

CREATION OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREAS AND ETHNIC CONFLICTS IN NIGERIA: THE CASE OF WARRI, DELTA STATE

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ABSTRACT

Using the case of Warri where local government creation triggered bloody violent ethnic conflicts, the article seeks to elucidate the paradox in which decentralization triggers instead of ameliorating conflicts. It shows that decentralization encourages violent group mobilization when it ignores historic local grievance and is perceived to be biased in favour of some groups. To be effective in conflict resolution, decentralization should be attentive to the history of inter-group relations especially historic grievance against inequalities.

Introduction

Shortly after his re-election as President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria in 2003, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo caused panic among local government chairmanship and councillorship candidates and their patrons who were worried that the third tier of government was about to be scrapped. The candidates who had secured the ticket of their parties at great financial costs were alarmed after the president announced the indefinite postponement of local government council elections, pending the reform of local governments. The President said:

What we have witnessed is the abysmal failure of the Local Government system. It is on record that at no time in the history of the country has there been the current level of funding accruing to the Local Governments from the Federation Account, yet the hope for rapid and sustained development has been a mirage as successive Councils have grossly under-performed in almost all the areas of their mandate....The number of Local Government Areas (LGAs) had also risen steadily from 301 in 1976 to 774 currently listed in the First Schedule, Part I of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999, yet the clamour for the creation of more LGAs has not abated. Indeed, as of date, a total of over 500 new LGAs are in the process of being created by various State Governments. At the same time, the number of States has tripled from twelve to thirty-six since January 1976 without addition of land area to Nigeria (Obasanjo 2003)

¹ *An earlier draft of this paper was presented at the CRISE West Africa Workshop, March 2006, Accra, Ghana. I appreciate the useful comments of the discussant and participants that have enriched my appreciation of the subject.*

As one of the architects of the Local Government Reforms of 1976, Obasanjo bewailed that local governments have produced exactly the opposite of their original objectives. Instead of bringing government and development closer to the people, local governments have produced absentee local government chairmen² who are only seen at council headquarters when the monthly ‘Abuja Allocation’ arrives and vamoose with their standby jeeps and mobile police escorts after superintending over the sharing of the local government’s share of the national cake among the relevant stakeholders.

Consequently, local government chairmanship has become one of the most attractive and lucrative elective positions, after the presidency and governorship, prompting most state governors to intervene to preside over the unbridled decentralised primitive accumulation. The state governors anxious to checkmate the emergence of countervailing local politicians have used both legal and political strategies to domesticate local governments. Most of the governors have exploited the constitutional provision for the establishment of Joint State and Local Government Account (JSLGA) to control local government funds. Moreover, most state governors orchestrate the nomination and subsequent election of their acolytes as local government chairmen. Aspirants who emerge victorious after the tortuous electioneering process are usually those who had pledged allegiance to the governor, including accepting whatever deductions the governor may make from the JSLGA. It is hardly surprising that the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) alleged that 31 out of 36 state governors have tampered with local government council funds (*This Day*, 28/09/06). Human Rights Watch (2007) has in a study of five LGAs in oil-rich Rivers State detailed the various strategies that state government

² Only 6 women were LGA chairpersons between 1999-2003.

officials and local politicians have used to divert funds meant for provision of basic social services for the people at the grassroots.

The implication of this is that local government is perceived as having brought corruption, misery and disempowerment rather than development and community empowerment closer to the people. Paradoxically, non-delivery of service to the community has not moderated the craving of Nigerians for local government areas. As successive military regimes instrumentalized creation of states and LGAs to buoy their sagging legitimacy, elites from different communal groups jostled for new LGAs and particularly the headquarters of such LGAs. It is in this context that some groups that disagreed with the outcome of such exercises resorted to violent mobilization. The article will show how this dynamic unfolded in Warri, where the location of the headquarters of a newly created LGA triggered one of the worst ethnic conflicts in post-civil war Nigeria. Before turning to the case study, the intermediate sections will provide a historical overview of the evolution of local governments in Nigeria, and the interface between the national question and the politics of creation of local government areas.

Evolution of local government in Nigeria

The precursor of local government was the native administration established by the colonial administration. As one of its principal authors posited, Native Administration was:

Designed to adapt to purposes of local government the tribal institutions which the native people have evolved for themselves so that the latter may develop in a constitutional manner from their own past, guided and restrained by the traditions and sanctions which they have inherited, moulded or modified as they may be on the advice of the British officers. It is an essential feature of the system, within the limitations, the British Government rules through these native institutions which are regarded as an integral part

of the machinery of Government with well defined powers and functions recognised by Government and by law and not dependent on the caprice of an executive officer (Cameron 1934).

The Native Administration was charged with the collection of taxes, maintenance of law and order, road construction and maintenance, and sanitary inspection, especially in township areas. This system of government, which was modelled after the Millsian ideal of local representation, generated two types of conflicts among the fledging ethnic groups in Nigeria.

The first arose in cases where two or more ethnic groups were 'lumped together' in one native administration. Given what Post and Vickers (1973) have aptly called the 'differential incorporation' of Nigerian peoples into Nigeria, some groups who had earlier access to the British and had acquired some education tended to dominate the Native Administration. If such domination could be justified, as the British did, on the grounds of the opportunity it afforded the privileged group to groom others in the art of governance, the superimposition of the paramount ruler of one group as permanent native authority even when there was no pre-colonial history of dependent relations, encouraged local separatism. Most of the groups joined in such non-consensual matrimony agitated for separation and independence.

The agitation was born out of fears of cultural assimilation and political domination. If the objective of native administration was to administer the native through his own culture, the agitators for separate native administrations wondered why the colonial officers whose 'Intelligence Reports' had sometimes documented stark cultural and physical differences between them and the other group decided to put them under the leadership of a separate customary authority. Thus, in seeking divorce from such unions the marginal groups harped on their cultural differences, the distance it took

them to get to the native courts and the fact that they do not understand the language of the neighbouring group, usually used for meetings and court sessions, and that their taxes were being used to sustain other communities (Ikime 1969).

