

**POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND GRASSROOTS DEMOCRACY IN  
NIGERIA: INSIGHTS FROM KOLOKUMA/OPOKUMA LOCAL  
GOVERNMENT AREA OF BAYELSA STATE**

**Preye Kuro Inokoba (Ph.D)**

Department of Political Science, Niger Delta University, Bayelsa State

**&**

**Samuel B. Kalagbor (Ph.D)**

Department of Public Administration, Rumuola, Port Harcourt Polytechnic, Rumuola

**Abstract**

*The cardinal objective for the establishment of the local government system in Nigeria is to bring democratic governance to the local citizens through proper political education and socialization that will empower them to effectively participate in grassroots democracy and governance. This is based on the premise that active and robust participation of majority of the citizenry is key to the health, survival and sustenance of democracy in Nigeria. Thus, the paper examined the extent, in which the citizens are involved in political activities at the local government level and how this has impacted on the state of grassroots democracy with particular reference to Kolokuma/Opokuma Local Government Area of Bayelsa State. The study adopted both qualitative and quantitative means of data collection, interpretation and analysis. This involved the use of questionnaires, oral interviews with stakeholders and data or information from secondary sources. The findings of this research are that there is low citizens' participation at the local level and this has had a debilitating effect on the state of democracy at the grassroots. On the basis of the findings of the study, it is recommended that there is urgent need for actionable informal and informal approaches to political education of Nigerians at the grassroots.*

**Keywords:** Political Participation, Grassroots Democracy, Local Government Area, Local Governance, Representative Democracy

**Introduction**

The role of Nigerians at the grassroots in the socio-economic and political development of the Nigerian state cannot be overemphasized. This is basically the reason the local government system came into existence in Nigeria with the sole mandate of bringing government closer to majority of Nigerians at the rural areas. The expectation and rationale of establishing the local government system in Nigeria was to encourage grassroots democracy that will serve as a platform for the people at this level to participate and own the local governance process.

Apparently, the essence of the local government system in Nigeria is to create a sense of belonging at the grassroots through the mechanism of decentralization in

governance. Thus, the local government system was designed to be a means of ensuring effective democracy at the grassroots level because it is the level of government closest to the people and by implication it is the most critical in engendering good democratic culture and values and effective participation in the process of development at the grassroots with the possibility of filtering up to the national level (Diongoli, 2014:1; Bashir & Mohammed 2012:98).

Efforts to encourage the active and full participation of the grassroots populace in the Nigerian political system especially in its electoral process through the local governance system, is very critical to the democratisation process in the country. This is understandable because the health, stability and vibrancy of any democracy largely depends on the rational conduct and active participation of the citizenry. After all, the beginning and end of democracy is the people. It is basically for this reason that Abraham Lincoln defined democracy as the government by the people, for the people and of the people. The consensus among scholars and political commentators is that no democracy can survive and consolidate without deliberate measures put in place that will enable and empower the populace to be part and parcel of the political process.

Thus, in an attempt to create an avenue for the large number of Nigerians at the grassroots to get involved in the local governance process, the local government system was established (Falade, 2014:10; Bashir & Mohammed, 2012:101). As a catalyst for democracy and good governance the local government is expected to serve as a form of political and administrative structure that can facilitate decentralization, integration, efficiency in governance, promote and ensure a sense of belonging at the grassroots. Though the local government system may take different forms all over the world, the local government is generally expected to provide a feedback to the state and national government relying on the opinions and demands of the people at the grassroots while at the same time promoting democracy at the local level, and mobilizing human and material resources for the development of local communities (Bashir & Mohammed, 2012:98). It is little wonder therefore that the local government system has been a major feature of Nigeria's political system since the colonial era. And over the years, to make local governance more responsive and accountable to the grassroots people, several governments had embarked upon different reform policies that has led to changes in the structure, composition and nomenclature of the local governance system in Nigeria.

However, from all indications, these policy reforms have so far failed to make the local government system more accountable, people-oriented, responsible and responsive to the needs and yearnings of the people of the grassroots. Democracy at this level of governance has been elusive and in most instances, non-functional as the local governance system has been hijacked by the various state governors and their cronies. Thus, the central aim of the study is to explain the near absence of democracy at the local government level of governance by attributing it to the state and quality of grassroots political participation. It is in light of this, that the research is embarked upon to investigate the level and extent of grassroots participation in the administration of the Kolokuma/Opokuma Local Government Area of Bayelsa State.

