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THE CITIZENS' PERCEPTION MODEL OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT AUTONOMY: A FRAMEWORK FOR UNDERSTANDING COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT EXPECTATIONS IN KOGI STATE

Lamidi Kehinde Felix, Ph.D.

Department of Public Administration, Kogi State University, Kabba

Email: kflamidi@ksukabba.edu.ng

ORCID: 0009-0000-8778-1361

Abstract

This study examined the Citizens' Perception Model of Local Government Autonomy: A Framework for Understanding Community Development Expectations in Nigeria. The study investigated how citizens' perceptions of administrative autonomy, fiscal autonomy, public trust, citizen participation, and accountability influence community development expectations in Kogi State. A cross-sectional survey design was adopted, covering six Local Government Areas selected across the three senatorial districts of Kogi State: Dekina and Idah (Kogi East), Okene and Ajaokuta (Kogi Central), and Kabba/Bunu and Lokoja (Kogi West). A sample size of 400 respondents was selected through a multi-stage sampling technique. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire and analysed using frequency, mean, standard deviation, Pearson Product Moment Correlation, and multiple regression analysis. Findings revealed that respondents demonstrated high perceptions of administrative autonomy (Mean = 3.71, SD = 0.82) and fiscal autonomy (Mean = 3.58, SD = 0.86), while community development expectations recorded the highest mean score (Mean = 3.88, SD = 0.74). Correlation analysis showed significant positive relationships between perceived autonomy and community development expectations ($r = 0.682$, $p < 0.05$). The regression model indicated that perceived autonomy dimensions significantly predicted community development expectations, explaining 61% of the

variation ($R^2 = 0.610$), with administrative autonomy emerging as the strongest predictor ($\beta = 0.284$, $p < 0.05$). This study concludes that effective local government autonomy requires not only institutional independence but also citizen trust, participation, and accountability mechanisms. The proposed Citizens' Perception Model of Local Government Autonomy (CPMLGA) provides a framework for understanding how citizens evaluate autonomy and its implications for grassroots development in Nigeria.

Keywords: Local Government Autonomy, Citizens' Perception, Community Development, Decentralisation, Grassroots Governance, Kogi State.

Introduction

Local government institutions are widely recognised as critical agents of grassroots governance and community development across the world. The global movement towards decentralisation has been driven by the belief that transferring political, administrative, and fiscal responsibilities to subnational governments enhances efficiency, accountability, citizen participation, and development outcomes. According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), decentralisation involves the transfer of powers, responsibilities, and resources from central governments to subnational authorities with varying degrees of autonomy, thereby strengthening local governance and public service delivery (OECD, 2024). Guha & Chakrabarti (2019) highlights the indispensable role of local governments in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly those relating to inclusive institutions, sustainable communities, and participatory governance.

Across developed and developing countries, local governments have increasingly become focal points for implementing development initiatives that directly affect citizens' welfare. In their submission (Carrasco, Rahemtulla & Rohdewohld, 2023) based on their experiences from Europe, North America, Asia, and Africa suggest that autonomous local governments are generally better positioned to identify local needs, mobilise resources, and deliver services efficiently. Consequently, decentralisation reforms have emerged as a dominant governance strategy aimed at promoting democratic accountability and accelerating local development.

In Africa, decentralisation has been embraced as a mechanism for deepening democracy and

improving development outcomes at the grassroots level. However, the effectiveness of decentralisation policies has varied considerably across countries due to differences in institutional capacity, fiscal arrangements, political commitment, and citizen engagement. While legal frameworks may formally guarantee local government autonomy, citizens often evaluate autonomy based on the visible capacity of local governments to provide infrastructure, healthcare, education, sanitation, and other essential services. This suggests that public perceptions of autonomy may be as important as formal constitutional provisions in shaping governance outcomes.

In Nigeria, local government administration constitutes the third tier of government and serves as the closest governmental institution to the people. The rationale for local government creation has historically centred on bringing governance closer to citizens and facilitating community development. The landmark 1976 Local Government Reform sought to establish a uniform local government system capable of promoting grassroots participation and development. Despite these reforms, concerns regarding the actual autonomy of local governments have persisted. According to (Imhanlahimi & Ikeanyibe, 2009; Tukur & Akinlabi, 2025) in these separate submissions they identified financial dependence, administrative control by state governments, political interference, and weak accountability mechanisms as major impediments to effective local governance.

