



RESEARCH ARTICLE

LOCAL GOVERNMENTS AS ANCHORS FOR INCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA: A QUALITATIVE–THEMATIC ANALYSIS

**Joseph Chukwudi UKWUNNA¹, Peter FIDERIKUMO², Chino Emmanuel OSUEKE³,
Kamorudeen Wale ABDULGANIY⁴**

¹ Economics Department, Faculty of Social & Management Sciences, Alvan Ikoku Federal University of Education, Owerri, Imo-State; ² School of Commerce and Management, Bayelsa State Polytechnic, Aleibiri, Bayelsa, Nigeria; ³ Department of Social Sciences, School of General Studies, Federal Polytechnic, Nekede, Owerri, Imo-State; ⁴ Department of Public Administration, Faculty of Social and Management Sciences, University of Ilesa.

ABSTRACT

This study explores the of local government councils in promoting inclusive development in Nigeria through a qualitative–thematic analysis. Despite their constitutional status as the third tier of government, local governments face systemic challenges such as limited fiscal autonomy, weak governance structures, and undue political interference from state governments. Using a multiple case study design, the paper examines grassroots experiences across different regions, including environmental neglect in Ogoni Land, forced evictions in Lagos State, poor service delivery in Zamfara State, and herder-farmer conflicts in Benue State. The analysis of semi-structured interviews reveals how communities perceive and cope with these challenges, highlighting issues like fiscal strangulation, erosion of autonomy, and democratic deficits. The paper concludes by emphasizing the need for genuine fiscal and administrative autonomy, improved accountability, community engagement, and capacity building to strengthen local governance and enable inclusive development.

Keywords: Local government, inclusive development, fiscal autonomy, democratic deficit, thematic analysis

Corresponding Author

Joseph Chukwudi UKWUNNA: Email Address: Joseph.ukwunna@alvanikoku.edu.ng
Telephone Number: +2347069268251

Received: 8/6/2025; **Revised:** 7/7/2025; **Accepted:** 25/7/2025; **Published:** 30/7/2025



1.0. INTRODUCTION

Local governments are constitutionally recognized as the third tier of government in Nigeria, designed to be the closest administrative unit to the grassroots, thereby facilitating inclusive development at the local level. They are envisioned as crucial anchors for delivering basic services, fostering participatory governance, and ensuring equitable resource distribution within their respective localities (Alao *et al.*, 2015). However, notwithstanding this foundational role, local government councils in Nigeria have consistently struggled to fulfill their mandate. The persistent gap between constitutional expectations and actual performance at the local level has led to widespread underdevelopment, disempowerment of communities, and a general erosion of trust in the lowest tier of government.

Previous studies have extensively highlighted systemic challenges such as limited fiscal autonomy, poor governance structures, and profound political interference by state governments (Bredino, Fiderikumo, & Adedoyin, 2022; Imhanlahimi & Ikeanyibe, 2009; Jide & Ikeanyibe, 2017; Alao *et al.*, 2015; Alao *et al.*, 2016; Minima & Bredino, 2018; Amassoma *et al.*, 2011; Lewi, 2011, Nwogwugwu, 2012; Olusola (2011). While these analyses provide a vital structural understanding, there remains a critical gap in comprehending how these challenges are experienced by local communities and officials, why they persist from the perspectives of those directly involved, their impact at the grassroots, and what specific coping mechanisms and strategies are in place to salvage the situation. This qualitative study directly addresses this gap.

This research employs a qualitative approach to gain in-depth understanding of the complexities of local governance and inclusive development from the perspective of various stakeholders. A qualitative methodology is particularly necessary to capture the lived experiences, perceptions, and context-specific realities of critical issues such as environmental neglect in Ogoni land, forced evictions in Lagos state, persistent poor social service delivery in Zamfara state, and herders-farmers clashes in Benue state. By delving into these narratives, the study aims to uncover the ‘why’ and ‘how’ behind observed outcomes, providing a nuanced understanding that both theoretical perspectives and quantitative data alone cannot capture. The recent Supreme Court ruling affirming fiscal autonomy for the 774 local government councils presents a significant opportunity, and this study as timely, seeks to explore its perceived implications and potential to improve service delivery, enhance participatory governance, and foster equitable resource distribution from the vantage point to those on the ground.

2.0. CONCEPTUALIZATIONS AND LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Conceptual Framework

The concept of inclusive development emerged in the Asian Development Bank’s (ADB) 2007 publications, emphasizing equity and empowerment through strategies like poverty



reduction, human capital development, social capital development, gender development, and social protection (Rauniyar & Kanbur, 2010). In the context of sustainable development goals, inclusive development involves ensuring that all members of society, notwithstanding their background or circumstances, are given equal opportunities and benefits from economic, environmental and social progress. Gupta et al., (2015); Sachs, (2004) in contrast between inclusive growth and inclusive development, support the later, arguing that perverse growth may lead to the exclusion of some people, the concentration of wealth, and segmented labour markets. Rather than focusing on economic growth, it calls for direct democracy (the exercise of civil, civic, and political rights) and the distribution of amenities (e.g., health, education, and infrastructure) with a view to enabling participation by all in these amenities.

On the merits of appropriate theories, this study reclines on the position of Nchuchuwe and Oviasuyi (2003) that there is no single theory of local government, rather, the formulation and adoption of any theory on local government is dependent on the functions and aspects under investigation. Hence, the submissions of Mackenzie, (1964); Chukwuemeka et al, (2014); Alao et al., (2015) and Odalonu (2015) on the efficiency-service model and the human needs theories suffices for thorough elucidation of this study where, the focal point of the former is that the fundamental essence of local government systems is the provision of social services while the later opine that governmental institutions exist specifically for the purpose of providing basic needs to the populace, failure of which may orchestrate a disconnect between the govern and the governed, thus, sparking a conflict situation.

