Journal of Social and Political Sciences

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Traditional Administration and its Impact on Democratic Governance in Africa "The Nigerian Experience"

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Abstract

Democratic governance is undoubtedly adjudged to be the most acceptable instrument through which people can be better served and administered for sustainable development. Even though traditional institution has been the indigenous governance instrument long before the advent of modern democracy, it is a framework that survived and believed to have tremendous impacts on the modern democratic process and governance in Nigeria. This paper therefore examines the relationship inherent between the traditional institutions and the modern democratic process of governance in Africa with particular reference to Nigeria. The research is a survey type which relies on available literature on governance, close observations and discussion with intellectuals and experts on governance generally. The paper finds a close relationship between the traditional administration and the democratic governance processes in Nigeria. This relationship by way of impacts on democratisation process is seen in the following ways; despotic disposition to leadership, personalisation of the instruments of governance, apparent disregard for constitutional limitations of tenure, masculinisation of leadership, class domination and promotion of political hegemony. The paper concludes that there is a dominance of such traditional administration values among Nigerian politicians and leaders. The paper recommends a systemic restructuring, systematic but aggressive mass reorientation and sensitisation about the true democratic culture and value as against the old order, promotion of equal opportunities for all, mass literacy campaign against despotism and personalisation of instruments of governance, promotion of transparency and accountability amongst others, for good governance and sustainable development.

Keywords: Traditional Institution, Democracy, Governance, Accountability

1. Introduction

The issue of governance and the complexity surrounding public administration remains a recurring phenomenon in any discuss affecting human organisation, civilisation and development. Typical of these complexities is the control of the commonwealth, transparency, accountability and gender equality for the good of all. Modern states and nations transcended through different stages and models of governance from the communal, feudal and what was later known as economic socialism or even capitalism before settling for democracy. Democracy is a system that places consensus over control.

The feudal stage of state formation witnessed a clear exploitation and personalisation of both human and land resources to consolidate political hegemony of the ruling class oligarchy. From the communal period to the stage

of capitalism, societies were governed under a system better described as tendentious human exploitations, since the supreme interest is that of promoting the self-serving interest of the ruler through land and territorial expansions. This to a large extent facilitated the political and economic strength of the rulers. The organisation of traditional institutions that emerged thereafter was structured along this land ownership and flamboyant power display structure resulting in human labour and exploitations for the comfort of the ruling class. It is worthy of note that the traditional governance system has survived different phases of human development history, covering trans-Atlantic trade in slave period, the sub Saharan slave trade, the indirect rule system and even post-independence Nigeria. The traditional institution remained very powerful in the governance process in those periods, until late seventies. The Nigerian state under military governance came up with some structural reforms that tinkered with the powers and roles of the traditional institutions. Although the institutions did not start losing its administrative powers under the military but long before the political independence, in fact its weakness started with colonisation policy of the British imperialist.

The administrative powers of traditional rulers witnessed gradual usurpation through the policy of indirect rule. This gradual but calculative power smuggling got to its climax when the role of traditional rulers was officially detached from the mainstream political leadership after the Nigerian political independence, precisely in 1999 when the military was to transfer governance to elected officials. However, the institutions, actively or passively retain considerable if not substantial level of relevance and influence in the democratization process in Nigeria for two fundamental reasons. Firstly, their proximity to the populace that provides legitimacy to democratic governance through a competed electoral mandate. Secondly, the democratically elected leaders of various positions emanate from the same traditional society; the elected official recognises the value of his culture and therefore unwittingly submits his loyalty to the custodian of such tradition and cultural values (Crowder, 1970). Again, the modern Nigerian state was under the traditional institutions before colonization, the people were administered under the umbrella of large political organizations such as the Fulani Emirate in the North, the kingdoms or empires in the Yoruba land (west) and Benin (Midwest), village system in Igbo land (south east) and the extended family system in the East of the Niger. Indigenous institutions in all these places mentioned were governed and administered through the instrumentality of customary laws. These laws are still respected and valued by the Nigerian politicians.

The post-colonial Nigerian state and governance system is patterned along the western institution of governance which remains undoubtedly at odds with the traditional cultures and normative values of the indigenous politicians and bureaucrats. This is why a public official displays fragmented loyalty, what Riggs (1964) described as formalism and social overlap in the prismatic society. The situation where a public official, elected or appointed, embodied and driven by his cultural values in the discharge of public responsibility is unacceptably abnormal in an ideal democratic situation. The consequential outcome is what Riggs referred to as nepotism and other impartial disposition of the public official when allocating public values. A package of attributes of power display structure of the traditional governance is found sufficiently manifest in the democratic leadership style of modern Nigeria. This paper is primarily concerned with clear analysis of the traditional institution of governance and the relationship it has with the democratization process and leadership structure and resource management in Nigeria. It is expected that the two systems operate to complement one another for a sustainable development.

This paper is an explanatory one that utilised the experiences of intellectuals who have considerable research interest in the area of governance and development as it affect Nigeria social political development. A robust discussion and interrogative assessment were made to determine the nature of relationship of the systems of governance and identifiable constraints to sustainable development. This is in addition to analysis of literature and personal observations by the writer on the relationship between the two institutions.

2. Conceptual Analysis

Traditional institution refers to the indigenous instruments by which various communities organised themselves and managed their affairs long before the advent of British colonial rule (Dorward, 1969). This is to say that traditional institution represents the system of politics and leadership operated by various ethnic groups before and even after the British authorities came to implement the indirect rule policy that gradually composed the various

units into one entity and into modern democratic society. The traditional institutions provide the premise upon which the indirect rule system thrived. This is largely due to the submissiveness of the people to their rulers in some parts of Nigeria. The indigenous government was considered a platform to orchestrate the imperialist agenda in view of the smooth command structure and powers of the rulers. The British colonial authority beckoned on the traditional office holders to assist in colonial administration because they believed that the best avenue for reaching the various colonial subjects was through the traditional rulers who enjoy unalloyed respects from their subjects.

