



# International Journal of Sociology and Anthropology

Volume 6 Number 7 July 2014  
ISSN 2006 - 988x



*Academic  
Journals*

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Full Length Research Paper

# The tradition to donate among women in Javanese rural areas: Reciprocity, food exchange and monetization

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Received 4 January 2014; Accepted 23 June 2014

In the history of the tradition to donate (*Tradisi Nyumbang*) in Javanese rural areas as reciprocity institution, food produce are the main form of gift. However, economic system has penetrated the social aspect of the tradition. Money use as the medium for donation replaced food produce is now a general practice in almost all villages. The research will show how women from underprivileged households in rural areas adhere to use food produce as social exchange tool in the tradition of donation. The produce itself has subjective meaning for the women rooted from the village culture and custom even if they are no longer involved in agricultural farming. The shift in women's work pattern also characterizes food consumption pattern of the village. Many instant foods have displaced local food existence. This tradition to donate will portray how the moral economic of women villagers is being constructed.

**Key words:** Reciprocity, food exchange, moral economy of the rural women.

## INTRODUCTION

### Background of the study

The concept of gift is a universal concept in various countries and it has been going on for long. The gift has various functions: economic, social, moral, religious, politic, law and esthetic; thus, it is called "total social phenomenon" (Mauss 1992). Therefore, examining concept of the gift means examining social phenomenon in many aspects, especially, the gift can either create and maintain social ties or undermine and destroy it (Komter 2005; Molm 2010). Understanding concept of the gift is understanding reciprocity social institution developing within the society. Belshaw (1981) states that to understand the economic system of a society using cultural

and social analyses exchange institution is the only point to start. As a separate institution, exchange has broken through all social buildings and can be seen as society's binder. "Tradisi Nyumbang" (tradition to donate) is one of the forms of concept of gift developing in Javanese rural areas. It is mostly viewed as activities to help each other and mutual assistance of rural society. During the ceremonies of human life cycle, such as ceremony for birth, circumcision, marriage and death; neighbors, relatives and friends assist, either by donating their money or doing volunteer work. Through this tradition, social solidarity is built. In addition, the tradition also can be seen as economic signal and dynamic social symbols.

Therefore, the kiting between social and economic acts

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characterizes the tradition of donation as a social institution of a village. As stated by Camerer (1988), gift can be seen as 'economic signals' and 'social symbols'. Rural household expenditure bare by rural households is getting heavier along with the development of market economic that turn money into something that is more important in every social transaction. This development has caused villagers' dependency on money to grow stronger and wider. In this case, woman appears to be the most "responsible" person for the change, because in social and cultural aspect, woman is the economic controller of a household (Abdullah 2001). In social transaction, however, such as the tradition of giving, woman is the important "social actor" who takes many roles.

Studies on women role in gift exchange have not been a focus in previous research including research done in Western society (Komter 2005). Since Mauss and Malinowski presented the concept of "the gift" as an important issue in anthropology study, the important question is what role does gender play in this gift exchange. Old anthropology studies assumed that woman has no relevant role in the gift exchange. Malinowski, however, admitted that woman took part in certain ceremonial acts, but did not mention woman activities in gift exchange, all the involved samples were men. After Malinowski, Levi-Strauss who gave more attention on gift exchange practice in several non-Western societies showed woman as the important tool for gift exchange. Women existence was showed as the basic of family relation system. In this case, men saw women as the object of gift exchange instead of the subject or actor. On the other side, some studies have showed clearly that women are not only give the gift to men – material or immaterial – but also the biggest receiver of the gift (Komter 2005). The same is shown in the tradition to donate in Javanese rural areas. In this case, women take most of the important parts, quantitatively (work, time and cost allocated) or qualitatively (related to the intensity of women involvement). In a celebration conducted at the village by an underprivileged household, these activities to donate are dominated by activity on how to distribute food production and consumption. Therefore, as mentioned in Geertz (1983) and Stoler's (1977) writing on autonomy of rural women, women have important role in social-collective activities of a ceremony; though it is a very stereotype role, which is related to food supply especially shopping, cooking and distributing food. Therefore, the biggest activity in a ceremony at the village is related to food supply. Food distribution is the strengthening of symmetrical and asymmetrical social-economic relationships, which is part of the reciprocity system.

The intensify pressure from money economy in the village that has characterized many social transactions does not immediately make women able to adapt

themselves to money economic system. Generally, those women describe as the specific women workers at the village, are the subsistence or non-salary workers and they are willing to be paid with food. The economic moral of rural women is shown in this tradition to donate, how they conduct social and economic transactions within the penetration of money economic. It is in this context, understanding how the existence of women in the tradition to donate is needed in order to understand how social-economic transformation in the village takes place, especially the ones related to the change from subsistence economic system to market (money) economic system.

### **Problem formulation**

Nowadays, villages undergo the growth of money culture and life orientation toward money. According to Heyzer (1986), agricultural commercialization process is an important pressure that changes organization and social institution of a village, including tradition to donate. In this case, rural women appear to be as the most "responsible" actors for the change, because in social and cultural aspect, woman is the economic controller of a household and doing social responsibilities in their household neighborhood. The social responsibility itself is a burden for rural women when it is faced with money economic culture, whereas they have been accustomed to subsistence economic culture. Therefore, this research is trying to examine how the tradition to donate among women in Javanese rural areas takes place under social-economic change, especially in facing money economic system that lead the villagers to act rationally and calculative.

### **OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY**

The research aims to analyze economic moral of rural women through the tradition to donate taking place under money economic pressure. As reciprocity institution, the gift/charity in the village has strong control in arranging and controlling society in exchange process, especially for women. This study also wants to see how food exchange takes place in the tradition to donate as a base of village economy (subsistence ethic).

