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**Democratic Local Government System in Nigeria: Bridging the Gap between
Predicaments and Dividends Delivery**

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Authors' Contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration among all authors.
All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

Research Article

ABSTRACT

The core motive for the creation of democratic local governments around the globe is to deliver services to local communities. Using observation and qualitative methods of data gathering, the study takes a cursory look at the factors responsible for the failure of local governments in Nigeria not to deliver quality services to local communities. The study equally x-rayed the adoption of the gerontocratic council as a development agency by democratic local government to facilitate the delivery of local services. The paper established that insufficient funds, insufficient and unqualified personnel, weak autonomy, and size of local government areas, among others, hampered the ability of local governments to deliver quality services in Nigeria. The paper recommended the adoption of a gerontocratic council by democratic local governments to aid in recognizing communities' needs and effective ways of addressing them. The study equally believes that the adoption of gerontocratic councils by democratic local governments in Nigeria would go a long way in helping them overcome their myriad of problems via robust planning, and economical, effective, and efficient management of their scarce human and financial resources.

Keywords: Bridging the gap, democratic local government, dividends delivery, predicaments, strategy,

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INTRODUCTION

A country is made up of states or regions and the states or regions also consist of many localities. Thus, it is difficult for a national government to administratively control every detail of these various groupings that constitute a country. Hence, local governments must be created as devices by which knowledge concerning the local people's socio-economic needs and priorities can be confidently obtained and legislated upon. Since it is the closest level of government to the people of a country, local government renders certain core services to the local people, which include political leadership training and act as a platform through which the local people organize and direct their affairs, and proffer solutions to problems concern their commonwealth. This reality caused many democratic countries to create local governments with democratic status (democratic local government) by their constitutions.

Effective democratic dividends delivery is fundamental to a country practising democracy (democratic state). Therefore, democratic states establish democratic local governments to take governance closer to the localities to deliver dividends of democracy to the rural/local people of the state(s). Consequently, any country constitution that establishes democratic local government ensures a democratically constituted local government council with structure, composition, finance and functions to achieve effective dividends delivery (rural development). So, it suffices to say that democratic local government has the responsibility to engineer rural development as dividends to the areas under its administrative jurisdiction. However, this responsibility has not been sufficiently performed by many democratic local governments due to some challenges facing them. Consequently, the thrust of the study

is to x-ray the causes of the incapability of democratic local government dividends delivery and supplementary vitality of the Gerontocratic Council as an area development agency to be adopted by democratic local government to heighten dividends delivery to local people in the developing country, Nigeria.

Globally, local government is administratively placed at the least of the hierarchy in the act of governing a country. Thus, democratic local government is created to ensure government is closer to the local people. In this regard, (democratic) local government provides a formally organized framework for local communities to be able to conduct their community affairs effectively and regulate their member's actions for the general public good (Odenigwe, 1977). However, despite the benefits accounted for the democratic local government creation, it faces challenges which obstacles to its effective performance in dividends delivery to the people. These obstacles include the poor financial base, insufficient and unqualified personnel, the problem of the size of the local government, lack of probity and accountability, and the weak autonomous status of the local government (Mukoro, 2019; Onuegbu, 2010; Ojong; 2002; Nwosu & Ede, 2020). These challenges have caused foot-dragging of many democratic local governments to deliver dividends of democracy to their constituents in their various constituencies in the developing country, Nigeria.

So, this paper aims to X-ray the supplementary vitality of the Gerontocratic Council as an area development agency to be adopted by democratic local government to facilitate dividends delivery to the local people in the developing country, Nigeria.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

Democratic Local Government

The concept of democratic local government is a local government council constituted of elected representatives of the local people for the provision of the services and functions which both the federal and state governments cannot perform and functions easily and effectively based on their distance from the local people. It is important to emphasize the differentiation between democratic local government and un-democratic local government. Democratic local government council is constituted of the elected representatives of the local people to provide efficient services due to their knowledge of the rural locality. In other words, a democratic local government is under the administrative control of an elected chairman and vice chairman, and councillors by the local people who manage their resources for democratic dividend delivery. The un-democratic local government functionaries are appointed by higher level of government such as state government to control the rural localities. For example, local governments under military regimes are undemocratic. This is why Egonmwan and Ibodje (1999) asserted after examination of the functions and structure of local in Nigeria, they noted that before the 1976 local government reform that introduced the democratic doctrine of elective principle into local government administration, it was a mere extension of the civil service because the local government functionaries became state government employees who were acting as more or fewer representatives of the state government.