Furthermore, the traditional institution can be seen as the entire traditional framework put in place for the day to day running of the affairs of the various indigenous communities. These various structures were at their peaks in the pre-colonial era of Nigeria but gradually lost substantial direct influence to the imperialist (Bamitale, 2016)

What then is Traditional Authority? Tradition is meaningless without the authority of local chiefs. It is the traditional authority that gives meaning to tradition. Traditional authorities contain the features of leadership structures and positions of authority and support; they are recognized in terms of customary law and sometimes by statue, and part of the societal organization of customary society, which observes a customary way of living and its laws (Bendel 1979). For the traditional leadership therefore, is the group referred to as traditional leaders or "tribal" leaders/rulers. They are individuals occupying communal political leadership positions sanctified by cultural values, and enjoying the legitimacy of particular communities to direct their affairs. Their basis for legitimacy is the tradition, which includes a whole range of inherited culture and way of life, a people's history, moral and social values and the traditional institutions, which survive to serve those values. Traditional ruler on the other hand is seen as ..

> *the head of an ethnic group or clan who is the holder of the highest primary executive authority in an indigenous polity, or who has been appointed to the positioning in accordance with the custom and tradition of the area concerned by the instruments or order of the state government and whose title is recognised as a traditional ruler title by the government of the state*(Ola and Tonwe, 2009: 174)

The running of the various traditional administrations of the different ethnic groups across the country was in the hands of the traditional rulers. The traditional rulers are therefore the divinely ordained individuals chosen by their people to administer the affairs of their respective domains in accordance to their customs and traditions. The traditional rulers are the paramount authority or natural ruler in any given community (Skinner, 1968). They provide a system of administration from which law and order came and provided a stable system of governance. Various ethnic groups have varied ways of selecting their rulers. For instance, in the Yoruba land of South western Nigeria, the Oba is appointed after the due process had been followed, with the choice of the Oba confirmed by the Ifa oracle. The confirmed Oba is expected to be a living repository of the history, culture and tradition of the throne, people and race; including their relationship with neighbours.

3. Features of Traditional Institution

The characteristics of the traditional ruler/ institution include:

    i.   Use of Force
    ii.   Separation of power/Checks and balances (in some parts of Nigeria)
    iii.   Prodigality
    iv.   Monopoly of power
    v.   Absolute Power
    vi.   Gender discrimination
    vii.   Unity of belief

Use of Force

The use of able young men for personal security guards has become paramount for every one vested with one form of power or the other. This is one of the fragmentations of the Nigeria traditional institution inherited by the leaders in modern democratic governance, it is a trend one hardly notices in a developed democracy. This is well portrayed in the sense that just like the traditional rulers especially in the Yoruba land where they are called "esho",

the modern democratically elected leaders flood themselves around with security agents and body guards around probably because they feel insecure or as a display of power and wealth targeted towards intimidating oppositions.

Separation of Power/Check and Balances

Even though separation of power universally forms part of the basic features of democracy, the doctrine was also eminent in some traditional institutions like in the Benin kingdom and old oyo empire where absolute power was not allowed to be vested in an individual (oba), hence the sharing of power to the Oyo-mesi and the Ogboni cult. This has helped to plant such a mindset against absoluteness of power in an individual.

Prodigality

It is so clear that the Nigerian politicians who are elected by their people for good governance most times subvert the good will to serve personal interest. This is evidenced by the incessant report of public treasury looting and corruption for personal comfort.

In the traditional institution, mechanisms were noticeably not put in place to really check rulers on their spending habit and that is why only those in the reach of power that own the finest houses and best of properties in the society, the same trend or even worse is found among the modern Nigerian politicians, they spend flashily, squander and save excessively even in foreign banks probably saving for an unknown posterity while the masses can barely survive the present.

Monopoly of power

Monopoly of power was dominant in the various traditional institutions. This is because power is often made hereditary, power is ascribed to particular clan, or family and this trend is playing out in the democratisation enterprise in Nigeria as they hold tight to power and then pass to their children as in the case of the Sarakis' family of Kwara state or to a close affiliate as in the case of Bola Tinubu and Babatunde Fashola of Lagos state and Ibrahim Idris and Captain Idris Wada of Kogi State.

Absolute power

Traditionally, in some societies power is vested on one person. Even though the constitution does not allow absolute power, certain politicians still pose as though they have been vested with all the powers of the (judiciary, legislature, and executive). This is made glaring in the mode of interference beyond their jurisdiction. In reality, the system of separation of powers remains a tantalising mirage, the more you look the less you see it functionally operational. The executive most times manipulate and make other arms of government subservient to them.

Gender discrimination

The traditional African societies give women no leadership consideration or decision making powers. Women are regarded as mere tools for the satisfaction and comforts of men. Leadership responsibility is traditionally a birth right of the men only. This belief still finds prominence in many African societies despite the campaign against gender discrimination. Except in few African states that recently produced female presidents, almost all African states were governed by men. In fact, the local politics is worst, since inception, Nigerian has never produced a female leadership at federal, state or at the parliament except once through the instrumentality of the executive. This trend no doubt one the legacies of the traditional institutions.

Cultural Socialisation of Belief

In the various traditional institutions, regard is given to one deity or the other to confirm choices and decisions to be taken. This same trend is eminent among the modern politicians as over 90% of them endeavour to consult a supreme power or the other Pastors, Imams, among others as a backup for their aspirations and career. Everyone

in this part of the globe directly affiliates with one religion or the other which brings thin lines between politics and religion unlike in some developed countries where religion has no direct influence on politics. Instances of politicians consulting deities for success in political race and fortunes are eminent. A serving governor was dethroned by his associate for disregarding an oath he undertook in a shrine. Many observers argue strongly that most of the ritual killings are perpetrated by politicians.

Roles of Traditional Institutions in the Contemporary Democratic Governance

An African ruler is not to his people merely a person who can enforce his will on them. He is the axis of their political relations, the symbol of their unity and exclusiveness and the embodiment of their essential values. Credentials are mystical and are derived from antiquity.