### **METHODOLOGY**

The study took place in Javanese rural areas, particularly in sub culture of Java- Banyumas. Java tribe is the biggest tribe in Indonesia. Javanese rural areas, up to now, are identified with poverty. In various social studies on poverty in South East Asia, Indonesia is mostly represented by poverty in Javanese rural areas having dense population. Moreover, according to Boeke (Husken

**Table 1.** Change in the form of donation in Javanese rural area overtimes.

Time	Before 1970/ 1980s	1980 – 1998 (economic crisis)	After 1998 (After Economic Crisis)
Economic System	Dominated by subsistence economic system	Modern economic system (industrial): The entry of urban product to the village	Money economic system
Form of donation	Agricultural foods and household products	More vary, present dominate the type of donation	Money dominates the type of donation
Contain of the donation	Food/Local Product: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rice, <i>tiwul</i> (snack made from dried cassava), coconut, <i>tempe</i> (fermented soybean cake), tea, sugar, and all types of vegetables and pulses and fruits (banana)</li> <li>• Livestock and livestock 's products (egg)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• glass, plate, spoon, fork, clock, etc.</li> <li>• food produced by global market (mass production)</li> </ul> Indirect money expenditure	Money is dominating the donation; food and present are starting to reduced
Time to give	Few days before the celebration/ party started	At celebration/party time	At celebration/party time
Social Implication	Building social ties	Villagers sold their harvest product to be traded with present	Tradition to get into debt are extending

Source: Kutanegara, 2002 reprocessed by the researcher

1998), the central characteristic of “Eastern villages” including Java is communal-based social life. This research used constructivist paradigm as part of qualitative approach. It is based on assumption that the tradition to donate is a relative issue and local reality that is specifically constructed. Constructivism, by its follower, is considered as having the ability to uncover details of certain community culture by understanding its cultural setting scientifically with point of view of the examined subject. The subject point of view in this research is rural household mothers whom mostly are workers (maid), household mothers and workers of an eyelashes factory.

## RESULT

### Donation institution in money economic system

In the long history of the tradition to donate in Javanese rural areas as reciprocity institution, food produce is the main form of the donation. The village's economy is dominated by subsistence economic system; therefore, for the donation, they use food from agriculture and their own/household processed product (Kutanegara 2002). The donation sometimes can be in form of livestock such as chicken, goat or cow meat. In the past, this gift exchange tradition can be an incentive for agricultural product development. According to Belshaw's (1981) opinion, it happens, for example, in a village community

Hanuabada, an infertile land with low produce production. Exchange tradition in this area contains a competition and party with food distribution. Food distribution is the main incentive for agricultural product, and without the distribution, agricultural product will not be developed. In Java, along with the green revolution in agriculture in the 1970/1980's, many products from urban areas were flooding the village. Modern life started to penetrate to the village and change the consumption pattern of the society. They were no longer tied to the principle commodities. At that time, villagers, especially the youth, preferred to give present, particularly glassware (such as plates, glasses, bowls) or clock for the donation. Money economic system grew stronger, but not for the donation (for detail can be seen in table 1). Money was seen as a medium for economic transaction only and to pay for the commodity bought. Meanwhile, paying the service was considered awkward. Many villagers were unwilling to be “paid” for their voluntary work or service. Money as social transaction tool was limited for social donation, in which money is given by the rich to the poor which brings gaps between those two parties (the giver and the receiver).

1990s was a new era for the penetration of money economic system into social institution of donation in Java and this made money as a significant social change agent (Carruthers, 2005). At that time, most invitation for



wedding and circumcision celebrations were inserted with message such as “Without being disrespect and with our deepest apology, ex-gratia should not be in the form of goods or wreath, thank you.” The message does not state that the guest should not give money, but it gives clear signal that the inviter only receives money. The invitation also put an image of gifts crossed or an envelope. Most of Javanese societies considered the message as unethical and it became a major issue among them. The reason was that the basic of “donation” is volunteerism from the giver. However, when this type of message spread, the society finally rationalized money as social payment tool. Since then, donation has become a calculative social institution. Money is not only as an economic instrument but also social instrument and calculative social instrument (calculating character). (Polanyi, 1957; Simmel, 2004). Nowadays, that type of message no longer exists because money as social payment tool has been institutionalized through rural area. As stated by classical sociologist, Weber and Simmel, money can be an entry point to understand society’s rationality process. When social institution of donation has monetized, donation turn into calculative and rational social institution.

The phenomenon from this tradition to donate as economic transaction is the emergence of profit/loss term to determine the success of conducting a party valued from the amount of donation gained. This is a general phenomenon taking place when conducting a party in Javanese rural areas as showed by Kutaneegara’s (2002) research in Bantul, Yogyakarta Special Region and a research from Prasetyo (2012) in Subang West Java. There are many economic terms tied to each celebration, such as circumcision, *profit*,  *mantu<sup>1</sup> receiving capital* and *mbesan<sup>2</sup> throwing the capital* or “wedding celebration is opening the saving”. It shows that tradition to donate has shifted into an economic medium. According to Kutaneegara (2002), it indicates the shift in the meaning of a ceremony, which was as an express of gratitude for a situation and now become business and trade arena. Unconsciously, anyone who comes to a celebration is seen as buying a commodity. It also can be used as a sign that capitalism has deeply penetrated and become intensive in Javanese culture.

On the other side, in trade activities, Javanese societies familiar with an ancient philosophy “*tuno satak*,

*bathi sanak*” (loss of money, but can gain friends). In simple meaning, *tuno* means loss and *bati* means gain/profit, two words with opposite meaning. *Satak* is type of small fish, which is used in the philosophy as a symbol of goods or money, *sanak* means brother or also relatives or friends who has special value or closeness. Therefore, literally, the philosophy means, “loss of money but the profit is gaining friends/brothers”. It means that maintaining hospitality and friendship is more valuable than losing the money/goods (Hadihardjono 2011). In the context of donation, the philosophy mostly applies to the giver where household expenditure for donation is a lot, especially in celebration season, months that are considered good for conducting celebration. For them, maintaining social harmony is more important than prospering their family. Borrowing from Geertz’s term “shared poverty”, villagers prefer to be poor together than being unable to give to their neighbor. For most rural women, the burden for being unable to give is heavier than poverty burden. It is indicated by avoiding meeting the person whom they did not donate to or pretending not seeing them when they passed each other.

In the middle of monetization pressure that institutionalized the tradition to donate in Javanese rural areas which has taken place for a relatively long period, women (especially from underprivileged group) in Banyumas villages maintain to give food as their donation. It is shown with the existence of *megari*. *Megari* is a woman actor who controls the supply of food donation given by women guests and she then arrange return gift for them. The return gift used usually gained from the donation too. The next section will discuss how the tradition to donate among women in rural areas of Jawa-Banyumas builds social ties in the middle of pressure from money economic system and how moral principle built in reciprocity institution.

