



## LOCAL GOVERNMENT CARETAKER COMMITTEES IN NIGERIA AND THEIR EFFECTS ON SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

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**ABSTRACT:** *The state governors in Nigeria have manipulated the local government councils in Nigeria to the extent that they appoint their cronies and loyalists as caretaker committee chairmen without regard to the constitutional provisions for democratically elected council chairmen. In all cases, the choice of their appointees is not always the choice and wishes of the local people and the masses at the grassroot always rejected them. The most fundamental problem inherent in caretaker committees of local government council is that caretaker committees are conduit pipes for corruption by the state governors to siphon off local government councils' finances. The state governors solely or in tandem with their party leaders handpick few individuals viewed as core loyalists to the governors. Local government councils ought to be managed by democratically elected individuals and not the state governors appointing their cronies and loyalists as caretaker committees' chairmen without regard to the constitutional provisions for democratically elected local government council's chairmen. Presently in Nigeria, the state governors are truncating the tenure of the democratically elected council officials and replacing them with members of the ruling political party in the state as caretaker committee. We perused at the constitutional provisions for local government councils through the Democratic Participatory Theory. This paper studied carefully the reasons for state governors in Nigeria setting up caretaker committees and the impact of these committees on local government councils in the country. Based on the conducts of the state governors, it was recommended that state governors who fail, neglect and refuse to conduct free and fair elections for local government councils in a state should be prosecuted after their tenures and if found guilty be given maximum capital punishment. This would serve as a deterrent to others in the future, among others.*

**KEYWORDS:** Caretaker Committees, Cronies and Loyalists, Councils, Constitutional Provisions, Local Government Reforms.



## INTRODUCTION

The state governors in Nigeria have manipulated the local government councils to the extent that they appoint their cronies and loyalists as caretaker committee chairmen in local government councils without regard to the constitutional provisions for democratically elected council chairmen. In all cases, the choice of their appointees is not always the choice and wishes of the local people and the masses at the grassroots always reject them.

The masses at a local government area in Nigeria no longer elect their representatives, who understand their plights and solve their problems at the grassroots, but state governors display their might by disconnecting and disenfranchising the citizens at the grassroots from the activities of government at the grassroots, thereby creating wide spread political apathy among the electorates at the grassroots level.

The most fundamental problem that is inherent in caretaker committees of local government councils is that caretaker committees are conduit pipes for corruption by the state governors to siphon off local government councils' finances. With caretaker committees, the state governors maintain dominance over other political parties, where opportunity for looting local government councils' funds by the state governors would be perfected. The state governors solely or in tandem with their party leaders handpick few individuals viewed as core loyalists to the governors or their party, appointing them to run the affairs of local government areas (Oviasuyi, P O & Isiraojie, L( 2016).

Caretaker committee members are government appointees. The state governors decide for the caretaker committee on the capital project to embark on in their areas. Where contracts are to be awarded by caretaker committees, it is the state governors that do the bidding and caretaker committee members cannot challenge any strict actions of the state governors against them.

Even when elections have been conducted, state governors may deliberately force the tenure of local government chairmen to lapse early, to pave way for the state governors to appoint loyalists as caretaker committee chairmen to deliver their local government votes to the ruling party (Abba & Ahmad, 2012). Caretaker committees are not responsible and accountable to the people and they have no money to do anything except to pay salary of workers.

State governors have transformed local government councils into Automated Teller Machines (ATM), as the former are always collecting local government council financial allocations, Internal Generated Revenue (IGR), and counterpart funding but fail, neglect and refuse to organize local government elections; they instead administer local government councils with selected and or appointed administrators.

The use of caretaker committees to govern local government councils is a direct departure from democracy. By the practice, local government councils have been turned into vassals of the state government held in the trail by parties and executive structure that have confiscated the local government council and strangulated development at the point nearest to Nigeria (Iriekpen, 2012). The persistent bane to socio-economic development in the grassroots level of Nigeria is the neglect by governors from the inception of existence of local government councils as a separate tier of government.



Caretaker committees ought not to surface in local government council administration in Nigeria. If it is necessary for caretaker committees to be constituted, there should be temporary arrangements made to take care of an emergency situation.

Local government councils ought to be managed by democratically elected individuals and not by the state governors appointing their cronies and loyalists as caretaker committee chairmen without regards to the constitutional provisions for a democratically elected local government council chairman.

The present issue in Nigeria is that state governors are truncating the tenure of the democratically elected council officials and replacing them with members of the ruling political party in the state as caretaker committees? In most cases, many state governments do not conduct elections for the local government councils in Nigeria and caretaker committees could exist in Nigeria as much as 100 years. Some state governments have not conducted local government council election since 1999.