The antiquated or ancestral and mystical origins of traditional rulers provided the grounds for legitimacy. This legitimacy is, for example, clearly lacking in most new states, especially in states with military regimes and many democracies in African states. Moreover, the community was a potent source of power of the traditional rulers and the notion of popular sovereignty was practised in so many ways. There was democratic decision-making process which involved virtually all adults at various levels. At the village level, these were the fabled "under tree" assemblies where divergent views were expressed and decisions finally taken based on the majority views. This was the case of the eastern Nigeria Igbo nation where democracy and egalitarianism characterised the form of governance. Again, in other regions, larger political systems, centralized and decentralized alike, show the apparatus of decision-making being decentralized at various levels (Osaghae, 1988:6). A typical Yoruba Oba is not an autocrat, he rules generally with the advice and counsel of his chiefs. The Ifa oracle, Ogbonicult which could be likened to the Roman senate, palace women and war chiefs all wielded power especially in critical matters of war and peace. The king as the head of his council serves as the court of first instance and also as the last court of appeal for his kingdom. It is rare to find in British Colonial Africa any instance in which the indigenous form of rule, previously in force could be described as autocratic, and there are not many cases which it could be described as authoritarian (Edmund, 1991).

The point of emphasis here is that it is bad history or bad civics to claim that African traditional system of governance was anti-democracy or autocratic, rather, the system did not support or encourage despotic regime. Whatever despotism that existed might have been aberrations.

Therefore, to base the call for eradication of the institution of traditional rulership on this premise is not sustainable. As a matter of fact Nigeria's flirting with the so-called modern political structure either under the civilians or military has not shown that these regimes are less corrupt or even more democratic than the traditional system.

Furthermore, the allegation that the traditional rulers are now culturally useless might be seen as a result of shallow reflections on what culture is. Since the time of Edward Taylor, culture has been described as that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, costume and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society. In a broad sense, culture refers to the whole range of human activities which are learned and not instinctive, and which are transmitted from generation to generation through various learning processes (Salami, 2004).

With a very risky exception of the family, there is no other institution that can accomplish this socializing role of culture in the society as the institution of traditional governance. African culture is an enduring one and as such, modernization, which brought about our exposure to colonial rule, has really not eaten deep into our cultural values as imagined by the so-called radicals or modernists. For example, it has been argued that the few decades of European rule in Africa were just a brief interlude when examined against the millennia of Africa's history. The European colonization might be seen as a major turning point in Africa's destiny, inaugurating changes which were fundamental and irreversible. However, its importance might have been exaggerated -because the impact of the colonial rule on African culture is shallow. Mazrui and Tidy (1984) claim that "the impact is shallow because African culture is deep... and also due to its own contradictory unevenness'. In the face of the contradiction, the impact of the West may now turn out to be more short-lived than many expected.

Either African culture may reclaim its own or help Africa retreat to its ancestral authenticity, or Africa may struggle to find a third way. At present, the scenario of the third way is more plausible than the scenario of Africa's retreat to its ancestry, but neither possibility can be ruled out. In any case, whichever way Africa is taking towards cultural emancipation in Eurocentric world culture, the role of traditional rulers cannot be overemphasized.

A major problem which the adherents of the abolitionist school have is the confusion of modernization with westernisation in their bid for decolonization. We share Mazrui's claim that re-traditionalisation of African culture can in fact take modernizing forms, especially if it becomes an aspect of decolonising the neo -colonial African States. Mazrui emphasized that

Retraditionalisation does not mean returning Africa to what it was before the Europeans came. In hard assessment, it would be suicidal for Africa to attempt such a backward leap. But a move towards renewed respect (or indigenous way and the conquest of cultural self-contempt may be the minimal conditions for cultural decolonization in Africa (Mazrui and Tidy, 1984:298-299).

The majority of those who call for the abolition of the institution of traditional rulers were westernized elites who have been culturally alienated and have fallen victims of nee-colonialism. These people needed to be "born again" by returning to their sources. These culturally alienated elites must repossess the culture of the villages in order to achieve identification with the masses, understand their needs and problems and mobilize them for social and economic development. No doubt there is a need for cultural reappraisal in Africa, but this we can begin in a microcosmic form by a reassessment of the institution of traditional rulers instead of calling its abolition.

Traditional Rulers and the Fourth Republic

An attempt has been made to reappraise the cultural values of the traditional rulers with a focus on the Yoruba Obas. We have made the point that, contrary to the beliefs of the abolitionists, the traditional rulers who are a vital link between Africa's past and present play important roles in the socio political set-up of their various communities. Before now, there had been varying degree of responsibility given to the traditional rulers. For example, the 1979 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (Schedule Three, Part II, Section B) provided for a Council of Chiefs in each state with powers to advise on customary law or cultural affairs, inter communal relations, chieftaincy matters and the maintenance of public order within the state. The traditional rulers are very important in dealing with all matters relevant to governance at the grass root level. This importance was recognised by the Political Bureau which recommended that their role should be confined to the local government areas where they have relevance. The Federal government accepted the recommendation.

The constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1989, provided for the establishment of the Traditional Council whose functions, among others, include advising the local government council concerned on proposed development plans and in collecting of taxes as may be required, advising on religious matters where appropriate and promoting and advising on ails and culture. The advice of traditional rulers becomes very important especially now that the politics of religion is taking a very dangerous dimension. Since the 1989 constitution is an outgrowth of the Constituent Assembly's deliberations, one can say that the Constitutional provisions on traditional rulers represent the Assembly's position. This fourth republic in Nigeria could still benefit greatly from the traditional rulers if serious considerations are given the following suggestions.

These rulers are in very good positions to serve as catalysts of growth at the grass root level, a great majority (about 70%) Nigerians live in rural areas. Given the love and respect which they command among their people, agricultural development programmes introduced through them are likely to gain higher acceptance. At least 60% of the total Nigerian population depends on agriculture to eke out a living. In fact, kings still play prominent roles in the settlement of land disputes, the Land Use Decree (1978) notwithstanding. A study by Atte(19S6) in Okun area of Kwara State showed that the Obas are indispensable in the area of land administration, land in most rural areas of Yorubaland is tied to a complex of interrelated spiritual, social and cultural habits which cannot be broken easily by a single proclamation or act. In spite of the Land Use Decree (1978), the traditional land tenure system has continued to prevail in most rural areas and the Obas' court is the repository of knowledge about the whole

domain. The Oba and his chroniclers know the exact boundaries of linage land and who owns what. Whenever land is required for public use, the Oba in council may compulsorily acquire an area of land and compensation may be paid for crops, economic trees and other structures on the piece of land. The traditional rulers regulate the system of social control over land.