### Reciprocity in women face

As mentioned by Mauss (1992), a gift will never be a “free” gift, without any obligation to return it, it is called *potlatch*. *Potlatch* defines by Mauss as an exchange gift. And clearly stated that it is categorized as a reciprocity gift. There are three obligation in Mauss’s exchange theory. *First*, give a gift as the first step to make social relationship. *Second*, receive the gift as the acceptance of social ties. *Third*, return the gift with higher value to show social integrity (Koentjaraningrat 1980). The obligation in gift exchange is reciprocally in nature; therefore, the value of the gift generally will increase. The more expensive the gift the better, because the parties involved is in exchanged (give – receive – return). This attitude is mostly shown by women; because women are more intensive in neighborhood life.

The reciprocity principle stated by Mauss is also strongly held by society in Banyumas village. Every

<sup>1</sup> *Mantu* is a wedding celebration conducted by the bride family. The general norm in Javanese community is that the bride family conducts wedding celebration.

<sup>2</sup> *Mbesan* is a wedding celebration, particularly in Java-Banyumas, conducted by the family from the groom to be several days before the wedding ceremony. This celebration is different to the general Javanese societies. The groom’s wedding celebration usually called *ngunduh* conducted after wedding celebration in the bride family. Therefore, *mbesan*, by some people outside Banyumas is considered as a medium to collect money for “*serah-serahan* (gifts for the bride)” to the bride. This *serah-serahan* usually consists of many goods and it is considered as *mbuang modal* (throwing the capital)

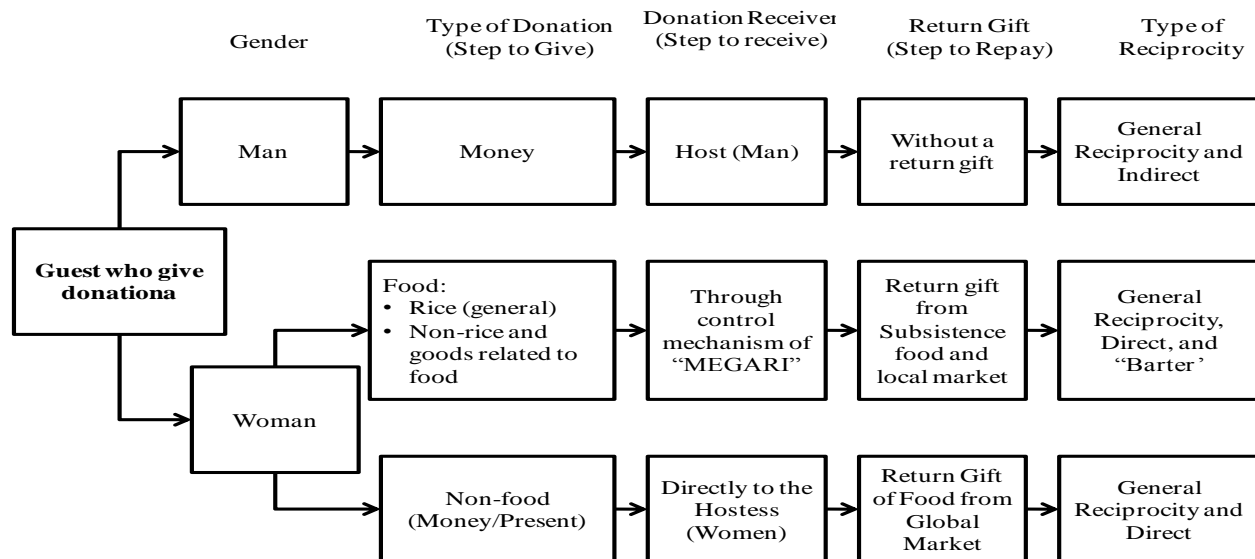


Figure 1. The mechanism of reciprocity principle in Java – Banyumasan Village.

donation received should be return properly according to the household condition of the person who holds the celebration. The mechanism of reciprocity principle, as seen in Figure 1, is determined mostly by gender and type or the amount of the donation. There are two types of reciprocity developed in the society, according to Sahlin (1974), generalized reciprocity and direct reciprocity. Generalized reciprocity is reciprocity exchange between individuals or groups without determining the time limit to return the gift. Villagers call this type of reciprocity as *Gentenan*. In this exchange, each party believes that they will give each other and that the goods gave or services provided will be repaid. In direct reciprocity, on the other hand, goods or services exchanged are having comparable value. Time to receive and return the gift, the amount and goods to be exchanged are pre-determined. The nature of this payment shows the exact time when someone receiving the payment or repay for the gift or activities conducted previously.

In the tradition to donate in Banyumasan village, the giver is representing individual unit instead of household unit; therefore, husband and wife give individually. This is in contrast to the phenomenon that takes place in urban society where donation is representing husband and wife in one household. Gender will determine the type of the donation. The general pattern of the donation is man usually gives money and woman gives food. It describes sexual-based work distribution pattern, which is very stereotype in society in general, man as the breadwinner and woman as household mother who takes care and arranges food consumption. For man, the type of donation involves money, which describes an established

pattern. Money is identified with man who has rationality because money is a rationality tool (Simmel, 2004). The difference is only on the amount of money to be given that is determined by kinship and neighborhood ties. Mostly, man gives Rp. 10.000,00 in average or between Rp. 5.000,00 to Rp. 20.000,00.

For woman, on the contrary, the type and form of donation will be more complex. The general pattern of the donation for women in rural society of Java-Banyumas is food. There are two categories of food, rice and non-rice. Rice is the general gift for woman with standard amount of two kg. Rice is used to describe the pressure of tradition to donate. Nowadays, villagers strive to buy "*Raskin*" – type of rice provided by the government grant to help poor household – for the donation purpose. The rice has lower price compare to the general rice consumed. The price of general rice would be Rp. 7.000,00 per kg, while *Raskin* only Rp. 6.000,00 per kg. The Rp. 1.000,00 difference on price will mean a lot for poor household women. They can save Rp. 2.500,00 for one donation. If they received 3 to 5 invitations for a ceremony just in one day, the money saved for the price difference can be calculated. In the beginning of each month where the *Raskin* is distributed, it can be sure that many of the donations are *Raskin*. Therefore, the term *Raskin* for local society can be also called "donation rice" because of its function for donation instead of consumption. The host will sell the rice after the celebration. Rice is a type of food donation with high selling power and it can be sold faster compare to other food types even if the quality is usually very low and sometimes it is not suitable to consume. This rice will continue to circulate from one donation to another and it is almost

never been consumed. In the end, rice is the only symbol of social legality for women from lower economy to be involved in a social relationship.

