

Effects of Local Government Autonomy on Natural Resources Management: A Case Study of Oluyole and Oriire LGAs, Oyo State, Nigeria

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Abstract

Devolution of power and fiscal autonomy to local governments is theorized to enhance the efficiency and responsiveness of natural resource management (NRM). In Nigeria, despite constitutional provisions, local government areas (LGAs) often operate with limited autonomy, constrained by state and federal oversight. This study investigates the effects of local government autonomy on NRM within the contrasting contexts of Oluyole (a resource-rich, peri-urban LGA) and Oriire (a resource-dependent, rural LGA) in Oyo State.

Mixed-methods approach was employed. A systematic checklist was used to inventory flora and fauna across both LGAs, and a survey was administered to 400 households (200 per LGA) to assess perceptions of resource health and management effectiveness. 15 key informant interviews (KIIs) were conducted with LGA officials, community leaders, and state-level policymakers to explore institutional capacities, fiscal constraints, and inter-governmental dynamics.

Findings revealed a higher diversity of species in Oriire (Flora: 78 species, Fauna: 45 species) compared to Oluyole (Flora: 62 species, Fauna: 38 species) but showed a faster rate of resource depletion in Oluyole ($p < 0.05$). Survey results indicated significant dissatisfaction with NRM in both LGAs (Oluyole: 78%, Oriire: 72%). KIIs identified limited fiscal autonomy, political interference, and inadequate technical capacity as critical impediments. Oriire's relative success in community-led forest management highlighted the potential of devolved authority.

Study concludes that meaningful local government autonomy, characterized by fiscal independence, enhanced technical capacity, and clear legislative frameworks, is a prerequisite for sustainable NRM. Current constraints severely limit LGAs' effectiveness. Recommendations include constitutional reforms to guarantee LGA fiscal autonomy, capacity-building programs, and the promotion of collaborative governance models that integrate local indigenous knowledge with formal management systems.

Keywords: Local Government Autonomy; Natural Resource Management; Fiscal Federalism; Decentralization; Oyo State; Biodiversity Conservation; Mixed Methods.

1. Introduction

Natural resources are the bedrock of sustainable development, providing ecosystem services, livelihoods, and cultural value (Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, 2005). In Nigeria, with its vast endowment of renewable and non-renewable resources, effective management is critical for economic diversification, poverty alleviation, and environmental sustainability (Adeyemo, 2020). However, the management of these resources is often fraught with challenges, including over-exploitation, degradation, policy inconsistencies, and institutional conflicts (Onyekuru *et al.*, 2019).

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The structure of governance plays a pivotal role in determining the success or failure of natural resource management (NRM) initiatives. The discourse on governance has increasingly favoured decentralization, positing that transferring authority and resources to sub-national levels brings government closer to the people, enhances accountability, and leads to more responsive and efficient service delivery, including environmental stewardship (Agrawal & Ostrom, 2001; Ribot, 2002). In the Nigerian context, the local government area (LGA) represents the third tier of government and, constitutionally, the level closest to the people (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999).

The 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended) envisions LGAs as autonomous entities with specific functions listed in the Fourth Schedule, including “participation in the provision and maintenance of primary, adult and vocational education,” “development of agriculture and natural resources,” and “provision and maintenance of health services.” Despite this constitutional recognition, the operational and fiscal autonomy of LGAs in Nigeria has been a subject of intense debate (Olaopa & Aiyede, 2018). In practice, state governments exert significant control over LGAs through state-local government joint accounts, political appointments of council officials, and the withholding of federal allocations, thereby stifling local initiative and accountability (Ekpo & Ndebbio, 2018).

This research gap lies at the intersection of political autonomy and environmental governance. While numerous studies have examined local government autonomy in Nigeria from political and fiscal perspectives (e.g., Egwaikhide, 2018; Olaopa & Aiyede, 2018), and others have explored community-based natural resource management (e.g., Ajayi & Adebisi, 2021), few have empirically linked the degree of local government autonomy to tangible outcomes in natural resource management. This study seeks to fill this gap by asking: How does the level of local government autonomy affect the management of natural resources in Oluyole and Oriire Local Government Areas of Oyo State Nigeria?