This concept of inclusive development at the local level is rooted in the principle of decentralization, which aims to devolve power, resources, and responsibilities from central to local authorities. This devolution is intended to bring governance closer to the people, making it more responsive, accountable, and effective in addressing local needs. In Nigeria, the 1976 Local Government Reforms and subsequent incorporation into the 1979 and 1999 Constitutions formalized the local government as the third tier, granting it specific functions including the provision of basic amenities, primary healthcare, education, and sanitation (Fourth Schedule, 1999 Constitution).

Economic Implications of Inclusive Development for Local Governments in Nigeria

Inclusive development has numerous economic implications for local governments in Nigeria, including:

Poverty Reduction: By implementing projects that benefit the poor and vulnerable, local governments can reduce poverty levels and improve living standards. For instance, the Community and Social Development Project (CSDP) has helped alleviate poverty in rural areas through community-driven development initiatives.

Job Creation and Entrepreneurship: Local governments can stimulate economic growth by supporting local businesses, agriculture, and entrepreneurship. This can be achieved



through training programmes, access to finance, and modern farming techniques, as seen in Ekiti State's Agricultural Enterprise Scheme.

Improved Infrastructure: Inclusive development initiatives can lead to improved infrastructure, such as roads, water supply, and electricity, making communities more attractive for investment and economic activities. The CSDP has executed projects worth millions of naira in various states, including rural electrification and water provision.

Increased Public Participation: By engaging citizens in decision-making processes, local governments can foster a sense of ownership and responsibility, leading to more effective governance and economic development.

Enhanced Local Economic Growth: Inclusive development can lead to increased economic activity at the local level, reducing dependency on external factors and promoting sustainable development. Lagos State's Bus Rapid Transit system and Enugu State's Ogbete Main Market Revamp project are examples of initiatives that have boosted local economies.

2.2. Challenges to Inclusive Development for Local Governments in Nigeria

Notwithstanding the robust positive implications of inclusive development for local governments in Nigeria, however, the operational reality has often diverged sharply from these worthwhile expectations and constitutional ideals. Several scholars and reports underscore the systemic challenges that impede local government effectiveness:

Fiscal Dependency and State Interference: A predominant issue is the lack of genuine fiscal autonomy. Despite constitutional provisions for direct allocations from Federation Account, the State Joint Local Government Account (SJLGA) has become a conduit for state governments to control and often divert local government funds. This financial strangulation is widely documented as a major constraint. Odalonu (2022) highlights that the freedom of local government to have direct access and full control of their statutory allocations is a recurring struggle. This control renders local governments subservient to state governors, limiting their ability to initiate and complete local government projects.

Erosion of Autonomy and Democratic Deficit: Beyond fiscal matters, political interference from state governments undermines the democratic integrity of local governments. The frequent dissolution of democratically elected councils and the imposition of caretaker committees are common practices that subvert the will of the local populace and weaken accountability. This absence of genuine local elections means that local government officials often owe allegiance upwards to the state rather than downwards to the citizens they are supposed to serve. Alao et al (2015) and Odalonu (2015) extensively discuss these challenges to local government administration and social service delivery in Nigeria.



Capacity and Governance Gaps: Issues such as corruption, lack of skilled personnel, and inadequate internal revenue generation further compound the challenges. The IMF (2016) has consistently highlighted the pervasive impact and costs of corruption in undermining governance and development, which is particularly acute at the local level in Nigeria. Even mechanisms can lead to inefficient resource utilization.

2.2. IMPACT ON INCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENT CASE STUDIES

The consequences of these systemic failures are visible across Nigeria, manifesting in critical areas of human development and environmental justice.

- **Environmental Pollution in Ogoni Land:** Oil exploration since 1958 has caused untold pollution, with a 2011 UNEP report confirming contamination of water sources and farmlands. This continuous environmental degradation from oil exploration, particularly in regions like Ogoni Land, exemplifies a profound failure of governance at all levels, including local government, to protect citizens and ensure sustainable development. Reports from Amnesty International (2019) and other environmental justice organizations highlight the severe human rights implications and the devastating impact on livelihoods and health in affected communities. Yet, there is lack of local inclusion in decision-making processes regarding oil revenue and land use. There is also gross neglect on investment in health, education, and infrastructure in affected communities. Despite the UNEP Report (2011) indicating severe pollution and lack of government action, yet after more than a decade, no meaningful efforts have been made for a cleanup notwithstanding the several claimed budgetary allocations of the federal government earmarked for this. The impact of this sheer neglect spans from marginalization of indigenous communities, poverty rates exceeding 70% amid resource wealth and severe health hazards, to reduced livelihood opportunities.

- **Unlawful Demolition in Lagos State:** The 2016-2017 forced evictions of informal settlements in Lagos by the state government with little or no input from local councils or community members displaced more than 30,000 people without consultations or compensations. These instances of forced evictions and unlawful demolitions in urban centres like Lagos state underscores a lack of social protection and due process, often impacting vulnerable populations. Such actions, sometimes carried out by state-controlled agencies without adequate resettlement or compensation, reveal a critical gap in local government's role as a protector of its citizens' rights and a facilitator of truly inclusive urban development. Several homes, schools, and livelihoods were destroyed without any resettlement plans, thereby turning many homeless and psychologically devastated and of course, causing a collusion between the state government and inhabitants of the affected local government. Hence, there were several violations of court orders by the both parties but more so, the violation of human rights and legal protections (Amnesty International, 2021).

- **Education and Healthcare Deprivation in Zamfara State:** Ihugba et al (2019) noted that since 1991, the revenues of the local governments have been the main source of



funding for primary education. Each local government is given sufficient funds to pay all the primary school teachers within their boundaries and other earmarked funds deposited under the supervision of each State Primary education Board (SPEB) through the now renamed Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC). Systemic neglect of education and health services in rural areas, despite allocations from the federal government in terms of UBEC and PHC funds seriously calls for critical investigations. These persistent challenges in accessing quality education and healthcare, as seen in states like Zamfara, point to systemic failures in social service delivery at the grassroots. These deprivations exacerbate poverty and inequality, limiting human capital development and overall well-being. This has resulted to a number of issues ranging from mismanagement and diversion of funds, failure to implement Universal Basic Education programs effectively to poor infrastructure and lack of healthcare personnel. This has significantly impacted not only communities in Zamfara but also the state in entirety giving room to banditry which is perceived to be caused by high illiteracy rates, particularly among girls. According to the Zamfara State Report (2023), there is a 68% illiteracy rate among rural women. There is also rise in preventable diseases and youth radicalism due to lack of opportunities.

