access roads, motor parks, and residential accommodation. Therefore, besides maintaining local administration, the NAs manage their treasuries, native courts, police and prisons, agriculture, animal husbandry and forestry, and provide some capital projects.

However, the dominance of traditional institutions in the administration of the NAs was subsequently challenged to give room for broader political participation. This agitation coincided with the colonial government's preparations for the transfer of power to Nigerians. Consequently, the Macpherson Constitution of 1951 and the independence constitution provided elected representatives in the regional legislative councils and the local governments (see Yahaya, 1980:34). Thus, Odoh (1991) maintained that the modern local government system appeared on the Nigerian scene with the advent of the Macpherson Constitution. Subsequent reforms saw the change of the term Native Authority to local government administration and the gradual weakening of the influence of traditional institutions in the administration of local governments. Also, there were significant changes in the structure and organization, functions, and scope of local governments primarily, through the 1976 local government reform, which was a prelude to the planned transition to civil rule in 1979. However, Olowu (1986) maintained that the 1976 reform recorded fair successes in the first few years before the emergence of a civilian administration in 1979. As such, the new military regime that toppled the civilian administration initiated another reform in 1984.

However, the Dasuki Committee maintained significant recommendations of the 1976 reform and recommended that the federal and state governments share the burden of funding local governments. It also introduced a Presidential system with the principles of separation of powers between the executive and the legislative arms of the Council. Therefore, the transition to civil rule in 1999 and the coming to force of the 1999 Constitution retained all the features of the reform. Hence local governments were placed

under the supervision and monitoring of the State Governments concerning their establishment, structure, functions, and finances. However, they shall be under democratically elected councils CFRN, 1999).

The return to civil rule in 1999 reignited lofty expectations for a functional and appropriate institution of government. The citizens anticipated a federation that would ensure equal access to public services irrespective of their residence, accommodation of diversity, individual and collective rights, and economic prosperity for all the federating units (see Aghalino 2009; Mohammed, 2012). Unluckily, the return to civil rule further witnessed the severe weakening of various institutions of governance, particularly the local governments. Accordingly, local governments become the subject of national debate among scholars, practitioners, and policymakers. Hence, the existing studies such as World Bank (2002), Akindele et al., (2002), Daniel (2012), Majekodunmi (2012), Agba et al. (2013), Wilson (2013), Abdulhamid and Chima (2015), Oladele (2020) have documented dwindling performance of local governments in Nigeria as democratic institutions and grassroots institutions for service delivery.

Section 7 of the 1999 Constitution christened to mother local government system, stipulates that the state governments shall ensure the existence of local governments through a valid law passed by the Houses of Assembly of State. Thus, the state governments are responsible for a system of local government that is democratically elected and sets its structure, composition, functions, and finance. Hence, section 162 (6) stipulates that each state shall maintain a special account to be called the State Joint Local Government Account (SJLGA) into which shall be paid all allocations to the local governments of the state from the Federation Account and the government of the state. This, however, resulted in many challenges and problems. It is alleged, instead of the state governments ensuring a system of monitoring and supervising, partnering with local governments, especially in the provision of public goods, they are failing to meet their financial obligations to local governments and refuse to distribute the statutory allocations due to local governments as envisaged by law (see Koko, et al., 2021). Thus, in 2005 the National Assembly passed a law 'The monitoring of Revenue Allocation to Local Governments Act intending to ensure prompt payment and distribution of local governments' statutory funds. But the state governments challenged the Act before the Supreme Court, and the Court ruled in favour of the state governments on the premise that going by the relevant provisions of the 1999 Constitution the National Assembly has no legislative competence to legislate on the nicely or the nitty-gritty of the allocation to local governments from the state joint local government account (AG, Abia V AGF and 33 Ors, 2006). However, the judge acknowledged the leakages here and there that are caused by human beings that either operate the system or supervise the operation of the system. The subsequent discourse examined critical challenges bedevilling the local government system in Nigeria from data obtained through official documents and interviews with officials of state governments and local governments in North-West Nigeria.