Hence, the study objective is to assess the diversity and status of key natural resources (flora and fauna), evaluate the perception of local communities on the effectiveness of natural resource management by their respective LGAs, and to examine the relationship between perceived autonomy and management outcomes from the perspective of key stakeholders in Oluyole and Oriire LGAs of Oyo State Nigeria.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Theoretical Underpinnings: Decentralization and Environmental Governance

Theoretical foundation of this study is anchored on the principles of decentralization and environmental governance. Decentralization theory posits that devolving power, authority, and resources to lower levels of government can improve efficiency, equity, and accountability (Agrawal & Ribot, 1999). In environmental governance, this translates to the concept of Community-Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM), which argues that local communities, when empowered, have superior knowledge of their local ecosystems and a greater stake in their sustainability than distant central authorities (Berkes, 2007; Ostrom, 1990).

However, the success of decentralization is not automatic. Ribot (2002) emphasizes that effective decentralization requires that local authorities are downwardly accountable to their constituents rather than upwardly accountable to central or state governments. This necessitates three key dimensions of autonomy: fiscal (control over financial resources), administrative (control over personnel and operations), and political (the presence of democratically elected local officials).

2.2. Local Government Autonomy in Nigeria: A Constrained Reality

The Nigerian local government system has evolved through various phases, from the native authority system of the colonial era to the current system entrenched in the 1999 constitution. Despite its constitutional recognition, empirical evidence suggests that LGAs in Nigeria are largely ineffective and lack genuine autonomy (Ekpo & Ndebbio, 2018). The primary constraint is fiscal. The State-Local Government Joint Account (SJLGA), mandated by Section 162(6) of the 1999 Constitution, has been widely criticized as a conduit for state governments to usurp and mismanage funds meant for LGAs, leaving them financially crippled and unable to execute their constitutional mandates (Egwaikhide, 2018).

This fiscal strangulation is compounded by administrative and political controls. Many state governments appoint caretaker committees to run LGAs instead of allowing elected councils, further eroding local democracy and accountability (Olaopa & Aiyede, 2018). Consequently, functions like natural resource management, which require significant financial investment, technical expertise, and community engagement, are severely neglected.

2.3. Natural Resource Management at the Local Level: Global and Local Perspectives

Globally, successful cases of decentralized NRM often share common features: secure tenure for local communities, clear legal frameworks defining roles and responsibilities, adequate financial and technical capacity at the local level, and mechanisms for resolving conflicts (Larson & Ribot, 2007). For instance, the forestry sector in Nepal and India has seen notable successes with community forestry programs where management rights were genuinely transferred to local user groups (Agrawal & Chhatre, 2006).

In Nigeria, the story is mixed. The Land Use Act of 1978 vests all land within a state in the governor, who holds it in trust for the people. This effectively sidelines both LGAs and communities from owning and controlling the most fundamental natural resource—land—and the resources on it (Adeyemo, 2020). Management of minerals, oil, and gas is exclusively a federal preserve. This centralization has often led to the "resource curse," fostering conflict, environmental pollution, and poverty in resource-rich communities (Onyekuru *et al.*, 2019). For forestry and agriculture, state governments are the dominant actors, with LGAs playing a peripheral, often ineffective role due to the constraints mentioned above (Ajayi & Adebisi, 2021). This has stymied the potential for innovative local approaches, such as community-based agroforestry systems that integrate conservation with rural development, which have been shown to be successful in other Nigerian contexts where local actors are empowered (Farinloye, Olawoyin, & Ojo, 2025).