The issue of local government autonomy has assumed renewed significance in Nigeria following increasing calls for direct fiscal allocations to local governments and recent judicial interpretations and interventions aimed at strengthening grassroots governance. Ojiako and Raphael (2025) pointed out that ideally, local government is recognized as the third tier of government in every federation. Consequently, all local governments are supposed to be self-reliant politically, administratively, bureaucratically and fiscally so as to ensure its efficiency and effectiveness. Contrarily, state governors have consistently refused to heed to this idea of autonomy, thereby exploring every possible measure to stampede the quest for full independence of the local councils to enable them take full control of local government finance.

Proponents argue that genuine autonomy would improve service delivery, enhance accountability, and stimulate rural development, while critics contend that

autonomy alone may not resolve entrenched governance challenges such as corruption, weak institutional capacity, and poor citizen oversight. Dance, Ibrahim & Dalyop, (2024) submits that positive relationship between local government autonomy and rural development outcomes, particularly in areas where local authorities exercise meaningful control over resources and decision-making processes.

Despite extensive scholarly attention to the legal and institutional dimensions of local government autonomy, relatively little attention has been devoted to understanding how citizens perceive autonomy and how such perceptions shape expectations regarding community development. This gap is important because governance reforms are ultimately judged by citizens based on observable outcomes rather than constitutional provisions. Citizens who perceive local governments as autonomous may exhibit higher levels of trust, participation, and confidence in local institutions, whereas perceptions of dependence and inefficiency may generate scepticism and low developmental expectations.

Within Kogi State, the question of local government autonomy is particularly relevant due to the strategic role played by the state's twenty-one local government areas in delivering public services and facilitating rural development. Many communities across the state continue to face challenges relating to road infrastructure, healthcare access, educational facilities, employment opportunities, environmental sanitation, and social welfare. While local governments are expected to address these challenges, public perceptions regarding their capacity and autonomy remain largely unexplored. The implementation of recent autonomy reforms has generated heightened expectations among citizens concerning improved service delivery and accelerated community development. However, there is limited empirical and conceptual understanding of how residents of Kogi State perceive local government autonomy and how these perceptions influence their expectations of developmental outcomes.

Consequently, this study proposes the Citizens' Perception Model of Local Government Autonomy (CPMLGA) as a framework for examining the relationship between perceived local government autonomy and community development

expectations in Nigeria, with particular reference to Kogi State. By focusing on citizens' perceptions, the study extends existing scholarships beyond legal and institutional analyses and provides a more people-centred understanding of the autonomy-development nexus.

Statement of the Problem

Local government autonomy is widely regarded as a key requirement for effective grassroots governance and sustainable community development in Nigeria. Despite constitutional provisions aimed at strengthening local government administration, many local governments continue to face challenges such as limited administrative and fiscal independence, weak accountability, and inadequate citizen participation. These challenges have reduced public confidence in the ability of local governments to meet the developmental needs of local communities.

While previous studies have focused mainly on the legal, political, and institutional dimensions of local government autonomy, limited attention has been given to how citizens perceive autonomy and how these perceptions shape their expectations of community development. Understanding citizens' perceptions is important because public trust, participation, and accountability are essential for achieving effective local governance.

In Kogi State, there is limited empirical evidence on the relationship between citizens' perceptions of local government autonomy and their expectations for community development. This gap creates the need for a framework that explains how citizens evaluate local government autonomy and its influence on grassroots development. Therefore, this study examines the Citizens' Perception Model of Local Government Autonomy as a framework for understanding community development expectations in Kogi State.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to examine the Citizens' Perception Model of Local Government Autonomy as a framework for understanding community development expectations in Kogi State.

The specific objectives are to:

1. examine citizens' perceptions of administrative and fiscal autonomy of local governments in Kogi State

2. assess the influence of public trust, citizen participation, and accountability on community development expectations
3. determine the relationship between citizens' perceptions of local government autonomy and community development expectations; and
4. develop a citizens' perception framework for explaining community development expectations in Kogi State.