### **Definition of Major Concepts**

From our topic it is obvious that the research has three central concepts: Political Participation; Local Government and; Grassroots Democracy. These concepts are given contextual definitions in this section of the paper.

**Political Participation:** Refers to the several formal and informal processes and structures through which the citizens get involve in public policy making as well as electing those that will represent them in government (Paki & Inokoba, 2008:157). In similar vein, Falada (2014:18) described political participation as the process through which the individual plays a role in the political life of his society and has the opportunity to take part in deciding what common goals of the society are and the best way of achieving these goals. It is a voluntary activity and one may participate directly or indirectly. The various ways by which the people can be involved in the political system include selection or election of political leaders, formation of policies, community activities and other civic engagements (Falade, 2014:18). As a fundamental principle of democracy, participation is also the principal means by which consent is granted or withdrawn in a democracy and rulers are made accountable to the governed. It is also a means for realising the democratic objective of equality and freedom by the citizenry in the determination of their affairs. Thus, without the active and effective involvement of the citizenry in the selection of public policies as well as personnel of government, democracy would be a hollow sham.

**Local Government:** For the purpose of the research, local government, is defined as an institution created by law to provide public services according to local peculiarities through the involvement of the people and to ensure maximum efficiency in the administration and provision of such public services to guarantee grassroots development (Odo, 2014:208). Similarly, the Guidelines for Local Government Reform (FGN, 1976) defined local government as:

Government at local level exercised through representative councils established by law to exercise specific powers within defined areas. These powers should give the council substantial control over local affairs as well as the staff and institutional financial power to initiate and direct the provision of services and to determine and implement projects so as to complement the activities of the state and federal governments in their areas, and to ensure, through devolution of functions to these councils and through active participation of the people and their traditional institutions, that local initiatives and response to local needs and conditions are maximized.

From the above definitions, there are four premium indicators of what local government system is all about and anything less than any of the under listed could lead to what is known as a defunct system of local government.

- i. Local government must be a legal entity distinct from the state and federal government.
- ii. Local government must be administered by democratically elected officials.
- iii. Local government must have specific powers to perform a range of functions assigned it by law.
- iv. Local government must enjoy substantial autonomy to perform a range of functions, plans, formulate and execute its own policies, programmes and projects, and its own rules and regulations and deemed for its local needs. This autonomy includes power to control its finance, recruit and discipline its staff (Adeyeye, 2005:17). Apparently, any local government system that is devoid of the above listed irreducible or indispensable elements is not fit to be referred to as a local government.

**Grassroots Democracy:** As a variant of democracy, is a people/community-driven participation in elections, governance and decision making. According to Sunday and Chinedum (2014:215), grassroots 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 governance. 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 democracy lies at the grassroots level; this is because the local people will appreciate a political representative who dwells among the local community members rather being governed from afar while this better explicates the government of the people which democracy presages. Thus, grassroots democracy is the political processes which are driven by group of ordinary citizens, as opposed to political processes that are under the strangle-hold of powerful and wealthy individuals with vested interests. In daily political practice, the term usually refers to frequent town hall meetings, consensus policy development, bottom-top consensus decision making, and robust participation of the local populace in the electoral process and where their electoral decisions are seen as sacrosanct and respected by the political elites. Basically, grassroots democracy is a democratic process driven and owned by the large number of Nigerians living at the local communities that make the local government system.

#### **Description of Study Area**

Kolokuma/Opokuma Local Government Area (LGA) is one among the eight (8) statutorily recognized LGAs in Bayelsa State. It was created on the 1<sup>st</sup> of October, 1996 by the then military Head of State, late General Sani Abacha. It has Kaiama as its headquarters. The LGA is bordered on the North and East by Sagbama LGA (SALGA), on the West by Yenagoa, LGA (YELGA). In other words, the Kolokuma/Opokuma LGA (KOLGA) is sandwiched by SALGA and YELGA respectively (Diongoli, 2014:32).

Historically, as noted by Alagoa (1999:80), the Kolokuma people share a common ancestor with Tarakiri (West) and Opokuma community. They share same cultural, language and occupation as the rest of the Ijaws. As a result of geographical

contiguity, it was easy to merge the two clans to form KOLGA in 1996. The LGA is also made up of 20 communities (or towns) with each clan having ten (10) towns respectively. The population of the area is estimated to be about 79,000 (D.O.S, 2012:2). The most important human occupation in KOLGA includes fishing, farming (both crop and livestock rearing), artisans (such as canoe carvers), traders and those that are engaged in paid employment in the public service.