This paper critically examines the reasons for constituting caretaker committees in local government councils in Nigeria by state governors and its effects on local government councils, with the mindset that remedies would emerge with a view to abolishing the use of caretaker committees at the local government councils and allowing the local people to direct their polity.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The theoretical framework we applied for this paper is the “Democratic Participatory Theory”. This school holds that local governments function to bring about democracy and to afford opportunities for political participation to the citizens at the grassroots as well as to educate and socialize them politically.

Central to this school is that democracy is a way of life that demands that the point of view and interest of everyone be mutually appreciated. It is a concept based on fair play, tolerance, responsibility and respect for the rights of others—a concept that accepts this to be intrinsically undeniable values. Local politics, like politics at all other levels, deals with conflicts, issues, controversies and disagreement on the one hand and order, consensus, reconciliation and agreements on the other hand. Hence, at the grassroots level, citizens make choices, to tolerate the views of minorities and to respect the opinions of others, be they in favour of or contrary to their own. With these functions of local government, the democratic school holds to be the most important school above schools. It contends and motivates the citizens by engaging them in political education and participation.

Several studies have shown that local governments are good recruiting grounds for upper level of governments and hence a source for greater participation. This argument does not prove convincingly. However, the trend is that local government serves as a training ground for a higher level of government; nevertheless, what is demonstrated is that a tendency exists in many democracies for a good number of parliamentarians whether at state or federal levels to have benefitted from a political apprenticeship at local government level.



It is rewarding to note that Section 7(1) of the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999) as amended provides as follows:

The system of local government by democratically elected government council is under this constitution guaranteed and accordingly, the government of every state shall subject to Section 8 of this constitution ensure their existence under a law which provides for the establishment, structure, composition, finance and functions of such councils.

Local government councils are expected to be managed by democratically elected individuals but state governors have been employing the lacuna in the extant constitution to continue the use of caretaker committees (Tonwe, 2012).

The lacuna in the extant constitution which some state governors exploit is the failure of the extant constitution, electoral laws and national assembly to expressly state the tenure of the elected local government council officials. This stunted the development of grassroots democracy.

Section 1 (2) of the extant constitution provides as follows:

The Federal Republic of Nigeria shall not be governed nor shall any person or group of persons take control of the government of Nigeria or any part thereof except in accordance with the provisions of this constitution.

Reasoning from the above, caretaker committees are an aberration to the extant constitution. Caretaker committees offend Section 1 (2) of the extant constitution, wherein state governors take control of local government councils, by appointing chairmen for the local government council without regards to constitutional provisions.

In the same vein, Section 1 (3) of the extant constitution provides that:

If any other law is inconsistent with the provisions of this constitution, this constitution shall prevail, and that other laws shall to the extent of the inconsistency be void.

Any law made by any state house of assembly in Nigeria that gives power to caretaker committees to administer local government councils is voided because the law is inconsistent with the provisions of the extant constitution, and the constitution shall prevail.

The 1976 local government reform also defines local government as:

Government at the local level is exercised through representative councils constituted by law to implement and exercise powers within a defined area. These powers give the council substantial control over local affairs including staffing, institutional and financial powers to initiate and direct the provision of service and to determine and implement projects so as to compliment the activities of the state and federal governments in their areas, and ensure, through devolution of these functions to those councils and through the active participation of the people and their traditional



institutions, that local initiatives and response to local needs and conditions are maximized.

The above definition showcases the nature and character of a local government council. What is common between the constitutional provisions and 1976 local government reforms is that local government is an elected institution. Caretaker committees are repugnant to the constitutional provisions of the extent constitution and 1976 local government reform.

### **Reasons for the Appointment of Local Government Caretaker Committee by State Governors in Nigeria**

The foremost reason for the appointment of local government council caretaker committees by the state governors in Nigeria is that this is the only platform by which state governors could consolidate their maximum control of the local government councils because if local government councils elections are conducted, it is possible for the opposition parties to control some of the local government councils in their respective states. The state governors do not have self-confidence for conducting local government elections, as the results may cripple their future political ambition. For this reason, state governors settle for caretaker committee.

In addition, the bad feeling about the opposition political parties is another reason state governors set up local government council caretaker committee. The incumbent governors are fully aware that winning elections at the grassroots level is a function to a large extent on who is the chairman of the local government. The entire Nigerian electoral process is riddled with electoral fraud and malpractices. So, the fear of losing elections to the opposition political parties makes the state governors to appoint their loyalists as caretaker committee chairman who would in turn organize the affairs of the council(s) in their favour, especially during election (Ojo & Ihemejie, 2014).