▪ **Herder-Farmer Conflicts in Benue State:** It is evidenced that persistent herder-farmer conflicts in Benue state have continued to undermine development efforts. Benue State, known as the “Food Basket of the Nation”, has experienced frequent and intense conflicts between herders and farmers, driven by competition over land and water resources, especially as climate change exacerbates resource scarcity. The role of local governments in mitigating these conflicts and fostering inclusive development requires a thorough examination, considering their unique position to address local needs, promote participatory decision-making, and build resilience from the bottom up. Records from an investigative journalism by ADDO (2025) states: “The once peaceful cohabitation between the farmers and the herders took a tragic turn in 2001, when a Benue farmer confronted a Fulani herder grazing cattle on his farm. The herder, feeling threatened, drew a sword and killed the farmer. This incident marked the first bloodshed in the region between herders and farmers.” In fact, the report concludes that: “This conflict is not just a communal struggle. It also shows the high level of insecurity in communities in Benue state and many parts of central Nigeria”.

The scholarly works by Jide & Ikeanyibe (2017) and Minima & Bredino (2018) reinforce the discussions on decentralization and local government autonomy, and their implications for grassroots development. Muhtar (2023), in his study on inclusive economic development in Indonesia, offers a comparative perspective, showing how other developing nations approach local government contributions and highlighting potential lessons for Nigeria. Furthermore, Uloaku (2025) emphasizes the importance of stakeholder involvement for project implementation success, a critical component for achieving inclusive development.

This qualitative study builds on the existing literatures by empirically investigating the lived realities of these challenges and the perceptions of various stakeholders, thereby providing a



more nuanced and in-depth understanding of how local governments can truly become anchors for inclusive development in Nigeria.

3.0. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Design

To explore the complex dynamics of local governments as anchors for inclusive development in Nigeria, this study adopted a qualitative research approach using a Multiple Case Study Design. This design allows for an in-depth exploration of specific contexts while also enabling cross-case analysis to identify common themes and variations across different localities and developmental challenges. Each of the four selected issues – environmental pollution in Ogoni land, unlawful demolitions in Lagos State, education/healthcare deprivation in Zamfara State, and herder-farmer conflicts in Benue State – served as a distinct case, providing rich, context-specific data. A case study approach is particularly suitable for exploring contemporary phenomenon within their real-life context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and its context are not clearly evident.

3.2. Participants and Sampling

Participants for this study were selected using quota-purposive sampling technique. The merging of these two non-probability sampling methods ensured that individuals who possess unique insights, direct experiences, or specific knowledge relevant to the research questions were included. The aim was to gather rich, detailed information from diverse perspectives. The study limited the sample size to thirty (30) participants whose categories include:

- **Community Members/Affected Individuals:** Residents directly impacted by environmental pollution in Ogoni land, displaced persons from demolition sites in Lagos state, parents/health workers experiencing deprivation in education and healthcare in Zamfara state, and direct victims and witnesses of herders-farmers conflicts in Benue state. This accounted for 40 percent of the sample size.

- **Local Government Officials:** Including local government chairpersons, councillors, and relevant department heads from the selected areas or related to the issues. Participants in this category accounted for 26.67 percent of the study sample size.

- **Community Leaders:** 26.67 percent of the sample size represented traditional rulers, youth leaders, and women's group representatives.

- **Civil Society Organization (CSO)/Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) Representatives:** An estimate of 6.6 percent of the sample size accounted for individuals from organizations working on environmental justice, human rights, housing, education, health, or conflict resolution in Nigeria, forming part of respondents for this study.

The specific numbers of participants totaling thirty (30) were adjusted during fieldwork based on saturation, where new data ceased to yield new insights.



3.3. Methods of Data Collection

The primary data collection method employed was semi-structured interviews. This approach allowed for flexibility in exploring emergent themes while ensuring coverage of key research areas. Interview guides were developed for each participant category, with open-ended questions designed to elicit detailed narratives, perceptions, and experiences. Interviews were conducted until thematic saturation was reached within each case and across cases. Some of the interviews were audio-recorded with informed consent and transcribed verbatim while some others were retrieved in writing.

In addition to interviews, document analysis was used to provide contextual information and triangulate findings. This involved reviewing various documents, including:

- The 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, particularly sections pertaining to local government functions and autonomy.
- Local government annual reports, budgets, and development plans (where accessible)
- Reports from national and international NGOs (e.g., Amnesty International, BBC News Report on demolitions) concerning human rights, environmental degradation, and social service delivery in Nigeria.
- Relevant policy documents and academic literature on decentralization and local governance in Nigeria.

3.4. Data Analysis

The collected qualitative data was analysed using Realist Thematic Analysis. This approach focuses on reporting the experiences and meanings of participants directly, often staying close to their actual words, to present a detailed account of the phenomena under study. The analysis process followed the six phases outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006):

1. **Familiarization with the data:** Repeatedly reading the transcripts and listening to audio recordings to immerse in the data and identify initial patterns.
2. **Generating Initial codes:** Systematically identifying interesting features across the entire dataset that relate to the research questions, coding specific phrases, sentences, or paragraphs.
3. **Searching for themes:** Grouping similar codes together to form potential themes, looking for overarching patterns and recurring ideas across the interviews.
4. **Reviewing themes:** Refining and reviewing the themes to ensure they are coherent, distinct, and accurately reflect the data. Themes were merged, split, or discarded as necessary.
5. **Defining and naming themes:** Developing clear definitions and concise names for each theme, explaining what each theme represents and its significance to the research questions.



