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Traditional Rulership in Contemporary Nigerian Government System and the Dilemma of Relevance

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Abstract

Traditional institution in Nigeria is not only an integral part but is also a vital element in the social, political and cultural establishment of Nigerian communities. It is a dynamic institution that reflects and also responds to the evolving political and social transformations of society. Traditional rulership and the institutions of the modern state are located along the line where the traditional world meets the modern-state administration. The context and rationale for this study are the current democratization process and commitment to good governance in Nigeria. Against the background of democratization in Nigeria, traditional forms of authority have come back into the spotlight of interest, especially with respect to the role of Chiefs as an intermediary between the state and the citizen. The paper observes that the current opportunities for democratic participation and good governance in Nigeria seem unprecedented, yet there have been many failures. A significant part of this lies in the overlooked relationship between the contemporary Nigerian state and traditional authority and the opportunities these institutions provide for bringing development to the people. The paper argues that traditional authority incarnates a reassuring institutional stability and certainty to the masses, which elected officers (who come and go) do not provide in democratic governance. The paper submits that traditional authorities should be formally integrated into the democratic institutional setting by effectively constituting the first level of decentralized institutions of governance.

Introduction

Traditional rulers in Nigeria seem to be the most enduring pre-colonial institution to have survived through the different stages of Nigerian administration to date. While the degree of importance of this institution might have depended on the ebbs and the flows of the Nigerian political system the institution has however never been completely overlooked by any administration in the country (Bitiyond, 1987).

Traditional institutions are usually understood as the instruments of social organization, which have been tested and chosen after sustained periods of social selection. They constitute the roots upon which social change occurs. Traditional rulers are enthroned for the progress and development of the entire society. Therefore nothing can hinder them from performing their roles in the society. Though their roles have been drastically changed due to so many factors, their relevance to the democratic dispensation cannot be over emphasized. Traditional structures remain very important in organizing the life of the people at the local level despite modern state structures. Traditional authorities, for example, regulate village life, control access to land, and settle disputes. The existence of traditional authorities means that both the decentralisation and the strengthening of local governance is not taking place in a vacuum. Recent experience has shown that successful decentralisation has to take existing traditional structures into account. While the standard view has been that they are a historic burden on the road to modernity, it is now widely recognised that for many people, traditional structures are often more legitimate than the modern state.

Traditional rulers had no doubt pervaded Nigeria's political system. It is through them that information is disseminated to the people. The running of government does not solely rest on these rulers, rather there are other subordinate rulers and council of chiefs that support in carrying out the rulings of the towns and villages. However, while the traditional rulers are as old as the society, the same cannot be said of the modern government as the latter came to existence following the colonial period and has since then been co-existing with the traditional institutions at the one hand and has greatly been modified by the British

presence on the other hand. Although the two have been coexisting, in the new democratic dispensation, traditional institutions have been pushed into extinction. In the Nigeria democratic government, there are so many challenges facing the traditional rulers. Despite these challenge, their importance in the society cannot be over-emphasized. They are so significant to the extent that no community can survive without them (Akinfenwa, 2010). The prevalence of traditional rulers to the present circumstances is not only among the most controversial issues but also people have been too emotional and sentimental on it.

It is in line with the above that this paper set out to examine the relevance of tradition rulers in the present democratic dispensation. This study departs from the sterile debate of traditional authority as a dying institution (or not) to propose that it exposes the positive role that traditional authorities today play in development as institutions, which justifies the need to integrate them into democratic institutions rather than being left on the periphery. This paper explains the resilience of traditional rulers in Nigeria, the present and the future roles of traditional rulers in contemporary Nigeria.

Traditional Rulership in Historical Perspective

Before attempting to examine the relevance of traditional rulers in the present day Nigeria, it is appropriate to first attempt the historical development of traditional rulership in Nigeria. Perhaps a useful way to begin the explication of the relevance is to look at the role of traditional rulers in historical perspective (Sambo, 1987). According to him, much of the scholarly works on the relevance to the debate on the role of traditional rulers have focused discussions on the changing status of this indigenous rulership institution.