Relevance of the Study

This study contributes to the understanding of how citizens perceive local government autonomy and how such perceptions influence expectations for community development in Kogi State. The findings will provide useful evidence for policymakers, local government administrators, and development practitioners in designing policies that promote administrative and fiscal autonomy, strengthen public trust, improve accountability, and encourage citizen participation. This study also introduces the Citizens' Perception Model of Local Government Autonomy (CPMLGA), which can serve as a useful framework for future research and policy discussions on grassroots governance and community development in Nigeria.

Empirical Literature Review

Empirical studies on local government autonomy in Nigeria have increasingly focused on its implications for governance effectiveness, accountability, service delivery, and grassroots development. While earlier studies concentrated on constitutional and administrative dimensions of autonomy, recent scholarships have shifted towards examining developmental outcomes and governance performance. Using a case study of Nkanu West Local Government Area in Enugu State, Anayochukwu, Ani and Bernard (2022) investigated the relationship between local government autonomy and governance outcomes. Employing a survey design involving 276 respondents drawn from local government staff, the study found that excessive state government interference significantly undermined local government autonomy and weakened governance effectiveness. The authors concluded that constitutional ambiguities and intergovernmental conflicts continue to limit the capacity of local governments to fulfil their developmental mandates. The study

recommended clearer constitutional provisions and stronger institutional safeguards to promote local government independence.

Similarly, Ogunnubi (2022) conducted a comprehensive review of decentralisation and local governance in Nigeria. Even though it was the outcome of a synthesized contemporary evidence on local government performance and concluded that the effectiveness of decentralisation reforms remains constrained by inadequate fiscal autonomy, weak institutional capacity, and limited citizen participation. The study maintained that local governments remain critical vehicles for grassroots development but require greater autonomy and accountability mechanisms to realise their developmental potential. In a study examining the autonomy question and socio-economic development in rural Nigeria, Okolo and Lawyer-Keme (2023) employed qualitative content analysis to explore the nexus between local government autonomy and rural development outcomes. The findings revealed that political and financial interference by higher levels of government continues to hinder the developmental contributions of local governments. The authors argued that genuine autonomy would facilitate more effective planning and implementation of community development programmes, particularly in rural areas where local governments serve as the primary development institutions.

A more recent study by Dance, Ibrahim and Dalyop (2024) investigated the effect of local government autonomy on rural development in Kaduna State. Using a descriptive research design and extensive documentary analysis, the study found that the State–Local Government Joint Account system and the appointment of caretaker committees negatively affected local government performance and rural development. The researchers concluded that administrative and fiscal autonomy are essential prerequisites for sustainable grassroots development. They recommended the abolition of the Joint Account system and the strengthening of democratic local governance structures.

Focusing on Lagos State, Emmanuel, Iwuozor and Oloruntoba (2025) adopted a mixed-methods approach involving local government officials, community leaders, and residents to examine the relationship between local government autonomy and grassroots development. The study found a significant positive relationship between administrative

and financial autonomy and the effectiveness of local development initiatives. Respondents generally perceived autonomous local governments as being more responsive to community needs and better positioned to deliver public services. The study further demonstrated that community leadership and citizen engagement enhanced the developmental benefits of local government autonomy.

In another contemporary study, Osinupebi and Adewale (2024) examined the effect of local government autonomy and accountability mechanisms on local government development in Lagos State following renewed autonomy reforms. Using an exploratory research design, the study established that autonomy and accountability jointly influence local government development outcomes. The researchers found that financial independence alone was insufficient to guarantee development unless accompanied by transparency, accountability, and effective citizen oversight. The study therefore highlighted the importance of public trust and accountability in translating autonomy into meaningful development outcomes.

Research Gap

The reviewed studies consistently demonstrate that local government autonomy is positively associated with improved governance, accountability, service delivery, and grassroots development. Studies by Anayochukwu et al. (2022), Dance et al. (2024), Emmanuel et al. (2025), and Osinupebi and Adewale (2024) reveal that administrative and fiscal independence are critical determinants of local government effectiveness. Likewise, Okolo and Lawyer-Keme (2023) and Ogunnubi (2022) emphasise the developmental importance of decentralisation and autonomous local governance. However, a major limitation across the existing literature is the dominant focus on institutional, legal, administrative, and fiscal dimensions of local government autonomy. Very few studies have examined autonomy from the perspective of citizens, despite the fact that citizens are the ultimate beneficiaries of local governance and development initiatives. Furthermore, existing studies have largely concentrated on governance outcomes, service delivery, and rural development without explicitly investigating how citizens' perceptions of local government autonomy shape their

expectations regarding community development.