Even though the traditional ruler may not have direct land rights, he is the head of the spiritual organization which guide attitudes to land. He is the priest of that spiritual entity called 'land' and therefore had tremendous influence on its exploitation (Atte, 1986).

The actions or inaction of traditional rulers meant a lot in stopping or fuelling various communal strife, especially in the oil producing Niger Delta Areas and other volatile communities in Nigeria.

Furthermore, if not for the timely intervention of the Sultan of Sokoto, Alhaji Maccido, and some notable northern Emirs, the Expanded Programme on Immunization (EPI) in northern Nigeria could have witnessed a total collapse in 2004. Health officers can therefore harness the support of traditional rulers to facilitate successful health care delivery services. Involving them is educative since it enables everybody concerned to get the real experience of thinking, discussing, deciding and implementing their own decisions which invariably may lead to rediscovery on the part of self and the community: Since organized community effort is very crucial to public health, efforts and every attempt should be made to solicit for support and cooperation of traditional leaders because of their tremendous influence in organising people (Salami, 2016).

In a similar view, traditional rulers could be very useful in the area of social mobilisation. In actual fact, during the past few years, they have been used in various campaigns of the government programmes such as the Universal Basic Education (UBE), the Operation Feed the Nation (OFN), War Against Indiscipline (WAI) and even currently in the programme of the National Orientation Agency (NOA). Traditional rulers like the Ooni of Ife, the Oba of Benin, Emir of Ilorin, among others, are looked upon by their subjects as embodiment of their respective cultures, traditions and social values and they definitely can wield immense influence in the area of social mobilisation. The 1989 Constitution (Promulgation decree) provides that the traditional council shall assist in the mobilisation of human and material resources towards self-reliance, community development and welfare within the area. This complements directly, the purpose for which NOA has been set-up. And, in fact, all successive Nigerian governments (both military and civilian) had used traditional rulers either as agents of political socialisation or as tools for legitimisation of their existence and their hold on power. Ibrahim Babangida's regime was no exception considering the roles played by the traditional rulers in resolving the May 1978 (anti-government) students' crisis. In October 1989, Babangida demonstrated a rare respect for the office of traditional rulers when he released from detention the popular Lagos Lawyer, Gani Fawehinmi to the Ooni of Ife. Reacting to his release, Gani Fawehinmi said the "traditional rulers could not be divorced from the socio-political and cultural activities of the society" (Daily Sketch (1990). Ibadan, Nigeria). While it could be argued that traditional rulers have sometime in the past been objects or agents of political manipulation or election rigging, it is indisputable that traditional rulers have been part and parcel of the political process and if the political process has led to intense corruption, nepotism and general political intolerance on the part of the political parties which either controlled the centre or the regions or both, traditional rulers could not be exempted from this general malaise -just like neither the military nor the academic could be exempted from the societal decay. Efforts to bring about a general improvement in the society will therefore necessarily include the traditional rulers. Also, we ask the traditional rulers to stay away from partisan politics and yet they are cuddled to boost the electoral fortunes of the politicians. Some intending politicians spend fortunes to acquire or purchase chieftaincy titles which will hopefully increase their political support. Even the westernized educated elites will engage the services of traditional rulers to settle private scores or land disputes in their villages or home towns, only to get back to the cities to call for the heads of these benefactors. If the governments and the elites solicit the support of traditional rulers as occasions demand, it is hypocrisy nearing self-deceit or outright dishonesty to say that they (traditional rulers) will not be relevant in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. Whatever one thinks about the traditional rulers, many still enjoy the support of their subjects. The reaction of Kano people in 1982 when the government threatened to remove the Sarkin Kano can be remembered. There was also another episode in Gongola in 1982 when the government attempted to create many chiefs of equal status in an attempt to dilute the influence of the Lamido. The community of Adamawa, particularly

Yola, reacted violently. Similarly, it is inconceivable that any government, civilian or military, will toy with the prominent position of the Sultan of Sokoto who is both a cultural and religious head of the Sokoto Emirate.

Contrary to the allegation that traditional rulers are economic parasites on the society, they are actually in positions to enhance the economic progress of their domains because of the enormous personal wealth they control. Apart from direct personal investments, these Obas can serve as loan guarantors for small holder farmers in their domain because they have an in-depth knowledge of the people and they can use traditional sanctions in loan recovery. This will particularly complement the Federal Government's current effort at boosting the activities of the Agricultural Credit Corporation and the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategies (NEEDS). This way, traditional rulers can be economic boosters for their communities and they can effectively serve good purpose in rural development. Also, efforts at combating the wave of armed robbery in the country could be more rewarding if traditional rulers are made chairmen of their local community security committees.

Finally and more importantly, we share Osaghae's (1988) thought that in the conception and resolution of the central political problem of power, there is a lot to learn from traditional thought. Power, traditionally, was not personalized; the ruler did not rule or enforce his personal will. Power was conceived in sacred terms and could only be held in trust. Today, the conception of political power is directly opposed to this. Leaders personalize power, based on force and violence. Even where elections are held, there is no unifying bond between the political rulers and the ruled. Thus, leaders are not seen as symbols of unity and integrity and the notion of collective good as the first requirement of power barely exists. This anomalous conception of power contributes significantly to political instability and the legitimacy crisis for which African states have become notorious. The traditional emphasis on leader-led unity of purpose has a lot to offer in the resolution of these problems.

It is important to consider some of the ethnic groups that had fascinating political frame work and strong institutions of governance in Nigeria

Hausa/Fulani Political Administration System

The pattern of the administration was based on the centralised emirate system. The paramount authority was the emir who governed with the instrument of Islamic Shari'a jurisprudence. The emirate is a standardised structure with a clear command system. The Emir was assisted in his administration by a number of subordinate office holders which include; Galadima (who administers the capital), the waziri (head of officials), the Madawaki (commander of army), and Hakimi (district head) among others. The Emir court was the highest legal instrument throughout the emirate.