As stated by Mauss (1992), to give and receive a gift is the initial step to have social relationship and build social ties. Whereas, referring to instrumental rationality of Weber (Ritzer 2008), if the donation is given directly in form of money, it will have more use value for the receiver and economically profitable. Some social calculations are put forward in basing the act of women for choosing rice as the general form of donation. First, traditionally, rice has stable exchange value and is protected from inflation. Therefore, the amount of rice, 2 to 2.5 kg, does not change much over times. Many donations in form of non-rice are calculated with rice price equivalence to repay the donation (Hefner 1983; Kutaneegara 2002). Second, rice is the main consumption of villagers so it will continue to be available and useful; therefore, the reselling price is higher compare to other donation goods. Third, rice is the stereotype of women work, which is processing the rice to be consumed by their family members. For women from underprivileged household, as long as they have rice any other foods will not be a problem. The importance of rice for rural household makes it important donation goods.

As the aforementioned, rice is the general goods for donation. However, women from the host's relatives or close neighbors usually give non-rice food (egg, cooking oil, noodle, coconut, sugar, etc) and *lawuh wedang*. *Lawuh wedang* is ready to consumed foods as the side dish in the reception. Socially, donation in form of non-rice food and *lawuh wedang* are more valuable than rice, even though the price is the same. The reason is that for villagers, rice is a basic need, while non-rice food and *lawuh wedang* represent the increase or improvement of consumption; therefore, they have higher social value. In other words, a gift in form of non-rice food is better than rice. Gift in form of non-rice food and *lawuh wedang* have important meaning for the host. Through these gifts, reciprocity principle in rural society can be seen and they are also useful for various interests, especially to entertain the guest and as return gift. Entertaining the guests with food is the key sign of acceptance, hospitality and friendship (Harbottle, 1997) and traditionally, this is the duty of women from the production (processing) to the distribution of the foods. Principle of giving and receiving, or reciprocity as the fundamental rule basing a ceremony (Mauss 1992) in the village in turn will be dominated by food exchange ritual.

The importance of food exchange is indicated by the existence of *megari* who controls the mechanism of reciprocity principle in tradition to donate. *Megari* works in woman area by controlling and serving women guest who donate foods (rice or non-rice). *Megari* will distribute the food to entertain the guest, for souvenir, and for anyone who work voluntary (*rewang*) and when there is any

leftover food they will give the food to the neighbors or sell it. Food for souvenir will be based on the type and amount of the donation. What is inside the souvenir is an issue for women who give donation. During their way home from the party, these women will try to look at each other souvenirs and it can turn to a gossip if the souvenir they received is not as they expected. Therefore, not every woman wants to be a *megari*, because she will be a gossip topic among the neighbors after the party. On the contrary, *megari* also source for information on the people who give donation, some may give donation that is inappropriate to the norm and some might give more. *Megari* will then report to the "hostess" about special donation. This report will be a base for the hostess to determine the amount of donation she will give her neighbor when she is having a celebration (*mbarang nggawe*). Generally, *megari* does not write the donation but only relay on her memory. For some societies, to write the amount of the donation is considered improper because "calculating" the donation shows a trading character. Even if it is written, it will not be publicized. However, in practice, the term loss/profit often becomes the topic of "gossip" among women in the neighborhood after the party. In this case, the tradition to donate becomes social dynamic for women when reciprocity is considered imbalance. Therefore, reciprocity institution is women institution that controls every behavior of women in the village related to donation. Thus, forms of reciprocity prevailed for rural women are long term (indirect) in form of return donation and short term (direct) in form of souvenir; whereas, for men, the form is only long term. Meanwhile, according to Mauss (1992), to differentiate *potlatch* and *barter*, the return gift is not given directly but in unspecified period. Bringing home the souvenir from a party is something that is expected by family, especially the children and it is the duty of a woman; while, man is considered inappropriate to bring back souvenir from a party. The return gift in form of souvenir is a mandatory to be given to people who give donation in a party or celebration.

The existence of *Megari* represents the importance of reciprocity principle in rural community; every gift has its reciprocity and it should be repaid. Symbolically, return gift (*ulih-ulih* in Java-Banyumas's term) is an expression of gratitude for attending the party, for the blessing, attention and most importantly for the donation. However, it is almost impossible for rural women to come to a celebration without a gift. Even if they are economically challenge, the pressure from abashment and social sanction is the trigger to involve in tradition to donate. It is common in Asian villages' societies where reciprocity is a fundamental moral principle basing social activities in villages at MuangThai and Philippine. In Philippine, for example, prevails a principle "every service received, either asked or no, should be repaid", where abashment (*hiya*) and feeling of moral duty (*utang na loob*) are the

trigger (Scoot 1974).

### Women and Money

As previously mentioned, there are different pattern of work division based on sexual in donation. Men will give money and women give foods (rice and non-rice). In the history of Javanese rural societies, food donation describes the subsistence ethic of rural women. Foods given were direct products from agriculture or processed by household mother having local characteristics. Almost all food given can be obtained in surrounding area. At that time, it was common that people bring banana from their own garden as donation to their neighbors or relatives. Vegetables and pulses were often used as donation goods as well. Not only is it produced in their village but also it can be used directly as consumption for the guests. Women who work as farmer also had time to prepare all foods to be given.

However, along with industrial development, including agricultural industry, villages were over flown with products from rural area and many women were removed from agricultural sector. Collier (1981) argues that agricultural development policy set by government of New Order known as green revolution in 1970s has caused evolution process in traditional institutional system, which gives limited access for poor farmers and farmer workers in agricultural production system. The green revolution has caused displacement process on women workers especially farmer worker group from labor market. Various institutions has changed (for example, *Bawon system* (profit sharing between owner and tenant) using *ani-ani* (a small knife used for harvesting in) were replaced with sickle, *Bawon system* were changed into *Tebasan* (a system were produce were bought before harvesting), processing paddy into rice using huller), since the revolution add more works for men workers. Sajogyo (1985) clearly explain that green revolution has reduced employment opportunity in agricultural sector for women in rural areas. In addition, according to Suratiah (1991), this situation in turn, pushed rural women to look for job alternative outside agricultural sector. Some of them became migrant labor (women workers), housemaid, trader, factory workers, etc.