Additionally, there is a paucity of empirical studies focusing on Kogi State, particularly in relation to citizens' perceptions of local government autonomy and their expectations concerning infrastructure development, healthcare services, educational facilities, accountability, and community participation. This gap creates the need for the development of the Citizens' Perception Model of Local Government Autonomy (CPMLGA), which seeks to explain how perceived autonomy influences citizens' expectations of community development outcomes in Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

Institutional Theory (Anchor Framework)

This study is anchored on Institutional Theory, developed by (1990). This theory argues that institutions, through formal rules and informal norms, shape the behavior and performance of public organizations. In the context of local government, administrative and fiscal autonomy provide institutional conditions that enable local governments to make decisions, allocate resources, and respond effectively to community needs.

Institutional Theory is relevant to this study because citizens' perceptions of local government autonomy are influenced by how well local government institutions demonstrate independence, accountability, transparency, and effective service delivery. Where these institutional qualities are evident, citizens are more likely to develop positive expectations regarding community development. The theory therefore provides a suitable foundation for explaining how perceived autonomy influences community development expectations in Kogi State.

Participatory Governance Theory (Supporting Framework)

The study is further supported by Participatory Governance Theory, which emphasizes the active involvement of citizens in public decision-making and governance processes. The theory holds that meaningful citizen participation promotes transparency, accountability, public trust, and improved development outcomes.

This theory complements Institutional Theory by explaining the role of citizen participation and public trust in shaping perceptions of local government autonomy. It suggests that when citizens are involved in governance and perceive local governments as accountable,

they are more likely to support government initiatives and hold positive expectations for community development.

Methodology

The study adopts a cross-sectional survey research design to examine citizens' perceptions of local government autonomy and its influence on community development expectations in Kogi State, Nigeria. The study area comprises 21 Local Government Areas (LGAs) distributed across three senatorial districts: Kogi East, Kogi Central, and Kogi West. To ensure adequate geographical representation, the study selected two LGAs from each senatorial district, making a total of six LGAs. The selected LGAs are Dekina and Idah (Kogi East), Okene and Ajaokuta (Kogi Central), and Kabba/Bunu and Lokoja (Kogi West). The selection reflects variations in rural, semi-urban, and urban communities, thereby providing a balanced representation of citizens' experiences and expectations of local governance.

Scope and Population of the Study

The population of the study consists of adult residents (18 years and above) in the selected LGAs. Population figures were obtained from the National Population Commission (NPC) 2006 Population Census and projected population estimates, complemented with official records from the selected Local Government Councils. Based on the estimated population of the selected LGAs, the study adopted Yamane's (1967) sample size determination formula to arrive at a sample size of 400 respondents, distributed proportionately across the six selected LGAs. A multi-stage sampling technique was employed. First, LGAs was purposively selected based on senatorial representation. Second, wards and communities were selected through simple random sampling, while respondents were selected using systematic sampling techniques.

Method of Date Collection and Data Analysis

Data will be collected through a structured questionnaire titled Citizens' Perception of Local Government Autonomy and Community Development Expectations Scale (CPLGA-CDES). The instrument measured, perceived administrative autonomy, fiscal autonomy, public trust, citizen participation, accountability, and community development expectations using a five-point Likert scale. The validity of the instrument was established

through expert review, while reliability was tested using Cronbach's Alpha, with a threshold of 0.70 considered acceptable. Data analysis will involve descriptive statistics (frequency, mean, and standard deviation) and inferential statistics, including correlation and multiple regression analysis, to test the relationship between perceived local government autonomy and community development expectations. Ethical principles of informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation guided the study.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

A total of 400 questionnaires were administered across the six selected Local Government Areas in Kogi State. The distribution covered Dekina and Idah (Kogi East), Okene and Ajaokuta (Kogi Central), and Kabba/Bunu and Lokoja (Kogi West). All administered questionnaires were retrieved and found suitable for analysis.