Gerontocratic Council

Gerontology is the study of old age and the process of growing old (Oxford

Advanced Learner's Dictionary, 2020). Thus, gerontocracy is a government of the old aged people. In this regard, gerontocracy is a gerontocratic council of community elders-based form of government that makes rules and regulations to control, protect, and guide their communities. Therefore, the gerontocratic council is a gerontocracy, which is the government of community elders who democratically make decisions on managing the community resources and protecting and improving the community's living conditions. The community is the basic, old and most popular instrument for social change/transformation around the globe (Egeonu, 2007). The entry qualification(s) into Gerontocratic Council is mostly by old-aged cum chieftaincy.

Development Agency

Development is the presence of modern socio-economic infrastructural facilities such as electricity, roads, potable water, schools, hospitals, and industries (Okeke cited in Abani et al, 2013). An agency is an institution or organization that renders/provides specified service(s), especially on behalf of other organization(s). It is also seen as a government department in charge of rendering a particular service (Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, 2020). Thus, the gerontocratic council is regarded as a development agency with delegated power to link their community to the democratic local government to make it possible to have a progressively wider range of effective and efficient achievement of rural development (democratic dividend) by identification of the community problems and express suggestions or any other matters Gerontocratic council deems to be of importance to the community development.

Dividends delivery

Dividends refer to profit earned from investment. Dividend delivery refers to socio-economic and political development done by an elected body of people who constitute and manage the government of a country/state/locality. Therefore, dividend delivery simply means development done in a country by elected government which can be referred to as democratic dividends. Democratic dividends delivered at the local level by local government can also be regarded as rural development.

Development

Development is the advancement of something. Development as concerns people is an improvement in the lives of people (Shehu, 2008). It can be seen also as noted by United Nations in 1962 declaration of a decade of development as a "growth plus change", which means quantitative and qualitative inputs that connote changes in institutional, social and administrative structures, social behaviour and attitudes cum sometimes customs and beliefs of the people (Ubani, Alum, Eke, Isigwe & Obasi, 2013). Development is the performance capability expansion and advancement of a person to have control of self, be less dependent, and be more proficient in oneself (Ogbe & Ejovi, 2023).

Importantly, this study sees development as the presence of modern socio-economic infrastructural facilities such as electricity, roads, potable water, schools, hospitals and industries (Okeke cited in Abani et al, 2013). Development is a provision of socio-economic amenities capable of life sustenance and self-esteem. Thus, development is life sustenance by the provision of basic needs of life and self-esteem that leads to the ability to exploit the natural endowments and control the

domestic affairs against economic and political dominance and de-prudent.

From the above analysis, development has to do with minimal conditions if not possible to eradicate poverty, inequality, and unemployment in society.

EMPIRICAL REVIEW

Generally, the local government either democratic or not is a system of government, responsible to the local people for their environmental development. It is the composition in terms of functionaries and operations that differentiate democratic local government from un-democratic local government. Thus, local government is a government of a locality for the managing of the locality's resources for its development. Local government is the third tier of government positioned at the grassroots, very much in contact with the local communities due to its position playing a strong role in the development of the communities in its dominion (Ottong, 2002; Mukoro, 2019). Furthermore, local government is a political unit lawfully empowered to control a particular locality. This expression follows some scholars' assertions as documented by Ugwu and Ekekwe (2020; p.27) that:

Local governments are units of local administration under local communities which are structured to maintain law and order, made available some limited range of social amenities and promote cooperation towards the improvement of their conditions of living, as well as provide the communities with formal an organizational framework which enables them to conduct their affairs effective for the general good.

Local government is also seen as the nearest government to the local people with the responsibility of articulating the needs of the people and formulating plans and strategies to achieve them. By extension, as noted by Egeonu (2007) local government serves as a training place for the emergence of the future of national political leaders and social engineers. Thus, it is also an important instrument to central/federal and state governments based on the provision of future political leaders. (Alabi, 2015). Similarly, Ogbe (2016) sees local government as the closest government meant to provide services to the local citizenry.