The dilemma the colonial administration faced was how to reconcile the need for recognition of local autonomy with the criterion of administrative efficiency and economic viability. Thus, it made local autonomy contingent on guarantees of administrative efficiency. Any request for separate native administration that did not meet the criteria of viability and efficiency was dismissed as 'uneconomical and retrogressive'. This emphasis on the price the agitating community was willing to pay as a precondition for decentralization served both the colonial administration and the communities who were so separated from 'bondage'. For instance, some native administrations established when the great depression and the women's riots had affected staff morale were still able to meet their targets in tax collection. In Warri Division, the District Officer gave the following remarks about some Urhobo speaking communities who resented paying taxes when they belonged to the Jekri Sobo Native Administration:

The Jekris, a race of waterside traders, had, in the early days of contact with Europeans and Africans, obtained ascendancy over the far more numerous and very primitive Sobos by intrigue, the power of wealth and by means of arms and powder supplied by European traders. Although British rule had protected the Sobos from excessive exploitation by the Jekris, a residual Jekri ascendancy had remained. When a small fraction of the Sobos became literate a Sobo Risorgimento movement came into being. Made use of very skill-fully during the past four years, this movement led to a successful pacification of the Province and to collection of tax without difficulty (RHA/MSS/Afr. 1000 (1)).

Generally, the practice was to allow communities that did not pass the test of viability to have their own native courts, while denying them a native treasury and authority. This was preferable to allowing them to go back to traditional methods of settling

disputes. Nonetheless, such communities never gave up but continued to demand separation.

The second type of conflict that challenged the basis of native administration emanated from urbanization. It derived from the attempt of the British colonial officers to reconcile the demands of taxation with representation in emerging towns, which had attracted hardworking 'natives' from other parts of the colony. This is because there was a conflict between the expectation amongst resident tax payers to be represented on the native administration and the expectation of sons of the soil should be excluded from the native administration. In response to this conflict, colonial officers, which were already fed up with the senile chiefs who snored at meetings and saw the native administration as 'mutual benefits societies', and were also facing pressures from educated nationalists, established urban and municipal authorities where resident taxpayers were eligible for elections to the Councils. While this did not pose any problem in most urban areas, establishment of municipal authorities generated controversies in towns such as Calabar, Port Harcourt and Warri, where stranger elements outnumbered the natives. This is because the natives in these towns were afraid of external domination (Lloyd 1974, Wolpe 1974, Nwaka 1990). As the Resident of Calabar Province noted:

The question of consent has, in all negotiations for the development of local government for Calabar, been paramount. Deadlock has in the past always been reached over the problem of how to reconcile the vested interests of the local Efiks with the aspirations of the more energetic and numerous strangers who have for many years paid more than half of the tax collected in Calabar...The Efiks feared that a municipal organization with elected members of geographical wards would, with uncontrolled stranger immigration, rapidly involve loss of any control over the most important part, politically and financially, of their territory (NAE/Calprof. 7/1/146).

This fear was not misplaced, because 'non-natives' won the elections in the three towns generating resentments and ethnic conflicts.

These two types of conflicts influenced reform measures that both the colonial officers and the emergent nationalist elites especially in southern Nigeria where indirect rule was generally controversial. The Eastern and Western Regions adopted a multi-tiered local government structure to accommodate both elected and traditional elements. There were no major reforms in the Northern Region where the system of indirect rule was more successful. For instance, the Northern Region retained the nomenclature of Native Authority and powers of traditional rulers which were progressively removed in the East and the West. This notwithstanding, in all the regions with the advent of multi-party politics in the 1950s, dominant parties in each region used the local governments as instruments for political control at the grassroots. The native or customary courts, the local government treasury, the local government or native authority police, and the local government sanitation inspectors were deployed to oppress and exploit opposition party members. Even in the southern regions where the local government reforms of the 1950s were partly driven by the need to promote democracy at the grassroots, ruling parties often abolished elected councils which they replaced with 'interim' management committees made up of loyal party members.

It is hardly surprising therefore that the military officers that took over power in 1966 said they were actuated by the need to stop the desecration of the national and regional political landscape and terminate political terrorism at the grassroots. However, while the short-lived first military regime of Gen. T. Aguiyi-Ironsi might have contemplated a national solution, the uproar and dissent its decision to introduce unitary system of government generated made the succeeding regime to eschew a national reform of local governments (Gboyega 1987). Thus, during the Gowon regime which lasted from 1967 to 1975, the different states operated different systems

of local government. In the Northern states, the Emirs retained some of their powers and influence because the councillors appointed by the military governors were traditionally and spiritually expected to defer to the authority of the Emir. The Eastern States and in the Midwest states abandoned the conciliar system adopted in the 1950s for development administration, modelled after the French system of deconcentration. Local government became a de-facto agent of administering state government projects and programmes at the locality. In the West, state governors who had initially posted sole administrators to local government areas were forced by the tax revolts of the late 1960s to reintroduce local participation.

The military officers who toppled Gowon in the bloodless palace coup did not think that the existing state of local government would be amenable to the kind of democratic order they envisaged for the country and for which they reportedly took over power. It is against this background that the Murtala/Obasanjo regime carried out the local government reform of 1976.³ The reforms were revolutionary in the sense that it was the first time a uniform local government was being initiated for the entire country. The reforms were also revolutionary in the sense that by one stroke, local governments were equipped with political, administrative and fiscal capacities. Local Government became a third tier of government with constitutional functions and responsibilities. They would be constituted through elections for a fixed term. Revenue was guaranteed because federal and state government were statutorily mandated to devote a specific percentage of revenue to the local government.⁴ Traditional rulers could only serve the councils in advisory capacities. Local

³ The reforms were initiated by Gen. Murtala Mohammed but executed by Gen. O. Obasanjo who took over after Mohammed's assassination.

⁴ The amount was to be determined by the national or state legislature.

government service boards or commissions were constituted at the state level for the recruitment, promotion and discipline of staff.

Above all, the 301 local government areas were listed in the 1979 Constitution to guarantee their perpetual existence. In creating these local government areas, the military government emphasised the need for viability and administrative efficiency. The minimum population for an area to qualify for local government was 150,000 while the maximum was 800,000. Elections on non-party basis were conducted into the councils, which were subsequently required to elect a delegate to the Constituent Assembly that deliberated on the proposed 1979 Constitution.

The litmus test for the local government reforms was the reintroduction of partisan politics in the Second Republic. Local government became a victim of the vicissitudes of party politics and competition for power. The problems were partly constitutional because there were loopholes in the 1979 Constitution, which the politicians were keen to exploit for political advantage. The constitutional provisions for the state controlled local government service board, a JSLGA and state oversight functions undermined the autonomy of local government. Moreover, there were confusions in allocation of functions between the federal, state and local government councils. Many state governments took advantage of this ambivalence to either take over local government functions or funds to finance responsibilities they were supposed to share with the councils. It also became common for state governors to withhold funds to local government. This prompted one federal legislator who claimed that the ‘distributable pool was no longer re-distributable’, to remind the governors that:

Local government are not creatures of state governments but one of the tiers of government of this country. Every effort should be made to allow local government councils to operate with prestige and not as beggars of a state ministry of finance begging for money (Ogan 1980).