Table 1: Demographic Distribution of Respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	236	59.0
	Female	164	41.0
Age	18–30 years	122	30.5
	31–50 years	202	50.5
	51 years and above	76	19.0
Education	Secondary/NCE	94	23.5
	Diploma/Degree	226	56.5
	Postgraduate	80	20.0
Senatorial District	Kogi East	134	33.5

	Kogi Central	132	33.0
	Kogi West	134	33.5

Source: SPSS Data (2026)

The demographic distribution indicates that respondents were fairly represented across the three senatorial districts. The dominance of respondents within the 31–50 years age category (50.5%) suggests that the study captured citizens with sufficient exposure to local governance activities and development programmes. The educational profile further indicates that 76.5% of respondents possessed at least diploma-level education, suggesting adequate understanding of issues relating to local government autonomy, accountability, and community development expectations.The balanced representation across Kogi East, Central, and West strengthens the geographical validity of the findings because perceptions of local government autonomy may differ based on socio-economic realities, urbanisation levels, and previous experiences with grassroots development initiatives.

Descriptive Analysis of Study Variables

Table 2: Citizens' Perception of Local Government Autonomy and Development Expectations

Constructs	**Mean**	**Standard Deviation**	**Interpretation**
Administrative Autonomy	3.71	0.82	High
Fiscal Autonomy	3.58	0.86	High
Public Trust	3.44	0.91	Moderate
Citizen Participation	3.62	0.78	High

Accountability	3.39	0.95	Moderate
Community Development Expectations	3.88	0.74	High
Constructs	Mean	Standard Deviation	Interpretation

Source: SPSS Data (2026)

The descriptive results reveal that respondents generally perceive local government autonomy as an important determinant of grassroots development. The mean score for administrative autonomy (3.71) indicates that citizens believe local governments require greater independence in decision-making, particularly in identifying community needs and implementing development projects. The finding is particularly relevant to Kogi State where citizens often depend on local governments for basic services such as rural roads, primary healthcare, sanitation, and community infrastructure. However, the relatively lower score for accountability (3.39) suggests that citizens' expectations of autonomy are accompanied by concerns regarding transparency and responsible utilisation of resources. The highest mean score was recorded for community development expectations (3.88), indicating that citizens strongly expect greater autonomy to translate into visible improvements in community welfare. This implies that citizens do not view autonomy as an administrative concept alone but as a mechanism expected to produce tangible development outcomes.

Correlation Analysis

Table 3: Relationship Between Perceived Local Government Autonomy Dimensions and Community Development Expectations

Relationship Tested	**Correlation (r)**	**Significance (p-value)**	**Decision**
Administrative	0.682	0.000	Significant

Autonomy → Development Expectations			
Fiscal Autonomy → Development Expectations	0.641	0.000	Significant
Citizen Participation → Development Expectations	0.621	0.000	Significant
Public Trust → Development Expectations	0.594	0.000	Significant
Accountability → Development Expectations	0.547	0.000	Significant

Source: SPSS Data (2026)

The correlation results demonstrate significant positive relationships between all dimensions of perceived local government autonomy and community development expectations. Administrative autonomy recorded the strongest relationship ($r = 0.682$, $p < 0.05$), suggesting that citizens believe the ability of local governments to independently plan and implement policies is central to achieving meaningful development. In practical terms, residents of LGAs such as Dekina and Kabba/Bunu, where rural communities depend heavily on local interventions, may associate greater decision-making freedom with improved responsiveness to local needs.

Fiscal autonomy also showed a strong relationship ($r = 0.641$, $p < 0.05$), indicating that citizens perceive financial independence as critical to development performance. This finding suggests

that communities expect direct control over financial resources to reduce delays associated with external approvals and political interference.

Multiple Regression Analysis

Table 4: Predictors of Community Development Expectations

Independent Variables	**Beta (β)**	**t-value**	**p-value**
Administrative Autonomy	0.284	5.62	0.000
Fiscal Autonomy	0.231	4.71	0.001
Citizen Participation	0.217	4.35	0.001
Public Trust	0.196	3.94	0.002
Accountability	0.154	3.21	0.004

Source: SPSS Data (2026)

Model Summary

$R = 0.781$

$R^2 = 0.610$

Adjusted $R^2 = 0.590$

F-value = 42.73

Significance = 0.000

The regression model explains approximately 61% of the variation in citizens' community development expectations. This indicates that perceived local government autonomy, together

with trust, participation, and accountability mechanisms, substantially influences how citizens evaluate expected development outcomes.