Moreover, local government is also seen as a democratic body at the grassroots level to promote democracy and cater to the welfare of the people of a locality. It is a government lawfully created to achieve socio-economic, cultural and political development through locally elected or selected governing bodies. Thus, Appadorai (1974) views local government as a popularly elected body with the responsibility of administering and executing duties concerning the local people. It is government at the local level performing through a representative council established (elected body) to exercise specific power within a limited area (Duru, 1997). To be called a democratic local government, it must be legally designed to create a democratic atmosphere that permits under its jurisdiction to elect their local functionaries, to be fully involved in decisions affecting them, initiate and execute consider desirable projects and developmental programmes to enhance the living standard of the people. It is a means of dividing a country into localities for the purpose of govern by elected representatives (Egeonu, 2007). In the same vein, Ezeajughu (2021) sees local government as an authority established by the elected

representatives of a locality, which adequately performs its services due to the sufficient autonomy enjoyed by either federal or state control. It is the government that functions in a specified geographical area in a state, through representatives locally elected or selected enjoys a level of autonomy, and is empowered to tax.

Given the above, democratic local government is meant for local governance to ensure its dividends/services delivery at the local level of a country. Therefore, the functions or justification of local government can be examined through the three theories of local government namely democratic-participatory, efficiency-service and developmental theories (Mukoro, 2002; Ola & Tonwe, 2003; Okoli, 2005; Gboyega, 1987, Umukoro & Okon, 2003). Democratic-participatory theory expresses the view that local government is functionally promoting democracy and adequately provides opportunities for citizens' political participation. Hence, local government fosters political education and training platforms for future political leaders. Efficiency-service theory points out that local government is lawfully created to provide services to local communities and it must be judged based on such accomplishment, while developmental theory postulates that local government is created to act as a means of decongesting both federal and state governments to give relieves to their leaders not to involve in local issues and to increase the local people's understanding, and economic development.

In conclusion, democratic local government in a democratic state is created for effective and efficient dividends/services delivery to the local people to improve political and socio-economic development at the local level. However, the dividends delivery expectation by the local people from the democratic local government is

incapacitated by a poor financial base, insufficient and unqualified personnel, the problem of size of local government, lack of probity and accountability, and weak autonomous status of local government the developing country, Nigeria (Alabi & Tunde, 2015; Mukoro, 2019; Nnaemeka, 2010; Nweke, 2010; Nwosu & Ede, 2020; Ojong; 2002; Onuegbu, 2010; Esidene, 2010; Nweke, 2010; Egeonu, 2007; Shehu, 2008; Mukoro, 2000; Mukoro, 2019; Egeonu, 2007; Alabi & Tunde, 2015; Ugoo & Nwanne, 2007; Okoli, 2005).

DISCOURSE

Democratic Local Government Finance Sources

Democratic local government as an organizational institution meant for localities' development through dividends delivery by the elected local functionaries needs finance to execute desirable projects and programmes. Various sources are available to source for funds by the concerned to finance governmental activities as identified by many Scholars, including Mukoro (2019) Agbode (2016); Eze (2010); Egeonu (2007); Ezeani (2004); Okoli, (2005) Denga (2003); Mukoro (2000) as follow: grants, statutory allocations, taxes and rate, licenses and fees, generated income from investments, loans, customary courts fines, donations, personal income, income tax and special levies.

Grant is an amount of money that is given by either government or non-governmental organization(s) or individuals to be used for a specific purpose. Okoli, (2005) identifies four types of grants: Block grant is given to augment local government internal revenue. It is money given for general service delivery and not for specific service delivery; A specific grant is a fixed amount of money given to a local government for a specific purpose; An

Equalization grant is given to the poor and backward local government to empower them to catch up developmentally; the Matching grant is a financial aid made by either state/central government to enable local government to embark on development project considered as priorities of government. It is a sum of money given to local government spending on a particular service.

Democratic Local Government Predicament for Poor Dividend Delivery

Mukoro (2000; 2019), Egeonu (2007), Alabi and Tunde (2015), Ugoo and Nwanne (2007), Okoli (2005) and Shehu (2008) identified various challenges affecting local governments from delivering democratic dividends to the local people as follow;

- a. **Insufficient fund** ---Most local government faced with the challenges of shortage of finance to embark on meaningful development delivery to the people of their jurisdiction. In some federal systems like Nigeria, the local governments and even the state governments rely heavily on the federal allocations to them, which sometimes diminish due to dwindling revenue generation from the sources of funds. Another dimension to the challenge of having insufficient funds is issues of corruption, diversion and mismanagement of local government resources which resulted lack of development. Sometimes, waste of funds by local government functionaries by embarking on white

elephant projects which are mostly motivated by undue political consideration (Mukoro, 2019)