### **Objective of the Study**

The research is embarked upon to achieve the following objectives:

- i) To investigate the level and extent of grassroots participation in the political process of KOLGA.
- ii) To investigate how the political involvement or non-participation of the grassroots affects the state of democracy in KOLGA.
- iii) To investigate whether there are hindrances to effective political participation of the grassroots in the politics of KOLGA.

### **Methods of Study**

**Research Design:** This study is descriptive in nature. The survey design is employed in conduct of this study. Both qualitative and quantitative approaches were adopted to obtain the data used in the research. In other words, the information for the realization of the research objectives was derived from both primary and secondary sources of data. The primary data was drawn from unstructured interviews and questionnaires, while the secondary data was derived from publications such as referred journals, newspapers, text books, conference papers, online materials, etc.

**Methods of Data Collection:** The research designed and applied the instruments of unstructured interviews, discussions and questionnaire. The interviews and discussions were conducted with a few randomly selected stakeholders such as former local government chairmen and other senior personnel of KOLGA. The questionnaire on the other hand, was administered on a sample population of people above 18 years old within the local government area. The questionnaire instrument was divided into two sections: Section A is made of items on the attitude of the people of the grassroots to political participation in KOLGA, while Section B reflects the grassroots attitude towards the challenges to grassroots participation in the politics of KOLGA.

**Sampling Size and Procedures:** A total of 180 questionnaires were employed to gather the quantitative data. The respondents were randomly selected from the three (3) largest communities with also the largest registered voters in KOLGA. These communities are: Sabagreia (with population of 16,800 and 6,538 registered voters); Kaiama (with a population of 18,300 and 9,672 registered voters) and Odi (with a population of 19,866 and 12,782 registered voters) (INEC, 2015). The 180 questionnaires were equally distributed and administered in the three communities: 60 questionnaires were randomly distributed in each of the selected communities. And

since the focus of the research was more on electoral participation, the age of the respondents was restricted to 18 years and above. However, out of the total of 180 questionnaires administered, only 165 were retrieved representing 92 per cent of the initially administered questionnaires.

**Methods of Data Presentation and Analysis:** The information derived from the qualitative means (interviews and discussions) and quantitative instrument of questionnaires were both analysed and interpreted. The data generated from the interview and discussions were recorded to secondary information. On the hand, responses from the questionnaire instrument were presented and expressed in simple percentages with the use of tables. That is, responses were tabulated and expressed in percentages, thus:

$$\frac{\text{No. of responses for each question}}{\text{Total No. of respondents}} \times \frac{100}{1}$$

It should be noted that due to the researcher’s inability to retrieve all questionnaires administered, analysis were based on 165 questionnaires and not on the 180 questionnaires initially administered.

**Data Presentation and Analysis**

This section of research deals with the presentation, analysis and interpretation of the data derived from interviews and questionnaires of our area of study. As earlier reiterated, the data collected through the questionnaire instrument were analysed, tabulated and expressed in simple percentage format.

The quantitative data obtained in this study were analysed on the basis of the research questions that were generated.

**Research Questions I & II:** What is the extent and level of involvement of the local population in the politics of KOLGA? And secondly, will the level of grassroots participation in the political process affect the quality of democracy in KOLGA?

**Table 1: Level of political participation by the grassroots and its impact on quality of democracy in KOLGA**

S/N	Item	Agree	%	Disagree	%
1.	The quality of grassroots democracy is dependent on the level of political participation of the local populace	146	89	19	11
2.	I have interest and faith in the political process	6	4	159	96
3.	I vote regularly in LGC elections	29	18	136	82
4.	I vote regularly in national elections	46	28	118	72
5.	I am a member of a political party	141	86	24	14
6.	I have regular access to my local government councilors	4	2	161	98

7.	I have contributed to public decision making in KOLGA	6	4	159	96
8.	My involvement in the political process is voluntarily	25	15	140	85
9.	I have regularly accepted financial and material inducement to vote and attend political rallies and campaigns	134	81	31	19
10.	Financial and material gratification is my main motive for voting and getting involved in other political activities	126	76	39	24

