

## Supreme Court Judgment on LGA Autonomy: Implications and Recommendations



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Local government autonomy is a crucial aspect of democratic governance, enabling local governments to self-govern and respond to their communities' unique needs. In Nigeria, the call for local government autonomy has been long-standing and widespread, with Nigerians and stakeholders advocating for self-governance and financial independence in local government administration.

Prior to the Supreme Court's landmark judgment, the 20.60% of monthly revenue allocated to Local Governments by the Revenue Mobilization Allocation and Fiscal Commission was disbursed into a Joint Account Allocation Committee (JAAC) account managed by state governors. However, the judgment, delivered by Justice Emmanuel Agim, granted financial autonomy to local governments, directing that all funds be paid directly into their accounts, thereby ending state governors' dominance and mismanagement of local government finances.

The court also prohibited governors from receiving, tampering with, or withholding local government funds and barred them from dissolving democratically elected officials, deeming such actions a breach of the 1999 Constitution. The Federal Government, through the Attorney General of the Federation, had approached the Supreme Court seeking to compel state governors to grant full autonomy to local governments, accusing them of gross misconduct and abuse of power.

The Supreme Court judgment delivered on July 11, 2024, is a significant step forward for democratic development in Nigeria, empowering local governments and promoting grassroots development. While the judgment marks a triumph for democracy and the entire Nigerian populace, the actual impact of this autonomy largely depends on the competence and integrity of leadership at the local government level. This underscores the crucial role of civic participation in holding local government chairpersons responsible for fulfilling their constitutional duties. Therefore, achieving true financial autonomy for local governments is not a cure-all solution but rather a clarion call for citizens to actively participate in the democratic process, ensuring that local governance genuinely serves the community.

## **Recommendations**

- To further strengthen local government autonomy, it is suggested that INEC conduct local government elections instead of the States' Independent Electoral Commissions (SIECs). Therefore, the National Assembly must as a matter of urgency leverage the judgment of the apex court to drive a thorough Constitutional amendment that not only strengthens Local Government Autonomy but also reinforces its position as a third tier of government.
- Furthermore, strengthening the civic space through various mechanisms like capacity building for activists in communities, public hearings, town hall meetings, etc. at local levels will ensure accountability, thereby encouraging citizens, especially the youth to be in the decision-making process. This will also promote youth inclusion in governance as young people will be better positioned to vie for offices at local government levels.
- Capacity building for local government officials to effectively manage resources and drive development is also crucial. This may include training and developmental programmes that focus on revenue management, digital literacy, and data-driven decision-making. By building capacity in these areas and other key areas, local government officials can effectively manage their resources and optimize efficiency in the delivery of democratic dividends.

By and large, the Supreme Court's judgment on local government autonomy is a significant step towards empowering local governments and promoting grassroots development. Stakeholders must work together to ensure effective implementation. In its implementation lies unique

opportunities, including ensuring youth participation which will gain significant momentum with local government autonomy.

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