Functions of an Emir
       i.   He appoints his officials
       ii.   He performs ceremonial functions
       iii.   He is the spiritual head of the emirate
       iv.   He made laws and maintain order
       v.   He imposes and collect taxes

From the command structure enshrined in the emirate system, the emir enjoys absolute powers and influence over his subject. It is a submissive loyalty drawn from the cultural belief tie to the Islamic faith.

The Igbo Traditional Political System

The Igbo had a decentralized system of government. The executive, legislature, and judiciary power were vested in the Oha- na eze, the council of elders, the ofo title holders, the family, the ozor title holders and Age grades (Okafor, 2000). The igbo society and administrative system was characterised by direct democracy, Republic and decentralization of power.

The Benin society belongs to the chiefly societies. The traditional Benin political institutions were arranged hierarchically with the Oba (king) at the apex. "Before the coming of the British colonial administration, the town

Benin (ubini) was the key political unit upon which government rested in all Benin kingdom Atanda (1980). Every town, village or hamlet was under a responsible leader called King (Oba) (Okafor, 1972). This arrangement allowed the functioning of the central administration which gave room to independent governments in each kingdom. The central government of the kingdom was based at the capital while those of the subordinate towns and villages served as local government units.

What the hierarchical nature of government signified was that the Oba cannot rule alone but must govern only with the assistance and support of his Council of Chiefs (Ekhaemwen). The Oyo Empire was an example where the Alaafin was assisted by a Council - the Oyomesi consisting of between six or seven chiefs with the Bashorun as Chairman. The Oba could not be autocratic because the principle of checks and balances was strictly adhered to in various kingdoms and empires so as to curb the excesses of traditional rulers. According to Adewumi (1985), any tyrannical Oba was quickly brought to book by well-established indigenous methods of direct or indirect control". For example, senior chiefs could tell the Oba the desire of the people. They could depose him or ask him to go into voluntary exile or even insist on his committing suicide. Therefore, any Oba who treated the advice of his chiefs with levity did so at his own risk or peril. Using Oyo as a case study, the council, through their Chairman, the Bashorun, could proclaim the rejection of the Alaafin and could even advise him to commit suicide by presenting to him an empty calabash. However, it was observed that the Council of Chiefs alone could not depose the Oba without the tacit consent and approval of the secret cult called the Ogboni. Buttressing this point further, Shaw (1969) pointed out that, "even though the empty calabash was presented to the Oba by the council of chiefs, it was also liable to the approval of the Ogboni before the Oba could be asked to commit suicide". From the above, one can rightly conclude that the traditional political institutions imbibed some democratic principles where certain decisions are meant for ratification by some other higher authorities.

In the judicial realm, the Oba, assisted by the Council of Chiefs, administered justice, the Oba could impose judgement on all types of cases including banishment and outright execution. The head of each subordinate town, village or hamlet was responsible to the Oba at the centre. Administration in these places was often headed by 'Enogie'. In the judiciary sphere, the Enogie could tackle certain matters, which could still be subject to the final approval of the central government (the Oba). The Enogie paid annual homage to the Oba and also supplied the Oba with a definite number of warriors for the Oba's army.

Another significant characteristic of the traditional political institutions is the method of choosing their leaders. Traditionally, the founder of a village was usually appointed as the leader or the head of the village, with a member of the family, either the son or the brother or a cousin succeeding in perpetuity (Johnson 1976). However, where a group of people decided to settle in a particular place, the selection of the village leader (Enogie) was usually through those who emanated from the Royal Family. Each Royal family in Benin traces its descent to the line of Oranmiyan the father of Eweka1. Because of this, it is discovered that not anyone can become an Oba except those from the ruling houses; hence the office of Obaship is not rotational but hereditary. A council of seven kingmakers (Uzama N 'Ihinron) was responsible for grooming the heir apparent (Edaiken). The installation of an Oba was always marked by traditional ceremonies and rituals and the Oba was said to be sacred. In Benin, the Oba is the next person to the "Osanobua," that is, the Supreme Being-God. In the past, the Oba was rarely seen in the public. After installation, all the property (Aro- Enikao) of the former Oba would be inherited by the newly-installed Oba because such property belongs to the 'throne' and not an individual.

The line of emphasis throughout this analysis is in four basic areas of concern. First is the emergence of the ruler which as argued above is basically through the founder or first settler of a particular community often referred to as the ancestors. Except for the emirate system which emerged through Islamic revolution that ousted the then Hausa kings and replaced them with Fulani emirs, same method of emergence applied to virtually other kingdoms in Nigeria. Secondly, the system of governance which seems authoritative in nature with little variations in form of checks and balances appeared to be a common amongst the institutions. Thirdly, legitimacy and or source of power, the traditional institutions draw their legitimacy from the custom and cultural heritage of the community. Since the institution remains the recognised custodian of the traditional values and custom of the people, it therefore enjoys the privilege that accompanied such burden. The last is the supremacy of the ruler's decision and

the tenure of office. There is no specified time limit for any traditional ruler till he dies and be succeeded by his son or member of the ruling class (Osaghae, 1988).

Democracy

Democracy literally means "rule by the .people. Democracy is a political form of government in which governing power is derived from the people, either by direct referendum (direct democracy) or by means of elected representatives of the people (indirect democracy). This is why the framers of the constitution insisted that an indirect democracy approach to government would be the best methodology in creating a new nation. To ensure that the will of all the people would be carried out and that the minority would still maintain their basic rights, a system of "check and balance" was established and the right to free speech and assembly insure through the constitution (Bamitale, 2016).

Democracy is built on the citizens, the freedom of these citizens to associate with one another for the realization of their ideals and the defence and promotion of their interests; and the freedom of these citizens to choose between the different political platforms of various political parties and candidates, and to see the actualization of the platforms they have voted for if their choices win.