**Source:** Fieldwork (2016)

Table 7.1.1 shows that only 6% of the participants have faith and are interested in the political process in KOLGA. This perception of the participants has resulted in the low level of grassroots involvement in the political process in the local government: only 18% always vote in local elections while 46% votes regularly in national elections; only 4% of the respondents have regular access to their political representatives at the council, while 6% opined that they have contributed to the decision making process in KOLGA. On the issue of the quality of grassroots involvement in the political process, while only 25% of the research respondents opines to voluntary participation in the politics, 81% agreed that they were motivated to vote and attend political rallies by financial and material incentives vein, 76% of the study respondents accepted the proposition that money and material inducements were the main motivating factors for their involvement in voting and other political activities. In spite of the low level of political participation by the research respondents, 89% of them agreed to the proposition that the quality of grassroots democracy is largely dependent on the active and full involvement of the populace in the political process especially electoral politics.

**Table 2: Challenges to Political Participation in KOLGA**

S/N	Item	Agree	%	Disagree	%
1.	Elections in KOLGA are free and fair	19	11	146	89
2.	Elections in KOLGA are peaceful and violence free	17	10	148	90
3.	Voting is a dangerous exercise	140	85	25	15
4.	Monetization and militarization of electoral politics is a major disincentive to electoral participation	151	92	14	8
5.	Local government political leaders are trustworthy and committed to the grassroots	18	11	147	89
6.	Political leaders usually fulfil their electioneering promises	15	9	150	91
7.	The absence of local government autonomy frustrates grassroots involvement in local governance	141	86	24	14

8.	The frequent appointment and dissolution of LG caretaker committees hinders political participation of the grassroots	140	85	25	15
----	---	-----	----	----	----

**Source:** Fieldwork (2016).

Table 7.1.2 presents the several challenges or disincentives to effective and full political participation of the grassroots in the local governance. Most of the sampled respondents identified electoral fraud and violence and monetization of the electoral process as strong disincentives to grassroots participation in politics; 89% of the research respondents are of the opinion that elections in KOLGA are not free and fair, while 90% disagrees with the viewpoint that elections in KOLGA are peaceful and violence free. More so, 140(85%) of the subjects view voting as a dangerous exercise, while 151(92%) of the respondents are of the opinion that commercialization and monetization is a major hindrance to active and full participation of the grassroots in the political process. Again, majority of the research subjects see the unethical and untrustworthy attitudes and conducts of the political elites: 147(89%) of the subjects are of the opinion that political elites are not trustworthy, while 150(91%) of the respondents disagrees with the proposition that politicians usually fulfil their electioneering promises. In addition, 141(86%) of the subjects identified the lack of local government autonomy as an obstacle to grassroots democracy, while 140(85%) of the research respondents consider the frequent appointment and dissolution of Local Government Caretaker Committees as a strong hindrance to political participation of the grassroots.

### **Discussion of Findings**

The findings of this research showed that there was low level of political participation among sampled respondents. Only 18% of the subjects regularly cast their votes in Bayelsa state Independent Electoral Commission (BSIEC) organised elections, while a little higher percentage of 28% of the respondents regularly cast their votes during INEC organised elections. According to the research qualitative report derived from it discussion and interviews, the discrepancy in voters turnout between BSIEC organised elections and that of INEC, has to do with quality and integrity of the elections. More than 95% of interview subjects opined that INEC elections are freer and better organised than BSIEC elections. As such, it is less surprising 87% of the interview participants did not cast their votes during the 2015 general elections.

The research finding of low political participation among the grassroots populace in KOLGA is further corroborated by the observation of Ibrahim, Liman and Mato (2015); they observed that the 2015 general elections recorded the least voters' turnouts of 43.7% after the 1979 presidential election with 35.25% voters' turnout. It was observed that the voters' turnout of 1999 (52.26%), 2003 (69.08%), 2007 (57.49%) and 2011 (53.68%) were all higher than the general elections of 2015. The low voters' turnout was also evidenced in the 2016 gubernatorial election in Bayelsa state; only 43.31% of the registered voters actually voted. The situation becomes more worrisome for participatory democracy, when one considers that the



election results are outcomes of electoral fraud and manipulations by desperate politicians (Falade, 2014:18). For instance, prior to the February 2016 Bayelsa state governorship election, politicians were reported buying up voters' cards at the rate of between twelve thousand Naira (₦12,000) and eighteen thousand Naira (₦18,000) per card. Again, during the elections, it was also reported and observed that politician spent as high as twenty thousand Naira (₦20,000) to bribe each voter to vote for their preferred candidates. This confirms the position of 76% of the research subjects who opined that financial and material gratification is the main motivating factor for their decision to vote in any election. Thus, we can conveniently assert that political participation especially voting decision may not be voluntary after all.

