Nigeria and the African Charter on the Values and Principles of Decentralisation, Local Governance and Local Development: Navigating Content, Context, Issues and Prospects

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Abstract

This article examines the major provisions of the 2014 African Charter on the Values and Principles of Decentralisation, Local Governance and Local Development (hereafter the Charter) and the prognosis for the prospects of its actualisation in Nigeria. Specifically, it notes that if this Charter is viewed within the purview of the philosophical principles and values that undergird it, it seems novel. If it is domesticated and internalised by the Nigerian governing elites and their counterparts in other African countries, especially at the federal and local levels, it could be the springboard for ensuring development at grass-roots level. However, based on the evidence they gathered from the review of the country's development history, the authors argue and submit that the objective of the Charter has a slim prospect of being realised in Nigeria, given the convoluted nature of the Nigerian federal state and the political environment that has sustained it. The article calls for the restructuring of the convoluted Nigerian federal system in order to allow peripheral governments to have more power and resources.

Keywords: decentralisation; local government; local development; Nigerian State

Seek ye first the political kingdom and all else shall be granted thee. (Kwame Nkrumah 1957, 164)

Introduction

The excerpt above from one of the numerous pan-Africanist speeches of Kwame Nkrumah, the first prime minister of an independent Ghana, perhaps symbolises the passion that the first generation of African political leaders had for the development of their countries and peoples. In other words, political independence, given the background against which it was won, had no meaning unless connected to the development of the people, domiciled within the artificially created states, within the shortest possible time (Mazrui 1993, 122). Perhaps, in popular terms, such a slogan seems to suggest that political independence has brought about and come to nurture a new order, an order in which the people—the armies of the nationalist struggles—are, through the self-governing local authorities that the constitutions have established, both the means and the ends of the developmental processes. However, paradoxically and disappointingly too, within the shortest possible time, development dictatorship, in which the state elites, under the guise of taming ethnicity and other centrifugal forces, marginalised the people, became the order of the day (Adejumobi 2009, 68). Thus, for decades, the centrist, top-bottom development paradigm of various models became the courted bride of political leaders in virtually all the countries in Africa. Even in countries where local governments were purportedly created and reformed, people and institutions at sub-national levels were still marginalised in the governance and development processes (Basiru and Ogunwa 2016, 114).

However, by the 1990s, courtesy of the global wave of democratisation, coupled with the failures in service delivery spurred by the contradictions in the implementation of the structural adjustment policies in many debt-ravaged countries, a case began to be made, within and outside Africa, for a new development model. This new model places the people at the grass-roots of the state, at the centre of governance and development (see Wunsch and Olowu 1995). Specifically, the contention of this new paradigm is that meaningful development and social transformation of nations grappling with underdevelopment will be better guaranteed when development processes are decentralised and pluralised. Put differently, this development paradigm is one in which the central state is not the only actor in the development process but participates in the process in conjunction with authorities at the sub-national level (Bhagwati 1995).

In Africa, following the initiatives of the Department of Political Affairs of the African Union Commission (AUC) and the Yaoundé-based All Africa Ministerial Conference on Decentralisation and Local Development (AMSOD), this development paradigm recently found multilateral expression in the African Charter on the Values and Principles of Decentralisation, Local Governance and Local Development (hereafter the Charter). It was adopted at the 25th Ordinary Session of the African Heads of Government in Malabo, Equatorial Guinea (Assembly/AU/Dec.529/ XXIII) in June 2014. It is hoped that the Charter, if domesticated and implemented by AU member states, would not only promote sustainable development at grass-roots levels but would also contribute to promoting the well-being of the citizens in the member countries.

This article examines the major provisions of the Charter and the prospects of its actualisation in Nigeria in the light of contemporary realities. The article is organised into several sections, starting with this introduction, which presents the article's significance, purpose and organisation. This is followed by the conceptualisation and discussion of the core concepts that are central to the discourse. It then sets out the theoretical framework that guides the discourse. Next is the examination and discussion of the background to and content of the Charter. The article also undertakes a prognosis of the prospects of the Charter's realisation in Nigeria's illiberal democracy. The article rounds off with concluding remarks.

Conceptual Clarifications

It has to be stressed from the onset that the key terms that are germane to this article (i.e. development, decentralisation and local government), like their counterparts in social analysis, cannot be pinned down to one specific definition because concepts often assume different meanings. This reality notwithstanding, some conceptual clarifications are imperative for the purpose of this discourse. In the words of Rubin and Babbie (1989, 12), "we specify what we mean when we use particular terms for the purpose of facilitating their contextual operationalization and comprehension." To this end, the authors clarify the concepts that are germane to this article, beginning with the concept of development which, aside from being nebulously contested, is also ideologically loaded (Adejumobi 2009, 66). According to Iyayi (2007, 10), "development is conceived usually from the standpoint of a specific social group."