Features of Democracy

a. Democracy is a form of government where power and civil responsibility are exercised by adult citizens, either directly or through freely elected representatives through the vote (Embassy, 2008).
b. It is based on ensuring the common welfare and respecting individual rights. For this reason, democracy usually disagrees with any form of centralized power and seeks to confer power at different levels, understanding that each of these levels must be receptive and accessible to the people.
c. The democratic model understands that one of its primary functions is to protect and promote human rights, freedom of expression and religion and access to equal protection of civil rights according to local law.
d. Within democracy, citizens should be able to organize and participate actively in political, economic and cultural decisions related to the community.
e. Democracies must periodically carry out free election processes, open for citizens to exercise their right to vote. Likewise, it must offer the possibility to any citizen to be elected by popular vote.
f. Citizens within democracy have the right and duty to participate in the political system which, in turn, was created to protect their rights and freedom.
g. Democratic societies are committed to the values of tolerance, cooperation and commitment. According to Mahatma Gandhi, intolerance is itself a form of violence and an obstacle to the growth of a true democratic spirit.

Majorities and Minorities

All democracies can be defined as systems in which citizens can make political decisions freely based on the will of the majorities. This means that democracy is characterized by decisions taken by the majority of individuals; however, it is important to clarify that the needs and rights of minorities must always be taken into account. Every time a law is built and passed, democracy must ensure that the interests of both majorities and minorities are balanced.

If a legitimate decision is made by the majority of individuals, but that decision adversely affects the fundamental rights of the minority of individuals, democratic principles dictate that that decision must be adjusted to reflect that which is just and equitable for all citizens. In this way, democracy ensures that each individual is represented at any level of democracy. This principle of decision-making by election of majorities and respect for the rights of minorities must govern all democratic models in history, regardless of culture, population or economy (Turner, 2017).

Principle of protection

A true democracy promotes the protection of human rights and citizens' rights according to local legislation, political agreements and the constitution. These rights include freedom of expression and religion, equal access to the protection of the law, the right to privacy without interference by the government and the right to be treated justly as required by law. In some countries, democracy ensures the right to education, an effective health system and freedom of the press. It also punishes discrimination based on sexual orientation or physical limitation.

On the other hand, democracy must guarantee that there is no centralization of power in one place. In this way, power is distributed at different levels and is exercised by different institutions locally. These different sectors of the government have particular processes that they must fulfil and can be audited and punished if they are not doing their duty (Quigley, 2017). The positions of government representatives in different instances and levels should be exercised for limited periods of time. In this way citizens have the opportunity to elect new representatives from time to time. Democracy, in this sense, seeks to give the possibility to any citizen to be elected by popular vote to hold a government office and seeks to avoid that power is always located in a single individual.

Theoretical Foundation

Keeping in mind the seemingly setbacks of the traditional institutions and the continual squabbles about their relevance today, Nigeria traditional institutions have the potentials to facilitate democratic transformation and socio-economic development. To explain this potential, attention is paid on the dynamics of both the leadership and values of traditional institutions.

Traditional Authorities

Understanding the dynamics of traditional authorities entails distinguishing between the social position of chiefs in the centralized political systems and that of elders in the decentralized systems. With respect to chiefs, their role in fostering democratic governance and socio-economic development largely depends on a number of factors, including the nature of the state; the level of democratic awareness of the population, which is influenced by the nature of traditional political values and level of education; the mechanisms of accountability of the chieftaincy system; and the administrative effectiveness of the sitting chief. (ECA, 2004). This paper therefore adopts the hypothesis utilised by ECA for a similar study on Africa continent generally in 2004.

The hypothesis is expressed as follows: $Y = f (Sn, Pa, Ca, Ce)$, where Y stands for the potential role of traditional authorities in promoting socio-economic development and democratic governance, Sn represents the nature of the state, Pa represents political awareness of the population, Ca represents the mechanisms of accountability to the community of the chieftaincy system, and Ce represents the administrative effectiveness of the chief. It is generally agreed that, since the loss of independence by Nigeria societies and the formation of the colonial State, chiefs have essentially operated between two political and social forces. On the one hand, the State often attempts either to co-opt chiefs or to abolish their authority altogether, especially if they fail to comply with its demands and directives; on the other hand, communities expect their chiefs to be custodians of their collective interests. Chiefs, like most other political leaders, can be expected to have conflicting tendencies; either to advance self-interest at the expense of community interests, or to curb their self-interest in order to promote community interests. The pursuit of either tendency is, however, constrained by the demands that the State and their communities place upon them. Chiefs cannot ignore the demands of the State, as they retain their position at the State's pleasure and often they depend on the State for resources. This dependence compels them to perform tasks that link the State with rural communities. At the same time, chiefs have to provide some protection for the interests of their communities in order to maintain the legitimacy of their leadership. The claim by Uche, (nd) that a chief commits political suicide if he fails to perform what his/her community expects is largely true since a chief cannot stay in power for long without commanding legitimacy within the community. Being under pressure from the two sides, the most basic self-interest of chiefs is likely to revolve around the preservation of their position, which is predicated largely upon their effectiveness in negotiating between the demands of their communities and those of the State. These two sets of interests may often conflict with each other. In other words, chiefs are motivated to maintain legitimacy through

the allegiance of their communities, which requires responding positively to community demands, and by securing recognition by the State, which also requires responding positively to the State's demands. Despite the community's heterogeneity, its demands are likely to revolve primarily around issues of development and democratic governance (Bamitale.2016). The level of political awareness and level of education of the community can also be expected to affect the ability of the community to articulate its demands and exert pressure on chiefs. The nature of the demands of the State, on the other hand, varies with the nature of the State. In a democratic environment where the population exercises control over the activities of the State, the demands that the latter places upon chiefs can be expected to coincide largely with those of the communities. A democratic system can also be expected to allow chiefs the freedom to choose political positions without reprisals from the State. Under these conditions, it is unlikely that the administrative role of chiefs would deviate significantly from the harmonious demands of the State and the community. In this era of democratization, in which Nigeria societies are engaged in an intensive struggle for popular political participation, chiefs who lag behind a progressive state in advancing the interests of local communities expose themselves to extinction. The people can easily vote with their feet by abandoning chieftaincy and embracing the institutions of the State. The State can also easily bypass or dismiss chiefs who lose legitimacy. Under such conditions, self-preservation is likely to force chiefs to act as agents for the advancement of local interest, which in turn will coincide with the promotion of development and democratic governance. In the process, however, the chieftaincy systems, and especially those with weak mechanisms of accountability, are likely to be transformed. In other words, under a democratic State, chiefs have to contribute to the empowerment of their communities in order to sustain their legitimacy and the more empowered rural communities become, the more likely traditional authorities are pushed to become agents of development and democratic governance. A democratic State can also be expected to facilitate reforming and integrating traditional institutions into the modern governance structures. In a democratic political system therefore, we can expect to have all three entities, namely the State (S), chiefs (C), and the population (P) pushing towards a democratic system of governance and development, as depicted in the simplified model below:

   a.   (Despotism) S ──►C──►P──►(Democracy & Development)

