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A New Era for Local Governance in Nigeria: CSO; SOAI Calls for Establishment of the National Local Government Election Commission (NALGEC); a centralized unit to be domesticated within INEC To Oversee Local Government Elections in Nigeria. A press conference held in Abuja, Nigeria - July 18, 2024.

- *Urges the local governments to utilize their autonomy responsibly while calling on National Assembly/ Federal Government to Consolidate Action and Grant Political Autonomy to the Local Governments.*
- *Says the judgment resonates with the LOGINaija project; promoting transparency, accountability, and good governance at third tier.*
- *Reaffirms the need to abolish and scrap State Electoral Commissions (SEC), advocate for a centralized body to be domesticated within INEC to oversee the local government elections in Nigeria.*

Introduction:

As a leading civil society organization committed to institutional reforms, promoting transparency, accountability, and good governance in Nigeria; Speak Out Africa Initiative (SOAI) commends the seven-man panel of the Supreme Court justices led by Justice Garba Lawal, for the landmark judgment granting **financial autonomy to the 774 local governments** across Nigeria. However, the journey towards true local government autonomy does not end here.

We must agree that the judgment is a significant step towards decentralizing power, enhancing grassroots development, and ensuring that resources are managed more efficiently at the local level. By granting financial autonomy to local governments, the Supreme Court has **empowered citizens** to hold their local leaders **accountable** for effective service delivery and **transparent governance**.

Overview of Local Government Background in Nigeria:

The supreme court judgement comes at a crucial juncture in our nation's history, where the need for participatory governance, transparency, and accountability has never been more pronounced. As we all know, the local government serves as the **bedrock of governance**, directly impacting the lives of millions of Nigerians, especially those in **rural and marginalized communities**. Yet, despite its pivotal role, the local government has often been plagued by **inefficiencies, lack of financial autonomy, and a disconnect between government and the governed**.

The plight of the local government as the third tier of governance in Nigeria cannot be overstated. For too long, our rural communities have grappled with underdevelopment, poverty, and a sense of alienation from the

decision-making processes that affect their daily lives. This judgement represents a beacon of hope, a catalyst for change that seeks to revolutionize local governance and bring much-needed succor to our rural populace especially if well managed.

To complement this financial autonomy and ensure the sustainability of effective governance at the local level, SOAI urgently calls for the establishment of the **National Local Government Election Commission (NALGEC)**, a centralized unit to be domesticated within the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) which will oversee the 774 local government elections in Nigeria. This press conference aims to highlight the necessity of this commission and its critical role in transforming local governance in Nigeria.

The Way Forward - Why NALGEC is Essential:

The Supreme Court judgment granting financial autonomy to local governments is a beacon of hope for decentralized governance. However, without political autonomy, financial autonomy alone will not suffice. The establishment of NALGEC is essential for ensuring that local government elections are democratic and free from undue influence while giving all political parties equal playing field. This move will empower local governments to deliver quality services and foster development at the grassroots level thereby serving their communities effectively.

In particular, the current system, where state chief executives hand-picked State Electoral Commissions (SEC) chairmen to conduct local government elections, has often resulted in the coronation of loyalists and stooges rather than democratically elected representatives. This practice undermines democracy and hampers the potential for genuine grassroots development. To rectify this, the establishment of NALGEC is imperative.

Benefits of NALGEC:

1. **Enhanced Democracy:** NALGEC will ensure that local government elections are improved in terms of being free, fair, and credible, fostering true democratic principles at the grassroots level.
2. **Accountability and Transparency:** A centralized electoral body will mitigate the manipulation of local elections by state executives, ensuring that local leaders are accountable to their constituents rather than to the state government.
3. **Efficient Governance:** With NALGEC in place, local governments can operate independently and efficiently, reducing the burden on the federal government and promoting sustainable development at the local level since it will amplify the citizen's power.

SOAI's Commitment:

Since 2019, SOAI has been at the forefront of advocating for local government autonomy through the Local Open Governance Initiative in Nigeria - **LOGINaija project**. The initiative have gathered significant momentum from social mobilization and advocacy activities from the citizens and key stakeholders, unlocking the potentials of the third tier of government since over the years, diversion of funds and lack of transparency has characterized its operations, leading to distrust and underdevelopment at the grassroots level.

Through our **LOGINaija** project, we envision a future where the principles of transparency, accountability, and citizen participation are not just ideals but tangible realities embedded within the fabric of our local governance structures. By this, the central government (federal) would have her overstretched-governance burden reduced drastically and have her seemingly punctured image as being sole cause for underdevelopment regained when the third tier live up to expectations.

Our goal is simple yet transformative: to catalyze a paradigm shift in local governance, empowering communities to actively engage in decision-making processes, hold their leaders accountable, and demand the quality services they rightfully deserve.

Conclusion:

Today, as we celebrate the recent supreme court judgment on financial autonomy, our work is far from over, not until state electoral umpires are collapsed and political autonomy is granted – where national INEC takes over the duties to now conduct the local government elections. Then we can say that our local government is truly autonomous and would be able to function efficiently.

We call on all stakeholders, especially the National Assembly, Federal Government to **ISOLATE THE CRUCIAL LOCAL GOVERNMENT AUTONOMY MATTER**, and give it expedite action, in ensuring the national INEC gets back the responsibility to oversee local government elections as it used to be before 1999. Together, we can usher in a new era of transparency, accountability, and democratic governance at the local level that can amplify the impact of this reform, reaching even greater heights of success and transformation.

In conclusion, let us know today that **NALGEC** will not just be a unit under INEC; it is a promise—a promise to citizens that their voices will be heard, their concerns addressed, and their futures secured. Let us seize this momentous opportunity to usher in a new era of governance—one marked by **openness, accountability, and prosperity for all**.

Thank you.

God Bless Federal republic of Nigeria

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About Speak Out Africa Initiative (SOAI)

SOAI is a citizen-led civil society organization that promotes transparency, accountability, and citizens participation in its efforts to strengthen democracy, enhance good governance, and improve public service delivery.

LOGIN ...unlocking the potentials of the local government in Nigeria.