Furthermore, another cogent reason why some state governors do not conduct local government councils election is as a result of the poor financial status of their states government's account. Some states are very poor to finance local government councils' elections.

Also, security challenges in some part of the country, especially the North-East geo-political zone of Nigeria, have prevented their State Independent Electoral Committee (SIEC) from conducting local government councils elections and in its place, has set up caretaker committee for local government councils in their states.

Besides, the state governor's party uses its power to sustain its supporters indefinitely in control of local government councils with the intent to disillusion the opposition parties and use the period of caretaker committees in the state to boost its party strength at the local government areas through patronage and empowerment provided by local government councils in form of contracts, junior staff appointments and promotions.

The state governors set up local government councils caretaker committee with a view to controlling the local government councils machinery seen as fundamental for electoral strength of a political party because it provides the background for the control of state and federal government machinery (Nyewsira & Kennet, 2012).



Another reason that ignited the state governors to set up caretaker committees in the local government councils is as a result of the lacuna created in constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999) as amended. The extant constitution did not expressly state the tenure/term of local government elected council officials. The increase in the practice of caretaker committee is as a result of the lacuna created by the extant constitution because it does not specify the tenure of local government council officials. The state governors hire and fire elected council official at will (Ananti, M.O, Onykwelu, R.U & Madubueze, M.C, 2015)

Moreover, state governors set up caretaker committees in local government councils with a view to diverting local government councils federal allocations and using the caretaker committees as conduit pipes, where the state governors milk the local government councils' Internal Generated Revenue (IGR) and federal allocations, that are meant for development. It is the state governors that administer the local government councils through the caretaker committees. The chairmen of the local government caretaker committees are mere rubber stamps.

Finally, the state governors set up caretaker committees in the local government councils to create jobs for the boys in return for their supports for the governors of a state. This enables the state governors to empower loyalists and supporters who fight tooth and nails for the election of the governors. The danger in appointing the boys as chairmen of the local government council caretaker committees is that some of the appointees are not the choice of the local people. The local populace are compelled to obey the warrant chairmen.

### **The Impact of Caretaker Committees on Local Government Councils in Nigeria**

The appointment of local government council caretaker committees by state governors in Nigeria has ravaged local government councils beyond revamp.

Firstly, caretaker committees in local government councils in Nigeria have bastardized democracy at the grassroots. This is against the democratic elected council that was recommended by the 1976 local government reforms. This also affected the lives of the local people.

Secondly, caretaker committees in local government councils in Nigeria have massacred democracy in Nigeria because the people at the grassroot are excluded from the polity of their areas and it also dismantled democratic structure at grassroots. Against this backdrop, local government councils in Nigeria under the caretaker committee ship are unaccountable to the local people.

Thirdly, there is political, economic and social decay in the local government councils in Nigeria, because of the period of caretaker committees in local government councils in Nigeria. There are no business activities or developmental projects. There is money for only recurrent expenditures and payment of salaries of workers.

Fourthly, state governors in Nigeria through the setting up of caretaker committees in local government councils have violated Section 7(1), Section 8 and Section 1(2) of the extant constitution, wherein democratically elected local government councils are provided for, and no person or group of persons should take control of the government of Nigeria or any part thereof except it be in tandem with the extant constitution.



Fifthly, caretaker committees are not representative government. The local are not allowed to participate in their affairs. They are denied participatory democracy. These result in political apathy and stunted democratic growth at the grassroots.

Sixthly, the chairmen of caretaker committees in local government councils do not embark on any meaningful development projects and they do not commission projects during their tenures because there is nothing to commission during the caretaker committee period.

## **CONCLUSION**

There is convincing and sustainable evidence that state governors in Nigeria set up caretaker committees in local government councils as a result of their selfish interests. This paper also exposes how caretaker committees in local government councils in Nigeria have ravaged local government councils beyond revamp.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- (1) For democratic participation of the grassroots, equity, efficiency, accountability, and transparency of the local government councils, state governors should abolish the use of caretaker committees at the local government council and on the local people to direct their polity.
- (2) The Federal Government of Nigeria should stop paying local government council allocation into the joint account of local government council and state government.
- (3) The national assembly should enact an Act on local government autonomy as soon as possible.
- (4) The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999 should be amended stating local government council tenure of office.
- (5) State governors who fail, neglect and refuse to conduct free and fair elections for local government councils in a state should be prosecuted after their tenure and if found guilty be given maximum capital punishment. This would serve as a deterrent to others in future.

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