In a situation where the functionaries of the State are despotic and self-serving, the demands of the State and those of the population can be expected to be in conflict, or to move in opposite directions as the second and third models depict. Reconciling the conflicting demands of the State and those of the community becomes difficult for chiefs when the State is undemocratic. They cannot ignore the State, as they serve at its pleasure. Often they are also corrupted by the rewards they obtain from political leaders in return for their support to such leaders. Still, even corrupt chiefs cannot completely ignore the demands of their communities without considering the risk of completely losing their legitimacy which would be costly for them because without the allegiance of their communities and their ability to maintain some link between the State and the community, their value to the State is also likely to disappear. Under these conditions, chiefs would face two options. One option is for them to meet the demands of the State and manipulate or ignore those of the community, as depicted in the second model. However, this strategy is likely to be unsustainable, especially in cases where the mechanisms of accountability and the political awareness of the community are fairly developed. The price for neglecting the interests of the community is that chiefs lose legitimacy and eventually their relevance to the state.

   b.   (Despotism)◄──S ◄──C P ──►(Democracy & Development)

The second and perhaps more likely option is for chiefs to attempt to meet some of the demands on each side (depicted by arrows pointing in different directions in model C so that they do not endanger their social position. In the process of taking a middle-of the-road position, chiefs provide some refuge to their communities thus mitigating the impact of the despotic State. Such a role, of course, requires effectiveness on the part of the sitting chief.

   c.   (Despotism) ◄───S ? C ? P──►(Democracy & Development)

Under a tyrannical State, the ability of chiefs to protect the well-being of their communities is likely to be limited, especially in the more centralized chieftaincy systems with less stringent mechanisms of accountability. The basis

for integrating traditional institutions with the modern governance system with a view to attaining better governance would also be largely absent. However, it is likely that the interests of the community would be better served under chiefs than without them, under a self-serving despotic State, Uche(nd)

Convergence of Traditional Political Values with Modern Democratic Governance

The nature of their underlying political values is another factor that gives traditional institutions the potential to contribute to Nigeria's democratization process. It is likely that the more traditional political values converge with democratic principles in their dispensation, the greater would be their potential to contribute to democratic transformation of the state. It is always risky to generalize about Nigeria traditional institutions, given their diversity. Nevertheless, the most common political values and practices in the decentralized political systems include:

      a. Decentralization of power;
      b. Direct participation in decision-making;
      c. Resolution of conflicts by narrowing differences;
      d. Respect for dissent and protection of minority views and interests by requiring consensus on decisions;
      e. Narrowing the gap between the rulers and the ruled through direct participation of all adult males in making and in enforcing rules;
      f. Shortening the term of service of office holders; and
      g. Equitable access to land.

These values clearly contradict claims that the political culture tends to be vertically organized in rural Nigeria societies (Amadi, 2007). Such practices are also not limited to decentralized systems. Most of these values are widely held at the grassroots level in most chieftaincy systems. As a result, they are Nigeria political values rather than political values limited to a specific type of a political system. Undoubtedly, traditional Nigeria political values have limitations that necessitate reforms, particularly in the area of gender relations, as indicated in the first section of the paper. This limitation notwithstanding, there is little doubt that Nigeria political 19 values, especially those of the consensual systems, converge with modern democratic political systems, which are crafted to allow the general population to exercise control over decision making on issues of public concern (Beetham, 1992). The identified traits of such political values and practices clearly enable local communities to control decision-making in so far as this affects their collective interests. However, perhaps because their development was blocked by the combined effects of Africa's colonial experience and subsequent neglect by the post-colonial State, traditional Nigeria values and their conflict-resolution mechanisms remained largely confined to the local level. As a result, they operate the basis of direct participation rather than on a representative basis, and decisions are made on a consensual rather than on a majority basis. Both of these arrangements reduce the need for electoral contests. In other words, Nigerian political values converge with the essential characteristics of modern democracy. The mechanism by which Nigerian democratic values are exercised, however, vary significantly from those of the modern democratic system of liberal democracy. Some of the mechanisms by which Nigeria traditional democratic values are practiced are inapplicable at the state level in their present form. It would, for instance, be impractical to have direct participation of the population in decision-making beyond the village or local level. It would also be hard to imagine all state-level decisions being made on a consensus basis. Some of the modern mechanisms of democracy are, therefore, indispensable for contemporary Nigeria. However, the imported mechanisms were largely developed in post-industrial and post-state- building (nation-building) conditions. As a result, some aspects of these imported mechanisms are inconsistent with preindustrial and pre-state-building realities of Nigeria. The majority-based electoral systems, for example, are unlikely to resolve conflict resulting from disagreements over the terms of incorporating various ethnic entities into the State. Nigerian social condition, therefore, requires that some mechanisms of traditional institutions are applied to complement the modern mechanisms of democracy in dealing with the critical problems that cannot effectively be addressed through the latter alone. Once state-building and transformation of the peasantry are achieved, the traditional mechanisms are likely to converge more fully with the mechanisms of modern democracy. In other words, the more advanced state-building becomes, and the further Nigeria state moves away from their present pre-industrial mode of production, the more likely it is that their traditional mechanisms of democratic values would also evolve closer to the mechanisms of modern democracy. Traditional authority is also likely to be transformed in tandem with the transformation of the

traditional mechanisms. We now examine some areas where the application of the traditional mechanisms would make a significant contribution to Nigeria's socio-economic transformation.