- b. **The problem of the size of a local government** ---Some local government areas are very small in size to be viable in term of having sufficient both human and material resources for Development delivery, while some are too distanced from the local people meant to serve due to largeness, consequently, there exist inability to deliver development by the government.
- c. **Shortage of qualified staff:** Effect of insufficient funds by local government makes it difficult for them to employ sufficient professional staffs, which negatively affects the government's performance. This level of government is usually unable to attract efficient/competent staff and professionals to manage its affairs due to the smallness and inability to finance such arising from the problem of meagre resources.
- d. **Insufficient political education:** Local governments are seen as training schools for future leaders to be engaged politically in terms of enlightenment and politicking. However, most of the large local governments are administratively distanced from the people for effective engagement in their local policies due to the largeness of the locality (the author's

assertion). Therefore, there is a need to engage communities' gerontocratic councils as local government agencies to support and assist in the dissemination of sufficient political education that is from local government in their various communities.

- e. **Lack of probity and accountability** among the functionaries of the local government system.
- f. **Problem of autonomy:** This is a serious problem that confronts local governments in many countries. Consequently, the lack of autonomy of local government hinders the exercise of their constitutional powers as the other higher level(s) of government overstepped their constitutional limits into local government jurisdiction. The situation has made some federal arrangements more of a unitary government because the structure and composition among others are determined by the federal/central government.

Adoption of Gerontocratic Council as Development Agency by Democratic Local Government

Gerontocratic council adoption as an area development agency by democratic local government will make the government recognizes communities' needs and to assume increasing responsibilities for solving their problems. A gerontocratic council is an elderly community-based form of government managing a community

affair. The creation of local government is impossible without the existence of communities because the basic purpose of the creation of Nigerian local government (as an example) is for rural development delivery (Egeonu, 2007). He further asserted that there can be no communities without local government as there can be no Nigeria without states. So, communities' can play an important role in their gerontocratic council in democratic local government administration as an adopted area development agency. Communities are capable of harnessing efforts to complement the developmental efforts of both federal and state governments in developing states. Thus, the gerontocratic council as a development agency for democratic local government will exploit the opportunity to perform optimally the following functions to strengthen the government for effective dividends delivery:

- a. To discuss and agree on general proposals as a community to the local government.
- b. To harmonise the socio-economic activities of the communities through discussion of problems affecting them generally and give advice and guidance to the government through their councillor representing their ward/constituency who will present their pressing issues at the local government council/parliament for deliberations and resolutions to

attract effective and people-oriented development.

- c. To link the community to the democratic local government by making it possible to have a progressive wider range of achieving rural development by expressing suggestions or any other matters it deems to be of importance to the community.
- d. To act as the process of self-sustenance by identifying the needed developmental skills and implementation capacity at the local government level to ensure the effective use of existing resources to sustain the development of the subsistence sector.
- e. To act as an agent to the government whereby concerted efforts will be made to facilitate a significant increase in community resources for productivity to enhance community incomes and increase employment opportunities in the local community.

In view of the above, the gerontocratic council as a development agency to the third-tier government will be strengthened for the effective performance of its functions.

Ways Gerontocratic Council can Better Democratic Dividends Delivery at Local Governments

Gerontocratic councils regarded as democratic local government development agencies are capable of serving as the linking channel of harmonizing the socio-economic activities of the communities discussing problems affecting them generally and giving advice and guidance to the government for effective and people-oriented development by resolving the below challenges facing democratic local government in the following way:

- a. **Insufficient funds:** Most local governments are facing this problem but with the adoption of a gerontocratic council, it can be resolved to be inconsequential. The gerontocratic council can embark on community tax assessment within the community in consultation with the local government councils to identify the locations of taxable elements in the community that will help to increase the local government revenue base.
- b. **The problem of the territorial size of local government can also be resolved by the community-based gerontocratic council.** There are local government areas that are too large to provide the basic needs of its population due to a shortage of economic resources. This problem can be resolved by engaging the gerontocratic council. Gerontocratic council can help the local government council to identify the unidentified community economic resources and develop the relevant skills to embark on economic productivity to ensure adequate and effective dividends delivery by the local government council at the community levels. For those local government areas that are small in size, the gerontocratic council can identify and locate viable sources of revenue for the community to be harnessed by the local government to increase the revenue base for development.
- c. **Shortage of qualified staff:** By the adoption of a gerontocratic council, identified able youths in a community can be trained and retained by the local government on taxation and in other needed areas to increase the numbers of professionals. Also, the establishment of recreation centres in the communities will discourage the exodus of professionals to urban centres, which is also a factor responsible for the shortage of qualified staff in rural local government councils.
- d. **Problem of insufficient political education:** Family is the first agent of political socialization. The gerontocratic council exists in the community which is made up of families, thus, political matters related to the local/state/national can be easily disseminated through the gerontocratic council to the families in the community.
- e. **The Issue of autonomy is not a problem that can be resolved by a gerontocratic council but it can engineer the process, particularly by talking to their sons and daughters who are in the executive and parliament at the state and national levels to see reasons why local government should gain its full autonomy and constitutionally grant local government autonomy for effective rural development.**