What has emerged in the literature is that the meaning of development is dependent on different approaches and phases (Omoweh 2000, 24). For example, Adejumobi (2009, 66) identifies three phases in the definition of development. The first, according to him, views development in strictly economic and technical terms, such as, increase in per capita income, gross domestic product, saving, and investment. He surmises that the second conceives development in social terms, namely, in terms of growth combined with equity. In other words, it views development in terms of the increasing access of people to the basic necessities of life. The third perspective which, according to him, transcends the first two in terms of comprehensiveness, defines development in terms of individual and group independence.

Notwithstanding the foregoing, notable scholars in development studies have espoused their views on what development means. For the purpose of the current study, the definitional perspectives of Rodney (1972), Iyayi (2007) and Sen (1999) are pertinent. Rodney (1972, 10–11) conceives development as being the increasing capacity of a social group to regulate both internal and external relationships. These capacities, according to Iyayi (2007, 11), are: capacity to regulate relationships among members and with outsiders; capacity of being independent of both nature and other social groups; and ability to provide for the material, social and psychological needs of members of the social group.

What could be gleaned from the positions of Rodney and Iyayi is that development is the outcome of a sustained process of transformation of the material and human resources of people brought about by the increasing capacities of people to shape and determine their destinies. Put differently, development refers to the increasing latitude of people to manage their affairs without hindrance from an external agency. In the light of the foregoing, the perspective that development is freedom (as can be discerned in the definitions of Rodney and Iyayi) is adopted as a working definition. Sen (1999, xii) rightly captures this perspective as follows:

expansion of freedom is viewed, in this approach, both as the primary end and as the principal means of development. Development consists of the removal of various types of unfreedoms that leave people with little choice and little opportunity of exercising their reasoned agency. The removal of substantial unfreedoms, it is argued here, is *constitutive* of development. (Sen's italics)

The concept of decentralisation is equally beset with definitional controversies and it has been defined in many ways. Definitions vary according to the orientations of the person or institution defining it (IseOlorunkanmi 2014, 48; Obiyan 2009, 117). However, it is instructive to note that at the heart of the controversy has been the vexing issue of whether the concept of decentralisation should be restricted in usage to the vertical process of transferring competencies and resources from the national government to territorially defined sub-national levels of government or whether the concept should also include the horizontal process of decentralising competencies and resources at a given level of government. In the midst of this controversy, what has thus emerged in the literature are different terms (e.g. devolution, delegation, deconcentration, privatisation, deregulation), all taking shelter under the umbrella of the imprecise term decentralisation. This controversy notwithstanding, Rondinelli (1981, 137) defines decentralisation,

as the delegation of legal and political authority to plan, make decisions and manage public functions from the central government and its agencies to field organizations of those agencies, subordinate units of government, semi-autonomous public corporations, area-wide or regional development authorities, functional authorities, autonomous local governments or non-governmental organizations.

For Olowu (1988, 34), decentralisation is the transfer of administrative and or decision-making (political) power to lower organisational units. Ribot (2002, ii) is of the view that decentralisation is any act in which a central government formally cedes powers to actors and institutions at lower levels in a political-administrative and territorial hierarchy. Okojie (in IseOlorunkanmi 2014, 49) conceives decentralisation as a process of transitioning from a governance structure in which power is concentrated at the central or national level to one in which authority to make decisions and implement them is shifted to lower level governments or agencies. At this juncture, it is instructive to stress that two major genres of decentralisation (deconcentration and devolution) are

often used interchangeably with decentralisation (Olowu 1995, 16). Enemuo (1999, 314) conceives the former as involving the redistribution of authority and responsibility among different levels within the central government. He posits that the latter (i.e. devolution) implies the transfer of responsibility for specified local services to autonomous local units that are elected by the local population and are granted the power to raise their own revenue and to decide policy directions.

What could be deduced from the foregoing is that devolution symbolises autonomy of local governments from the central government. Thus, for the purpose of this article, devolution is equated with decentralisation. In this context, Wunsch (2008, 25) posits as follows:

Decentralization is the redistribution of authority, resources and accountability from the center to some subordinate political jurisdiction, usually called local government. While the center retains superior authority in many areas, in those functions which are decentralized, local governments are autonomous within specified boundaries.