African societies, throughout the centuries, have been organized on the basis of a social contract whereby people come together to form a state or nation because they believe that, through their combined efforts, they will be more able to realize their common aspirations for peace and security, which are essential for their physical and spiritual welfare and progress, both as individuals and as a community. It is to achieve these objectives that the people agree collectively to surrender to a king or ruler the power to control their lives and to organize and regulate activities within their society. In the process, they have always had clear understandings and agreements regarding the ideas and principles that underlie their political systems and on the basis of which power and authority are to be exercised by the various elements of government (Osei Tutu, 2004). Ake (1993) described Africa's traditional democratic system in these succinct words:

Traditional African political systems were infused with democratic values. They were invariably patrimonial, and consciousness was communal; everything was everybody's business, engendering a strong emphasis on participation. Standards of accountability were even stricter than in Western societies. Chiefs were answerable not only for their own actions but for natural catastrophes such as famine, epidemics, floods, and drought. In the event of such disasters, chiefs could be required to go into exile or asked to die.

Before the advent of colonialist, traditional rulers formed the nucleus of governance, because in different parts of what make up the present day Nigeria was synonymous with traditional institutions. From the earliest time therefore, the system of traditional rulership has been a significant feature of the tradition of most West African peoples and commanded a large degree of loyalty and respect among the people. Traditional rulers in pre-colonial Nigeria were rulers by every standard because they derived their executive, legislative and judicial functions from traditions long rooted, recognised and reversed by their people. In essence, the traditional rulers and their offices were to be accorded most utmost reverence by the people whose thought was that doing otherwise was acting contrary to demands of traditions, which could result in anger and punishment from the gods (Arifalo and Okajare, 2005).

The pre-colonial period was the golden age of traditional institutions in Nigeria. This is because the traditional ruler's paramountcy was not in doubt during this period. The traditional rulers were fulfilling the very well known functions of government, i.e legislative, executive and judicial functions. Besides, traditional rulers were seen in some areas as the companion of gods and were symbol of unity and the protector of the social and political institutions of their people. Some have even likened the power of the traditional ruler to that of an absolute monarch possessing the power of life and death over his subjects. As argued by Sambo (1987), to talk of the relevance of traditional rulers in the pre colonial period is, in fact, to

state the obvious. This is because traditional rulers in pre colonial times were, in a very real sense, the owner as well as managers of the areas over which they exercised rulership. They were both the “de jure” and “de facto” head of their jurisdictions.

In the pre-colonial era, traditional leaders and traditional authorities were important institutions, which gave effect to traditional life and played an essential role in the day-to-day administration of their areas and lives of traditional people. The relationship between a traditional leader and community was very important. The normal functioning of the traditional community was the responsibility of the traditional authority. Pre-colonial traditional leadership was based on governance of the people where a traditional leader was accountable to his people. During the pre-colonial era, the institution of traditional leadership was a political and administrative centre of governance for traditional communities (Khunou, 2011).

Traditional rulers were pivot on which rested the administration of the people of Nigeria during the pre-colonial era. The traditional ruler was the political, social, economic, legal and military head of the traditional state. As political head, he was responsible for the maintenance of good order in his state. He was the guardian of the fundamental values of his people and mediated between them and the spiritual forces. He administered tributes, court fines, market tolls, and other revenues. He was also the final arbiter in the administration of justice. It can thus be seen that in the pre-colonial era traditional ruler commanded a great deal of autonomy (Adjaye and Misawa, 2006).

Colonialism in Nigeria had a long history, which had a profound influence on the institution of traditional leadership. Various laws were enacted to legalise encroachment and to deprive traditional communities of their land. These changes had a great impact on the systems of pre-colonial customary law, communal land tenure system and the institution of traditional leadership itself. While it is apposite to state that the pre-colonial period was the golden age of traditional institutions in Nigeria, the colonial era thus afforded the traditional rulers the opportunity to partake in governance. This notwithstanding, the traditional rulers lost their sovereignty to the British monarch because they were to operate under the British Resident Administrator.