The poverty of leadership and personnel: Local governments in Nigeria have not attracted a pool of competent political leadership and qualified personnel to discharge the onerous responsibilities of delivering services to the people at the grassroots. This is because local government administration generally has not been considered a serious government enterprise in Nigeria, and the excessive political interference and politicisation of sensitive positions had significantly undermined the capacity of the political leadership and

personnel. Going by the antecedents of the state governments in the exercise of supervisory control over local governments revealed the extent to which the state governments impaired the capacity of local governments in Nigeria. Accordingly, Vambe (2018) argued that local governments would continue to suffer at the hands of their respective state governments through their supervisory powers. The Ministry for Local Governments is one of the major agencies state governments use to supervise and monitor local governments. The Ministry coordinates, supervises, and oversees local governments' functions, operations, and performances. Thus, it considers and approves local governments' annual budget estimates before being forwarded to the House of Assembly for passage. Also, the Local Government Service Commission is responsible for recruiting, promoting, disciplining, transferring, and posting staff of the unified local government service. However, the Ministry in some states performs this function. Not all states have the commission. Other supervisory controls are often ad hoc bodies formed for a particular purpose. Examples include the local government audit, board of inquiry, primary pension board, local government staff pension board etc.

The implications of this political interference in the local government system are excessive control, dictating and manipulating local governments, thereby politicising sensitive positions at the local governments. Many state governments are deliberately refusing to conduct elections in the local governments instead, of appointing a caretaker committee to oversee the affairs of local governments. In addition to these, lack of financial resources has been the vanguard local governments are not attracting the right calibre of people, a capable, productive, and vibrant workforce that can propel and accelerate the system. It is alleged, many state governments carefully appoint people with no requisite experience to oversee the affairs of local governments as a reward for political patronage. Furthermore, the issue of segregation between staff employed by the state governments and those for local governments, such that the most senior post in the local government is regarded as inferior in terms of responsibility and status and remuneration to his counterpart at the state level. Consequently, qualified, and competent staff have not been attracted to local government service.

Fiscal dependency: Local governments in Nigeria have two dominant sources of revenue to sustain them. These are internal sources in local taxes, fees, rates, and fines, and the external source is mainly from the Federation Account and 10% of IGR from their respective state governments. Therefore, for local governments to function efficiently and effectively, they must have viable sources of revenue. However, the state governments have been alleged to fail in meeting their financial obligation to local governments. In most cases, they withhold and temper the statutory allocation standing to the credit of their local governments. Regarding internal revenue generation, the state and local governments have not demonstrated a real appetite to exhaust all their revenue sources optimally. Thus, the state governments' inadequate revenue generation, personnel capacity, and overbearing dominance are interlinked: the state governments are responsible for local governments in all ramifications. As such, their statutory revenues are transmitted from the Federation Account to their respective states. However, the state governments often quarantine the funds and only release them piecemeal to local governments at the sole discretion of the state governments. Also, the state governments determine the rate of taxes to be collected by the local governments and are influential in appointments, discipline, and placement of personnel.

Until 2002, local governments received their statutory allocation directly from the Federation Account Allocation Committee through the Office of the Accountant General of the Federation (OAGF). But the Supreme Court Judgement in AG Ogun Vs AGF, 2002 affirmed the provisions of section 162 (6) of the 1999 Constitution, which provides that each state shall maintain a special account to be called ‘State Joint Local Government Account’ (SJLGA) into which shall be paid all allocations to the local governments of the state from the Federation Account and the government of the state. Whereas some states did affirm the process of distributing statutory allocations due to their local governments and established a committee referred to as the Local Government Account Distribution Committee (LGJAAC) in conformity with the Allocation of Revenue (Federation Account etc.) Act, several other states have not complied and often distribute the statutory allocation to their local governments in an ad hoc arrangement.