Impacts of the Traditional Institution on the Nigerian Democracy

The traditional rulers, from the foregoing discussion, enjoyed substantial amount of control and influence over their followership. This is largely due to the structure and belief system that define traditional societies. The unwritten laws which are believe to be from the "above" conferred armada of control and powers for the rulers to rule through the dictate of unseen deity and religious dictates. The fact that the governance system is more of control, the rulers inadvertently   became "demigods" with absolute powers to dispense. This is why the administration system is better characterised by the use of force, prodigality of the ruling class, monopolised administrative powers, unquestionable exercise of powers (absolute power), gender discrimination and unity of religious belief among others (kanu, 2015).

Considering the nature and character of this traditional institution, and given the fact that it still exist side by side the modern system of governance that promote participation and freedom, social change becomes very slow. This is because of the social overlap between the tradition and modern governance philosophies. The continuous and seemingly unending existence of these philosophical strange bed fellows, a frontier of yet another cornucopia of challenges emerged to inhibit sustainable social, economic and political progress. The impact of this could be viewed in the areas of; a Rent seeking behaviour of political leader who represent the state similar to what was obtainable in traditional governance (Ajid, 1996). Secondly, a clear economic blueprint for national growth and development is lacking since the old order personalise common wealth to remain economic supremacy of the stronger above all. It is difficult therefore for the leaders today to democratise economic opportunities for national growth through a focused public policies and programme. This is because total disconnection from the old order of personal enrichment appears somehow impossible. Thirdly, the judicial institution remains perpetually weak as it operational existence is often manipulated by the executive to subvert justice in favour of the state. The higher the status of an individual the more immune he becomes to justice administration in Nigeria. Cases of corruption involving office holders and high profile politicians and elites can remain for decays in courts without being dispensed off. This scenario has even culminated into political socialisation of corruption where judicial conviction against a suspected corrupt individual is termed political witch hunt and or sectional or religious bias. Surprisingly, a case of common theft, misdemeanour involving low profile citizen is given speedy hearing leading to a conviction without any of these ethnic colourations. Nigeria today hardly can it survive on clear and purposeful political direction that hold a prosperous social and economic agenda for the nation. Political affiliation and agenda can appear nationalistic but the practice and attitudes of politicians is no less than a human tragedy because of regional jingoism, ethnic chauvinism and religious bigottory that are confrontational to national consensus and integration. This is what combines to describe the political movements in Nigeria. Fourthly, is the case of ethnic undertone of electoral process and contests. Electoral exercises and engagements in Nigeria have a record of violence and destruction among opposing groups in event where of one of the political parties loses (Antony, 2008). Conceding defeats is often difficult because of sharp sectional divides and some obvious social factors that define us. Fifthly, Political leaders mostly personalise public property and monopolise governance process as seen in the traditional governance. This provides premise for the promotion of subservient loyalty to the leaders who allocate economic values and patronage to his loyalists. Sycophantic followership, hypocrisy and scheming to win patronage and attention of the leader become lucrative since the leadership gets flattered by such subservience compliancy. Government developmental project are distributed along social and political considerations and not for national interest.

4. Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

Traditional institution and governance is not by all purposes inimical to progressive and sustainable development especially when viewed against nations that operate under traditional institutions like Saudi Arabia, Morocco and many other countries. These countries have apparently achieved a considerable progress in social and infrastructural developments. The problem of many African states and mostly Nigeria comes from heterogeneity of the society that has divergent cultural values which compete amongst themselves for supremacy and dominance.

Each ethnic grouping strives to gain preeminence over others in political, social and economic management. Competition and rivalry within this heterogeneous social organisation inadvertently open space for sectionalism and or cultural definition culminating into seated hatred that frustrates national patriotism and sustainable development. This is the case of many African countries like Kenya (Anthony, 2008), central Africa, Ivory Coast, sierra Leon and Nigeria among others. Electoral contests in these countries generate lots of tension and anxiety over possible post electoral violence. The 1966, 1992, 2011 post-election violence in Nigeria, the one in Cote d'ivoire during Loren Gbagbo were typical of ethnic induced post-election violence. The absence of national consensus and unity to form a common front for collective development characterised the social metabolism of most African countries. With this, social change and economic development can only last on assumption but certainly not a reality. Democracy and development agenda is only a facade behind which common wealth of the nation is cornered for the ruling class adventures. Diseases, corruption, unemployment, hunger and squalor are gaining more grounds in Nigeria and indeed other African countries in the face of abundant wealth and natural resources. This is so because there is apparently lack of committed efforts through national economic and developmental policies by the political leadership to instigate and propel sustainable development.

All these socio political and economic upheavals find their root to the inability of the Nigerian nation to management the heterogeneity and tap the advantages inherent in national diversity. It is on the strength of these setbacks that the following recommendations were proffered.

Firstly and the most needed one is immediate structural reorganisation of the county along regional identity. This will reduce or even address the regional rivalry in the nation. Focus will be on the development of autonomous region as powers and economic resources were concentrated for just the regional development. This was the case in the 1960's before the creation of states. Political leaders were closer to their people, the enthusiasm and regional patriotism was higher than the mere impossible national patriotism.

The need for sincere economic reforms is paramount. These will allow the regions to focus on their resources and economic potentials for self-development. For instance, when Nigeria state operated under the regional arrangement in the 1960's, each of the three dominant regions were known for a specific area of economic strength. The northern region was rich in grand nuts, cotton, animal and other food crops. This was what defines the region and its economic profile. But shortly after the dissolution of the region and immediate unification into state system couple with the oil boom in the seventies, focus on agriculture was shifted to petro dollar, thereby making the agricultural rich states redundant and the people enveloped in poverty that still remain dominant in northern Nigeria.

Strong institution of governance is required. This is institutions should focus and emphasis transparency in fiscal governance and general administration of a new Nigeria. Sensitisation and awareness become necessary for every citizen to understand and promote quality, respect and dignity of man and his existence and the potentials to contribute to the development of the society. Lastly is the need to promote the understanding of the ideals of democracy and good governance in Nigeria, social equality and equal opportunities for self-strive.

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