The worst violations of the autonomy of local councils however stemmed from political machinations. The politicians realised they could trade local councils for votes as there were agitations across the country for more LGAs as local elites eyed local councils which now had guaranteed funding. Politicians also realised they could balkanise local governments for electoral purposes. As elections approached most state governments dissolved local councils and appointed loyal party members who were expected to deliver votes in the locality. Little wonder, the local government councils were deeply involved in the large-scale electoral fraud of 1983.

These abuses arose partly from the incorporation of the local government in the evolving federal character principle and electoral systems of the presidential systems chosen for the Second Republic. The composition of the council was to be consonant with the federal character principle, which required every part to be represented. Local governments were also to form the basis for composition of the state executive council and representation in the national assembly. Just as the electoral policy introduced to encourage parties to seek support from all parts of the country, required a presidential aspirant to secure electoral votes from a certain number of states, the 1979 Constitution also stipulated that the gubernatorial candidate should reach out to the local councils for votes. So whereas local government was originally intended for grassroots development and empowerment, it was drawn into the vortex of high politics. There was no longer separation, allowed in the literature, for the ambitious national politician and the community servant. Local patrons and fledging elites embarked upon cacophonous allegations of ‘discrimination in distribution of amenities or in appointments, especially to positions of chairman or supervisory councillors, in the local government concerned as the main reason of their discontent’

(Gboyega 1998:403-4). Consequently, by the time military intervened in 1983, the number of local councils in the country had more than doubled from 301 to 703.

Many of the new LGAs did not effectively take off because one of the first decisions of the Buhari regime was to abolish the LGAs the politicians had created. While reverting to the 1976 LGAs, the regime set up a Panel to look into the issue of LGAs. However, before the panel could report, the Buhari regime had been toppled in a palace coup, which brought in Gen. Ibrahim Babangida.⁵ The new regime introduced the structural adjustment programme (SAP), which was, among other objectives, intended to terminate the development model that expropriated the surpluses of the rural peasantry to appease the volatile urban working class. Decentralization was pursued vigorously, not only through local governments but also several federal government agencies such as the Directorate for Foods, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFPRI), Better Life for Rural Women, Peoples Bank, National Directorate for Employment, etc. that were established to cushion the effects of SAP. The agencies were expected to have field offices and projects in all local government areas. However, there is little evidence that these agencies helped to build capacity in the communities. Most of the projects were designed and executed by contractors unknown to the host communities. Many of them were abandoned and communities could not hold any one to account.

The Babangida administration also made local governments part of his elaborate democratization programme. Elections were phased to begin at the local councils, through which delegates would be selected to the state and to the federal levels. The federal government built secretariats for the two 'test tube' parties in all LGA

⁵ The panel eventually submitted its report to the Babangida administration. It upheld the abolition of the LGAs and recommended that government should consider establishing new LGAs, every ten years.

headquarters. After the June 12 debacle, it became evident that these programmes as well as the creation of more states and local government areas were legitimization structures for the civilianization of the military rulers. They allowed Generals Babangida and Abacha to buy support from certain interest groups. For instance, the isolated Gen. Abacha directed local governments to devote between 5 and 10 percent of their revenues to traditional rulers within the local government. This triggered communal conflicts as subordinate chiefs sought paramount ruler status in order to access the 'maintenance allowance' (Mustapha and Jones 2003).

Local government also became conduit pipe for looting of national treasury. For instance, the elite club of LGA chairmen called the Association of Local Government of Nigeria (ALGON) reportedly mandated the maximum military leader to deduct local government funds for the purchase of two Toyota land-cruiser jeeps for all LGAs. One of the jeeps was allocated to the LGA chairman while the other belonged to the police to facilitate effective policing and combat of armed robbery. In a context where multiplication of LGAs had become a lucrative business for military dictators, it is not surprising that by the time the military handed over power in 1999, there were 774 LGAs in the country. Again, the president's diagnosis is apt:

We also notice that proliferation of State Governments has been matched by proliferation of Local Governments without adequate consideration for viability. In fact there is clear evidence that the creation of Local Governments has been for reasons that not only negate the objectives and principles of the 1976 Reform, but, in some cases, are clear expressions of patronage by revenue distribution to favoured areas or interest groups (Obasanjo 2003).

The transformation of local governments into patronage resources for favoured groups alienated groups who felt they were not favoured. In other words, local government creation became a metaphor for power and powerlessness. Why this should be the

case would be clear as we consider the link between the national question and the politics of creation of local government.

The National Question and Creation of Local Government Areas (LGAs)

As the 2003 elections approached, about 500 new LGAs had been created or were in the pipeline. This created a conflict between the federal government and states that had created local governments as the federal government claimed it would not release funds from the federation account to LGAs that are not listed in the constitution. While this non-release of funds forced the concerned state governments to scrap the new LGAs, Lagos State government refused to bulge, risking non release of funds for LGAs for several months. Lagos was obviously able to sustain the resistance because it is the state with the largest non-oil internally generated revenue. The state government was also hoping it would defeat the federal government in the court of public opinion because Lagos had since become the ‘killer fact’ advertised by complainants of the inequities in creation of LGAs. Both those sympathetic to the plight of Lagos and those who used its ‘predicament’ to advance their own cause have argued that Lagos was created on the same day as Kano and also has more population than Kano. However, Lagos has 20 LGAs while Kano and Jigawa, which it birthed in 1991, have 71 LGAs (Sagay 2001).

The Lagos case has been raised by southern elites who have since the 1990s agitated against so-called northern domination. It is alleged that successive ‘northern’ military rulers favoured the North in the creation of states and local governments. The southern elites therefore insist that central to the resolution of the national question is

a restructuring of the ‘unbalanced’ federation. As Table 1 shows, the local governments are unevenly distributed across geopolitical zones. The North-West zone has a quarter (24%) of the LGAs in the country while other five zones have between 12 per cent and 18 per cent. However, the table also shows that the zone has a quarter of the country’s population. If population and landmass which were among the criteria for creation of local government areas in 1976 (Mbanefoh and Egwaikhide 1998), are used as yardstick for assessment of fairness, then the military midwives of the state should actually be commended for a job well done.

Table 1: Distribution of LGAs by geopolitical zones

Zones	No. of LGAs	% of LGAs	Population⁶ in millions	% in national population
North Central (+Abuja)	120	15.5	12.5	14
North East	111	14.3	11.9	13.4
North West	186	24	22.9	25.8
South East	95	12.2	10.8	12.1
South South	123	16	13.3	15.1
South West	139	18	17.4	19.6
Total	774	100	88.8	100

Source: Compiled from Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999).