The shift of women's work from farm to non-farm in some extent has affected the tradition to donate, because many of them had to leave their home to work. Therefore, time allocation for domestic work is decreased. The market products, which are more practical, replaced food donation that was once using subsistence product. The change from subsistence products to market products surely needs more money. Economically, the change of women's work from farm to non-farm made women to gain more stable income compare to their husband who works in agricultural sector, in which his income will

depend on the yield of seasonal harvest. Thus, many of their daily household needs were placed on the woman's income, though quantitatively, the amount is less. This made their income small is because they are not accustomed to "appreciate their own merit" or even to demand minimum wage standard, especially for them who work in private sector (as housemaid). Their awkwardness to money culture affects their inconvenience to donate money, even if this money donation has institutionalized. There are many social considerations for women who are unable to adapt with money donation, which are:

- 1) They do not always have enough cash; therefore it is more likely for them to be in debt in a food stall to buy rice than to borrow money from their neighbor. A food stall will not sell well if it does not allow for debt;
- 2) Donation for poor women is social legality to shows their existence as villager whom sometimes marginalized. By donating food, their social legality is under control because it is shown what they bring (*keton gawane*). Social legality is also under control because women who donate come in groups carrying *donation bag* typical of the village; in other words, many people see them carrying the goods for donation. It is also under control through *Megari* mechanism;
- 3) Direct use philosophy (a celebration at the village is dominated by food redistribution activities);
- 4) Generally, donation in form of money for women is considered having low trust.

As it is shown in Figure 1, donation in form of money is given directly to hostess without process of control mechanism of *megari*. Therefore, in women opinion, "there are fraudulence" in the amount of the donation. Fraud in their opinion is less amount of donation (under the standard of village norm). This opinion shows that donation is not based on sincerity but appropriateness. Donation in form of money is given directly to the "hostess" as they shake hands to leave home; thus, the amount of money is unknown. Therefore, the souvenir for people who donate money is treated equally; they are usually given foods from global market (mostly instant noodle from certain brand).

Therefore, reciprocity principle conducted by women in rural areas through food donation (especially rice) is a compromise rationality action accommodating all social actions from Weber, rational and irrational. The reason is that rice fulfills all aspects of exchange value: symbolic value, utility value and exchange value. In other word, rice has social, economic and time dimensions. In this context, it can be concluded that women in rural areas can play in both social rationality (moral) and economic rationality (formal) areas. Rice has symbolic value since food donation is a symbol of specific donation of rural societies (especially women) and this has social control mechanism (through *Megari*). The utility value of food

donation is based on the function of the donation that have social solidarity value, which is to provide food for the guests, as souvenir for the guest (women guests), and to be distributed to the neighbors, family or everyone who assist during the ceremony. Whereas, the economic value of food donation (rice) is that rice can be resold after the ceremony to cover all ceremony's expenses. Therefore, food donation generally has market exchange value and rice is a reciprocity medium that is considered to have a stable exchange value. By doing this, women are able to maintain social solidarity amid their economic limitation.

## CONCLUSION

Unlike urban society in general, where donation to a celebration is representing one household unit, in rural society, donation to a celebration is individual; husband and wife donate separately and there exist work division which is sexually dichotomy. Man gives money and woman gives food (rice and non-rice). The existence of food as the exchange tool for donation by women in rural area describes their economic moral that still bound with subsistence ethic. Through food donation, women can share to each other, create sodality space, and strengthen their social legality as villager. Meanwhile, though donation in form of money has institutionalized in various other areas, underprivileged women consider it as socially less valid. In addition, it is considered to have lower trust and inappropriate with moral ethic which has been institutionalized among Javanese rural women.

With the change of donation from gift to money in urban society, rural women still prefer food as the main donation exchange tool. The existence of *Megari* shows the legacy of traditional society on subsistence economic system, where the role is as a medium of food barter in the tradition to donate. Through *megari*, food donation (rice and *lawuh wedang*) is controlled and valued to fulfill reciprocity principle. Through this food donation, women build social solidarity to share to each other, because this donation will be redistributed through *megari*. It is just that the foods are no longer produced in subsistence way but through market production. The disappearance of local food production can be related to the shift in women's work from farm to non-farm, which leads women to leave their home. Therefore, pragmatism value is put forward in the choice of food, especially instant noodle. Women's work in non-farm sector has shifted value rationality of women to instrumental rationality in terms of food choice, though generally, they cannot accept money as direct social exchange tool. On the other hand, the persistence of food (though it is obtained through market economic) as social exchange tool is mostly due to the social calculation. Food has social control (through the control mechanism of *megari*);

therefore, it allows women to have social legality. Social legality has important meaning as social guarantee for underprivileged women who often marginalized.

Reciprocity of rural women is reciprocity based on food redistribution, either short term (gift replies) or long term (donation reciprocity). Therefore, the general conclusion of the research is that rural monetization has directed moral ethic of women in rural areas in *nyumbang* tradition to the form of rationality action compromising between rational and irrational actions to maintain food-based social solidarity.

## Conflict of Interests

The author have not declared any conflict of interests.

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*Full Length Research Paper*

## Mushrooming appointed Caretaker Committee: A quagmire to grassroot democracy in Nigeria

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Received 20 January 2014; Accepted 7 July 2014

The inclination and imposition of non-elected local government council impoverished the political institutional structure of local government while many state governors have trampled upon the constitutional provision which vindicate and established democratically elected local council. Therefore, this study carefully examines budding appointed caretaker committee in Nigerian local government which has become a quagmire to survival of grassroots democracy. This study employs qualitative source of data, samples are drawn from the states operating appointed caretaker committee system in Nigeria. The study concludes that out of 36 states, 14 states comprising six geo-political zones are operating appointed caretaker committee local government council in Nigeria. The subject of non-conduct of elections at the third tier of government has become a common trait within the political spheres of most states. The tier of government which is closest to the grassroots is thus hijacked, prevented from meeting up with its primary and major obligations; the citizens have been denied fair representation with feelings of alienation and disillusionment. Therefore, the study recommends constitutional review and its strict compliance in order to democratize political institution of local government whilst the lacunas and loopholes entrenched in the 1999 constitution should be amended to stem the proliferation of appointed local government executive councils in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** Local Government, Caretaker Committee, Democracy, Grassroots, Governance, election.