With the imposition of colonial rule there were changes in the status and role of traditional rulers. The various independent political units became a part of a larger entity; the Protectorates and later the colony of Nigeria. Functions like the conduct of war became entirely scrapped from the functions of traditional rulers, as states hitherto with independent existence were all now constituted into one political entity. In retrospect, traditional rulers made it possible for the colonial government to bring immense, often impassable territories under their control. They carried additional responsibilities of a civic nature, as they were entrusted with responsibility for local infrastructural development, including agriculture, health, education, and livestock farming.

Colonialism brought remarkable changes in the status and role of traditional rulers. These changes were a consequence of incorporation of traditional rulers into the colonial political structure. During this period, the major functions of government such as law making, the maintenance of law and order etc, were taken over by the colonial administration. Perhaps the most significant change which colonial rule brought about was the subordination of the authority of the traditional ruler to a higher authority, i.e, the British Resident Administrator to whom he was responsible and accountable. In other words, the traditional rulers lost his sovereignty to the British Monarch and operated under the guidance of the British officials (Ayeni, 1986). A major consequence of subordination of the authority of the traditional ruler to that of the colonial overlord was the reduction of many chiefs to auxiliary position. At the same time however, the removal of all customary constraints by an often unknowing superior administration thrust absolute power into the hands of the traditional rulers vis-à-vis their subjects. But if the traditional ruler appeared to be all powerful, chieftancy itself became an empty shell devoid of the legitimacy of the pre-colonial era. For instance, trying to extend the Alafin's power in the southwest Nigeria, the colonialists became the grand patrons of the traditional rulers thereby neutralizing the traditional structural checks of the Oyo Mesi over him. In fact the new colonial patronage the Oyo Mesi conversely had to solicit for his favour; as this was accompanied by the Alafin's powers to appoint officials of his administration. In view of this new situation, the traditional

constitutional checks and balances virtually ceased to operate, consequently, the Alafin emerged stronger than he ever had been. The administration testified to this unprecedented powers of the Alafin were enhanced beyond custom and tradition (Atanda, 1970).

The institution of traditional leadership in Nigeria has undergone some profound changes since the colonial era. As expansive territories were being brought under colonial control in Nigeria and other territories, the British were faced with cost and logistical issues associated with colonial administration. Unable and unwilling to commit the resources necessary to administer their colonies effectively, the British resorted to the familiar policy of indirect rule and devolution. Recognizing that the traditional rulers were the centres of economic resources, they decided that it would be a cheap and pragmatic policy to rule the "natives" through their own leaders. In the process of instituting the colonial administration, traditional rulers and their councils, especially in Northern Nigeria, came to dominate local administration (Adjaye and Misawa, 2006). The power to recognise, appoint and depose traditional leaders was placed in the hands of the Governor-General who was also made a supreme chief of all traditional leaders in Nigeria.

The colonial system ostensibly enhanced traditional rulership through the system of indirect rule particularly in Nigeria. But the perception that chiefs and kings ultimately derived their power from the colonial power eventually undermined their power. In some African countries the colonial authorities appointed chiefs directly thereby underscoring the uncomfortable fact that they were colonial creations, which were ultimately abolished with the demise of colonial rule (Osei Tutu, 2004). As noted by Nack (2000), 'traditional institutions have lost their role as a check on the powers of modern institutions and have been relegated to the rank of mere consultative organs'. Traditional authorities, to Kamto (1999), are 'a place of cultural reference: structures where members gather together to project a common identity. There is no doubt that traditional rulers in Nigeria have gradually witnessed the erosion of their powers, from depending upon British colonial administration to dependence upon elected politicians. As their roles narrowed, that of the political parties increased.

The role which traditional rulers played in the immediate post-independent period has to be seen against the background of a relationship of suspicion and deep rooted resentment by the nationalist elites to whom the baton of political power was handed by the British. A traditional ruler could only be relevant in such a situation if that ruler had been blackmailed into supporting the ruling political party by openly canvassing for votes among his subjects (Sambo, 1987). In essence therefore, the pursuit of relevance by traditional rulers in the years after independence had important consequences for political stability in Nigeria.