However, given the controversies that have dodged population census in the country, communal claims, especially from minority groups, on the state are rarely based on population. Rather groups who feel short-changed by the system have canvassed equal recognition and treatment of all groups or in the case of revenue allocation, insisted that the share of each group should depend on its contribution to the national revenue.

The strongest challenge to the present structure has come from the oil producing states where minority rights activists complain that oil revenues have delivered more

⁶ Based on 1991 census figures.

local government areas to regions that make marginal contributions to the Federation Account. South-South elites allege that ‘northern’ military dictators deliberately followed the footsteps of the colonial administration, which created an ‘imbalanced federation’ that gave the North veto power over legislations that are not in the North’s interests. These sentiments were evoked in 2001 when the National Assembly voted against a bill for the resource control proposed by South-South delegates to increase the share of oil revenues that accrue to oil producing states from the Federation Account. For instance, Itse Sagay professor of Law and minority rights activist said:

It is clear that no bill can pass through the house without the concurrence of the Northern States. But bills sail smoothly through the House, even if the whole of the Southern representatives oppose them. That is permanent power, installed by a combination of the colonial master, the AREWA political oligarchy and the Northern military organization. The statistics are interesting. Whilst the Southern States have a total of 357 councils, the Northern States have 419 councils out of a countrywide total of 776 (sic). On the issue of representation in the House of Representatives, the North has 182 seats as against the South’s 154. It was therefore no surprise that the courageous bill for resource control ... was defeated by the permanent Northern majority by 81 votes against the 64 in favour. ..In the same manner, the numbers of local governments per state have been so structured, as to give the North a permanent majority in local governments. The major implication of this is that the direct funding of local governments from Abuja, means that the bulk of the 20% of the Federation Account that goes to local governments, ends up in the North (Sagay 2001-original emphasis).

It was such agitations which heated up the Nigerian polity that informed the convening of the National Political Reform Conference in 2005. As would be expected the ‘Resource Control’ debate dominated the Conference’s proceedings. In fact, the Conference ended unceremoniously when the South-South delegate walked out following the refusal of delegates from the North and the West to adopt a recommendation for a phased increment of derivation funds from the present 13 percent to 50 percent in the next decade.

The southern states have also challenged the rights of the federal government to create local government, describing the current practice as a travesty of 'true' federalism.

For instance, the Delta State Delegation to the Conference submitted that:

The over-concentration of powers at the centre, has led to an unsalutary governance mode, which seeks to produce an uncreative homogenization. Federalism is not about uniformities, but recognition of diversities and autonomy of the different components. The imposition of a central authority on all spheres of activity as has occurred since the return to civil rule violates the independence of the federating units. It has fostered the attitude of a bullying imperial arrogance at the centre in its relationship with the states...Diverse development initiatives which should naturally be the bounteous harvest from the pluralist essence of federalism are scorched, if they stray beyond the horizons and mindset of the almighty centre. This is especially the case if some of these initiatives are popular with the people, and issue from a State run by an 'opposition' party. A state dares to create new Local Council to catalyse development and efficient administration, and it is immediately denied even its legitimate share of revenue. A state introduces a scheme to facilitate the flow of traffic in its territory, but this popular initiative is prohibited by 'big brother' centre, on the ground that the roads are 'federal' property! In effect the possibilities of our national growth and development are limited by the level of the centre's wisdom at any point in time (Delta State Government 2005:45).

The state canvassed the restructuring of Nigeria on the basis of zonal units and asked the federal government to relinquish control over local government. Like most southern states, Delta State wants the state governments to have sole responsibility for creating and funding of local government. It also wants state governments to determine the tenure of local government councils. However, this recommendation, which is likely to expand the scope of the powers of state governments, is not popular among ethnic minorities in the states. Moreover, as Sklar (2004) has observed, minorities would not be willing to accept the regional/zone structure. This is because minority groups are wary of replacing one majority rule with another (Mustapha 2000). It is in this light that the position of the Itsekiri Ethnic Nationality needs to be juxtaposed with that of the Delta State Government.

It should be noted that in constituting the state's delegation to the National Political Reform Conference, the Delta State Government ensured that all five major ethnic

groups were represented. However, even though the Itsekiri intelligentsia was among the team that produced the Delta Memorandum, the Itsekiri Ethnic Nationality still sent its own Memorandum to the Conference. Interestingly, the Itsekiri took a different stance on most of the issues. While the Delta State Government wanted states to be responsible for creation of local governments, the Itsekiri preferred the system where the federal government created the LGAs. They asked for more autonomy from the state through the abolition of the Joint State and Local Government Account and the Local Government Service Commission. The only issue where the Itsekiri position dovetailed with that of Delta State Government was the undesirability of the uniform system of local government. The Itsekiri asked for deepening of decentralization to grant local governments more autonomy in funding, supervision and staffing. According to the Itsekiri:

The Local Government Councils should be reformed. Unified local government system should be abolished. Local Government Service Commission should be abolished. Councils should be empowered to hire and fire its employees. Uniform salary structure for Council should be abolished. Each LG Council should fix the salary of its workers (Itsekiri Ethnic Nationality 2005)

By seeking control of recruitment into local government, minorities like the Itsekiri, intend to exclude civil servants from other parts of the state from working in their local government. They also asked that derivation funds should be channelled directly to the local governments and communities from where they are produced. The concern of the Itsekiri arises from fears of Urhobo domination in Delta State. This fear historically made the Itsekiri to oppose all Urhobo-led demand for states creation (Omuta 1982). Since 1991 when Delta State was created Itsekiri fears seem to have been confirmed as the Urhobo have produced all elected governors of the state till date. Itsekiri already claim that Urhobo governors have worked against Itsekiri

interests and fear that the Urhobo dominated State Government would create LGAs for Ijaw and Urhobo in Warri if states were granted the powers to create states.

The Conference Committee on Fiscal Federalism recommended that that local government should not be used in revenue allocation and that states should be allowed to set up local government since the 1999 constitution already gives them the residual powers to do so. The Committee also recommended that JSLGA should be scrapped and that the same principle that is used for allocating revenue in the federation should be adopted to allocate revenue among local governments in the state (NPRC 2005). The report of the Conference was submitted to the National Assembly to consider during the constitutional review process.