Although there have been controversies with regards to the role of the state governments in managing the SJLGA. While it was argued that the state governments are mere trustees of the SJLGA, others believed the state governments are just channels of passing statutory allocations for onward distribution to their respective local governments. Expectedly, the SJLGA is made for convenience to transmit local governments’ funds. As such, the distribution of the funds should be according to valid laws passed by the National Assembly and the Houses of Assembly of State. On the contrary, however, it was argued that the essence is to streamline the economies within states. Thus, revenues standing to the credit of local governments in a state are to be distributed, not allocated such that no local government is left behind in terms of meeting its obligations. These notwithstanding, the state governments have often been accused of mismanaging the funds and failing to meet their financial obligations to the local governments. For instance, Salami (2011), based on data examined from the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) statistical bulletins and annual reports revealed that from 2003-2008, all the local governments in Nigeria got 0% allocations from the state governments’ IGR. However, from 2014, 2015, 2016, and 2017 annual reports of the CBN, it was revealed that local governments received such allocations. Although, whether what was allocated is up to the 10% required by law cannot be ascertained. Thus, both the state governments and local governments have been fiscally irresponsible in revenue mobilisation and utilisation. Therefore, the next issue to examine is how these challenges ensue ungoverned spaces.

Ungoverned spaces and the risen Insecurity in Nigeria!

In view of the preceding challenges discussed, local governments have failed to provide essential services, especially in many rural areas which are vulnerable and susceptible to what Raab and Milward (2003, 2006) referred to as dark networks. By dark networks they opined is a metaphor that refers empirically to illegal covert networks that pursue criminal ends. Accordingly, it was opined that failed states might not necessarily be a condition for dark networks to thrive but can facilitate them and serve as their sanctuaries (see Milward and Raab 2006). Thus, the failure of the local government system, and indeed its failure to provide basic services in such a way that people at the rural level feel governed had created ungoverned spaces that provided avenues for dark networks (bandits, kidnappers, terrorists and ethnic militia or separatists) unfettered access to continue to unleash mayhem in virtually all parts of the federation. Although several studies have examined the failure of

local governments in service delivery, there has been an insignificant attempt to link these failures with the rising insecurity in the country.

Local governments are vitally important in the provision of essential services to the local populace and their participation, especially on matters that directly affect their lives and the general well-being of the entire society. Statutorily, local governments in Nigeria performed basic functions ranging from preventive health services (sanitary inspection, sewage disposal and refuse collection, administration of vaccines, regulation and licensing of laundries, food vendors, abattoirs and environmental pollution); education services (nursery, primary and adult education, public libraries, provision of scholarship and bursaries); development of agriculture and natural resources (excluding exploration of mineral resources); public utilities and social welfare (water supply, provision of roads, regulation and control of buildings, markets and motor parks, gardens and parks, cemeteries and burial grounds, orphanage, and community and recreation centres etc.). These assigned responsibilities obviously indicate local governments closeness with the people. However, a lack of correspondence between available revenue and expenditure responsibilities has challenged providing these services. Thus, the wide range of responsibilities demanded by citizens from the local governments, the ever-growing demand for improved standards of their delivery, and the sequential failure of local governments to respond efficiently and effectively had presumptively brought up ungoverned spaces. It is assumed, therefore, the rising insecurity challenges in Nigeria, where criminal elements have been perpetrating flagitious attacks, especially on soft targets indicate the dark networks come forth from the ungoverned spaces springing up from the failure of the local government system in Nigeria.