The transfer of political power to Nigerians following the country's independence did not change the colonial system had accorded traditional institutions. Thus in its neo-colonial context traditional ruler in Nigeria got equated with the new institutions of government. In other words, that the colonial institutions were wholly carried over into the post-colonial stage, simply implies that the neo-colonial role of these institutions could not be disputed. In his analysis of the post-colonial society. Williams (1976) argues that the leadership owes its existence to what he calls the legacy of "colonial patrimonialism" which he says was:

A system of administration in the ideological guise of indirect rule in order to enlist the dominant status groups in the service of colonial rule and to contain the political consequence of the change in the class structure.

The entrenchment of some specific functional roles for the traditional rulers is a clear manifestation of their acceptance by the post-colonial state. The implication of this for the traditional institutions as noted by Amin (1979) is that:

Under these circumstances, the traditional society was distorted to the point of being unrecognizable, it lost its autonomy, and its main function was to produce for the world market under conditions which, because they impoverished it, deprived the members of any prospects of radical modernization. Thus traditional society was not, therefore, in transition to modernity as a dependent society it was complete, peripheral and hence at a dead end

There still remain many variations in the level of acceptance and recognition of traditional authority in modern states. Most often the new government did not recognise traditional authorities after independence. In Latin America, indigenous communities were not given rights and were exploited by the new regimes. In Africa, new governments consisted mainly of modern urban ruling elites educated in the western world who placed little importance on local traditions and removed traditional leaders from formal political structures. Where traditional leaders had served the colonial rulers, they were regarded as corrupted by the previous regimes. But where traditional rulers thus survived into the period of the colonial state and into the post-colonial state, they retained sources of political legitimacy rooted in the pre-colonial period (Ray, 2003). There is no doubt that post colonial traditional rulers in Nigeria have gradually witnessed the erosion of their powers, from depending upon British colonial administration to dependence upon elected politicians. From the historical excursion undertaken above, two major point of relevance can be derived. The first is that the ruling class in pre-colonial Nigeria was dominated by traditional rulers who, in theory and fact, owned and managed the productive assets of their respective domains. In like manner, the British administrators constituted the dominant faction of the ruling class in the period of colonial rule in Nigeria. Secondly, the ruling class in any concrete historical period came into existence to execute some essential functions in the fulfilment of the overall interest of that class. It is in the pursuit of the task of executing these essential functions that ruling classes create, adapt and co-opt, as the case may be, institutions which give the class homogeneity and consciousness of its functions.

Having catalogued the historical antecedents that have led to the present status of traditional rulers in Nigeria, the next important area of examination would be to examine the argument for and against the relevance of traditional rulers in modern government and administration.

Traditional Rulers and Democracy: The Debate of Relevance

The question of relevance, with regard to traditional leadership and democracy, needs to be taken in the contemporary context of cultural pluralism and globalization. Before examining the importance of traditional leadership in democratic Nigeria, one has to acknowledge the fact that Nigerian politics is not autonomous but rather occurs within a global setting and thus has to serve the purpose of incorporating both local and international concerns. This will be important, when considering the extent to which traditional leadership will determine the nature of Nigeria's democracy and thus the relevance of traditional leadership in a democratized Nigeria. In other words, when looking at Nigerian democracy and the role of traditional leadership, one cannot isolate Nigeria from the nature of the contemporary global political community, but needs to consider the issue with the idea of Nigeria being a part of an integrated whole and accept that the political values of Nigerian democracy are a manifestation of ideas and practices from a global influence.

The debate on the relevance of traditional rulers in the country's modernizing polity is a highly controversial one, as there are divergent opinions and interests. Egwerube (1985) identified three schools of thought in this regard. These include; the abolitionists, the retentionists and the middle-of-the-road schools of thought.

The abolitionists constitute one of the dominant schools of thought in the debate. The abolitionists vehemently deny relevance of traditional institutions in modern day government and administration. The conceptualisation of relevance by this school is reflected in their concern with the seeming incompatibility of traditional authority structures with the demands of democratic ethos. Abolitionists argued that traditional rulership is politically irrelevant given the ascendancy of modern democratic government (Sambo, 1987). The supporters of this school conclude that, if the country is serious about ensuring that the citizenry imbibes the democratic and participatory culture needed to quicken the pace of the modernisation of the polity, then a decisive step need to be taken to jettison this archaic institution once and for all to enable the people to develop the required orientation in line with the reality of the present age and time (Ayeeni, 1985).