6. **Producing the report:** Weaving the themes together into a coherent narrative, using illustrative quotes from the respondents to support each theme and provide vivid empirical evidence.

Remarkably, the NVivo, a qualitative data analysis (QDA) software was used to analyse the data for the study while Python software was adopted for coding of the study data and eventual transmission into visual representations.

4.0. ANALYSES, PRESENTATIONS, AND DISCUSSIONS OF RESULTS

4.1. Thematic Analyses

Based on a realist thematic analysis of the interview responses which for purposes of this study is labelled Report of Interview Responses on Local Government as Anchors for Inclusive Development in Nigeria (RIRLGAIN), several key themes emerged concerning the challenges, impacts, and potential solutions related to local governments as anchors for inclusive development in Nigeria. These themes highlight the lived realities of how fiscal and political impediments translate into concrete failures in development and service delivery at the grassroots.

Theme 1: Fiscal Strangulation and State Interference

This theme vividly illustrates the profound financial dependence of local governments on state governments, which critically undermines their capacity to undertake development initiatives and achieve genuine autonomy.

Direct Control by State Governors: Respondents consistently emphasize that state governments, particularly governors, exert direct control over local government funds. As *Respondent 1* unequivocally states, “Local governments don’t control their money; it’s practically controlled by the state government, particularly the Governor”. This sentiment is powerfully echoed by *Respondent 3*, who asserts, “The state governments are holding them by the jugular because that’s where the money is controlled from”. This pervasive control extends to the State Joint Local Government Account (SJLGA), which is widely perceived as a mechanism for manipulation rather than an efficient means of resource distribution.

Impact on Development: The diversion, arbitrary withholding, or significant reduction of allocated funds leads directly to a severe scarcity of resources for local projects. *Respondent 10* observes, “Most times, the money that gets to them is not even up to the amount that is being allocated to them”. This financial deprivation translates directly into dilapidated infrastructure, extremely limited basic service delivery, and a profound inability to address the pressing needs of grassroots communities. *Respondent 22* succinctly captures the ripple effect: “Local governments cannot fully participate in inclusive development if they cannot meet the needs of the rural people”.



Political Subservience: The inherent financial dependency coerces local governments into a state of political subservience, fundamentally compromising their constitutional and democratic functions. *Respondent 4* bluntly articulates this: “They cannot carry out any form of development without carrying the state government along...they are totally under the state government”. This hierarchical dominance profoundly undermines the constitutional mandate of local governments as a distinct and autonomous tier of government.

Theme 2: Erosion of Local Autonomy and Democratic Deficit

This theme captures the systemic undermining of local government independence, primarily through the absence of genuine democratic elections and the resultant imposition of leadership, which collectively foster a significant democratic deficit.

Lack of Genuine Election: A pervasive and deeply felt grievance among respondents is the consistent failure to conduct regular, free, and fair local government elections. *Respondent 14* asserts, “You find out that most times the elections are not genuinely held, they are mostly appointed”. This sentiment is strongly shared by *Respondent 5*, who highlights “appointment of caretaker committees” as a common, undemocratic practice that systematically bypasses legitimate electoral processes.

Imposition of Leadership: The overwhelming influence of the state government extends to hand-picking local leaders, frequently disregarding the preferences and aspirations of the local communities. *Respondent 17* states, “They just select anybody they feel like and they impose them as local government chairmen”. This practice fundamentally strips local communities of their basic right to choose their representatives, leading to a critical lack of accountability from local government officials towards the very people they are meant to serve.

Consequences for Accountability: In the absence of genuine elections local government officials’ primary accountability shifts upwards to state authorities rather than downwards to their constituents. *Respondent 2* cutely observes, “The people have nobody to look up to because they didn’t even put them there”. Regrettably, *Respondent 25* notes, “My brother, imagine how our communities were brutally attacked and nobody to speak for us. . .yet some people say all is well”. This structural flaw directly impacts the quality and responsiveness of service delivery and fundamentally erodes trust between the government and the governed at the grassroots level.

Theme 3: Inadequate Service Delivery and Grassroots Disconnect

This theme comprehensively details the profound failure of local governments to provide essential services and establish meaningful connections with the needs of the grassroots, resulting in widespread deprivation and disillusionment.

Core Service Failures: Respondents consistently highlight significant and critical deficiencies in the provision of basic services, including crucial infrastructure like roads,



essential social amenities like schools, and vital healthcare facilities. *Respondent 30* pointedly describes the dire state of rural roads, which severely impedes the ability of farmers to transport their agricultural produce to markets. *Respondents 7, 12 and 23* emphatically stress that “health centres and schools are not properly built and equipped”.

Lack of Needs-Based Planning: The pervasive absence of genuine fiscal and political autonomy means that local governments are often unable to conceptualize, plan, or implement projects that are specifically tailored to the unique and pressing needs of their communities. *Respondent 7* articulates this critical issue: “Local governments cannot fully participate in inclusive development if they cannot meet the needs of the rural people”. This structural impediment inevitably creates a profound “disconnect between the policies and the people at the grassroots”, leading to projects that are often irrelevant or ill-suited to actual community demands.

Impact on Vulnerable Groups: The cumulative failure in service delivery disproportionately and severely affects vulnerable populations. Hence, there is a widespread mistrust of local government motives, consequently, the belief that local governments serve political interest, not community needs. *Respondents 23, 6, 8, 13 and 19* highlight how impassable roads exacerbate critical challenges for pregnant women in rural areas seeking medical attention. *Respondents 2, 5, 10, 11 and 24* in reference to traditional conflict resolution mechanism agree that traditional systems (e.g., elders, community leaders, etc.) exist but are not fully integrated into formal governance. Some local governments support them while others ignore them. With particular reference to peacebuilding initiatives, they equally affirm that there are local peacebuilding efforts but they have limited impact and absence of sustained follow-up.