The failure of registered voters to participate in voting exercise or their decision to allow politicians to influence their voting behaviour through financial inducement is a major obstacle to democratic governance and moreso, participatory democracy at the grassroots. This is understandable, because non-participation or induced participation in the electoral process is a means of installing unpopular, unaccountable, irresponsible and unresponsive political leadership.

Again, it was discovered that the participants were not involved in the process of decision making in the local government council. 78% of the interview participants responded that they were not involved in decisions that affect their own lives. It is in agreement with 96% of our survey population who opined that they do not contribute to the decision making process in KOLGA. The research interview respondents also pointed out that even when their opinions were sought, their interest and needs were not reflected in policy decisions. It is therefore less surprising that 89% of the survey subjects are of the opinion that KOLGA political leaders are not trustworthy as such, are not committed to the needs and interest of the populace of the grassroots. This finding is in agreement with previous findings of Mattes, Keulder, Chikwana, Africa and Davids (2003:588) that popular trust in political institutions remains at relatively low levels. In their study of the extent to which South Africans trusted their leaders, Mattes, et al (2003) discovered that just over one third (37%) trusted the president while just under a third (31%) trusted the parliament; one quarter (28%) trusted provincial government; Premier (28%) and; Local Government (24%) (Falade, 2014:21; Oruonye, 2013:16). According to Awofeso and Afolabi (2013:181) this apparent distrust of political leaders has a lot to do with the fraudulent elections that brought them to power as well as corrupt, unaccountable and unresponsive governance process. This lack of faith and confidence in the political process and leaders by the citizenry has resulted in people's apathy, indifference and low voters' turnout in elections. To make matters worse for the people, low political consciousness and education and extreme poverty has made the grassroots populace to auction their votes to the highest bidder thereby installing unscrupulous individuals to manage the affairs of the state. It is therefore less surprising that responsibility and accountability in grassroots governance has become vague words only in theory but not in practice.

Furthermore, the table 7.1.2 unveiled some of the challenges to political participation and grassroots democracy in local governance. The challenges to active

and full political participation of the populace as identified by the responses of the respondents ranges from lack of trust of the political leaders, fraudulent and violent electoral process, uncaring and unresponsive political leaders, inaccessibility of elected public officials as well as undemocratic local governance structures such as the overbearing state control of the local government system.

One of the greatest disincentives to political participation especially electoral participation in Nigeria is the ugly and undemocratic phenomenon of electoral corruption and violence. According to Inokoba and Nwabueze (2015:8), conducting free, fair and credible elections has been major challenge to the democratization process in the Fourth Republic Nigeria; they attributed this to the unethical conduct of Nigerian politicians and their corrupting impact on the electoral process and institutions. Apparently, the Nigerian electorate environment has been devoid of electoral integrity and security. The findings of the study also supported this view point; while 146 (89%) of our subjects opined that elections in KOLGA are not free and fair, 148 (90%) of our respondents are of the opinion that elections in the LGA are not peaceful and violence free. Again to buttress this view point; that the electoral process is violent, 140(85%) of our subjects considers voting as a dangerous exercise; that is, a strong enough disincentive to electoral participation. And to make the situation more worrisome for representative democracy at the grassroots, more 95% of the research discussants and interview participants were of the opinion that BSIEC organised elections cannot in the true sense of the word be referred to as elections. The people at the grassroots do not have a say about who represent them at the local council as all political representatives were handpicked and imposed by the governor and political elites of the ruling party. It is for this reason that governors and their ruling parties always make sure that they only appoint staunch party members as the chairman of their states' electoral commission. It is therefore less surprising that electoral outcomes of local government elections are always predictable in Nigeria (Interview with a former LG Chairman, 2016).