Retentionists school is the second school of thought. This school is championed by the holders of traditional rulership position. They argued for the need not only to retain the institution of traditional ruler but also for an upward revision of the roles which the institution plays in the political scheme of things, to a level comparable to what it was in the pre-colonial period. According to this school of thought, there is a

perception of the under-utilisation of the institution of traditional rulership especially in the years since independence in 1960. The protagonists of this school envisaged a situation where traditional rulers could engage in politics at the local level and thus effectively contribute their quota to the well-being of the citizenry. While the intention of this school of thought is to carve out a prominent role in governance at the local level for traditional rulers, their strategy as argued by Ola and Tonwe (2003) may in fact led to the collapse of the institution of traditional rulership in the country.

The middle-of-the-road constitute the third school of thought. This hybrid, neither-here-nor-there viewpoint accept the position of the abolitionists on the anachronistic nature of traditional rulers, but rather curiously argues for a befitting role for traditional rulers in specific aspect of our development process. This school viewpoint is presented as the position of a moderation which recognises the traditional and cultural relevance of traditional rulers which at the same time agreeing to the point that they might not have much place in modern governmental administration. The fact that governmental policies tend to rule out the abolition of traditional rulers while traditional rulers continue to freely enjoy public financial support without clearly defined roles is cited by accomodationists as the practical demonstration of the realistic nature of their position (Sambo, 1987). This school of thought favours the retention of the traditional rulers as participatory local government actors in advisory and non-executive capacities.

Traditional Rulership and Democratic Governance in Nigeria

Traditional institutions comprise all the structures, system and processes that community have evolved in the course of their history and development to govern them. These are distinct from national governance authorities, which are creation of modern state.

The roles of traditional rulers in governance have been in the front burner of debate and critical examination in recent times. Some people hold the view that they should have no constitutional responsibility while certain others opined that the government should take advantage of the professional competence and experience of some of them. In Nigeria, the democratic governance at the local level developed around the traditional rulers. They were considered by their people as repositories of religious, executive, legislative as well as judicial functions. This shows that the importance of the traditional rulers in the socio-political development of Nigeria has never been in doubt. Not only do they posses' tremendous possibilities for progress at the local level, but as the community heads and the custodians of our cultural heritage, also hold the key answers to national security, unity an survival (Fatile and Adejuwon, 2009).

While traditional institutions' roots are ancient, they are a repository of the history and the collective experience of a people. The history and the experience are the foundations on which solid modern institutions are built. Nothing emanates from a vacuum. Modern political ideas of democracy in Europe emanated from traditional European institutions with their systems of thought, organization and belief. Traditional institutions had authority and legitimacy that post-colonial African governments are yet to attain.

The traditional African values of community, solidarity and the extended family are being eroded in preference for Western individualism. Traditional social institutions in Nigeria, including those of the Benin Kingdom, operated based on the principle of division of labour. People performed duties and engaged in activities in which they were recognized as specialists. The rainmaker was known by all across the kingdom just as the orator and sculptor were known throughout the land (Ochoche, 2002). He stated further that:

When considered in relation to the modern concept of democracy, there were some anti-democratic practices in the operation of traditional African beliefs and practices. For example, the belief which equated age with wisdom - the older a person was, the wiser - tended to entrench the principle of exclusion, which is considered undemocratic in liberal democracy. This aspect of African worldview led to the under-utilization of the productive capacities of a broad spectrum of the population. We have since known, of course, that age does not necessarily add to an individual's ability to reason. On the contrary, age could result in a diminished ability to reason.

Traditional rulers are central to democratic governance at the grassroots because they are the nerve centres for the mobilisation of the citizens for any collective effort, they should be adequately consulted and considered during the formulation and execution of any public policy. The pivotal role of traditional rulers is significant because they provide the vital linkage between the government and the people, they influence the success of specific modernisation schemes by serving as translators, interpreters and mediators of government goals. The involvement of traditional rulers allows the government to have the advantage of benefitting from the cultural and historical experience of them before making realistic and acceptable policies.