Theme 4: Recommendations for Enhanced Autonomy and Development

This theme synthesizes the consistent and actionable solutions proposed by respondents, emphasizing the critical importance of genuine fiscal autonomy, robust democratic processes, and proactive community engagement as foundational pillars for sustainable local development.

- **Fiscal Autonomy as the Foundation:** There is an overwhelming and strong consensus among *respondents* that direct and unfettered financial allocation to local governments is absolutely paramount for their effective functioning. *Respondent 23* explicitly stresses the urgent need for “total financial autonomy”. Reinforcing this, *Respondent 5* states, “There should be a means by which the local governments will get their allocation directly”. This aligns directly with the spirit of the recent Supreme Court ruling affirming greater fiscal autonomy, though its implementation remains crucial.

- **Genuine Democratic Elections:** *Respondents* passionately advocate for the conduct of genuinely free, fair, and regular elections for local government officials, completely free from state interference. *Respondent 4* articulates the direct benefit: “If the local government

chairmen are properly elected, they will be accountable to the people who elected them,”. This will serve to fundamentally foster both accountability and legitimacy within local governance structures.

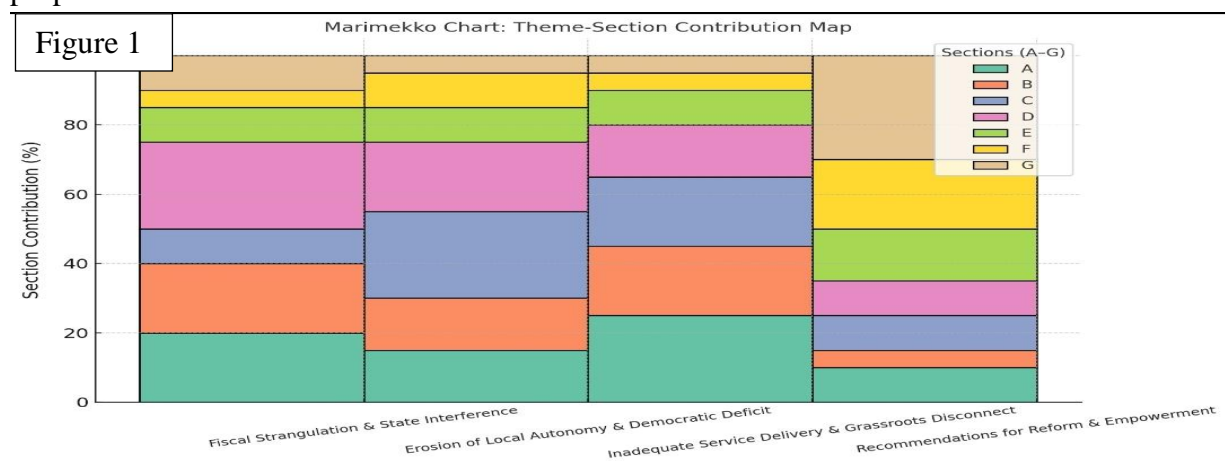
- **Capacity Building and Monitoring:** Beyond the critical aspect of financial autonomy, there is a clear recognition that local government personnel require targeted training and robust, effective monitoring mechanisms. *Respondent 5* thoughtfully suggests that “mechanisms should be put in place to monitor the funds” once they are directly allocated to local governments. This highlights a need for accountability frameworks to ensure judicious use of funds.

- **Community Engagement and Participation:** Several respondents strongly emphasize the vital importance of actively engaging local communities in all stages of development processes. *Respondent 1* urges, “They need to look inwards, call for meetings with the people at the grassroots”. This recommendation powerfully echoes the call for “Participatory Needs assessment” and regular “town-hall meetings”, underscoring the necessity of bottom-up development.

Revenue Generation and Innovation: Some responses, notably *Respondent 7*’s forward-thinking suggestions for local governments to hold shares in International Oil Company (IOC) assets or to own and operate power plants, point towards innovative and sustainable strategies for internally generated revenue, thereby lessening an over-reliance on federal allocations.

4.2. Presentations of Results

The researchers are poised to make presentations of various tables and figures emerging from the analysis of the study as supporting evidence of empiricism and for in-depth illustrative purposes:



Above here in Figure 1 is a Marimekko Chart representing the contribution of each section (A – G) to the four major themes synthesized across the study. Each column represents one of the four overarching themes: Fiscal Strangulation & State Interference, Erosion of Local Autonomy & Democratic Deficit, Inadequate Service Delivery & Grassroots Disconnect and



Recommendations for Reform & Empowerment. The width of each bar reflects the total thematic weight (same across all for clarity), while the segments inside each bar show the percentage contribution from each section (A – G), color-coded.

Table 1:

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS ON LOCAL GOVERNMENTS AS ANCHORS FOR INCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

SECTION A	GENERAL ROLE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENTS IN INCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENT
1.	How would you describe the role of local governments in promoting inclusive development in your area?
2.	Do local governments have sufficient autonomy to address community-specific challenges? Why or why not?
3.	What are the major barriers preventing local governments from effectively serving marginalized groups?
4.	Can you give example where local government intervention successfully resolved a community crisis?
5.	How transparent and accountable do you perceive local government decision-making processes to be?
SECTION B	ENVIRONMENTAL CHALLENGES IN OGONI LAND
6.	How has the local government responded to environmental degradation (e.g., oil pollution) in Ogoni Land?
7.	Do you believe local governments have the capacity to enforce environmental regulations? If not, why?
8.	What role should local governments play in mediating between communities and multinational companies on environmental issues?
9.	How inclusive are environmental remediation programs for affected Ogoni communities?
10.	What alternative livelihoods has the local government facilitated for residents impacted by environmental damage?
SECTION C	RESIDENTIAL DEMOLITIONS IN LAGOS STATE
11.	How would you assess the Lagos local government's approach to urban development and housing policies?
12.	Were residents adequately consulted before demolition exercises in your area?
13.	What compensation or resettlement measures were provided to affected individuals?
14.	How do demolitions align (or conflict) with inclusive development goals in Lagos state?
15.	What alternative solutions could local governments adopt to address urban planning needs without displacing residents?
SECTION D	POLITICAL UNREST IN ZAMFARA AND BENUE STATES
16.	How has the local government addressed farmer-herder conflicts in your state?
17.	Do local governments collaborate with state/federal authorities to mitigate political unrest? Provide examples.
18.	What measures has the local government taken to protect vulnerable groups (e.g., women, children) during crises?
19.	How effective are local peacebuilding initiatives in your community?
20.	Are there traditional or community-led conflict resolution mechanisms that the local government supports?
SECTION E	INTERSECTIONAL CHALLENGES (POVERTY, GENDER, MARGINALIZATION)
21.	How does the local government address the needs of women, youth, and persons with disabilities in its programs?
22.	Are there specific policies to reduce poverty and inequality at the local government level?
23.	How does political patronage or corruption affect inclusive development initiatives?
24.	What steps should local governments take to ensure equitable resource distribution?
SECTION F	COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION AND ADVOCACY
25.	How often do local governments engage communities in decision-making processes?
26.	What platforms exist for citizens to hold local governments accountable?