Under this scenario of undemocratic imposition of supposedly elected political leaders at the local level of governance, majority of Nigerians at the grassroots are deliberately and systematically excluded and disenfranchised in the electoral process (Inokoba & Maliki, 2011:221). This is basically the reason why Awofeso and Afolabi (2013:172) after examining the extent to which democratic values and practices have permeated politics and administration at the grassroots in Nigeria, came to the conclusion that the whole idea of grassroots representative democracy is more of a sham and myth than reality. The wishes and interests of the grassroots are never considered in the process of electing political leaders as well as decision making at the local level of governance. Apparently, the democratic principle of representation is compromised at the altar of political expediency and interests of the political class.

From our discussions and interviews with former local LG Chairmen and other stakeholders, the lack of democratic value and practices at the grassroots was attributed to how the state governors perceive the LG system. The research participants all opined that the state governors see the local government councils as

their personal political and economic enclaves; where their whims and caprices hold sway above the provisions of the constitution that stipulates the nature of state/local government relations. That the constitutional provisions about LG administration is observed more in breach than its observation, is evidenced by the inclination and imposition of non-elected LG Caretaker Committees to manage the local government council. Since the inception of the Fourth Republic, out of the thirteen (13) sets of LG chairmen that have managed the affairs of its local councils, only 4 of these were "elected". 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 in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. According to Sunday and Chinedum (2014:24) this mushrooming of appointed Caretaker Committees in LG administration is now a serious quagmire to grassroots democracy in Nigeria. Our field findings also validates this point; while 140(86) opined that the frequent appointment LG caretaker committee hinders grassroots political participation, 141(86%) of our respondents were of the opinion that the absence of LG autonomy cripples grassroots involvement in local governance.

It is also the general opinion of our discussants and interview participants that the lack of LG autonomy has turned the LG councils into appendages of state governments. For one, this has adversely affected service delivery and performance of the LG as tier of governance. It is less surprising as local government funds or allocations have become the personal pocket money of the state governors and their ruling party members. For instance, our interview with a former KOLGA chairman revealed that local government funds are mainly used for political purposes such as settling political faithful as well as funding of governorship elections of the incumbent state governor. By so doing, many state governors have trampled upon the constitutional provision which vindicate and established democratic elected local council. This tier of government which is closest to the grassroots is thus hijacked, prevented from meeting up with its primary and major obligations; a situation where the citizens have been denied fair representation; instead left with feelings of alienation and disillusionment.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

From our findings, the study is able to establish that there is low level of political participation at the grassroots in Nigeria. Many Nigerians especially the politically disenfranchised and alienated grassroots populace do not have an interest in the political process; as such they are not committed to the electoral process and other political engagements. This research revealed that the Nigerian political system and act of governance especially at the third tier of government, do not encourage affective and full participation. The study was also able to unravel some of the disincentives to effective political participation in Nigeria. The factors responsible for political apathy includes electoral fraud, monetization and violence, ignorance, lack of trust and confidence in the political leaders, irresponsible and selfish political class and finally, a governance process that is not responsive to the needs of the citizens. At the local government level, other impediments to popular grassroots participation in

local governance includes lack of local autonomy and the violation of the LG laws by state governors through the imposition of non-elected LG caretaker committees to run the affairs of the Local Government Councils in Nigeria. We can therefore conclude that the high level of political apathy at the third tier of governance has made it difficult for the entrenchment and sustenance of democratic values and practice at the grassroots.

Based on the research findings and conclusion, the following recommendations are made to improve the level of grassroots participation in local governance process. A sustained civil society driven political sensitization, education and enlightenment campaign must be embarked upon to encourage grassroots participation and ownership of the local governance processes and structures. Both formal and informal approaches should be adopted to orientate the citizens on the need for active participation in the political system. Actionable measures should be taken to encourage the local populace to recognize their political roles and responsibilities with the officials of the local government in project planning and execution. This will guarantee community ownership of projects, a prerequisite for programme sustainability and grassroots democracy and development.

Concrete steps should be put in place to wrestle LG administration from the hands of the state governors; from our findings we were able to establish that they are the main obstacle to meaningful grassroots democracy and development. To curtail governor's excesses and impunity, there is urgent need for the amendment of the Nigerian constitution that will grant autonomy to local government in Nigeria. The strengthening of the laws of the local government will make it difficult for state governors to arbitrarily dissolve elected local councils by state fiat for varying political reasons.

To tackle the undemocratic phenomenon of fraudulent, monetized and violent electoral process, there is need to put in place actionable legal frameworks that will remove state's electoral bodies from the control of state governors. To ensure that these state electoral bodies become truly apolitical and independent, the civil society should be allowed a greater role in the appointment of personnel and management of these bodies. Measures to make the electoral process more transparent, credible and free, is key to instituting democratic consolidation and governance at the grassroots in Nigeria.