### INTRODUCTION

The Nigerian political elite do not believe in the constitution under which they claimed to have assumed power (The' Punch Newspaper, December 9, 2012). Despite the claim of being in control of political activities in their states, many governors fail to conduct local council elections out of fear that the outcome of the elections might hinder their political ambitions. (George Emine). The system of local government by democra-

tically elected local government councils 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 (1999 Constitution of Federal Republic of Nigeria). The above constitutional affirmation positioned local government on democratic

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pathway with its fundamental jurisdictions and functions within Nigerian federal polity. The constitution further places the power to provide the legal framework for the administration of local councils on states; however, it never conferred on the state such powers as substituting “democratically elected” leaders at that tier of government with appointed “ones” (Channels Television, May 17, 2012). The hidebound of elected governors has hindered the status and democratic precept of local government and this may be as a result of the nature of Nigerian politics and its forceful acquisition of political power.

As Nigerians celebrate 13 years of unbroken democracy, many local government areas in the country are without elected representatives. Rather, what are in place in these councils are caretaker committees appointed by state governors. So far, about 27 states have not conducted local government elections in the last five years (Nigerian News World, Monday, 06/04/2012). Although, the caretaker committee system of local government is not mentioned in the Constitution, the system has remained common in the history and evolution of local government in Nigeria. (Ogunna, 1996, p. 116 cited in Okafor and Orjinta, 2013). Recently, the House of Representatives intervened to stop the flagrant abuse of power and clear disobedience to the rule of law by many state governments over the administration of the local government system in their domains. The lower house was pained that for many years the affected governors have continued to run the local governments on caretaker committee basis (Business Day Newspaper, 12 June 2012).

The apparent reluctance of some governors to conduct council elections is somewhat consistent with their opposition to calls that local government autonomy should be included in the constitution. The governors have premised their opposition on the grounds that development and harmonization of programmes would be more difficult with such autonomy (Osun Defender, December 8 2012). Majority of the state governors in collusion with the Houses of Assembly have remained unswerving in the pursuit of a surreptitious agendum to continually armpit the local government as a pun on their chess board.

These governors have exploited the noticeable blank gap in the 1999 constitution. They have consciously and covertly converted the local government councils to one of their parastatals, departments or agencies because of the lacuna created in sections 7 and 162 of the 1999 Nigeria’s Constitution. (Urhobo Times, June 14, 2012). Section 7(1) of the 1999 Constitution allows for an elected administration in the councils but in practice, most of the councils in Nigeria are administered by appointed chairmen or caretaker committees. Only very few can be said to be under democratically elected officials. Even in those with elected administrations, their finances are under direct control of the state government. Hence, there is no visible development in practically all

the 774 councils in Nigeria (The Sun Newspaper, January 19, 2013).

For many years, local government allocation has been hijacked by the various state governments because of absence of a truly local government system in our practice of democracy. Section 7(1) of the 1999 Constitution allows for an elected administration in the councils but in practice, most of the councils in Nigeria are administered by appointed chairmen or caretaker committees. Only very few can be said to be under democratically elected officials. Even in those with elected administrations, their finances are under direct control of the state government. Hence, there is no visible development in practically all the 774 councils in Nigeria. Their roads are as dilapidated as ever. There is nothing to show that there is grassroots government in Nigeria. And, this is the tier of government that is supposed to be closer to the people. Unfortunately, the nation’s councils exist only on paper. In reality, they are not centre of rural governance and development (The Sun Newspaper, October 19, 2012). To compound the problem, the ambiguities in 1999 Nigerian constitution also contribute to the proliferation of appointed caretaker committee in local government in Nigeria, as Omar (2012) explicitly argued that credible elections into local government councils have been non-existent from independence in 1960 till date. This is because the local councils are often subjected to controls by the upper levels of government in the federal system of government. During the First Republic, the Native Authorities (as local governments were then called) were under the control of the regional governments. The Constitution of the Second Republic (1979 to 1983) gave state governors the power to dissolve local councils and appoint Caretaker Committees to run the affairs of local councils. The 1999 Constitution currently being operated empowers state governors to appoint chairpersons of State Independent Electoral Commissions, the electoral umpires mandated to conduct local government elections in the 36 states of the federation. As the situation stands, there is some ambiguity as to whether the state governors can dissolve local councils before elections are conducted at the expiration of their tenure, but often, state governors capitalize on this ambiguity to dissolve local councils at the end of their tenure, and appoint Caretaker Committees. Often, these Committees are staffed with cronies and party sympathizers. It is against this background that this study examines mushrooming appointed caretaker committee in local governance in Nigeria which has become a quagmire to grassroot democracy. As shown in Table 1.

## **Delineation of Concepts**

### **Local government**

Local government is primarily recognized as the branch



**Table 1.** States Operating Appointed Local Government Council in Nigeria.

No	State	Classification	Geo-Political Zone
1	Abia	Appointed local government council	South-East
2	Bauchi	Appointed local government council	North-East
3	Borno	Appointed local government council	North-East
4	Delta	Appointed local government council	South-South
5	Ekiti	Appointed local government council	South-West
6	Imo	Appointed local government council	South-West
7	Kano	Appointed local government council	North-West
8	Katsina	Appointed local government council	North-West
9	Ondo	Appointed local government council	South-West
10	Osun	Appointed local government council	South-West
11	Oyo	Appointed local government council	South-West

**Source:** By author

of government that is closest to the people. It is the medium through which the people actively participate in grassroots government and continue to enjoy the provision of services (Mukoro, 2003). Local Government was not only accorded its place of pride in the socio-economic well-being of the country, it was also seen as a way of bringing government closer to the people (Awotokun, 2005). A local government is a political and an administrative body saddled with the governance and development of a small geographic area under its purview, such as a city, town or county, as it is known in some countries. Better still, to put it simply, a local government is a body saddled with the responsibility of meeting the yearnings of the people at the grassroots. (Daily Post Newspaper, February 2, 2013). Wraith (1984) cited in Adeyemo (2005) also defines local government as "the act of decentralizing power, which may take the form of deconcentration or devolution. Deconcentration involves delegation of authority to field units of the same department and devolution on the other hand refers to a transfer of authority to local government units or special statutory bodies such as school boards for instance. From this perceptive, one can see local government as a lesser power in the national polity. It is an administrative agency through which control and authority relates to the people at the grassroots or periphery.

The idea of creation of local government is to bring development nearer to the people and ensure participatory democratic governance. Local government is an instrument of political mobilization while the citizens engage in every political processes revolving around their locality. Local government facilitates and addresses local problems by providing local solutions. This will enhance people's capacity to solve their problems using the local strategy and mobilization within a local domain. It is a government at the periphery level with legal background to perform its functions efficiently and effectively. The

justification for the existence of local government lies in socio-political and economic mobilization towards addressing people's problem at the grassroots level. Due to distance, local governments are created to make government accessible to the people in their door step and it is believed that a government that is nearer to the people will indubitably comprehend the problems facing the general citizenry within their local environment.