27. Have civil society organizations (CSOs) influenced local government actions in your area? How?
 28. What recommendations would you give to strengthen local governance for inclusive development?
- SECTION G FUTURE PROSPECTS**
29. What three key reforms would make local governments more effective in addressing your community's challenges?
 30. Do you believe Nigeria's local government system can become a model for inclusive development? Why or why not?

Above in Table 1 are the thirty (30) items structured interview questions administered to the respondents to elicit valid and lived experience responses (RIRLGAIN) for data analysis.

Table 2:

THEMATIC SUMMARY TABLE OF EACH SECTION OF THE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS – ALL SECTIONS (A to G)

SECTION	CORE THEMES	THEMATIC SUMMARY
SECTION A: GENERAL ROLE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENTS IN INCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENT	Inclusive Service Delivery, Equity and Empowerment, Participatory Governance, Local Economic Support, Collaboration and Digital Inclusion	Local governments deliver key services and support inclusion, but effectiveness varies by location and capacity. Participatory approaches, though emerging, are often limited in scope.
SECTION B: ENVIRONMENTAL CHALLENGES IN OGONI LAND	Weak Government Response, Lack of Enforcement, Exclusion from Clean-Up Efforts, Conflict Mediation Role, Neglect of Livelihood Recovery	Local governments are largely sidelined or ineffective in addressing environmental degradation. Affected communities are excluded from decision-making and remediation programs.
SECTION C: RESIDENTIAL DEMOLITIONS IN LAGOS STATE	Forced Evictions and Displacement, Lack of Community Engagement, Absence of Compensation or Resettlement, Legal and Policy Voids, Human Rights Concerns	Demolitions are often sudden, unplanned, and disproportionately affect the poor and certain endangered species. Local authorities rarely engage communities beforehand or offer support after eviction.
SECTION D: POLITICAL UNREST IN ZAMFARA AND BENUE STATES	Ineffective Conflict Response, Limited Coordination Across Levels, Vulnerable Groups Left Behind, Symbolic Peacebuilding, Weak Support for Traditional Systems, Mistrust in Local Governance	Local governments struggle to address farmer-herder conflicts and protect civilians. Peace efforts are fragmented, and traditional conflict resolution systems are underutilized.
SECTION E: INTERSECTIONAL CHALLENGES (POVERTY, GENDER, MARGINALIZATION)	Overlapping Exclusions, Poor Policy Targeting, Cultural and Gender Barriers, Symbolic Inclusion, Reliance on NGOs, Weak Data Systems	Poverty, gender, and social marginalization intersect, but local responses rarely reflect this complexity. Most efforts are driven by civil society, not embedded in local governance.
SECTION F: COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION AND ADVOCACY	Civic Mobilization and Resistance, Legal Awareness, Media and Social Campaigns, Collective	Communities are increasingly organizing to resist exclusion, especially through legal channels and public campaigns.



Figure 2

<https://www.ajsspub-org.b12sites.com>

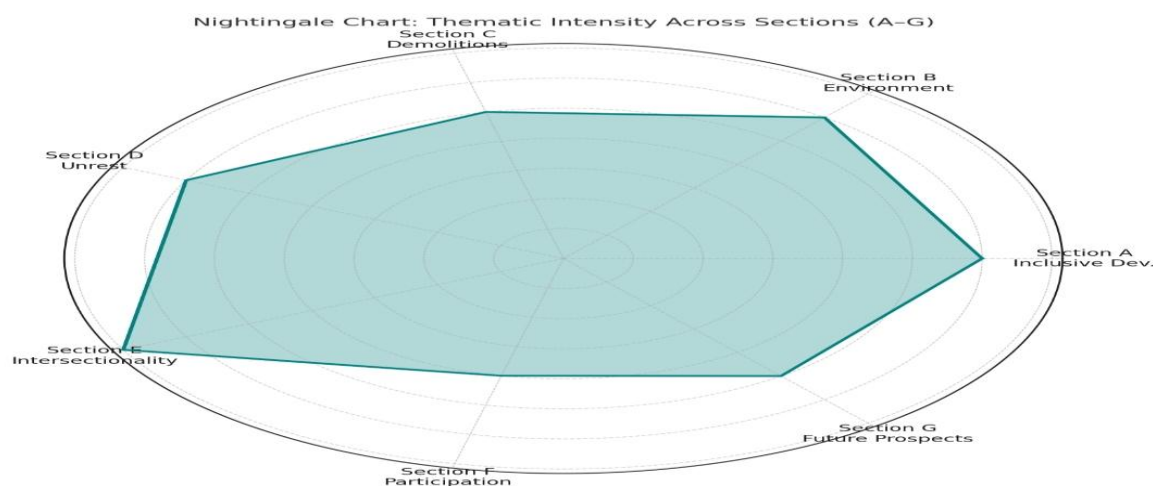
N: 3043 – 5463 ISSN: 1595 – 5842

<https://www.ajsspub2.org>

VOULUME 2, ISSUE 2, 2025

	Organizing	Participation is often driven from below rather than through government invitation.
SECTION G: FUTURE PROSPECTS	Calls for Reform, Investment in Local Capacity, Decentralization and Autonomy, Inclusive Policy Frameworks, Hope for Stronger Civil Society	Respondents called for increased autonomy, better funding, and stronger community roles in decision-making. There's optimism if inclusive governance structures are prioritized.