However, the constitutional review process was overshadowed by the controversial attempt of President Obasanjo to change the constitution to fulfil his ambition to remain in power beyond the two-term limit. The surreptitious mobilization, which became known as the third term 'project', ended in a dramatic fashion when the Senate voted to discontinue consideration of the bill. Incidentally, the 'project' failed because its advocates were unable to get the support of northern federal senators and representatives (Harriman 2006). While South-South legislators claimed they supported the unpopular project because it was linked to the increase in derivation funds, their South-East counterparts said their support was a quid pro quo for new local government areas (Sklar, Onwudiwe and Darren 2006; Harriman 2006). If the 'project' had succeeded, more local governments would have been handed out as 'patronage' to some 'interest groups', and intriguingly, under Obasanjo's watch.

The foregoing discussion offers insights into some of the considerations that inform the creation of local government areas (and states) and such decisions which are often

taken in the name of decentralization have triggered violent conflicts in Ife/Modakeke, Osun State, Tafawa Belewa, Bauchi State and Umuleri-Aguleri, Anambra State and Warri, Delta State (IPCR 2002, Ibeanu 2003). The remaining section of the paper examines the Warri case.

Creation of Local Government Areas and Ethnic Conflicts in Warri

Located 30 miles from the sea on the landward margins of the mangrove swamp of the Western Niger Delta, Warri developed as a colonial town as European firms established factories and the British colonial administration established a vice-consulate there in 1891 (Lloyd 1974:227). The nuclei of the town were the Itsekiri settlement of Okere and the Urhobo settlement of Agbarrha. However, the town eventually grew into other Urhobo, Itsekiri and Ijaw settlements. In 1906, Warri became the capital of Central Province, one of the three provinces of the Southern Protectorate. It later became headquarters of Warri Province and Warri Division. While the Province was made up of Itsekiri, Urhobo, Ijaw, Isoko, and Kwale, the Division comprised of the Itsekiri, Urhobo and Ijaw communities surrounding town.

However, while the Itsekiri are only found in the Division, the Ogbe-Ijoh, Gbaramatu and Egbema Ijaw communities and the Agbarrha and Okere Urhobo communities constitute an infinitesimal proportion of the larger Ijaw and Urhobo ethnic groups. The ethnic structure of Warri is therefore tripodal, 'one in which there are only three groups' (Bangura 2006:4). While the Itsekiri are the majority in Division, they are a small group in comparison with the larger Urhobo and Ijaw ethnic groups. Ethnic

conflicts in Warri have been driven by the struggle for pre-eminence in both Warri Town and Warri Division.

This struggle for pre-eminence has its roots in the pattern of external contacts and the role each of the ethnic group played both in external trade and colonial penetration. The Itsekiri played the middleman role in the slave and oil palm trade while the Urhobo supplied both the slaves and oil palm. The Ijaw, who remained fishermen as they were cut off from the trade only featured as 'pirates' (Ikime 1967). The inequalities generated by external trade were reinforced by patterns of colonization. The Itsekiri were dominant in the early colonial period because of the role that Chief Dore Numa, an Itsekiri merchant played in the subjugation of resistance to colonial rule in Benin River and Benin Kingdom. The British rewarded Dore with the position of Paramount Ruler in the Province, a position which he used to favour other Itsekiri elites and cultivate clients among Ijaw and Urhobo who desired appointments into the Native Administration. The Itsekiri easily became the governing class in the Province during the period of indirect rule. The Urhobo and Ijaw resented this role as they claim there was no pre-colonial history of subjugation to the Itsekiri. The result was persistent separatist agitations which culminated in the anti-tax riots of the late 1920s.

Careful not to reduce the sphere of influence of their friend the colonial officers only began serious reorganizations in the early 1930s following the death of Dore. The Urhobo who were the largest ethnic group in the Province were able to get two Divisions between 1933 and 1948. However, Itsekiri, Urhobo and Ijaw rivalry persisted because the Ijaw and Urhobo communities in and around Warri Town were left in Warri Division and there was the unsettled question of which group should control Warri Town itself. When the British bowed to pressures from the Itsekiri to

reintroduce their Kingship institution after Dore's death, the Ijaw and Urhobo were concerned it was a ploy to subject them to Itsekiri paramount rulership. This is because the Itsekiri wanted their monarch to be designated 'Olu of Warri' and to relocate from Ode Itsekiri, the traditional capital of the Itsekiri before the eclipse of Itsekiri kingship in the 1860s. While the colonial officers acceded to Itsekiri demands that the monarch should live in Warri because it was administratively speaking convenient, they refused to recognise him as Olu of Warri even though they admitted that the pre-colonial Itsekiri kingdom was also known as Warri kingdom.

The advent of representative politics and full penetration of trade in the hinterland aggravated tensions in ethnic relations in Warri Province. The Urhobo were able to take over both political and economic power. While Urhobo merchants traded directly with foreign firms that established factories in Urhoboland, the Urhobo were able by majority vote to elect their own sons into the newly established Western Region House of Assembly. This generated resentment among the Itsekiri who had hitherto produced provincial representatives at the Nigerian Council and the old Legislative Council, which existed between 1914 and 1945. The enlargement of membership of the legislature and introduction of universal suffrage in the 1950s led to the rise of political parties.

In the context of the ethnic conflicts in the region, ethnic political alliances became an attractive option for ethnic elites. Thus, while most of the Itsekiri elite declared for the Action Group (AG), most of the Urhobo elite and Ijaw elite supported the National Council of Nigeria and Cameroon (NCNC). In the 1951 elections the AG, which formed the government in the Western Region, rewarded the Itsekiri with a ministerial position. The Urhobo and the Ijaw did not have any position even though

there were more Ijaw and Urhobo legislators in the House of Assembly. The resentment of the Urhobo and Ijaw against the AG government was aggravated by the decision of the government to recognise the Itsekiri monarch as Olu of Warri. It was this decision that provoked the first ethnic riots in Warri Province in 1952 as the Urhobo attacked several Itsekiri villages. Although the Province was renamed Delta Province to assuage the fears of other ethnic groups, the recognition of the Itsekiri monarch as Olu of Warri and the alleged Yoruba domination of the Region became the basis for agitations of minorities in the region for a separate state. At the local level, the Ijaw and Urhobo in Warri Division intensified their campaign to be separated from the Itsekiri. As earlier indicated, problems also arose from who should control Warri Town as Igbo migrants and Urhobo from outside the Division were more in number than the Itsekiri. While the Urhobo dominated the Council, the AG government appointed only Itsekiri traditional chiefs as members of the Traditional Council. This and the quest of the Urhobo and Ijaw in Warri Division to be separated from Itsekiri would create the impression that the Division belonged to the Itsekiri.