A truism of the ungoverned spaces thesis is that states must exercise absolute sovereignty over their national territories. Ungoverned spaces pose potential security threats to the nation-state and globally (see Taylor, 2016). Importantly for the advocates of the approach, ungoverned spaces bring about powerful overtones of threat, instability, and insecurity, and the sense that an ungoverned space is something the affected territory and international state system should avoid at virtually any cost (Taylor, 2016). Furthermore, Reno (2010) opined that the collapse of institutions that can control and discipline armed individuals leaves all groups vulnerable to attacks from competitors. In other words, the absence of constraining state institutions generates incentives for violent predation among armed groups at the expense of broader community interests. Also, Menkhaus and Shapiro (2010) maintained areas without functioning state institutions do not provide safety for their residents. Quite generally, ungoverned spaces ensue when states or institutions of states failed to effectively function within any of their territorial areas. Impliedly, local governments in Nigeria have been unable and are failing to provide essential services and public goods effectively.

Local governments have failed in all ramifications to provide efficient and effective services and public goods as envisaged in their statutory responsibilities. There are enough reasons to make people lose hope in the local government system in Nigeria, going by their level of responsiveness to the people's demands. Service delivery and provision of public goods remain a daunting challenge to local governments in Nigeria. Virtually, the rural populace lacks essential social services and amenities such as health care, basic education (both western and religious), sanitation, water (for both consumption and other domestic uses), access roads, communication, electricity etc. Going by the demographic data

released by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) and National Population Commission (NPC), rural areas are below the national average in virtually all indices measured. Especially those on the functional responsibilities of local governments. Thus, in basic education, primary health care, and access to basic services such as water, electricity, rural roads etc., existing data revealed a grim situation and a critical challenge to governance in Nigeria. This is even more worrisome given the astronomical rise in the country's population, particularly young children, and youth. According to the NPC, only 20% of households have water on their premises, and almost 24% of households travel 30 minutes or longer to obtain their drinking water, with barely 11% using appropriate treatment methods to ensure the safety of their drinking water. Regarding sanitation, the National Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS) revealed that less than 10% of households in rural areas have access to improved toilet facilities (NDHS, 2013).

The primary healthcare being the bedrock of Nigeria's health system falls within the concurrent legislative list. As such, every level of government is responsible for its provision. However, the local governments practically partner with the other levels of government in providing the required services, especially in terms of staffing and funding. Accordingly, Ozochukwu (2017) opined that the local governments are the main source of financing primary healthcare service delivery, especially regarding staff salaries, facility construction and maintenance, and supply of drugs and equipment and other medical commodities. The federal government established the National Primary Health Care Development Agency (NPHCDA), to provide technical support and ensure standards in delivering primary health care and the construction of primary health care centres through budgetary allocations by the federal government. These notwithstanding, access to primary health care services remains a critical challenge, especially for rural people. A very fundamental challenge for instance is that of inadequate, inexperienced, and unqualified personnel and essential facilities in all the country's primary health centres. Thus, the 2016 National Health Facility Survey (NHFS) report revealed that the clinical competence of health workers is below par as their diagnostic accuracy, adherence to guidelines and ability to propose correct steps and actions in the management of maternal and newborn complications. The report scored the National quality of care services at 34.3%.

Furthermore, the provision of public primary education in Nigeria has mainly degenerated due to the inability of local governments to provide the necessary political support. Through the Local Government Education Authority (LGEA), each local government is responsible for managing primary schools. However, the delivery of primary education is replete with several challenges ranging from poor infrastructure, poor quality of teachers, and dwindling students performance across all levels of public education in Nigeria due to insufficient background. Statistics on out-of-school children, literacy rate, especially on student's ability to read and write, the proliferation of unlicensed and unregistered private schools, quality of teachers, etc., significantly indicate the prevalence of social vices in the country. For instance, according to the National Commission for Colleges of Education in 2013, it will take Nigeria 20 years to produce the required number of teachers for basic education (NCCE, 2013). This is despite quite a few federal government agencies and other development partners' contributions towards education in the country.