In a similar vein, Article I of the Charter defines decentralisation as the transfer of power, responsibilities, capacities and resources from national to all sub-national levels of government with the aim of strengthening the ability of the latter to both foster people's participation and delivery of quality services.

The concept of local government is equally not amenable to a universal definition (Eme 2009, 89; Marcellus 2009, 27). This reality notwithstanding, it has been defined from various standpoints. Oyediran (1988, 2) describes local government as a government in which popular participation both in the choice of decision-makers and the decision-making process is conducted by local bodies, which, while recognising the supremacy of the central government, is able and willing to accept responsibility for its decisions. Ikelegbe (2005, 8) conceives it as "a segment of a nation state, established by law to provide public services and regulate public affairs within its area of jurisdiction." Ogunna (1996, 36) posits that local government is a political authority that is purposely created by law or constitution for a local community to manage its local public affairs within the limits of the law or constitutions.

From the foregoing definitions, it is clear that local government is characteristically different from other local administrative entities. In this sense, Abubakar (1993) defines it as, a political subdivision of a nation (or a federal system, a state) which is constituted by law and has substantial control of local affairs including the powers to impose taxes or to exact labour for prescribed purposes. The governing body for such an entity is elected or otherwise locally selected.

Reinforcing Abubakar's view, Venkatarangaiye and Pattabhirann (in Ola and Tonwe 2005, 62) describe local government as,

the administration of a locality, a village, or town, a city or any other smaller than the state by a body representing the local inhabitants, possessing a fairly large amount of autonomy, raising at least a part of its revenue through taxation and spending its income on services which are regarded as local and therefore as distinct from state and federal services.

Framed in the context of the aim of the Charter, local government, in conjunction with other local non-governmental actors, rather than the national government, should be the fulcrum of development in all African Union (AU) member countries. However, there is a caveat: such order has to be predicated on the institutionalisation of an autonomous, democratic and decentralised local government system whose existence is guaranteed by devolutionary-compliant higher levels of government (AU 2014, Chapter II, Article 5–7). Succinctly put, the removal of substantial unfreedoms from the way that local governments (i.e. member countries) operate, are, assumedly, the *sine qua non* for local development.

Theoretical Framework of Analysis

The starting question posed in our theoretical discourse in this article is: Which model of development does the Charter seek to promote? This question is posed against the backdrop of the fact that the discourses on the routes to development in the Third World have been framed by two mutually exclusive and opposing theoretical perspectives (Wunsch and Olowu 1995). To be sure, the two theoretical perspectives attempt to define the roles of the national government and the sub-national governments[1] and other actors[2] in the development processes of any nation (Basiru and Ogunwa 2016, 117). The first, the centralised perspective, considers the domain of development, planning, control and administration as the exclusive reserve of the national government. In other words, the way to achieving development in any society lies in a system in which the national government not only sets the stage in the development process but, most importantly, also acts the script. According to this theoretical reasoning, local governments and other local self-organising entities have no roles to play in the overall development of the country, and if they do exist, they are mere instruments in the administration of the developmental directives of the national government. It is instructive to note that this perspective, nomenclatured in radical development literature as an authoritarian development model, developed against the background of the New States'[3] search for a development paradigm in the 1950s (Adejumobi 2009).

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1   These include other governing entities, either established by the country's constitution or created by the central parliament or decreed into existence outside the state's headquarters. For the purpose of this article, these are local governments.
2   These are organisations, such as civil society organisations, town associations and farmers' unions, that are also stakeholders in the development process.
3   New States here refer to Third-World states that emerged from colonialism in the 1950s and 1960s.

Specifically, the underlying premise and assumption of centralisation is that development is not an all-inclusive process that involves many actors but rather a phenomenon that must be carefully guided by the central state. Indeed, during the heyday of the modernisation paradigm in the 1960s, so popular was the contention that a democratically governed development model, in which democracy and development went *pari passu,* promoted disorder, which in turn threatened development (see Apter 1960; Lipset 1959; Nordlinger 1971). Given this reality, what these post-colonial societies needed, according to the advocates of centralised development, was an authoritarian and mono-centric model of development. Therefore, it was theorised that as a country matured economically and its people's socio-economic conditions improved (under state authoritarianism), its political system would become more responsive and democratic, guaranteeing political order upon which sustainable development could be erected (see Huntington 1967; Zolberg 1966).