The establishment of a Commission to inquire into the fears of minorities in 1957 provided an opportunity for the three ethnic groups to air their grievances. When the Commission headed by Sir Henry Willink's visited Warri, representatives of the Itsekiri, Urhobo and Ijaw made their submission. While the Urhobo supported the creation of Midwest Region, the mainstream of Itsekiri leadership opposed it preferring to be merged with Ondo Province as part of the Western Region.⁷ On their part, the Ijaw asked to be merged with Eastern Ijaw to form a Rivers State. Putting

⁷ A group of Itsekiri elites under the aegis of Warri People's Party (WPP) aligned to the NCNC supported state creation.

forward the Itsekiri position, Hon. Gabriel Ekwejunor-Etchie, who represented Warri East Constituency at the Western Region House of Assembly said alleged that:

Since the introduction of democracy, Urhobos, Ijaws and Ibos have used the right to vote as a useful weapon of domination of the Itsekiri people. The Ibos acting in alliance with the Urhobos have employed all the means at their disposal to dominate the economic life of the Division. They control the Warri Urban District Council and there have employed all discriminatory methods in their avowed aim to exterminate the Itsekiri people (BNA/CO 957, File No. WA/1/23).

But while the Itsekiri avoided Urhobo and Ijaw domination, the Urhobo and Ijaw in Warri demanded separation from the Itsekiri. For instance, the Ogbe-Ijoh Local Council Area told the Commission that:

This unconstitutional subordination has greatly affected us that we are not heard by nor represented in the Western Nigeria Government. We are being administered dictatorially by the Itsekiri in all local government affairs. This will certainly eliminate the title 'Ijaw' when Nigeria will attain full independence if the position is not rectified.....Since we have been under Warri Division, we were and are remembered at the time of taxation or rating but completely forgotten at the time of amenities. For example, ever since the introduction of taxation in 1928, only person has been trained out and only two now in the training in the same institution where over hundred Itsekiris have been turned out as teachers of which some are now in the senior service (BNA/ CO 957. File No. WA/1/29).

On their part, the Agbarrha-Urhobo opposed any move to relocate them along with the Itsekiri to Ondo Province:

We do not propose to quarrel with the choice of the Itsekiri people, but we say that although we have all along been grouped with them for administrative purposes much against our wishes, we certainly do not want to be group with the Yoruba anywhere. Our 7 villages...known as Warri since 1893 must not form part of Itsekiri jurisdiction in their move to Ondo (BNA/ CO 957. File No. WA/1/29).

The Willink's Commission did not recommend the creation of states and the rivalry between the groups continued into the post-colonial era. It was not until 1963 that the federal government acceded to demands for the creation of the region. The Constitution of the Midwest Region became a source of conflict because it essentially

recognised Warri Division as Itsekiri homeland and reserved all elective positions to the Itsekiri. By this legislation, the Urhobo and Ijaw could not contest for election in Warri or be appointed to any elective positions from Warri. This remained the position until the post-civil war period, when the military government appointed an Urhobo as member of the Warri Division Management Board. The Itsekiri, however, dominated the local government board.

Following the 1976 Local Government Reforms, Warri was divided into 13 wards. In the first election into the council, the Itsekiri won six wards, the Urhobo five wards and the Ijaw two wards. The position of chairmanship was contested by an Urhobo and an Itsekiri. However, before the elections were conducted Egbema, one of the Ijaw wards was transferred to Ondo State, which left Warri with 12 wards. The result of the transfer is that when the elections eventually took place, there was a tie as the Itsekiri candidate won six wards while the Urhobo candidate won six wards made up of the five Urhobo wards and the remaining Ijaw ward. The Urhobo and Ijaw alleged that the transfer of Egbema was an attempt to pre-empt the victory of the Urhobo chairmanship candidate, since the Ijaw wards were expected to vote for the Urhobo candidate. The Ijaw and Urhobo also alleged that it was an Itsekiri who at the time held the position of the Secretary to the State Government that masterminded the transfer and eventual appointment of Itsekiri as chairman.

The allegation of insider dealing and favouritism was raised again in 1977 when the State Government classified clans and traditional rulers. The Urhobo complained that it was the Itsekiri Secretary to the State Government and the Itsekiri Commissioner for Local Government and Chieftaincy Affairs that stopped the recognition of Urhobo clans and traditional rulers in Warri. The Warri Traditional Council of Chiefs was

dominated by Itsekiri as the Olu was not only its permanent president but also the Permanent Deputy President of the State Council of Traditional Rulers. The Ijaw and Urhobo boycotted the council when the Itsekiri majority adopted Itsekiri as the Council's language of business (See, Imobighe, Bassey and Asuni 2002).

Throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, the Urhobo and Ijaw used every opportunity for LGAs creation to request for separate LGAs. They based their claims on the discriminatory practices allegedly orchestrated by the Itsekiri to exclude the Urhobo and Ijaw from participation in the local government. The government did not grant this request. Instead, in 1978, 1982 and again in 1992, some Ijaw clans were transferred to other Ijaw LGAs in the state. Such transfers were revoked as a result of the administrative problems involved as the Ijaw had to cross several other LGAs to get to the LGA headquarters. Moreover, the Ijaw refused to be transferred because they did not want to lose Warri Township. During the Second Republic, political parties exploited these divisions by supporting one group against the other. Thus, while the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) Government transferred the Ijaw of Warri to Burutu (an Ijaw) LGA, the Ijaw were transferred back to Warri by the National Party of Nigeria (NPN) Government, which took over after the 1983 elections.

In 1991, the Babangida administration created Delta State as one of the nine new states. However, against the expectations of the proponents of the state, some parts of Benin Province were joined to Delta Province to make up the new state and the headquarters of the state was located in Asaba which was under Benin Province. There were protests against the composition of the state and its capital because it was widely believed that Asaba was chosen as capital because it was the hometown of the first lady. Much more disappointments trailed the creation of local government areas

in the same year. Warri was divided into two local government areas, Warri South and Warri North LGAs. Against the expectation of the Ijaw that the new LGA would be called Nein-Ibe LGA and its headquarters situated in Oporama, an Ijaw Town, Koko, an Itsekiri town was announced as the headquarters of the new LGA.