At a conference on chieftaincy in Africa, held in Niger Republic, there were numerous reports from African countries such as Nigeria and South Africa as well as Ghana about the developmental roles of chiefs, mobilizing their people for the execution of development projects, sensitizing them to health hazards, promoting education, preaching discipline, encouraging various economic enterprises, inspiring respect for the law and urging the people to participate in the electoral process. Most of these efforts are done without formal recognition or financial support from Government (Osei Tutu, 2004). It is important therefore to note that modern African states have not all succeeded in establishing viable insurance schemes, comprehensive health and educational systems, facilities for counselling the youth or role models in all fields of endeavour.

Traditional rulers and institutions in Nigeria have been described as integral stakeholders in the quest by the federal and state governments to implement sustainable development programmes for the people. The government, both at the Federal, State and Local levels are conscious of the necessity of mainstreaming traditional institutions in its evolving democracy and at the same time consolidating mechanisms for grassroots development, advocacy and conflict mediation and resolution and has taken major steps in involving traditional institutions in the democratic governance project.

Traditional authorities often have greater mobilization capacity than the state. Even when formal recognition by the state is lacking, the state has to consult and convince the traditional authorities in order to reach and/or mobilize the people, which is one of the reasons why political leaders in Nigeria have started to recognise and work with traditional leaders. Many governments have recognised the importance of traditional leaders in supporting state policies and mobilizing the people in favour of change. In many cases it is very difficult or impossible to implement policies without the support of traditional leaders, especially in areas that touch upon the traditional customs of a community (Georg and Wolf, 2004). This is manifested in the empowerment initiatives for the traditional institutions like procurement of automobiles and other welfare packages. Traditional institutions can valuably orientate their different communities towards their respective values, cultures and histories, as basis on which politics can be construed.

Traditional authorities are at the centre of local development and, as such, are educators of the local population on matters of local development. They are advisers of local councils on the priority development problems of the area. So, traditional authority links the local with the national/global and through cooperation and partnership with modern authorities and institutions (Cheka, 2008). Traditional authorities constitute the most appropriate channel for transmitting information from modern authorities to the villagers, especially because, in the rural setting, the oral culture of communication remains the most reliable and most used.

The increasing focus on traditional authorities is linked to an increasing interest in and support for decentralisation. Modern institutions and the modern urban elite at the national level often co-exist with traditional structures at the local level. Traditional structures in many cases survived the colonial period and continued to be an important part, or even the main reference point for large parts of the population after independence. Recent efforts of decentralisation have shifted the focus to existing social and political structures at the local level. Without taking traditional structures into account, social and political engineering are likely to fail at the local level.

Traditional authority is a legitimate source of authority, because legitimacy is what people believe. Where in western states legitimacy is closely linked to democracy, in many other countries (especially at the local level in rural areas) democracy is a rather foreign concept and the legitimacy of traditional leadership is greater than the legitimacy of modern state structures. Traditional authorities therefore are a social reality, and development efforts at the local level have to recognise these existing structures (Georg and Wolf, 2004).

A democratic state can also be expected to facilitate reforming and integrating traditional institutions into the modern governance structures (ECA, 2004). In no other area is the co-existence between the traditional and the modern more pronounced than in matters relating to political governance in traditional African societies and contemporary liberal democracies has been of great interest to social researchers in Africa. As a result of the onslaught of western liberalism, post-traditional African societies were at a precipitous crossroads. Traditional rulers have a vital role to play in democratic governance in Nigeria. These according to Maddick (1963) include; loyalty to the chiefs are still strong they are in position to promote local agreement in problems before their councils; they often have varied experience in government; in some cases, the chiefs have functions in matters of customary law and chieftaincy, and to leave the traditional rulers out of democratic governance could possibly generate a more powerful centre in loyalty outside the council.