### Grassroot democracy

Democracy in its true meaning is synonymous with grassroot democracy. Grassroot democracy is a people/community – driven participation in elections, governance and decision making. Grassroot democracy can be seen as a tendency towards designing political processes where as much decision making authority as practical is shifted to the lowest level of organization. Thus, a local government is a government at the grassroots level of administration meant for meeting peculiar grassroots need of the people (Agagu, 1997 cited in Oruonye, 2013). Grassroots democracy refers to shifting democratic traditions to the periphery level through people's mobilization and electoral participation in determining who is to govern them. The sustenance of democratic canons lies in grassroot level; this is because the local people will appreciate a political representative who dwells among the local community members rather than being governed from afar while this better explicates the government of the people which democracy presages. As the words "ours is ours" invariably expounds that the government belong to us. Grassroot democracy is the political processes which are driven by groups of ordinary citizens, as opposed to larger organizations or wealthy individuals with concentrated vested interests in particular policies. In daily political practice the term usually refers to

frequent town meetings, consensus policy development, consensus decision making, and electoral reform, all of which is intended to make politicians more responsible to their constituents, at least, and (in the more literal Green conception of the idea) to living things and local habitats in general ([www.wordiq.com](http://www.wordiq.com)). Democratic governance therefore, refers to a system of government that is controlled by representatives who are elected by the people of a country. The concept of democracy is central to the democratic-participatory school of thought. This school of thought believes that democracy is a way of life that "demands that one another's point of view and one another's interest be mutually appreciated". (Panter-Brick, 1970: 347 cited in Aluko, 2010).

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The methodology espoused in carrying out this study is derived from both secondary sources and empirical observations in relation to local government administration in Nigeria. The major newspaper and television reports were analyzed with empirical evidence drawn from the number of states operating appointed local government council in Nigeria. The content(s) of the secondary data and empirical observations unfold the current proliferation of appointed local government council in Nigeria.

### **The place of 1999 Constitution in appointing caretaker committee in Nigerian Local Government**

There are some contradictions in the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria in relation to local government administration. Section 7(1) states emphatically that "The system of local government by democratically elected local government councils 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". Yet, section 7 (6a) submits that "the National Assembly shall make provisions for statutory allocation of public revenue to Local Government councils in the federation. But the confusion is extended further by section 7 (6b) which states that "the House of Assembly of a state shall make provisions for statutory allocation of public revenue to local government councils within the state" (Khaleel 2012).

This confusion also resurfaced in section 162 (6) where it established the State Joint Local Government Account for the purpose of payment of "all allocations to the Local Government councils of the State from the Federal account and from the Government of the State". In Section 162(7) it directs State Government to pay to Local Government councils its total revenue on the terms

prescribed by the National Assembly. At the same time it gives the same power and functions to the State House of Assembly in section 162(8). Further, section 8 (sub-sections 5 and 6) saddles the National Assembly with some functions before creation of a local government can become legal. The implication of all the identified contradictions and ambiguities is that it is difficult to locate constitutionally the locus of power on local government creation. The unresolved contradictions, confusion and ambiguity created in the 1999 constitution have been tools in the hands of some third republic generation of politicians to cripple the Local Government system in Nigeria (Khaleel, 2012). Democracy is all about inclusion, participation and representation. Therefore, for democracy to thrive, it has to be grounded at the grass-root level for its survivability. However, democracy in Nigeria has been categorized as a system of government without root due to inability to enhance people's democratic participation at the local level. What we have in Nigeria in this contemporary political regime has been tagged with centralized democratic system without roots. The non-autonomization of local government has pussy-footing democratic political participation at the grassroots level in Nigeria, therefore creating undemocratic political loopholes anchored with state government dominations which placed the mode and manner of managing it as authoritarian. The skyrocket state overlord in managing and appointing caretaker committees in local governance negates the fundamental ethos of section 7(1) which stipulates democratically elected local government council in Nigerian polity. The principal aim of conducting election at the local level is to facilitate citizen's participation in local affairs. Through people's participation in choosing their elected representatives, democratic values are inculcated in the souls of local dwellers while they also become democratic instrument for the incoming generation yet unborn.

Local government were created to make governance comes to grassroots level, however, many state governors in Nigeria has hijacked the political instrumentality of local government for their economic aggrandizement and to retain political elongation. It is necessary to trace the legal background of local government in Nigeria under the constitutional guides of 1999 Nigerian constitution. The constitution provides democratically elected local council in Nigeria, while it also contradicts itself in the fourth schedule where powers are accosted to the state governor to dissolve the local government council in their due course. The state governors have been hiding under this provision to appoint caretaker committee in local government council in Nigeria. This has been raging Nigerian democratic politics in a very longtime. The elected state governors have been using the weaknesses in the 1999 constitution of Federal Republic of Nigeria to perpetrate evil. Majority of elected local government council have been dissolved in Nigeria under the pretence

of constitution empowering the state governors to dissolve local government council. Many state governments have refused to conduct elections in the political nomenclature of local government. It is against this background that people have been clamoring for constitutional amendment in order to salvage the democratic elected local government council in Nigeria. It is highly detrimental to the survivability of Nigerian nascent democracy if elections are not conducted within the stipulated period in Nigerian local government. This was noted that:

It is too well known that state governors rule over local government system in the country like the Lord of the Manor. They have practically decimated the administration of local government through illegal state/local governments' joint accounts, the conduit pipe through which they arm-twist and divert funds meant for the development of the rural areas in the country. They have also destroyed democracy at the local level because, some states in the country never deem it fit to conduct local government elections since 1999 when the country returned to democratic government. The issue of the underdevelopment nay outright negligence of the local government administration in Nigeria is a running story, a very sad situation (Nigerian Pilot October 25, 2013).

Local government as third tier of government in Nigeria's purported federation was created for the sole aim of taking government 'dividend' and development to the people at the grassroots. However, it is regrettable that despite the whole local government reform, this third tier of government is yet to achieve the aim it was created for. More worrisome is that, out of 36 states in Nigeria, only about 13 states among them are Enugu, Rivers, Jigawa and Lagos have conducted elections in their local government areas (LGA). This then means that all the remaining local government is being run by care taker or other informal arrangements. Obviously, this has completely thrown away the legislative organ in the local government and also denying the people in the grassroots the opportunity to elect representatives in the local government chamber (Legislative Digest, October 2012). It is evident that Nigerian 1999 constitution has created loopholes which encumber grassroots democracy to survive in Nigeria. The salient provision which emphasizes democratically elected local council also ample opportunity for state governors to dissolve elected representatives of local government whenever it's necessary. Democracy may be defined as a system of government where sovereignty resides in people to choose their elected representative within a particular political community. Democracy accommodates people participation to choose their leaders.