Here in Table 2 is a full Thematic Summary Table covering all the Sections (A to G) based on the interview data (RIRLGAIN). Each theme reflects cumulative insights drawn from the interview responses within each section.

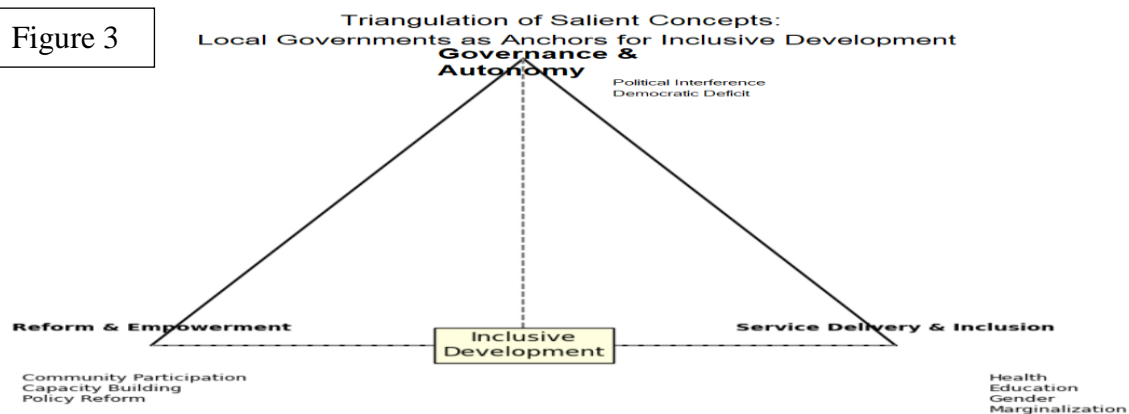


This Figure 2 above is a Nightingale Chart illustrating the thematic intensity across all sections (A – G) of the study. Each segment of the Nightingale Chart represents a section of RIRLGAIN. The radius (length) of each segment reflects the number of themes or depth of insights identified in that section. Section E (Intersectional Challenges) stands out with the most thematic richness, while Section F has slightly fewer distinct themes but remains critical to the overall narrative.

4.3. Discussion of Findings

The qualitative findings of this study, illuminated by the thematic analysis of stakeholder interviews, provide robust empirical evidence that both corroborates and significantly deepens the theoretical understanding of local government challenges in Nigeria. The themes of Fiscal Strangulation and State Interference, Erosion of Local Autonomy and Democratic Deficit, and Inadequate Service Delivery and Grassroots Disconnect are intricately linked, forming a vicious cycle that profoundly impairs local government function and hinders inclusive development.

The consistent emphasis by respondents on the state government's control over local government funds echoes existing literature on fiscal federalism challenges in Nigeria. However, the qualitative data adds a crucial layer by detailing the lived experience of this control – how it directly translates into unexecuted projects, underfunded services, and a pervasive sense of political subservience among local officials. This empirical insight reinforces the arguments for genuine fiscal autonomy, as supported by the Supreme Court ruling, not merely as a legal mandate but as an essential prerequisite for grassroots development.

Figure 3

This triangulation diagram in Figure 3 above visually organizes the three core conceptual domains central to this study.

Each point of the triangle represents a key area of concern identified through thematic analysis:

1. Governance & Autonomy – highlighting fiscal constraints, political interference, and lack of local decision-making power.
2. Service Delivery & Inclusion – focusing on failures in basic service provision and the exclusion of vulnerable groups.
3. Reform & Empowerment – encompassing community participation, capacity-building, and institutional reform.

At the centre lies Inclusive Development, symbolizing the goal that can only be achieved when all three domains are effectively addressed and balanced.

Similarly, the pervasive “Lack of Genuine Elections” and “Imposition of Leadership” described by participants directly illustrate the democratic deficit often discussed in academic discourse. The findings underscore that without true electoral accountability, local government officials become upwardly focused, leading to a profound “disconnect between the policies and the people at the grassroots”. This empirical validation highlights that democratic legitimacy at the local level is not an abstract idea but a practical necessity for responsive and inclusive governance. The challenges identified by Alao et al (2016) and Odalonu (2015) regarding efficient social service delivery resonate strongly with the thematic



findings of “Inadequate Service Delivery and Grassroots Disconnect”. The qualitative data provides specific examples of these failures – from impassable rural roads hindering pregnant women to poorly equipped schools and even to the absence of any effective conflict resolution mechanisms on communal clashes, hence, bringing the human cost of governance failures to the forefront.

The advocacies emerging from the thematic analysis – focusing on fiscal autonomy, genuine democratic elections, capacity building, community engagement, peace and conflict resolution, and innovative revenue generation – are not merely theoretical prescriptions but are firmly rooted in the expressed needs and insights of those experiencing these challenges firsthand. The emphasis on “Participatory Needs Assessment” and “town-hall meetings” aligns with Uloaku’s (2025) arguments for stakeholder involvement, suggesting a pathway to development that is both inclusive and sustainable. Ultimately, this study’s qualitative lens reveals that for local governments to truly serve as anchors for inclusive development, a fundamental reorientation towards genuine autonomy, democratic accountability, and community-centric governance is imperative.

5.0. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This qualitative study has provided an in-depth understanding of the persistent challenges faced by local governments in Nigeria and their profound implications for inclusive development. Through a multiple case study approach and thematic analysis of stakeholder interviews, the research empirically confirms the major impediments to inclusive development of local governments in Nigeria, which largely incapacitates them from fulfilling their constitutional mandates, leading to widespread deprivation and lack of grassroots development.