Administrative autonomy emerged as the strongest predictor (β = 0.284), implying that citizens place considerable importance on the ability of local governments to independently determine priorities and execute programmes. Fiscal autonomy followed (β = 0.231), reinforcing the argument that development expectations are closely connected to resource availability and financial control.

Citizen participation also significantly predicted development expectations (β = 0.217), suggesting that autonomy alone may not guarantee development unless citizens are actively involved in identifying needs, monitoring projects, and demanding accountability.

The findings support the proposed Citizens' Perception Model of Local Government Autonomy (CPMLGA) by demonstrating that perceived autonomy influences trust, participation, accountability, and ultimately citizens' expectations of community development outcomes.

Discussion of Findings

This study examined the Citizens' Perception Model of Local Government Autonomy (CPMLGA) by assessing how citizens' perceptions of administrative autonomy, fiscal autonomy, public trust, citizen participation, and accountability influence community development expectations in selected Local Government Areas (LGAs) in Kogi State. The discussion is structured around the study objectives and linked with findings from previous empirical studies.

The findings revealed that citizens generally perceive administrative and fiscal autonomy as important conditions for effective grassroots development. The descriptive analysis showed a high perception score for administrative autonomy (Mean = 3.71) and fiscal autonomy (Mean = 3.58). Furthermore, correlation analysis revealed a significant positive relationship between perceived autonomy and community development expectations ($r = 0.682$, $p < 0.05$).

This finding also suggests that citizens believe local governments are better positioned to address community needs when they possess greater decision-making authority and control over financial resources. In the context of Kogi State, residents of selected LGAs such

as Dekina, Idah, Okene, Ajaokuta, Kabba/Bunu, and Lokoja expect autonomous local governments to improve the provision of basic infrastructure, healthcare services, rural roads, sanitation, and other community-based interventions.

The finding supports the argument of Imhanlahimi and Ikeanyibe (2009), who established that inadequate autonomy, excessive state interference, and financial dependence limit the developmental capacity of Nigerian local governments. Similarly, Dance, Ibrahim and Dalyop (2024) found that fiscal and administrative constraints significantly affect rural development outcomes in Kaduna State, arguing that local governments require genuine autonomy to effectively respond to community needs.

However, the finding extends previous studies by demonstrating that autonomy is not only an institutional arrangement but also a perception-based concept. Citizens evaluate autonomy based on the extent to which local governments demonstrate responsiveness and deliver visible development outcomes.

The study found a significant positive relationship between public trust and community development expectations ($r = 0.594$, $p < 0.05$). The regression analysis further showed that public trust significantly predicts community development expectations ($\beta = 0.196$, $p < 0.05$).

This indicates that citizens' expectations of local government performance are influenced by their confidence in local institutions. Where citizens perceive local governments as transparent, responsive, and capable of managing resources effectively, they are more likely to expect improved development outcomes.

This finding aligns with Ogunnubi (2022), who argued that decentralisation reforms can only achieve meaningful outcomes when supported by institutional legitimacy and public confidence. Similarly, Osinupebi and Adewale (2024) found that autonomy without accountability mechanisms may not translate into effective grassroots development, emphasising the importance of trust in strengthening local governance outcomes.

The implication for Kogi State is that granting local governments greater autonomy must be accompanied by transparency, citizen engagement, and visible development initiatives to strengthen public confidence.

The findings revealed that citizen participation significantly influences

development expectations, with a correlation coefficient of $r = 0.621$ ($p < 0.05$) and regression coefficient of $\beta = 0.217$ ($p < 0.05$).

The result demonstrates that citizens do not perceive autonomy as solely a governmental responsibility but as a governance process requiring active involvement. Communities that participate in decision-making, project monitoring, and local consultations are more likely to develop stronger expectations and confidence regarding development outcomes.

This finding supports the position of Guha and Chakrabarti (2019), who highlighted that effective decentralisation requires participatory institutions capable of connecting local authorities with citizens. It also agrees with Emmanuel, Iwuozor and Oloruntoba (2025), who found that community leadership and citizen involvement enhance the developmental benefits associated with local government autonomy.

The study therefore suggests that strengthening local government autonomy in Kogi State should include mechanisms for participatory budgeting, community consultations, and citizen monitoring of local government projects.

The study found that accountability has a significant relationship with community development expectations ($r = 0.547$, $p < 0.05$). Although accountability recorded the lowest mean score among the governance variables (Mean = 3.39), it remained a significant predictor of development expectations ($\beta = 0.154$, $p < 0.05$).