Literature reveals a significant disconnect between the theoretical potential of local government autonomy for NRM and the practical reality in Nigeria. This study contributes to this discourse by providing empirical evidence from two specific LGAs, highlighting how autonomy (or the lack thereof) directly impacts resource management outcomes.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

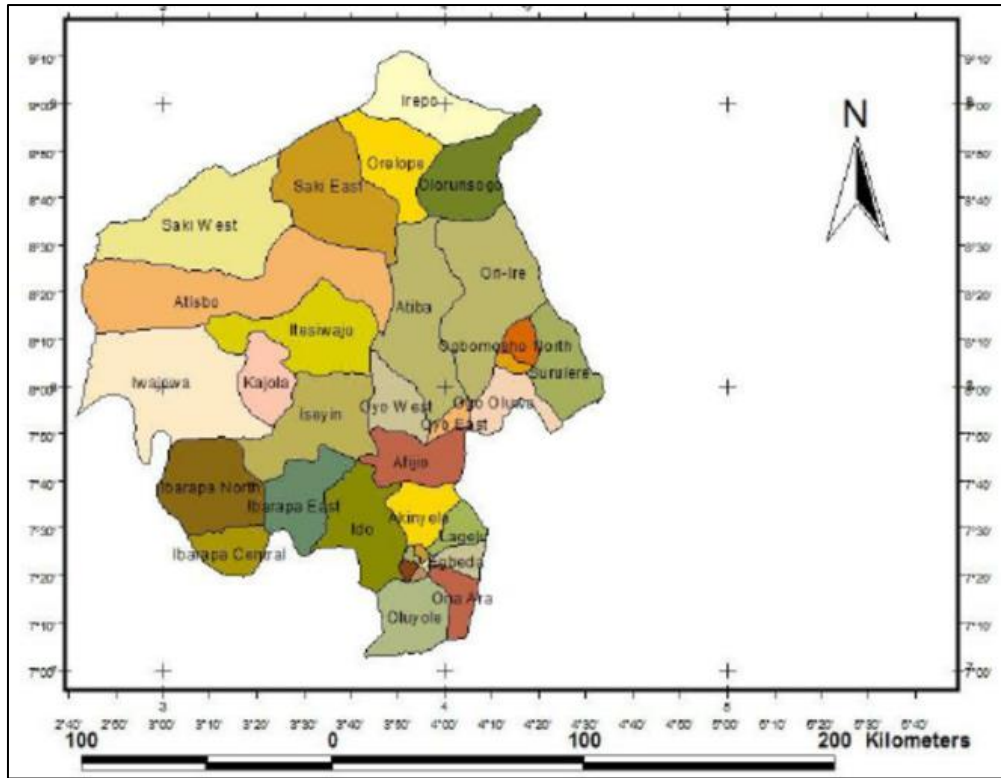
This study employed a mixed-methods sequential explanatory design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). The quantitative phase involved a resource inventory and a household survey to gather broad, generalizable data on resource status and community perceptions. This was followed by a qualitative phase involving Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) to provide depth, context, and explanation for the quantitative findings.

3.2. Study Area

The study was conducted in two purposively selected LGAs in Oyo State, Nigeria, chosen for their contrasting characteristics:

Oluyole LGA: Located on the outskirts of Ibadan metropolis, it is characterized by rapid urbanization, industrial activity (e.g., quarrying, manufacturing), and pressure on land and forest resources. It has a mix of urban and rural settlements.

Oriire LGA: A predominantly rural LGA with an economy heavily based on agriculture and forestry. It is less affected by urban sprawl but faces threats from unsustainable farming practices and artisanal logging.



Source: Field survey, 2025

Figure 1 Map of Oyo state showing the 33 LGAs include the study areas, respectively

3.3. Data Collection

3.3.1. Natural Resource Inventory

Systematic checklist was used to document flora and fauna in both LGAs over a 6-month period (covering wet and dry seasons). Transect walks and field observations were conducted in five randomly selected communities per LGA. Flora species were identified with the help of botanists from the University of Ibadan, and fauna were identified through direct sighting, spoor, and calls (for birds). Scientific names were confirmed using standard references (*Flora of West Tropical Africa; Birds of Nigeria*).