Counterpoised to the above perspective is the decentralised model of development that regards the diversity of governments and other institutions as essential to the articulation and promotion of economic growth and development. Its central argument is that national government, far from being the only actor in the development process, participates in conjunction with other governments and organisations at the sub-national level (Ostrom and Ostrom 1977). Instructively, the underlying assumption of this perspective, as posited in Todaro (1981) and Olowu (1995), is that without institutions which create and sustain a diversity of viable organisations to facilitate the broad and flexible human organisational patterns necessary to produce an increasing variety of complex goods and services, neither capital nor technology will avail in bringing about social transformation. Writing in support of this argument, Owens and Shaw (1972, 54) contend that "meaningful development cannot be brought about only by the national government but through collaboration among diverse individuals in the pursuit of their individual and collective interests."

What could be deduced from the arguments above is that a decentralised model of development is anchored on local autonomous development, underwritten by decentralisation philosophies and principles. Olowu (1995, 6) lists these as follows:

- devolution of real responsibility and authority to choose and provide social services and development projects to local governments;

- substantial shrinkage of the role of the central state in the economy, including size of national budget, regulation of small-scale economic sectors, reduction of the cost of the civil service, and reduction of the entrepreneurial, managerial and production role of the state;

- opening up of politics to much greater public participation, though not necessarily trying to emulate Westminster or American forms of competitive political parties;

- legalisation and protection of extra-state voluntary groups organised for social, communal, occupational, professional, religious, labour, and other purposes, and encouragement of their activity in social, economic and political affairs; and

- constriction of the role and power of public office holders to those tasks necessary to manage the state, rather than offering them the ability to redefine the rules of the state to facilitate their interests.

In the light of the foregoing, which perspective does the Charter mirror on decentralisation? We will come to this soon; however, it is imperative to first put into clear perspective the background to and the content of the Charter.

The Charter on Decentralisation: Navigating Context and Content

The process leading up to the formulation and adoption of the Charter in 2014 could be traced back to as early as the late 1980s. This was the time when failures in service delivery, spurred by the contradictions in the implementation of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) in Africa, led to a fundamental rethinking of Africa's development by leaders of civil society organisations and the intelligentsia (Mkandawire and Olukoshi, 1995). To be sure, this rethinking culminated in the International Conference on Popular Participation in the Recovery and Development Process, which was sponsored by the United Nations Inter-Agency Task Force and was held in Arusha, Tanzania from February 12–16, 1990 (Adejumobi 2009). The conference, which was attended by over 500 delegates from a wide range of African people's organisations (e.g. nongovernmental, grass-roots, peasant, women and youth organisations and associations, and trade unions) deliberated on the relationship between development policy, popular participation, and decentralisation of the state. The outcome of the conference was the issuing of the African Charter for Popular Participation in Development and Transformation (UNECA 1990, 6).

Specifically, the conference called for the full and effective participation of the people and civil society organisations in charting their development policies, programmes and processes. The conference agreed that, "We affirm that nations cannot be built without the popular support and full participation of the people, nor can the economic crisis be resolved and the human and economic conditions improved without the full and effective contribution, reactivity and popular enthusiasm of the vast majority of the people" (UNECA 1990, 4). Indeed, in a forceful tone, the delegates asserted that:

the political context of socio-economic development has been characterized, in many instances, by an over-centralization of power and impediments to the effective participation of the overwhelming majority of the people in social, political and economic development. As a result, the motivation of the majority of African people and their organizations to contribute their best to the development process and to the betterment of their own well-being as well as their say in national development has been

severely constrained and curtailed and their collective and individual creativity has been undervalued and underutilized. (UNECA 1990, 4)

Perhaps, it was against the background of terse statements such as the one above that the idea of popular participation of people in development became a key feature of the continent's development discourse. To be sure, the 1990 Arusha Declaration represented the new agenda that Africa's non-state actors presented to African leaders and donor agencies as an alternative to centrist development initiatives. Unfortunately, however, rather than accepting the positions of the civil society organisations by situating the developmental crisis, which confronted the continent in the 1980s and 1990s, in the failure of the centralised states and the centrist developmental policies that have defined them, African statesmen and the donor community continued to implicate external debts and other exogenous factors (Basiru 2011, 179). However, in the first decade of the 21st century, with the new-found awareness in African governmental circles that the people must be the object and the end of development, efforts began to be exerted at the multilateral levels to bring back to the continent's development discourse the issues of decentralisation and local development.