However, the worst disappointment for the Ijaw came in October 1996 when the Abacha regime announced the creation of six states and 138 local government areas. Based on the announcement by the state military administrator, the headquarters of the new local government area created in Warri was Ogbe-Ijoh, believed to be an Ijaw community. However, when the federal government gazette which legalised the new LGAs was published, the headquarters of the new local government area in Warri was Ogidigben, an Itsekiri community. The Itsekiri therefore protested and the local government headquarters was subsequently relocated to Ogidigben. It against this background that the Ijaw who were celebrating their new found freedom from so-called Itsekiri domination with the new LGA allegedly launched attacks on Itsekiri communities. Hundreds of lives were lost and Ijaw youths allegedly destroyed and occupied about 25 Itsekiri villages. The State Government established a commission of inquiry whose report was not published because the Itsekiri had boycotted its proceedings citing the bias of the state military governor. The crisis lingered until 2003 when Itsekiri youths carried out retaliatory attacks destroying Ijaw villages. This was the most destructive in terms of loss of lives and properties.⁸ It crippled the economy of Warri causing oil companies and ancillary firms to shut down as the Nigerian Army which was deployed to Warri was unable to quell the conflicts given the sophisticated weapons available to the combatants.

⁸ Since reports of all commissions of enquiry and presidential panels were never published it is impossible to ascertain the exact number of lives that were lost in the Warri conflicts. However, submissions of the groups to the commissions and newspaper reports suggest that more than 1000 lives were lost.

Although the immediate cause of the conflict could be traced to the relocation of the local government headquarters from an Ijaw community to an Itsekiri community and was therefore an Ijaw-Itsekiri affair, the Urhobo were drawn in thus re-enacting the tri-dimensional aspect of the conflict. Urhobo involvement stemmed from the persistent Itsekiri opposition to all moves by the government to recognise two traditional rulers for the two Urhobo communities in Warri. It also stemmed from the alliance between the Ijaw and Urhobo to terminate Itsekiri stranglehold on Warri LGAs. Since its inception in 1976, the Itsekiri have produced all the elected chairmen of Warri LGA. The Itsekiri have also dominated the chairmanship position of both Warri North and Warri South West LGA, even after the latter's headquarters was relocated to Ogbe-Ijoh on the orders of the Delta State Government.

Even in employment into the councils, the Itsekiri have been dominant. For instance, a Federal Character Commission panel set up to look into complaints of the Ijaw confirmed that all 413 workers of Warri North LGA were Itsekiri whereas there was no Ijaw staff member. Moreover, although the Itsekiri and Ijaw respectively had 11 and 9 wards in the LGA, 35 political appointments in the LGA went to the Itsekiri while only six Ijaw were appointed (Ogafere 2005). Furthermore, the Ijaw and Urhobo alleged that social amenities have been concentrated in Itsekiri areas even though most of the oil from Warri are sourced from Ijaw and Urhobo areas (Urhobo of Warri 1997 and Gbaramatu Clan Communities 1997). It is as a result of such allegations of bias in allocation of social amenities and employment opportunities that location of the headquarters of local government areas has attained central importance. The group in whose land the local government area is located tends to benefit from the infrastructure and amenities as well as employment opportunities that the local government secretariats attract.

While such grievances have generated conflicts the principal reason for the degeneration of the conflicts into violence is the perception of state bias. This perception that the state favours one group at the expense of the others is evident in the following words that appeared in a leaflet that was distributed in Ijaw and Urhobo sections of Warri during the conflict under the cover of darkness:

This is an urgent piece of information to you the Okere Urhobos and the Ijaws in general. Your enemies have a very bad plan for you. Any moment from now before the end of the enquiry they are going to bomb houses of the Okumagba families and the Ijaw big men all over the town even those living inside Okumagba layout and other parts of Warri and some Ijaw villages...The aim is to kill all who may live in these houses, principally the Okumagbas and all Ijaws families that own their own houses in Warri...*Their objective is to create room for breakdown of law and order to make the Federal Government to declare a state of emergency and use their Godfathers to lobby the Federal Government to take over Warri as federal territory*, which has always been their aim and their dream...Do the following immediately: Blow out this plan of your enemies to the world immediately. Arrange for securities in all your domains and Urhobo towns and settlements within Warri municipality. *But you must not strike first as their Godfathers will still use your first attack on them as an excuse to make Warri a Federal Territory for them* (Emphasis added).

The context of this rumour sheet is the perception that the Federal Government has favoured the Itsekiri. For instance, Ijaw elites claim that an Ijaw member of the Armed Forces Ruling Council had assured them in 1991 that the Council agreed to create an Ijaw LGA in Warri. They believed the Itsekiri used their influence as top bureaucrats to change the new LGA to an Itsekiri LGA. The Ijaw leaders alleged it was the same connections that informed the relocation after Ogbe-Ijoh had been announced as LGAs (Gbaramatu Clan Communities 1997). On the other hand, the Itsekiri elites claim that the local government was never destined for Ogbe-Ijoh but that the state military administrator was only keeping his promise to his Ijaw superiors in the military when he announced the creation of a non-existent LGA (Concerned Itsekiri Citizens 1997). The Itsekiri have also alleged that the state governor, an Urhobo, has favoured the cause of the Ijaw and the Urhobo. They attribute the

unilateral decision of the governor in 2000 to take back the LGA headquarters to Ogbelike and the subsequent creation of development areas in Warri LGAs as evidence of the governor's bias.⁹

The perception that the state favours particular groups is fuelled by the utterances of elites who have served in government positions. Such elites usually brandish their achievements for their ethnic groups in their aspiration for leadership of their ethnic groups. This was the case in 2001 when two Ijaw leaders, Chief Edwin Clark and Chief Wellington Okrika, were involved in a leadership tussle. While Clark, widely known as Ijaw National Leader, is not an indigene of Warri where he has lived for many years, Okrika is a traditional chief of Gbaramatu Clan in Warri. Conflict between the two arose from the decision of Clark to mobilise the Ijaw to disown a peace agreement that Okrika had signed on behalf of the Ijaw. Okrika had signed an agreement which demanded that Ijaw youths should withdraw from Itsekiri communities they occupied during the conflict. In questioning Clark's leadership credentials, Okrika paraded his own contribution to the cause of the Warri Ijaw. This included his contribution to the longstanding struggle of the Ijaw in Warri for a local government. The following statement shows that he was aware of the circumstances that led to the announcement which subsequently led to the conflicts in 1997:

Col. J.D.Jungs assumed office as the military administrator just as the creation of more local government were announced by the Federal Military Administration in the country. I went to the Government House in Asaba to discuss with the new Military Administrator. I was then the chairman of the Family Support programme in Delta State. Thus, I had quick assess (sic) to

⁹ Development Committees were introduced in 2005 as part of the Governor's Road Map to Peace in Warri. The plan essentially decentralises management to the ward level to allow wards take charge of administering development in their area. This is done in the expectation that it would contain allegations of ethnic bias. See, Delta State of Nigeria (2004).