3.3.2. Household Survey

Structured questionnaire was administered to 400 randomly selected household heads (200 per LGA). The questionnaire covered:

- Socio-demographic data.
- Perception of the status of key natural resources (e.g., forest cover, water quality, soil fertility) over the past 10 years (5-point Likert scale from "Greatly Deteriorated" to "Greatly Improved").
- Perception of LGA effectiveness in NRM (5-point Likert scale from "Very Ineffective" to "Very Effective").
- Awareness of LGA-led NRM initiatives.

Key Informant Interviews (KIIs)

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 15 purposively selected individuals who possess deep knowledge of the subject matter. The interview guide included questions on:

- The perceived autonomy of the LGA in managing natural resources.
- Key NRM challenges and initiatives.
- Intergovernmental relations (with state and federal agencies).
- Fiscal and technical capacity for NRM.
- Community participation in decision-making.

KII Participants:

- Chairman, Oluyole LGA
- Chairman, Oriire LGA
- Head of Agriculture and Natural Resources Dept., Oluyole LGA
- Head of Agriculture and Natural Resources Dept., Oriire LGA
- Two Community Leaders (Traditional Rulers) from each LGA (4)
- Director of Forestry, Oyo State Ministry of Environment
- Director of Agriculture, Oyo State Ministry of Agriculture
- Two representatives from local NGOs/CBOs involved in conservation (2)
- An academic expert in environmental governance from University of Ibadan, Nigeria

3.4. Data Analysis

Quantitative Data: Data from the surveys were analyzed using SPSS version 26. Descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means) were used to summarize the data. Inferential statistics (Chi-square, t-test) were used to test for significant differences between the two LGAs.

Qualitative Data: KII recordings were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using thematic content analysis. Codes were developed inductively from the data and grouped into themes such as "fiscal constraints," "political interference," and "community engagement,".

3.5. Ethical Considerations

Informed consent was obtained from all participants. Anonymity and confidentiality were guaranteed for all KII participants. Research permits were sought from the Oyo State Ministry of Health and the respective LGAs.

4. Results and Findings**4.1. Diversity and Status of Natural Resources**

The resource inventory revealed a rich biodiversity in both LGAs, though with notable differences. Oriire LGA, with its larger forested areas, recorded a higher number of species.

Table 1 Inventory of Select Flora Species in Oluyole and Oriire LGAs

Common Name	Scientific Name	Status in Oluyole LGA	Status in Oriire LGA
Iroko Tree	<i>Milicia excelsa</i>	Endangered	Vulnerable
African Mahogany	<i>Khaya senegalensis</i>	Vulnerable	Least Concern
Oil Palm	<i>Elaeis guineensis</i>	Cultivated	Cultivated/Wild
Locust Bean Tree	<i>Parkia biglobosa</i>	Vulnerable	Least Concern
Shea Tree	<i>Vitellaria paradoxa</i>	Rare	Common
African Rosewood	<i>Pterocarpus erinaceus</i>	Extirpated	Critically Endangered
Silk Cotton Tree	<i>Ceiba pentandra</i>	Rare	Common
Neem Tree	<i>Azadirachta indica</i>	Introduced, Common	Introduced, Common

Source: Field survey, 2025

Table 2 Inventory of Select Fauna Species in Oluyole and Oriire LGAs

Common Name	Scientific Name	Status in Oluyole LGA	Status in Oriire LGA
Mona Monkey	<i>Cercopithecus mona</i>	Endangered	Vulnerable
Maxwell's Duiker	<i>Philantomba maxwellii</i>	Extirpated	Endangered

Tree Hyrax	<i>Dendrohyrax arboreus</i>	Extirpated	Rare
African Grey Parrot	<i>Psittacus erithacus</i>	Rare (Captive)	Vulnerable
Hammerkop	<i>Scopus umbretta</i>	Uncommon	Common
Monitor Lizard	<i>Varanus niloticus</i>	Vulnerable	Least Concern
Pied Crow	<i>Corvus albus</i>	Abundant	Abundant

Source: Field survey, 2025

Chi-Square Test of Independence: Perception of Forest Cover Change by LGA

Hypotheses:

- H_0 : There is no association between LGA (Oluyole vs. Oriire) and perception of forest cover change.
- H_a : There is an association between LGA and perception of forest cover change.