An Analytical Pathway of Gerontocratic Council to Strengthen Democratic Local Government for Dividends Delivery

Gerontocratic council as an agency of democratic local government will be supplementary to strengthen democratic local government for effective dividends delivery. Within a local government the Gerontocratic council can facilitate more targeted and effective governance at the local level. It can play an essential role in bringing about democratic dividends delivery at the rural level in the following ways;

Gerontocratic council can serve as a platform for the local community to actively engage/participate in the decision-making process. This can be done through town hall meetings/consultations, which give the local people to air their needs and preferences that can guide the development priorities of the local government council. More importantly, the increased participation contributes to effective democratic dividends delivery by ensuring that the local people voice out their needs and aspirations for address by the local government council.

It can create a chance for localized planning and execution of developmental projects. Hence, a gerontocratic council as an agency can lead to more relevant and impactful development initiatives, fostering a sense of community ownership among the population. Through the gerontocratic council, specific challenges and opportunities unique to each local community can be addressed effectively.

The Gerontocratic council will attract the attention of the local government council to improve infrastructural development in communities such as building and equipping health-care centres, access to clean pipe-borne water etc, not only to improve living conditions of the local community dwellers but also bridging the

urban-rural development gap that encourages rural exodus.

Local government council through gerontocratic council as its agency will encourage economic development by identifying small businesses and agrobusiness that need financial support by facilitating access to Microfinance, and training market opportunities for community members to reduce poverty.

Delegation to Gerontocratic Council at Local Governments for Better Dividends Delivery

Delegation is made to strengthen or improve something else. Therefore, delegation connotes supplementary efforts requested by the higher level of authority from its lower level in achieving a targeted goal(s). In this way, the Gerontocratic council is seen as an institution meant to strengthen democratic local government effective dividend delivery at the local level. Delegation is a transfer of responsibility from central to semi-autonomous bodies, that is the transfer of managerial power for specific functions to semi-independent agencies to perform (Sapele, 2015). He further noted that these semi-independent bodies play pivotal roles in maintaining effective and efficient service to the public through dedicated functions and programs.

Speaking on the essentiality of delegation in achieving set goals, Adebayo (2000) noted that lack of delegation is a mark of poor administration, which causes endless delays and is counterproductive as it slows down work and supervision by an administrator. In his part, Mooney cited in Obi, Obikeze and Ugoo (2012) asserted that delegation confers specified authority by a higher level to a lower level in any system, which implies the use of discretion in solving specific problems within the framework of the assigned duties. He emphasized that the delegator must ensure

that the subordinate (delegate) is properly supervised and controlled, and the delegator is equally still ultimately responsible for the performance or non-performance of the duties delegated. Appleby cited in Ibodje (1998) noted that a manager may entrust some parts of his work to a subordinate but the delegator holds the subordinate accountable to him and the delegator who has the responsibility to ensure that the job is done.

From the above, therefore, the Gerontocratic council is seen in this study as an area development agency to be engaged by the democratic local government to enable it to maintain effective service delivery to the public. The various communities' Gerontocratic councils that make up the democratic local government area will aid the government at this level in recognizing communities' needs and assume increasing responsibilities for solving their problems. The primary reason for democratic local government creation is for rural people-oriented service delivery to the rural communities, so the communities' Gerontocratic councils regarded as democratic local government delegates are capable of serving as the linking channel of harmonizing the socio-economic activities of the communities and discussing problems affecting them generally and give advice and guidance to the government for effective and people-oriented development.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Democratic local government connotes democratic dividends delivery at the rural/local communities. However, the democratic local government predicaments have caused foot-dragging of dividends delivery to the local communities. The paper affirmed insufficient funds, insufficient and unqualified personnel, weak autonomy, and size of local government area among others

have caused the incapacitation of democratic local government in dividends delivery in developing countries. To bring in remedy to these challenges identified as related to dividends delivery, gerontocratic council adoption by democratic local government as its area development agency is recommended to strengthen the efforts of government to bring effective and people-oriented dividends delivery

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