It might have been this new thinking that informed the Yaoundé Declaration that the African ministers in charge of decentralisation and local government adopted on October 25, 2005. It might also have influenced the decisions of the Department of Political Affairs of the African Union Commission (AUC) and the Yaoundé-based All Africa Ministerial Conference on Decentralisation and Local Development (AMCOD) to facilitate a new development initiative for the continent—the African Charter on the Values and Principles of Decentralisation and Local Governance and Local Development (which is dealt with in this article). This Charter was adopted by the Assembly of Heads of State and Government at their 25th Ordinary Session, held in Malabo, Equatorial Guinea, in June 2014 (AU 2014).[4]

For the purpose of analysis, it is mentioned that the Charter has four chapters and contains twenty-six Articles. The first chapter deals with the conceptual definitions, objectives, scope and values of decentralisation and good local governance. The second chapter focuses on the principles of decentralisation, local governance and local development, whereas the third chapter covers issues of mechanisms for application, and the final chapter deals with other relevant clauses such as safeguards and settlements of disputes, signature, ratification and entry into force of the Charter, amendments and

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4   Prior to this date, a series of activities, which were suggestive of a paradigm shift towards accountability, were at play in the continent's development discourse. These included the AU Convention on Preventing and Combating Corruption (2003), the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance (2007), and the Accra Declaration (2007).

revision. In terms of objectives, the Charter, as stipulated in Article 2, specifically seeks to:

- promote, protect and act as a catalyst for decentralisation, local governance and local development in Africa;

- promote and champion local governance and local democracy as the cornerstones of decentralisation in Africa;

- promote resource mobilisation and local economic development with a view to eradicating poverty in Africa;

- promote a shared understanding and a common vision of member states on matters relating to decentralisation, local governance and local development;

- promote the core values and principles of decentralisation, local governance and local development;

- guide policy formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation at continental, regional, state and sub-national levels on decentralisation, local governance and local development;

- encourage effective coordination, harmonisation and knowledge sharing within member states and among regional economic communities on decentralisation, local governance and local development;

- promote the association and cooperation of local governments or local authorities at local, national, regional and continental levels; and

- promote civil society, private sector and people participation in decentralisation, local governance and local development initiatives (AU 2014, 3–4).

Further, aside from emphasising the scope of the Charter in Article 3, which includes decentralisation, local governance and local development, it presents in Article 4 the core values that informed it. These are: community-based participation and inclusiveness; solidarity; respect for human and peoples' rights; diversity and tolerance; justice, equality and equity; integrity; civic responsibility and citizenship; transparency and accountability; and responsiveness (AU 2014, 4).

A critical look at the whole Charter clearly indicates that, aside from the general objectives, scope and values (articulated in Chapter I), and the principles (articulated in Chapter II), the Charter contains many provisions that, if implemented by the concerned parties, could provide the dividends associated with decentralisation and participatory local governance as envisaged in the 1990 Arusha Declaration. However, out of all of

these, the key provisions in Chapter III[5] (Article 18(1)a and b) are central to the analysis in this article and are thus examined in order to put the issues into perspective.

Specifically, sub-section 1(a) of Article 18 stipulates actions to be taken at the local authority level. Local governments or local authorities, according to this sub-section, shall:

- equally be responsible and accountable to their local populations for the implementation of the objectives of the Charter, and the adherence to its values and principles;

- cooperate with the central government and other sub-national levels of governments to realise shared development priorities;

- participate in national local government associations and collaborate with civil society and the private sector to achieve the objective of the Charter;

- demonstrate the political will to advocate and ensure the implementation of the objectives, values and principles of the Charter, together with the central government;

- commit to create favourable conditions for the dissemination and implementation of the Charter; and

- commit to participate in the monitoring, evaluation and reporting of implementation of the Charter (AU 2014, 15).

- Sub-section 1(b) states that State Parties[6] shall:

- adopt appropriate legislative, executive and administrative measures to align their national laws and regulations to the objectives of this Charter and adhere to the values and principles contained therein;

- integrate commitments, objectives, values and principles of this Charter into national policies and strategies;

- take all necessary measures to ensure the broader dissemination of this Charter;

- undertake and coordinate efforts to place decentralisation and local development at the centre of governance and development;

- demonstrate the political will, inter alia, through the allocation of appropriate resources for the realisation of the objectives, values and principles of this Charter in a concrete manner; and

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5   See Chapter III on Mechanism for Implementation.
6   State Parties here refer to national governments.

- take the necessary steps to develop cooperation and share experiences in the area of decentralisation, local governance and local development in accordance with the objectives, values and principles of this Charter.