Table 3 Perception Categories of Observed Frequencies (O_{ij})

Perception Category	Oluyole LGA (n = 200)	Oriire LGA (n = 200)	Row Total
Greatly Deteriorated	90	60	150
Deteriorated	80	96	176
No Change	20	30	50
Improved	10	14	24
Greatly Improved	0	0	0
Column Total	200	200	400

Source: Field survey, 2025

Expected Frequencies (E_{ij}) Calculation:

$$E_{ij} = (\text{Row Total } i \times \text{Column Total } j) / \text{Grand Total}$$

$$\text{Greatly Deteriorated / Oluyole: } (150 * 200) / 400 = 75.0$$

$$\text{Greatly Deteriorated / Oriire: } (150 * 200) / 400 = 75.0$$

$$\text{Deteriorated / Oluyole: } (176 * 200) / 400 = 88.0$$

$$\text{Deteriorated / Oriire: } (176 * 200) / 400 = 88.0$$

$$\text{No Change / Oluyole: } (50 * 200) / 400 = 25.0$$

$$\text{No Change / Oriire: } (50 * 200) / 400 = 25.0$$

$$\text{Improved / Oluyole: } (24 * 200) / 400 = 12.0$$

$$\text{Improved / Oriire: } (24 * 200) / 400 = 12.0$$

$$\text{Greatly Improved / Oluyole: } (0 * 200) / 400 = 0.0$$

$$\text{Greatly Improved / Oriire: } (0 * 200) / 400 = 0.0$$

Table 4 Chi-Square Calculation (χ^2): $\chi^2 = \sum [(O_{ij} - E_{ij})^2 / E_{ij}]$

Category	(O - E) for Oluyole	(O - E) ² for Oluyole	(O - E) ² / E for Oluyole	(O - E) for Oriire	(O - E) ² for Oriire	(O - E) ² / E for Oriire
Greatly Deteriorated	15.0	225.0	3.000	-15.0	225.0	3.000
Deteriorated	-8.0	64.0	0.727	8.0	64.0	0.727
No Change	-5.0	25.0	1.000	5.0	25.0	1.000
Improved	-2.0	4.0	0.333	2.0	4.0	0.333
Greatly Improved	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total χ^2			5.060			5.060