According to Abutudu (2011) cited in Ikeji et al. (2013) governance at the grassroots level is in a state of crisis. This crisis stems from what increasingly looks like deliberate efforts to stem the advance of democratic governance at the local government level in the country.

As a tier, the local government retains its outwards appearance; it even goes through the motions of performing its functions. However, the crisis into which it enmeshed has undermined its essence as government whose authority is directly derived and anchored in the constitution. Local Government is a system of public administration at a local level, charged with the responsibility of bringing the people at the grassroots closer to the government. A critical survey of local governments (LGs) in Nigeria today shows almost the same scene: that is, they are living in the shadow of the Federal Government. What we have witnessed is the abysmal failure of the local government system (Daily Independent, June 13 2010). Section 7(1) of the 1999 Constitution allows for an elected administration in the councils but in practice, most of the councils in Nigeria are administered by appointed chairmen or caretaker committees. Only very few can be said to be under democratically elected officials. Even in those with elected administrations, their finances are under direct control of the state government. Hence, there is no visible development in practically all the 774 councils in Nigeria (The Sun Newspaper, October 19, 2012). In foregoing, democracy has not been institutionalized at the grassroots level in Nigeria; this is due to political and economic dominations of state government. Many states are yet to conduct election into local government councils while the economic pauperization has been the other of the day in the overall management of local government affairs in Nigeria.

#### **Reasons for proliferation of appointed caretaker committee in Nigerian Local Government**

This story of non-conduct of elections at the third tier of government has become a common feature within the political spheres of most states. The tier of government which is closest to the grassroots is thus hijacked, prevented from meeting up with its primary and major obligation. Even in states where elections have been conducted, it has been fraught with controversy as most times, opposition has cried foul, claiming that the ruling party had tampered with the process so as to make the results come out in their favour. The local governments were created so that governance can come down to the people, but in reality what is happening is that the governors have hijacked these local governments. What they do is that they collect fund meant for the local governments, and dispense in such a way as to secure the loyalty of these local government chairman or punish them if they are not loyal to them, by starving them of funds. So they dictate what happens." the problem is that the state governors know that if their cronies are not at the helm of affairs at the local government level, they might have problems at the polls as the entire Nigerian

electoral process is riddled with fraud and malpractice (Nigerian Newsworld, 06/04/2012). Corruption and Diversion of Funds engulfed the administration of local government by the state governors in Nigeria. The policy makes nonsense of democracy at the rural level. It provided governors ample opportunity to manipulate appointed administrators to divert funds meant for the development of rural areas to other purposes. The nation's constitution states that local administrations as third tiers of government should be run by democratically elected chairmen and not appointed sole administrators who are loyalists of governors. Governors prefer sole administrators due to resistance on the part of elected chairmen who were always at logger-heads with state executives because they resist pressures from governors to divert funds to projects that do not benefit the people (Orient Newspaper, March 25, 2013). Also the fear of political opposition engenders proliferation of caretaker committee at the grassroot level. The fear of political opposition contributes to the main reasons for the mushrooming appointed caretaker committee at the local government level in Nigeria. This is because many of Nigerian politicians see politics as rig and roast. The fear of losing election in political contestation facilitates appointment of non-elected local government executives with intent of sheltering loyalty across the state.

## CONCLUSION

This study has explored mushrooming appointed caretaker committee in local governance which has become a quagmire to grassroot democracy in Nigeria. The state governors have been employing lacuna generated in 1999 constitution of federal republic of Nigeria to secure appointment for their loyalist at the local government level. Therefore, many local governments in Nigeria have been governed by appointed caretaker executives. The loophole midwife by Nigerian constitution which enables the state government to manage the affairs of local government undemocratically with impunity has championed the pauperization of local government institution in Nigeria. In this regards, it is very germane to review Nigerian 1999 constitution in the areas relating to local governance in order to ensure grassroot democracy in Nigeria. The constitution should accommodate political and economic sovereignty of local government for sustainable grassroot democracy in Nigeria. The allocation of local government should be sent directly from the federal government to avoid diversion of funds by the state governments. It is therefore unconstitutional for state government to manage the political affairs of local government in undemocratic comportment in Nigeria.

There should be zero-tolerance for appointment of non-elected political executives at the local government if Nigerian democratic system of government is to be

strived and respected among the comity of nations.

If truly local government is one of the federating units and the third tier of government, it should be made autonomous both politically and economically, in such a way that neither its political structure nor economic fortune would be determined or subjected to manipulation by the states. Meanwhile, the constitution should reserve a safe place or provide a soft landing for local government to have its own executive, legislative and judicial arms of government as obtained at the state and federal levels (The Tide, July 11, 2012). Khaleel (2012) emphasizes the imperative for removal of section 7 of the 1999 Constitution. This section of the 1999 constitution is full of contradictions and confusion. It is under this ambiguity that State Governments hide to manipulate the Local Government system by aborting democratic governance, suspending elections and imposing a regime of caretaker administration; usurping the statutory functions of local government and plunder its resources. To replace this section, a chapter on Local Government should be provided in the Constitution to restore the autonomy of Local Government and guarantee its status as the third tier of government in Nigeria with power to exercise all Executive, Legislative and Administrative functions. This chapter will deal with issues such as: Tenure of office; Public Service of Local Government etc. Only an outright removal of the section that creates the state joint local government account can stop State Governments from tampering with Local Government funds to the extent that only between 23 to 25% of statutory allocation from federation account eventually gets to the Local Government due to illegal and sundry deductions. All lawful methods to stop this fraud, including judgments of the Supreme Court and other Courts of competent jurisdiction have been frustrated by the State Governments. This will guarantee fiscal jurisdiction through direct remittance of local government allocations from federation account to respective Councils with necessary checks to guard against the mismanagement of public funds. The amendment of this section should broaden the revenue generation capacity of the Local Government and specifically forbid the State or Federal Governments from encroaching upon the statutory functions of the Local Government as listed in the Fourth Schedule of the 1999 Constitution.

## Conflict of Interests

The author has not declared any conflict of interest.


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