

DECENTRALIZATION FOR DEVELOPMENT” EVALUATING THE IMPACT OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT AUTONOMY ON SERVICE DELIVERY EFFICIENCY IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Local government autonomy is widely regarded as a cornerstone of democratic decentralization and a critical enabler of effective grassroots service delivery. In Nigeria, however, the effectiveness of local governments has been consistently undermined by limited fiscal, administrative, and political independence despite their constitutional mandates. This paper examines the relationship between local government autonomy and service delivery efficiency, drawing on empirical data, national surveys, and case studies from across Nigeria. The analysis reveals a strong correlation between fiscal autonomy and improved service outcomes, while also highlighting the adverse effects of state-level interference and centralized control. Donor agencies like the World Bank, UNDP, and USAID typically emphasize “local governance” when assessing how decentralized structures support development, not just through bureaucracies but through participatory and transparent processes and offering scalable models for reform. The study identifies key structural and institutional constraints and proposes actionable policy recommendations to enhance the autonomy and performance of local governments. By advancing legal reforms, promoting administrative independence, and fostering inclusive development planning, the paper argues for a renewed commitment to genuine local government autonomy as a pathway to effective and efficient service delivery, accountable and transparent governance for sustainable development in Nigeria.

Keywords: Decentralization, Development, Local Government Autonomy, Service Delivery Efficiency