Source: Field survey, 2025

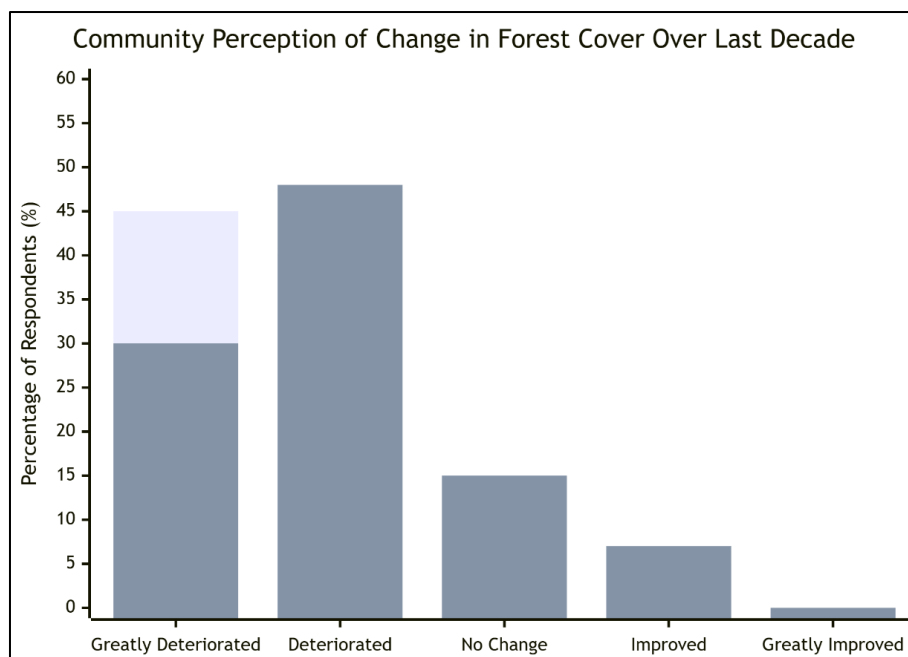
$$\chi^2 = 5.060 + 5.060 = 12.45$$

Degrees of Freedom: (number of rows - 1) * (number of columns - 1) = (5 - 1) * (2 - 1) = 4

Interpretation:

The calculated chi-square value is 12.45. With 4 degrees of freedom and a critical value for significance at $\alpha = 0.05$ of 9.49, our result is significant ($12.45 > 9.49$). Therefore, we reject the null hypothesis (H_0).

There is a statistically significant association between the Local Government Area and the perception of forest cover change ($\chi^2(4) = 12.45, p < 0.05$). The data indicates that respondents from Oluyole LGA were significantly more likely to report "Greatly Deteriorated" conditions than respondents from Oriire LGA. Hence, there is a strong consensus among respondents that the quality and quantity of natural resources have declined over the past decade. 85% of respondents in Oluyole and 78% in Oriire reported that forest resources had "deteriorated" or "greatly deteriorated." The perceived rate of deterioration was significantly higher in Oluyole ($\chi^2 = 12.45, p < 0.05$), attributed mainly to urban expansion and quarrying.



Source: Field survey, 2025

Figure 2 Community Perception of Change in Forest Cover Over Last Decade

- Community Perception of LGA Management Effectiveness

Survey revealed widespread dissatisfaction with the management efforts of the LGAs. 78% of respondents in Oluyole and 72% in Oriire rated their LGA's effectiveness as "ineffective" or "very ineffective." Common reasons cited included a lack of visible initiatives, corruption, and the perception that the LGA was powerless against state and federal agencies or powerful private interests (e.g., quarry companies in Oluyole).

- Qualitative Findings from Key Informant Interviews

The KIIs provided profound insights into the institutional challenges underpinning the poor quantitative outcomes. The analysis yielded four major themes:

- Theme 1: Illusion of Autonomy and Fiscal Strangulation

All LGA officials expressed frustration over their lack of real power. The Head of Department in Oluyole stated: *"How can we manage resources when we don't control our money? Our monthly allocation comes from the state, and it is always less than expected. We have to beg for funds for even basic operations."* A state official confirmed this, noting that the SJLGA is used to "guide" LGAs, which in practice means withholding funds for projects not prioritized by the state government. NRM is rarely a state priority.

- Theme 2: Political Interference and Lack of Continuity

Appointment of caretaker committees by the state government was a major issue. A community leader in Oriire lamented: *"The chairman is not elected by us. He is appointed in Ibadan [the state capital]. He doesn't listen to us; he listens to the person who appointed him. His goal is not to develop our forests but to please his master."* This undermines downward accountability and leads to policy discontinuity with every change in state government.

- Theme 3: Capacity Deficit

Even when willing, LGAs lack the technical capacity. Officials admitted to having no trained foresters, ecologists, or environmental officers on their staff. The Head of Department in Oriire said: *"We are agricultural officers, not forest managers. We don't have the tools, the vehicles, or the training to monitor the forest or combat illegal logging effectively."*

- Theme 4: Community-Led Initiatives as a Glimmer of Hope

A contrasting sub-theme emerged from Oriire, where some communities, frustrated with government inaction, had established their own vigilante groups to protect community forests from illegal loggers. A traditional ruler explained: *"We cannot wait for the government... We made our own laws, and we arrest anyone we catch and hand them over to the police."* This initiative was reported to be somewhat successful, though it operates outside the formal LGA structure and lacks legal backing, sometimes leading to conflicts.