the new Military Administrator, where I was briefed about the full details as its affects our local government (Okrika 2001).¹⁰

If such assertions were confined to private correspondence, they would not have affected public perception they way have done. They have shaped public perception because the claims also appear in books that are meant for public consumption. For instance, Gen. David Ejoor, the first military governor of Midwest State and former Chief of Army Staff outlined his achievements in a recent book on the Urhobo. Instructively, the achievements includes influencing creation of local governments, appointments of Urhobo as chief judge and justice of the supreme court, and exemption of Urhobo Progress Union (UPU) from the blanket ban of ethnic associations in 1966. On the specific Warri conflicts, he claimed he ‘established the fact that Urhobo and Izon people legally own Warri metropolis’ (Ejoor 2005:136). The Ijaw and Urhobo politicians and military officers publicly made such claims because of the widespread belief that Chief Festus Okotie-Eboh, an Itsekiri chief, who was Finance Minister in the First Republic was responsible for inserting the special minority clause in the Midwest Region Constitution which declared Warri Division as Itsekiri homeland.

Moreover, the upsurge of conflicts in the 1990s can be linked to the rise of ethnic nationalism in the Niger Delta as various groups struggled to stake their claims on the Nigerian state. This has meant that Ijaw leaders in order to present their group as the fourth largest ethnic group and by so doing compete favourably with the three major ethnic groups (Nwajiaku 2005), have embarked irredentist mobilizations to bring all Ijaw groups together. This has made the Ijaw in other parts of the country to be more sympathetic to the cause of the Warri Ijaw. Following the example of the larger Ijaw

¹⁰ The Family Support Programme (FSP) was a pet programme of the first lady. The fact that Okrika was the State Chairman of the Programme suggests he had close links with the Abachas.

community, Warri Ijaw youths formed their own organizations, notably the Federated Ijaw Niger Delta Communities (FNDIC), which spearheaded the violent mobilization of the Warri Ijaw. Itsekiri elites have alleged that it was the presence of the 'Big Brother' in the background that emboldened the Ijaw in Warri to attack the Itsekiri in 1997 (Ejueyitchie 1997).

The 1990s also witnessed the resurgence of Urhobo nationalism as Urhobo leaders tried to portray the Urhobo as the fifth largest ethnic group in the country. The Urhobo claim that despite their contribution to the national cake, they have been marginalised in the scheme of things (Akiri 2002). In trying to forge a common identity, the Urhobo have become more sensitive to the 'plight' of their brethren in Warri. In 1999, Chief Benjamin Okumagba an Urhobo from Warri was elected President-General of the revitalised Urhobo Progressive Union (UPU). The combined resurgence of Ijaw and Urhobo nationalism have put the Itsekiri under pressure because the Itsekiri leadership have realised that they can no longer contain the Ijaw and Urhobo of Warri.

Concluding remarks

In 1997 the violence that spread across various parts of the country over the issue of local government headquarters revealed that decentralization, which ideally should promote peaceful development at the grassroots can also have destabilizing consequences. This article has traced decentralization related conflicts to the early years of colonial rule when native administration structures privileged certain groups. It argued that separatist sentiments that emerged during the colonial period have

continued to affect efforts to bring government closer to the people because communities conceive local government as antidotes to discrimination, inequality and exclusion. The matter was aggravated when the LGA reforms of 1976 guaranteed federal funding of LGAs. This transformed local government into a component of the proverbial national cake to be shared to competing interests.

In the context of demands from all interest groups, the process of creation of local government became less transparent and it seemed that military rulers dispensed local governments as patronage to favoured groups. This situation alienated some groups who felt they have lost out from successive local government exercises and that new local governments have not met their aspirations for self-government and development. It is in this context that creation of new local governments triggered violent conflicts between ethnic and communal groups. The situation where local government became patronage resources also encouraged corruption as elites who claim they were responsible for influencing the creation of the local governments have turned it into their spheres for accumulation. Consequently, even in those communities that new local governments were created, the aspiration of the people for development has yet to be met even though traditional rulers and local politicians are richer and more powerful.

As early as 1965, the United Nations emphatically pinned the fate of many of its new member nations on the adoption and thoroughgoing implementation of decentralization. It defined decentralization as ‘the transfer of authority on a geographic basis, whether by deconcentration (i.e. delegation) of authority to field units of the same department or level of government, or by devolution of authority to local units or special statutory bodies’ (Cited in South Eastern State, 1973). This

bundling of two theoretically distinct approaches raised the concern of scholars who preferred the unbundling and separation of deconcentration and devolution (Wraith 1971). The comparative literature on development administration generally preferred devolution, even though in the context of one party state (Africa) and benevolent dictatorship (Asia) that gripped the postcolonial nations devolution seemed farfetched.

Economic decline, which set in the 1970s and 1980s, adversely affected the capacity of even those states that followed the path of deconcentration to maintain field-staff. In this period, the literature veered from the issue of framework to focus on the objectives of decentralization. Scholars were increasingly interested in whether the objectives of decentralization, whatever form it took, were being achieved (Adamolekun 1991). The objectives were identified as administrative, political and economic and scholars also, in this liberal frame of mind, extended decentralization to encompass non-governmental and community organizations as well as privatisation of provision of local goods and services.

With the collapse of one-party regimes and return of multiparty elections, attention was turned to considering the relationship between decentralization and democratization. Decentralization was considered beneficial to democracy because it would not only deliver the political good of representation but also enhance delivery of economic goods (Crook and Manor 1998). The result of this postulation was that decentralization increasingly became part of the political conditionality for aid-dependent countries (Ndegwa 2002). Also in the aftermath of civil wars in some conflicts, decentralization has been advanced as a veritable tool for peace-building and post-conflict reconstruction (Premdas 2006).

These approaches have enhanced our understanding of decentralization, especially its potential positive impact on human development of the neglected majority who inhabit the peripheral sphere of the state. However, the concern for deliverables has the unintended political effects of decentralization deserve more attention. As Fanthorpe (2006) has highlighted in his case study of Sierra Leone, decentralization can strengthen authoritarian and patriarchal structures at the grassroots rather than promote community democracy and governance. It is worthwhile to consider the results of decentralization not only on the basis of stated objectives of the government but also the responses of civil society and powerful interest groups. There is need to find out what interests drive decentralization and what price communities have to pay for it. This would reveal nested interests that explain why decentralization sometimes fails to deliver development but rather fosters inter-group conflicts.

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