The foregoing indicates that citizens do not significantly feel service delivery by local governments in all its ramifications. Overall human capital development is virtually stagnant. Healthcare centres and primary schools are ill-equipped, and staff quality,

quantity, and capacity are at their lowest ebb and standard. Provision of other basic amenities like water, road networks, rural electrification, basic sanitation etc., has proven difficult to provide by the local governments. Indeed, the existing challenges of governance, the poverty of leadership, waxing insecurity, abject poverty, and myriad social problems in the country are reasonable pointers to the failure of local governments. The implications of the apparent local government failure are profound, chief of which is the rising insecurity, especially in the country's rural areas. Beyond the failures of local governments, the porous nature of national borders, mainly the land borders, and the civil unrest in Libya had contributed significantly to providing pathways for the illicit flow of small and light weapons into the country.

Consequently, in spite of the unceasing military operations in virtually every part of the federation, the security situation seems unabated. This, therefore, necessitates a comprehensive governance reform, cheap amongst which is the local government system. Given the renewed interest in decentralisation, Nigeria is not alone in the quest for reforming local governments. It is the rage worldwide in governance matters (Bardhan, 2002). Thus, in 2014, the umbrella body of the African continent, the African Union, in its bid to promote and reposition local governments as vehicles for improving the livelihoods of all peoples to ensure access to basic services for all peoples on the continent, promulgated and adopted an African Charter on the Values and Principles of Decentralisation, Local Governance, and Local Development. Also, the 10th of August of each year was chosen to commemorate 'Africa Day on Decentralisation and Local Development.

Reforming Nigerian Local Governments: The Immediate Concerns

Given the discourses raised, the urgent need to reform local governments is of immediate concern if the security challenge in the country is to be managed. Although, since the return to civil rule in 1999, quite significant reforms were embarked towards addressing the challenges bedevilling the public service and governance in general. Prominent among these reforms were: Federal civil service reforms, Review of the Financial Control and Management Act; privatisation and commercialisation of public entities; The National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) and governance and anti-corruption reforms. All these reforms significantly improved the state of Nigeria, particularly at the federal level. However, little or virtually nothing trickles down to the states and local governments. Thus, the most prominent local government reform in Nigeria was by the military in 1976 as part of the regime's preparation for the civilian transition in 1979. Consequently, the provisions of the 1999 constitution, especially those pertaining to local governments, were in no way distinct from the provisions of the 1979 constitution. By implications, it is reasoned that the provisions of the 1999 constitution are partly responsible for Nigeria's dysfunctional local government system. This is evident by the incessant agitation and clamour for granting local governments autonomy.

Specifically, section 7 (1) of the 1999 constitution stipulates that state governments shall ensure the existence of local governments under a law which provides for the establishment, structure, composition, finance and functions. Furthermore, section 162 (5-6) mandates that the states should be the recipient of statutory allocations from the Federation Account for the benefit of their local governments. As such, states were required to establish and maintain a special account for the receipt of such allocations (CFRN,

1999). However, substantial discourse prevails regarding the flow of such statutory revenues to local governments. In effect, state governments were accused of withholding and spending such revenues with impunity (see Adeyemo, 2005; Asaju, 2010; Koko, et al., 2021). Hence, the federal government in 2003 set up a 10-man commission under the chairmanship of his Royal Highness Etsu Nupe, Alhaji Umaru Sanda Ndayako, with the sole mandate examining the issues of inefficiency and high cost of governance with a view to reducing costs and wastages at the three tiers of government, review the performance of local governments and consider the desirability or otherwise of retaining them, adoption of a modified version of the pre-1976 local government. Given the failure to record significant success in that regard, the National Assembly, during the last 4 constitutional amendments (2007, 2011, 2015 and 2022) attempted to grant local governments autonomy by altering sections 7 and 162 of the 1999 constitution. Also, in 2005, the legislature passed a law titled 'Monitoring of Revenue Allocation to Local Governments Act, 2005' with the intent of checkmating the irregularities and mismanagement of the joint account by the state governments.