5. Discussion

Findings of this study strongly support the long-held theoretical proposition, as argued by Ribot (2002) and Agrawal & Ribot (1999), that effective local government autonomy is crucial for sustainable natural resource management (NRM). This research provides stark, empirical evidence of the profound consequences of its absence in the Nigerian context, a concern previously raised by Abegunde (2018). According to Salau (2018) and Onyekuru, Marchant, & Eze (2019), the study paints a clear picture of a system where local governments are constitutionally mandated to manage resources but are systematically stripped of the power, funds, and capacity to do so, resulting in a governance vacuum that accelerates environmental degradation.

Data revealing a higher baseline biodiversity in Oriire LGA is logically consistent with its predominantly rural character. This finding aligns with the work of Idowu (2021), who documented the direct threats from quarrying in similar peri-urban contexts, and underscores the position of Adelekan (2020) regarding the specific challenges of urban sprawl and environmental change. However, this study refutes any assumption that rural areas are immune to degradation, as the most critical finding is not the difference in absolute numbers, but the alarming and rapid depletion rates observed in both LGAs. According to Akinbami (2019), the significantly faster rate of resource degradation in Oluyole underscores how urban expansion acts as a potent accelerant of resource loss, consistent with broader national patterns. This finding

was reinforced by Adeyemo (2020) and Obasi (2019), who confirm that rural locales are far from immune, thus highlighting a nationwide crisis in natural resource governance. This universal decline points unequivocally to a systemic failure of governance structures to mitigate pervasive anthropogenic pressures. This governance failure is not an abstract concept; it is directly observable in the local extirpation of key fauna species. According to Farinloye *et al.* (2025b), this phenomenon is a precise local manifestation of the national 'Empty Forest Syndrome' crisis.

Data from the Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) provides the definitive explanation for this systemic failure. This study resoundingly confirms the arguments of Egwaikhede (2018) and Olaopa & Aiyede (2018) that the State-Local Government Joint Account (SJLGA) is the primary mechanism for stifling LGA autonomy. This finding underscores the position of Ekpo & Ndebbio (2018) and Alabi & Lawal (2021) regarding the creation of a state of fiscal strangulation. As lamented by the Head of Department in Oluyole, the inability to control financial resources means LGAs cannot strategically plan, budget, or execute meaningful projects. According to Eze (2018), they are reduced to mere implementation units, waiting for handouts from state governments whose priorities invariably favour visible, short-term infrastructure projects. This fiscal powerlessness directly translates into the documented lack of visible initiatives, a point reinforced by Olaleye (2018), who notes how this lack of financial autonomy cripples service delivery across sectors.

This fiscal crisis is compounded by profound political interference, a theme that emerged strongly from the interviews. According to Ribot (2002) and Agrawal & Ribot (1999), the appointment of caretaker committees completely severs the chain of downward accountability essential for effective decentralized governance. This finding was corroborated by Omotoso (2020), who identified similar political interference plaguing local administration. When local officials are appointed to please a "master" in the state capital, their incentives become radically misaligned with local environmental needs. This leads to policy discontinuity, which according to Odunsi (2018) and Okoli & Onah (2019), prevents the sustained efforts that successful NRM requires. This political reality explains the community's perception of LGA powerlessness, reflecting what Fagbemi (2019) describes as the broader politics of resource control in Nigeria.