Instructively, the aforementioned provisions and also other provisions were expected, if domesticated and operationalised by state parties and local authorities, to be the springboard for achieving development at grass-roots levels in Africa. What is Nigeria's situation? Answering this question is the focus of the next section.

Nigerianising the Charter: Context and Prospects

Article 18(1)a and b of the Charter, as recounted above, imposes huge obligations on the Federal Government of Nigeria and all the 774 local governments. Here, the pertinent question is: What are the prospects of these entities meeting these obligations as envisaged? Put differently, what are the prospects of institutionalising local development and governance as provided in the Charter? However, before addressing this question, it is imperative to interrogate the content, context and politics of development and power-sharing in the country. This serves two purposes. First, it helps in putting the country's developmental efforts in proper historical perspective. Second, it unravels the nature of federalism and inter-governmental relations in the country, and the politics that both engender. To be sure, colonial rule in Nigeria, like in virtually all British colonies in Africa, while it lasted, failed in the development sector. In other words, the colonial state in Nigeria did not have as its raison d'être the development of the Nigerian society and its people but rather the tapping of the resources that it superintends to use for the benefit of the British society and its people (see Dike 1960; Ejimofor 1987; Ekeh 1975).

But at the country's independence, the successor state elites, conscious of the developmental gaps between their country and those that came to colonise them, promised to reverse the colonial order by putting development, even though in token terms, at the centre of the nation-building agenda (Ake 2001, 6). Umezurike (2012, 25) categorises the aims of the developmental agenda into two, namely, the aim to inadvertently promote economic nationalism of the Nigerian state, and the aims that were directly structured and oriented towards advancing market liberalisation and state divestiture. According to Umezurike, the first category contains developmental strategies such as indigenisation policy, land-use reform, and poverty alleviation. The strategies in the second category include austerity measures, an economic stabilisation programme, privatisation and commercialisation, which were all embodied in, for example, the Structural Adjustment Programme and the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy.

It is instructive to note that during the first phase of the country's development agenda (1960–1966), the global ideological horse-trading between Washington and Moscow set the context for choice of developmental policy available to the country's ruling elites. Given the realities of the time, the country's first prime minister, Alhaji Tafawa

Balewa, seemed to think that the best strategy for the furtherance of Nigeria's economic growth at the time was import-substitution-industrialisation (Asobie 1991). In real terms, it seemed that the policy was directed primarily at attracting foreign investment, external public loans and grants without putting in jeopardy the country's internal security and political independence.

During the second phase (1966–1980), the governing regimes (military and civilian) adopted the strategy of state intervention in the economy. Specifically, the principal objectives of the Nigerian state during this era were twofold. Firstly, it was to provide basic infrastructure to accelerate growth and secondly, it was to moderate economic transactions in order to ensure social equity in the distribution of the fruits of development (Onuoha 2009, 49). However, by 1981, the second phase of the post-colonial developmental agenda had run its full course as the country lost its sovereignty to the Bretton Woods Institutions (BWIs) to direct its developmental course (Oluyemi-Kusa 1994). It is instructive to stress that by accepting the terms of these institutions, the ruling elites launched the country into the era of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), characterised by the state divesting itself of the public sector (Olukoshi 1990).

However, with the passage of time, despite these obvious facts about the failure of the SAP, the BWIs held on to the belief that the reform could not fail, and if it did, it must have been as a result of bad governance, neo-patrimonialism and corruption. The solution, according to them, thus lay in the enthronement of good governance and accountability. Interestingly, the regime of General Abubakar after the demise of General Abacha in June 1998 accepted the BWI's position and resultantly launched the country into the globalisation-driven, post-adjustment phase. At this juncture, it is instructive to note that notwithstanding the change in nomenclature from adjustment to post-adjustment, the logic seemed the same (Umezurike 2010). Even after the exit of the military from power and the return of democracy to the country on May 29, 1999, neo-liberal policies anchored on the terms dictated by the BWIs continued to be the defining features of the country's developmental aspirations (Adeyemo, Salami, and Olu-Adeyemo 2008).

To be sure, the common thread in all the development efforts of the post-colonial state in Nigeria is that they mirror a centrist development strategy in which the central state, the Federal Government, takes centre stage in the developmental processes of the country. Put differently, a decentralised model of development, typical of a federal system (except during the first republic[7]) has not been the defining norm of the development process in post-independence Nigeria.

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7   Here, the first republic refers to the period between October 1, 1963 (when the country attained republican status) and January 15, 1966 (when the republic ceased to exist).