### **References**

- Adeyeye, M. (2005). *The Dynamics of Administration Reform: An Analysis of Nigerian Local Government*. Paper Presented at the Mid-Term International Conference Organised by IPSA RC 4 in collaboration with NnamdiAzikwe University and Centre for Democratic Governance (AFRIGOV) Abuja.
- Alagoa, E.J. (1999). *The Land and People of Bayelsa State: Central Niger Delta*. Port Harcourt: Onyoma Research Publications.
- Anifeso, A. &Afolabi, O.S. (2013). *Local Government and Grassroots Democracy in Nigeria : Myth or Reality ?* Available at: [www.globalacademicgroup.com/.../LOCAL%20GOVERNMENT%20AND%20GRAS...](http://www.globalacademicgroup.com/.../LOCAL%20GOVERNMENT%20AND%20GRAS...)

- Bashir, A. & Muhammed, A. B. (2012). Challenges of Democratization at the Grassroot in Nigeria: Case Study of Taraba State. *Research on Humanities and Social Science*, 2(7), 98-109.
- Diongoli, G. I. (2014). Local Government Administration and the Challenges of Democratizing the Grassroot in Nigeria: A Case Study of Koloma/Opokuma LGA, Bayelsa. B.Sc Research Project, Department of Social Science, Niger Delta University, Wilberforce Island, Bayelsa State.
- Falade, D. A. (2014). Political Participation in Nigerian Democracy: A Study of Some Selected Local Government Area in Ondo State, Nigeria. *Global Journal of Human – Social Science. Political Science*, 14(8),11-15.
- Ibrahim, S. G., Liman, A. N. & Mato, K. (2015). The 2015 General Elections: A Review of Major Determinants of Paradigm Shift in Voting Behaviour and Political Participation in Nigeria. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Humanities and Social Studies*, 2(9), 8 – 16.
- Inokoba, P. K. & Maliki, E. A. (2011). Youths, Electoral Violence and Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria: The Bayelsa State Experience. *Anthropology*, 12(2), 217 – 225.
- Inokoba, P. K. & Nwobueze, C. C. (2015). Interrogating Ethical Deficit in Leadership as a Constraint to Democratic Governance in Nigeria’s Fourth Republic. A Paper Presented to a Conference with the Theme: “Bridging the Gaps in Africa’s Development.” Organized by the Faculty of Social Sciences of the Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Rumuolumeni, Port Harcourt, Rivers State. Date: 26<sup>th</sup>-29<sup>th</sup> July, 2015.
- Inokoba, P.K. & Kumokor, I. (2011). Electoral Crisis, Governance and Democratic Consolidation. *Journal of Social Sciences*, 27(2), 139 – 148.
- Mattes, M., Keulder, L. R., Chikwana, O., Africa, R. K. & Davids, T. K. (2003). Democratic Governance in South Africa. *Journal of Social Sciences*, 14(4) 581 – 593.
- Odo, L. U. (2014). Local Government and the Challenges of Grassroots Development in Nigeria *Review of Public Administration and Management*, 3(6), 204 – 114. [www.arabianjibmr.com/pdfs/RPAM\\_VOL\\_3\\_6/18.pdf](http://www.arabianjibmr.com/pdfs/RPAM_VOL_3_6/18.pdf)
- Oruonye, E. D. (2013). Grassroot Democracy and the Challenges of Rural Development in Nigeria: A Case Study of Bati Local Government Area of Taraba State. *Asian Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 1(1), 12 – 20. [Ajhss.org/pdfs/Grassroot%20Democracy%and%20the%Challenges...pdf](http://Ajhss.org/pdfs/Grassroot%20Democracy%and%20the%Challenges...pdf)
- Paki, F. & Inokoba, P. K. (2008). *An Invitation to Political Science*, Port Harcourt: Kemuela Publications.
- Sunday, O. J. & Chinedum, I. G. (2014). Mushrooming Appointed Caretaker Committee: A Quagmire to Grassroot Democracy in Nigeria. *International Journal of Sociology and Anthropology*, 6(6), 214-220. [www.academicjournals.org/IJSA/Article-full-text-pdf/845c46630](http://www.academicjournals.org/IJSA/Article-full-text-pdf/845c46630)