One of the most important functions of traditional rulers in present day Nigeria is the custody and preservation of culture and traditions. They are to see that Nigerian cultural heritage and traditions are not neglected or relegated to the background in our quest for social advancement. They are always called upon by the President and Governors to help ensure peaceful co-existence and promote national unity and political stability as well as help in the security of the nation as a whole.

The argument here is not just that traditional political system and their cultural imperative could provide the needed lessons for the strengthening of democracy in Nigeria, but that the persisting failure of democracy is not unrelated to its disregard of this cultural past. Given that the past is always implicated in the present and that no worthwhile edifice could be built on nothing, it becomes important that modern democratic practice be built on the reality of the past in Africa and Nigeria and this would entail grafting modern democracy on the cultural and institutional pattern which defined the people in order to ensure a link between the modern form of governance and the people (Olaitan, 2009). Traditional institutions have valuable characteristics that can inform the development of culturally relevant institutions of democratic governance in contemporary Nigeria.

The Future of Traditional Rulership

Traditional rulers of today can effectively be engaged to assist in sanitizing delay in the administration of justice by amending the constitution to give them powers to resolve minor disputes. Apart from the fact that several traditional rulers have a sound intellectual and professional background which can be used to advantage in governance, the people at the grassroots believe very much in them as custodians of cultural values. Many people believe, for instance, that land matters are better handled by them than orthodox institutions. And the fact must be recognized that, even now, certain State governors and other policy formulators of government depend very much on them for their advice not only because they relate intimately and regularly with people at the grassroots level of the society but because their suggestions have always been found unassailable. To refuse to acknowledge that is to plan for political disaster in the modern state system.

Our traditional political power structure, like any other part of our culture, must be dynamic and open to change. The truth is that we have with us today a new political arrangement, in the form of the modern nation state. The truth too is that in the administration of the modern nation state system there have been a few conflicts between traditional institutions and institutions of the modern state. There have been conflicts over the bounds of traditional institutions with relation to the operation of political parties. There have been conflicts over the bounds over jurisdiction in the allocation and distribution of resources. Many of these conflicts are avoidable and only call for better understanding and partnership between the state and the

traditional structure. Some of them, however, call for a careful assessment of roles, a better understanding of the new political, social, and economic demands made on the system by democratic governance, and informed response to the demand for change and adaptation which is necessary for the sustenance of life (Ochoche, 2002).

The importance of traditional institutions in facilitating modernization lies in the need for an adaptation mechanism, or a translator of new ideas through reference and contrast to pre-existing ones. The traditional institutions form the foundation on which new concepts are built. Certainly all traditional institutions could, with modifications, be accommodated in national constitutions with strong bills of rights. The bills of rights would stipulate that where necessary, local practices be modified to ensure compliance with universal human rights standards.

Partnering the traditional leadership in state governance is a vital and necessary tool for sustainable development. The state, traditional leadership and societies exist in a globalized world to which there exists a close knitted collaboration. It is therefore necessary that all parties to sustainable development of human societies are integrated towards growth and development that satisfies all. Government should strengthen traditional leadership through the regional and national houses of chiefs, to ensure the promotion of peace and settlement of chieftaincy disputes. The judiciary can also be tasked to deal effectively and quickly with chieftaincy disputes, in order to safeguard the traditional institution. This would facilitate the existence and effectiveness of the institution. In order to ensure a peaceful society in today's conflict-ridden society, there is an urgent need to preserve certain important aspects of traditional social institutions - especially mode of governance and ethics as they relate to modern liberal democratic institutions. Useful aspects of traditional social institutions must be utilised and integrated with the official security apparatus to ensure peace in the conflict-ridden contemporary Nigerian society. The key areas that must be addressed include the issues of land and social justice. These would promote security of lives and properties. A genuine integration of modern and traditional conflict management strategies, excluding their pitfalls, would provide lasting solutions to avoidable conflicts in Nigeria.

Traditional authority embodies social norms within ethnic communities. Because people who belong to these ethnic groups have internalized the social norms, there is a minimum level of effort in directing development behaviour in these communities. This facilitates good governance. So it is suggested to accommodate traditional institutions formally and most especially in view of the local development role that this study establishes as played by them and perceived and attested by other actors in local development. Traditional authorities should be formally integrated into the democratic institutional setting by effectively constituting the first level of decentralized institutions of local governance rather than being left in limbo as is the case now (Cheka, 2008).