Undoubtedly, in the past, these circumstances significantly influenced the 1976 reform as indicated by the then Chief of Army Staff (Brigadier Shehu Musa Yar'Adua), highlighting the government's intentions and justifications for the reform. The defects of previous local government systems are too well known to deserve further elaboration here. Over the years, local governments have suffered from whittling down their powers. The state governments have continued encroaching upon what would normally have been the exclusive preserves of local government. The lack of adequate funds and appropriate institutions continued to make local government ineffective and ineffectual... (see Guidelines for Local Government Reforms, 1976).

The imminent security threat in Nigeria can never be viewed beyond proportion. Accordingly, Barnett and Rufa'I (2023) reported an incidence when members of al-Qaeda's Sahelian affiliate, Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM) were sighted moving towards Nigeria to link up with small militant group known as Ansaru that was to pledge to al-Qaeda in the Islamic Magreb, the paramount affiliate within al-Qaeda's West African organisational hierarchy. Thus, they opined that the complex and evolving nature of the Nigeria's jihadists continue to have a potential influence on the overall trajectory of jihadism in West Africa (Barnett and Rufa'I, 2023). Moreover, it's been more than a decade now, the Nigerian government has been battling with the Boko Haram insurgents since their emergence in 2009. Besides, the Boko Haram elements, other numerous forms of security threats emanating from the bandits, IPOB, Niger-Delta militants and several other clandestine criminal elements had for many years continue to spew violence in almost every part of the country (North, South, East and West). Similarly, in the Southern parts of the country, the spate of attacks by the IPOB have exacerbated the security situation in the country. At the moment, in the entire South East region (comprising 5 states), the secessionist declared Mondays a 'sit at home' order thereby depriving residents from undertaking any lawful activity, thereby grounding socio-economic activities (Njoku, 2022). In the South West geopolitical zone, some states had to go extra mile to form a security outfit referred to as 'Amotekun' to confront the prevalence of killer herdsmen, bandits, kidnappers, armed robbers etc. The move which raised serious controversies, yet did not deter the states from instituting the security network (Vincent & Dayil, 2020). Furthermore, the incidences farmers/herders clashes had continued unabated especially, in

the North Central geopolitical zone. In view of these, there is overwhelming evidence that the local government system in Nigeria is broken and dysfunctional. Thus, the most obvious drive for the prevailing security threats in the country are linked to the complexity and variability of ungoverned spaces, which the local governments failed to cover. Hence, the inevitability to reform the local government structures and processes in order to perform governance-like functions.

Conclusion

From the foregoing, local governments are vitally important in providing essential services to the local populace and their participation, especially on matters that directly affect their lives and the general well-being of the entire society. However, going by the challenges bedevilling local governments, it is clear that local governments have failed and are continuously failing. Thus, the paper contrasts this failure by drawing insights from the approach of the ungoverned spaces and establishes that the ongoing security challenges in all parts of the country are, to a degree, ascribable to the ungoverned spaces created because of governance deficits at the local levels. This, therefore, necessitates far-reaching local government reforms in the country that will not only strengthen the local government system but will significantly lessen the security challenges the country is facing. First, Nigeria must ensure the domestication and implementation of the African Charter on the values and principles of decentralization, local government, and local development, 2014, in which the country is a signatory. Thus, necessary constitutional amendments should be made, especially those that will empower the Houses of Assembly of State and the state judiciaries to function without undue interference by the state executives. Second, political parties and voters should strive to ensure credible and competent people are fielded for elective positions, especially as state legislatures, councillors, and council chairpersons. There is also the need to define the proper role of traditional institutions in the administration of local governments beyond just advisory roles while earning huge sums of resources from the councils. Third, there is the need to streamline the local governments' personnel with the states' public servants in terms of parity of condition of services in all ramifications. Fourth, state and local governments should strive towards being fiscally responsible and ensure proper identification and collection of all internal revenue sources to improve their financial viability. Fifth, the tenure of elected local government councils should be affirmed, and the dissolution of the councils should be in strict accordance with the law. Also, such dissolution shall be followed by fresh elections without unnecessary delay.

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