For local governments to genuinely serve as anchors for inclusive development in Nigeria, it is recommended that there should be enforcement of absolute fiscal autonomy, ensuring genuine democratic elections, strengthening capacity building and governance structures, promoting participatory governance and community engagement, diversifying revenue generation avenues and implementing strong oversight and monitoring.

By addressing these systemic issues with concerted efforts from all tiers of government and active participation from communities, local governments in Nigeria can indeed be transformed into effective anchors for inclusive and sustainable grassroots development.

Competing Interest

The authors have declared that no conflicting interest exist in this manuscript.



REFERENCES

- African Digital Democracy Observatory (ADDO). (2025). How Nigeria's farmer-herder conflict destroys lives. *Medium*. <https://disinfo.africa/navigating-the-decades-long-farmer-herder-conflict-in-central-igeria-4e00546c2d9e>
- Alao, D., Ajike, C., & Ibrahim, M. (2016). Environmental factors and local government administration in Nigeria: A study of Ede North and Ede South Local Government, Osun State, Nigeria. *Kuwait Chapter of Arabian Journal of Business and Management Review*, (57).
- Alao, D., Nwogwugwu, N., Ibrahim, M., & Ajike, A. (2015). Challenges of Local Government Administration in Nigeria and the Way Forward. *Ethiopian International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research*, 3(1), 1-7.
- Amassoma, D., Nwosa, P., & Aiisafe, A. R. (2011). Components of government spending and economic growth: An error correction modelling. *Journal of Economics & Sustainable Development*.
- Amnesty International. (2019). Nigeria: Human rights agenda. <https://www.amnesty.be>
- Amnesty International. (2021). Nigeria. Submission to the UN Committee against Torture. 72nd Session. <https://www.amnesty.org>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3, 77 – 101.
- Bredino, S. M., Fiderikumo, P., & Adedoyin, A. (2022). Fiscal policy implementation in Nigeria: Issues and challenges. *International Journal of Economics and Management Studies*, 32 – 36.
- Chukwuemeka, E., Ugwuanyi, B., Ndubuisi-Okolo, P. & Onuoha, C. (2014). Nigeria local government: A discourse on the theoretical imperatives in a governmental system. *An International Multidisciplinary Journal, Ethiopia*, 8(2), 305 – 324.
- Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 (as amended). Cap. C23 Laws of the Federation of Nigeria 2004.
- Gupta, J., Nicky, R., & Ros-Tonen, M. (2015). Towards an elaborated theory of inclusive development. *European Journal of Development Research*. DOI: 10.1057/ejdr.2015.30
- Ihugba, O., Ukwunna, J., & Obiukwu, S. (2019). Government education expenditure and primary school enrolment in Nigeria: An Impact analysis. *Journal of Economics and International Finance*. Vol. 11(3), 24-37.
- International Monetary Fund (IMF). (2016). Nigeria - selected issues. <https://www.imf.org>
- Imhanlahimi, J. & Ikeanybe, M. (2009). Local government autonomy and development of localities in Nigeria: Issues, problems and suggestions. *Global Journal of Social Sciences*, 8(2) 13 – 30.



- Jide, I., & Ikeanyibe, O. (2017). Decentralization and local government autonomy: Implication for grassroots development in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. <https://www.academia.edu>
- Lewi, I. (2011). Towards more efficient local government in United Kingdom and Nigeria. Retrieved from: <http://dukeoshodi.blogspot.com/2014/05/toward-more-efficient-local>
- Mackenzie, W. (1964). *Theories of local government*. London, London Press.
- Minima, G., & Bredino, S. (2018). *The GMoU framework and rural poverty: A study of selected communities across Niger Delta*. *AKSU Journal of Management Sciences*, 3(1), 80 – 93.
- Muhtar, M. (2023). Inclusive economic development in indonesia: An empirical study of local government contribution. *Jurnal Akuntansi Dan Bisnis*, 94-105.
- Nchuchuwe, F., & Oviasuyi, O. (2003). The need to re-negotiate Nigeria's federalism for agricultural development in the 21st century. *The International Journal of Governance and Development*, 1(2), 26 – 42.
- Nwogwugwu, N. (2012). *Educated elites political participation and Governance in Ogun State (2003-2011)*. (Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Babcock University).
- Odalonu, H. (2015). Challenges confronting local government administration in efficient and effective social service delivery: The Nigerian experience. *International Journal of Public Administration and Management Research (IJPAMR)*, 2(5), 12 – 22.
- Odalonu, H. (2022). The rationale and challenges of local government autonomy in Nigeria. In S. C. Ugwu & H. B. Okibe (Eds.). *Contemporary Issues and Trends in Local Government Administration in Nigeria* (pp. 316 – 340). ESUT Press.
- Olusola, O. (2011). Boosting internally generated revenue of local government in Ogun State, Nigeria, A Study of Selected Local Governments in Ogun State. *European Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 8(1), 336-348.
- Rauniyar, G. & Kanbur, R. (2010). Inclusive development: Two papers on conceptualization, application, and the ADB perspective, <http://www.kanbur.dyson.cornell.edu/papers/ADBCompensumInclusive-Develop.pdf>
- Sachs, I. (2004). Inclusive development strategy in the era of globalization. *International Labour Organization Working Paper, No. 35*. Geneva, Switzerland: ILO
- Uloaku, O. (2025). Stakeholder Involvement and Project Implementation Success of Niger Delta Development Projects, Niger Delta Region, Nigeria. *Diamondbridge Economics & Business Journal*.
- United Nation Environment Programme (UNEP) . (2011). Environmental assesment of Ogoniland report. <https://www.unep.org/topics/disasters-and-conflicts/country-presence/nigeria/environmental-assessment-ogoniland-report>
- Zamfara State Government. (2023). Education & health report. <https://zamfara.gov.ng>