For pomp and pageantry traditional ruler are still underutilized. The great obstacle in this regard is, of course, the inability of successive governments to insulate them from politics. Successive governments at all levels have paid lip service to according them their rightful place in the scheme of things and allowing them to play their as father of all. In practice they overtly or covertly solicit their support for their own parties and goad them to use their position as father of all to tilt the scale of their own favour when public opinion has to be obtained on political basis.

This study therefore calls for the recognition of the enabling possibilities of recreating and transforming memory associated with traditional ruler so that the image of the 21st century traditional rulers becomes the new model that integrates contemporary imaginings. The commonly held memory-created image of traditional ruler continues to be a product of colonial bureaucracies and missionary conversion projects. If that image is one of a subordinate, pliant cog that of the contemporary traditional ruler should be transformed into one that is self-liberated and dynamic through selective retention and adoption of practices conducive to modernization. A new vision of the traditional ruler—global, modern, entrepreneurial—must be constructed. To achieve this, the traditional institution must recognize that it is capable of re-inventing itself, of negotiating and modifying itself to sustain it into the future traditional rulers must continue to be considered not only as guardians of the public interest and custodians of the traditional state, but also

brokers of the present and into the future. In emphasizing the fluid, syncretic, eclectic, constantly evolving and compelling character of traditional ruler, one is also thereby giving recognition to a more personalistic model.

Traditional authority embodies social norms within ethnic communities. Because people who belong to these ethnic groups have internalized the social norms, there is a minimum level of effort in directing development behaviour in these communities. This facilitates good governance. So it is suggested to accommodate traditional institutions formally and most especially in view of the local development role that this study establishes as played by them and perceived and attested by other actors in local development.

Conclusion

Traditional rulers are important relics of our traditional political system and the embodiment of our culture. Consequently the institution of traditional rulers should be preserved. But in the modern political system with modern political structure it would be superfluous and undemocratic to give them any executive political function at the federal, state or local government level. However, they should be given advisory role to play in government. However, traditional rulers should be heads of their community councils which are based on traditional system. They possess the power to advise the local government when it gets out of its way. Traditional rulers can also serve as members of the customary courts.

The political survival of traditional rulers is significant because they provide the vital linkage between the government and the people, they influence the success of specific modernisation scheme by serving as translators, interpreters and mediators of government goals. The traditional rulers themselves should appreciate the fact that a lot of changes in all aspects of our national endeavour have taken place since colonisation and by extension should be prepared to accept such changes which have also affected the traditional institution in good faith. This way, they will perpetually commend local support, respect and above all integrity.

We have tried to argue in this paper that the "traditionalness" of our contemporary traditional rulers started eroding in the colonial period; and since then has never returned to its pre-colonial position. The institution of traditional leadership in Nigeria has undergone fundamental changes throughout the different historical phases of pre-colonial, colonialism, apartheid and post colonial era. These changes do not represent a complete story of the institution of traditional leadership.

The traditional rulers themselves have been proving the importance of the traditional institutions to the government, whether military or civilian. Thus, recently the traditional rulers across the country presented before the National Assembly, a request for the inclusion into an emended Constitution, of the National Council of Traditional Rulers and similar bodies at the level which would enable traditional rulers to play a constitutional role and also become members of the National Council of States. These requests were endorsed by 37 monarchs each from the 36 states of the federation and the Federal Capital Territory. These requests however point to the fact that traditional rulers are still relevant in Nigeria's political system. It is therefore important that the role of the institution of traditional leadership be revisited and empowered in order to fit squarely in the scheme of constitutional democracy. Traditional authorities should be formally integrated into the democratic institutional setting by effectively constituting the first level of decentralized institutions of local governance rather than being left in limbo as is the case now. A way forward is to formally integrate traditional authorities into republican institutions. In order for the development of a sustainable and transparent democracy, all levels of leadership need to stem from the same liberal ideals upon which the constitution and legitimacy of Nigerian politics is based.

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