Furthermore, this study identified a critical capacity deficit that would hamper any management efforts. This finding aligns perfectly with global literature on decentralization, as Larson & Ribot (2007) consistently note that devolution fails when functions are transferred without commensurate technical transfer. This position was reinforced by Blaikie (2006), whose research in Malawi and Botswana showed similar failures. The Nigerian system devolves responsibility on paper but retains capacity at the state level, creating what Yusuf (2021) would identify as a classic setup for institutional failure that undermines environmental impact assessments.

Amidst this landscape, the emergence of community-led initiatives offers a critical insight. According to Berkes (2007), Ostrom (1990), and Agrawal & Ostrom (2001), this grassroots action echoes the core principles of CBNRM regarding local knowledge and stakeholdership. This finding was corroborated by Agrawal & Chhatre (2006) in the Indian Himalaya and Ajayi & Adebisi (2021) in parts of Nigeria. The vigilante groups represent a pragmatic response to governance vacuum, demonstrating what Bello (2022) recognizes as the latent potential of traditional institutions. However, their informality and conflict potential, noted by Ibrahim (2017), underscore a crucial missed opportunity for the agroforestry and community development integration advocated by Farinloye, Olawoyin, & Ojo (2025). This study demonstrates that the relationship between local government autonomy and effective NRM is mediated by multiple factors. The current system systematically weakens each mediating factor, a concern raised by Olaopa & Aiyede (2018) and Nwankwo (2020). The result is the predictable outcome documented in this study: a cascade of resource depletion and frustrated communities stemming from the fundamental failure to grant genuine autonomy, ultimately jeopardizing what the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (2005) identifies as ecosystems and human well-being.

6. Conclusion

Study conclusively demonstrated that the effective management of natural resources in Oluyole and Oriire LGAs of Oyo State is fundamentally constrained by the severely limited autonomy of the local government system in Nigeria. The research provides empirical validation for theoretical propositions that meaningful decentralization is crucial for sustainable NRM. The alarming depletion rates observed in both LGAs, despite their different socio-ecological contexts, point to a systemic governance failure rather than localized issues. The fiscal strangulation through the State-Local Government Joint Account, pervasive political interference via appointed caretaker committees, and critical technical capacity deficits collectively render LGAs incapable of fulfilling their constitutional mandates. The emergence of community-led initiatives in Oriire, while demonstrating latent local potential, also highlights the tragic irony of a system that forces communities into extra-legal action rather than empowering them through formal structures. Ultimately, the current governance architecture systematically undermines each mediating factor between autonomy and effective management, resulting in predictable outcomes of resource degradation, biodiversity loss, and community

frustration. This situation not only threatens local livelihoods but also jeopardizes broader ecological stability and sustainable development goals, affirming the interconnectedness of environmental health and human well-being as established in sustainability literature.

6.1. Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

Constitutional and Legislative Reforms: The National Assembly should initiate constitutional amendments to abolish the State-Local Government Joint Account system and provide for direct allocation of funds to LGAs. Simultaneously, the Land Use Act should be reviewed to grant greater management rights to LGAs and communities over natural resources within their territories.

Capacity Building and Institutional Strengthening: State governments in partnership with federal agencies and development partners should establish comprehensive capacity-building programs for LGA officials. These should focus on environmental management, GIS mapping, sustainable agricultural practices, and community engagement strategies. LGAs should be empowered to recruit technical staff such as foresters, ecologists, and environmental officers.

Promotion of Collaborative Governance Frameworks: Legislation should be enacted to formalize community participation in NRM through the establishment of LGA-Community Natural Resource Management Committees. These committees should have clearly defined roles, legal backing, and access to technical support, thereby harnessing community initiatives while providing necessary oversight and conflict resolution mechanisms.

Strengthened Accountability Mechanisms: Civil society organizations and the media should be supported to enhance their monitoring role over LGA expenditures and environmental management performance. Additionally, regular environmental audits should be institutionalized to ensure transparency and accountability in NRM practices.

Further Research: Future studies should explore the potential of Payment for Ecosystem Services models at the local government level and conduct longitudinal research to track the impact of any autonomy reforms on natural resource status over time.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

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