Instructively, this state of affairs is not unconnected to a centralised federalist model that concentrates power and resources in the Federal Government of Nigeria and by implication nurtures dependency and inefficiency of the sub-national governmental actors (Achi 2004, 15). Reflecting on this model of federalism, albeit from a global perspective, Coleman (in Peil 1976, 115) posits that "excessive centralization and statism of most developing countries … not only means greater vulnerability as a result of unfulfilment of populist expectation, it also means heightened inefficiency." Nigerianising this contention, Ojo (2009, 390) avers, "if anything, the greatest travail of Nigerian federalism is the problem of asymmetric power relationships between and among the disparate component units of the federation."

Some remarks about federalism are in order here. A federal arrangement, even though it was classically conceived as a device for organising governance in plural societies, in recent times it is further conceived as a framework that enables the federating units to benefit from economic opportunities of large and small operations at diverse levels beginning with the most basic (Basiru and Ogunwa 2016, 118). It is in this sense that Olowu 1995, 198) contends as follows:

The federal contract provides an umbrella under which various nationalities might pool their resources for economic and military advantage while at the same time ensuring that the human drive for self-organization in the provision and maintenance of a range of goods and services is not extinguished. The peculiar advantage of federalism is that because of its relatively loose constitution, it enables a political system to maximize the advantages both of small and large political organization.

Instructively, it was this model of power-sharing that the nationalists, at the height of the decolonisation struggles in 1954, accepted as a framework for welding together the disparate ethnic groups in Nigeria (Ojo 2009, 4). For example, to Obafemi Awolowo, the Premier of the Western Region in colonial Nigeria, "the constitution of Nigeria must be federal because any other constitution will be unsuitable and will generate ever recurring instability which may eventually lead to the complete disappearance of the Nigeria composite states" (Awolowo 1960, 239). In a similar vein, his counterpart from the Northern Region, Ahmadu Bello, avers "federalism was the only guarantee that the country will progress evenly all over" (Bello 1962, 181). Indeed, this model of power-sharing, which was anchored on the logic of decentralised development, was credited with the rapid growth recorded in Nigeria between 1954 and 1966. However, the gains of this "progressive" era began to be lost from 1966 when the military, having overthrown the constitutional order, moved to centralise administration and resources and, by extension, deprived the units (regions) of their erstwhile developmental roles. In due course, in line with the military's command structure, Nigeria's federal system became over-centralised to the extent that it turned the country back to the pre-1953 era. This development assumed greater currency after the civil war that ravaged the country for 30 months (Basiru and Ogunwa 2016, 119). By this time, it would be recalled that oil had not only become the vertebra of the national economy but also the major revenue

earner to Yakubu Gowon's military regime[8]. With the huge oil revenue, especially after the promulgation of the Petroleum Act of 1969[9], several erstwhile responsibilities of the federating units were taken over by military fiat by the Federal Military Government (Adigbuo 2013, 37). Specifically, the marketing board systems and the universities were nationalised. Also, responsibilities that were hitherto in the residual lists, such as secondary education, basic health services, housing, and urban development, were now to be dispensed by both the centre and the units.

Interestingly, Gowon's model was sustained by the successive military regimes. For example, his successor, General Murtala Mohammed, in his bid to reduce "divisive tendencies" in the nation, abolished the federating units' coat of arms and mottos. In the aftermath, all sub-national governments in the country adopted the coat of arms and motto of the federation (Policy Briefs 1999). This model was also incorporated into the post-military constitutions of the country. Evidently, this could be observed in the increase in the number of matters assigned to the Federal Government in the 1979, 1989 and 1999 constitutions of the Federal Republic of Nigeria as opposed to those assigned in the independence and republican constitutions. Equally, some of the military decrees that centralised revenue collection, such as the Petroleum Act of 1969 and the Exclusive Economic Zone Decree Cap 116 Law of the Federation of 1990, were codified into the 1999 Constitution by military fiat[10] (Adigbuo 2013, 39). Specifically, section 44(3) of the 1999 Constitution reads, inter alia:

Notwithstanding the foregoing provisions of this section, the entire property in and control of all minerals, mineral oils and natural gas or upon any land in Nigeria or in, under or upon the territorial waters and Exclusive Economic Zone of Nigeria shall vest on the Government of the Federation and shall be managed in such manner as may be prescribed by the National Assembly (Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999).