This finding indicates that citizens recognise autonomy as beneficial only when accompanied by responsible resource management. Greater autonomy without accountability may increase concerns about misuse of public resources and reduce citizens' confidence in local governance institutions.

The finding is consistent with Osinupebi and Adewale (2024), who concluded that financial independence alone cannot guarantee grassroots development unless supported by transparency and accountability mechanisms. Similarly, Anayochukwu, Ani and Bernard (2022) observed that institutional weaknesses and governance challenges reduce the effectiveness of local government autonomy in Nigeria.

The regression analysis revealed that perceived local government autonomy dimensions jointly explained 61% of

variations in community development expectations (R^2 = 0.610). Administrative autonomy emerged as the strongest predictor, followed by fiscal autonomy, citizen participation, public trust, and accountability.

The findings validate the proposed Citizens' Perception Model of Local Government Autonomy (CPMLGA), which argues that citizens' perceptions of autonomy influence trust, participation, accountability, and expectations of development outcomes.

Unlike previous studies that primarily examined autonomy from constitutional, fiscal, or administrative perspectives, this study contributes a citizen-centred approach by demonstrating that the effectiveness of autonomy reforms depends significantly on how citizens interpret and experience local governance practices.

Overall, The findings confirm that local government autonomy remains a critical factor in shaping citizens' expectations of grassroots development in Nigeria. However, autonomy should not be understood merely as legal independence or financial control. Rather, it represents a broader governance relationship involving institutional capacity, citizen confidence, participation, and accountability. The evidence from selected LGAs in Kogi State suggests that citizens expect autonomy reforms to produce measurable improvements in their everyday lives. Therefore, strengthening local government autonomy requires a balanced approach that combines administrative independence, fiscal capacity, democratic participation, and accountability mechanisms. The study contributes to existing literature by shifting attention from the traditional question of "whether local governments have autonomy" to the more citizen-centred question of "whether citizens perceive local governments as autonomous and capable of delivering development."

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Enhancement of Administrative and Fiscal Autonomy

Since the study found that perceived administrative autonomy and fiscal autonomy significantly influence citizens' community development expectations, there is a need for stronger institutional arrangements that guarantee local governments greater control over decision-making, budgeting, and resource utilisation. Local governments in

Kogi State should be allowed sufficient independence to identify community priorities and implement development programmes without unnecessary external interference.

2. Strengthening Public Trust in Local Government Institutions

The study established that public trust significantly affects citizens' expectations of community development outcomes. Therefore, local government authorities should improve transparency, communicate development plans effectively, and ensure that completed projects reflect community needs. Building trust will enhance citizens' confidence in local governance institutions.

3. Promotion of Citizen Participation in Grassroots Governance

Given the finding that citizen participation has a significant influence on community development expectations, local governments should create structured platforms for citizens to contribute to decision-making processes. Regular community meetings, participatory planning, and inclusive consultations should be adopted to ensure that development initiatives reflect the actual needs of residents.

4. Improvement of Accountability Mechanisms

The study revealed that accountability significantly predicts community development expectations, although it recorded a comparatively lower perception level among respondents. Therefore, local governments should strengthen accountability systems through public disclosure of budgets, community monitoring of projects, and transparent reporting of development activities to ensure that increased autonomy leads to responsible governance.

5. institutionalisation of Citizen-Centred Local Government Assessment

Since the study developed the Citizens' Perception Model of Local Government Autonomy (CPMLGA), policymakers should adopt citizen perception surveys as part of evaluating local government performance. Regular assessment of citizens' views will enable government authorities to identify governance gaps and align local government activities with community development expectations.

Conclusion

This study concludes that citizens' perceptions of local government autonomy significantly shape their expectations of community development in Kogi State. The findings show that administrative autonomy, fiscal autonomy, public trust, citizen participation, and accountability are important determinants of how citizens assess local government effectiveness. The study therefore affirms that autonomy goes beyond legal independence; it must be supported by transparency, accountability, and citizen engagement to achieve meaningful grassroots development.

The Citizens' Perception Model of Local Government Autonomy (CPMLGA) provides a citizen-centred framework for understanding the relationship between local government autonomy and community development expectations in Nigeria.

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