Since the end of the civil war, the central state had been the most dominant participant in the economy. In fact, the philosophy that informed the second and third national development plans (1970–1975 and 1975–1980) was one in which the central state took over the control and the management of the "commanding height" of the economy. To be sure, local governments, despite being recognised as the third tier of government courtesy of the 1976 local government reform, were not allowed to play any role either in the design of development plans or in their implementation. As indicated in notable studies on local government and economic development in Nigeria, they were marginalised not only in terms of revenue allocation but also in the shaping of the

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8   General Gowon succeeded the first military Head of State, General Aguiyi Ironsi, in the counter-coup of July 29, 1966.

9   Section 1(1-3) of this Act vested the ownership of all onshore and offshore revenue from petroleum resources in the Federal Government.

10 Added to this was the abolishment of private ownership of land through a controversial Land Use Act.

country's development direction (see Ola and Olowu 1977; Orewa and Adewunmi 1983; Oyediran 2003; Oyewo 1987). As a matter of fact, while military rule lasted in the country, local governments seemed to be mere instruments for carrying out orders handed over to them by the central government. Putting this into perspective, Olukoshi and Agbu (1996, 86) posit as follows:

Like the military in most parts of the world, the Nigerian armed forces operate a centralized command structure which their years of involvement in the political arena have transferred into the administration of the country. The structure of governance is based on a hierarchy of tiers of government in which the federal government is pre-eminent and the state and local governments are subordinate. The chain of command in the federal arrangement they promoted assumed the flow of instructions and mandates from the top to the bottom.

The foregoing discussions have laid bare two basic facts about Nigeria's socio-political environment. Firstly, since 1966 (when the military intervened in the politico-administrative process of the country), the development process has reflected a statist and centrist development model, even in spite of the operation of federal constitutions. Secondly, this centrist model has over the years been sustained by a convoluted and warped federal system, which itself was an outcome of military foray into the country's governance. Given these facts, the pertinent question is whether there is any prospect of the realisation of the objectives of local governance and development as enunciated in the Charter.

Our contention is that, given the facts presented earlier, the prospects of realising the core objective of the Charter, which is to promote local governance and development, is rather slim. This is because of the almost unlimited opportunities and advantages that the extant convoluted and centralised state structure offers the class that controls it at the centre of the country's federation. To be sure, this may not be unconnected to the fact that in Nigeria, as in other African post-colonies, the character of the central state and the politics that it engenders as well its role in the management of the national economy are central to understanding the contour and trajectory of governance and development at all levels. In the words of Ake (2001, 1), "by all indications, political conditions in Africa are the greatest impediment to development." Framed this way, therefore, since foray into politics in Nigeria, like in other post-colonial countries, is motivated by the crave for wealth accumulation rather than public service, capturing state power and consolidating it when captured have not only defined politics but have also shaped elites' developmental orientations. Instructively, upon capturing and consolidating state power, either by a coup d'état or an election, the only model of development that would seem to be suitable for elites' accumulation drive is the one that centralises the development processes of the country in the central state.

Indeed, an alternative to such a framework would have been a working federal political framework that decentralised and localised politics, resource ownership, governance

and development, as was the case in the country between 1954 and 1966. However, going this path by way of devolutionary decentralisation, as the drafters of the Charter might have envisaged, would amount to the central state elites' loss of a firm grip over the wealth accumulation sector. More worrisome in the whole scenario is the fact that even the "token" resources that reach the local governments are often squandered to support local patronage networks due to the culture of prebendalism and corruption that has percolated through the entire system (Aiyede 2009).

Conclusion

In this article, we examined the major provisions of the 2014 African Charter on the Values and Principles of Decentralisation, Local Governance and Local Development in an attempt to make a prognosis on the prospects of its actualisation in Nigeria. This has become necessary taking into account the increasing marginalisation of local governments in the country's developmental process even under a democratic dispensation. As the preceding analysis suggests, a centrist development strategy, in which the central state centralises development policy and planning, has characterised Nigeria's development processes. As revealed, this state of affairs cannot be divorced from, firstly, a convoluted and warped federal system that centralises power and resources in the central government to the great disadvantage of sub-national governments, and secondly, the character of the central state and the politics that it engenders. This scenario conjures a picture of a very slim prospect of the realisation of the core objective of the Charter on local governance and development in illiberal Nigeria. However, this is not to say that the future of local governance and development, in view of the ongoing amendments that aim to ensure local government autonomy, is gloomy. Given these realities, we recommend two measures. Firstly and in the short run, there should be concerted efforts on the parts of major stakeholders that are geared towards ensuring the passage of the amendments that seek to promote local government autonomy. Secondly and in the long run, there is the need for the restructuring of the convoluted Nigerian federal system in order to allow peripheral governments to have more power and resources.

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