Traditional Rulers and leadership: A Focus Ikono People of Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This research paper was conducted to examine the prospects and part played by traditional rulers in community development with particular reference to Ikono Local Government Area in Akwa Ibom State. Traditionally, the Ikono people have the paramount ruler who is the head of the traditional rulers in the Local Government, and village heads in the respective villages. The theory used is modernization theory propounded by Max Weber. The study was carried out in nine (9) towns of Ikono Local Government Area. Based on the analysis of the data collection, the following result emerged, traditional rulers make positive impact in community development programmes in Ikono. There is significant role played by traditional rulers in implementing government policies at grassroots level. Some recommendations were also made to complement the role of traditional rulers in community Development which include; traditional rulership consultative forum and programme management committee should be set up at the local government level. The Local Government Chairman and councilors should be meeting with traditional Rulers during their executive council sessions. Seminars and training programmes like workshop for leaders and development of skills should from time to time be organized to enhance the roles of traditional rulers towards community development.

Introduction

In Nigeria, traditional rulers belong to the category of people who have attained distinguishing position as ascribed status.

Traditional rulers are those who claim to be of royal birth in the sense of being descendants of people who founded dynasties in the past history of their specific areas, and as a result of this gained respects from the common people in their territories.

There has been change in the role of traditional rulers in Nigeria as it applies to community development, since the introduction of local government reforms of 1976 in the said reforms, leadership roles were clearly expressed, which state that it is not the intention of government to destroy the organic unity of the traditional institutions. The traditional Emirate and Chiefdom will remain, although their functions will be changed to accord with the present day circumstances. Although the paramount of Chiefs was undone by colonial rule, traditional rulers have served as important adjuncts in the administration of post-colonial government in both Nigeria and Africa (William F.S. Miles, 2007). Local government are creations of state government. As such, the Akwa-Ibom State government under the delegated power enacted the 1976 local government edict No. 14 of 1978. This in effect streamlined the procedure for the selection, recognition and roles of traditional rulers. This therefore formed the constitutional framework for traditional democracy by a community selection of an acceptable ruler. There were the warrant chief during the indirect rule system, and the then colonial government recognized local chiefs who performed as native court judges. The first class chiefs were recognized in the Ikot Ekpene Division of Nigeria during the colonial era. All these sets of traditional rulers in Ikono have been that of development in line with the development of present democratic dispensation in the country. Therefore, it has become necessary that they redefine their role as traditional heads of their domains within the framework of development and its adjuncts, as well as Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO).

Traditional rulers in Ikono remain for a variety of reasons important as the design and implement of develop-projects within their area of jurisdiction. Their core function includes mobilization of their communities for development purposes. This includes the provision of infrastructure to enhanced standard of living with the community. Sometimes traditional rulers initiate development projects and secure the support of both internal and external development agents for the execution of these projects.

Ikono Local Government Area is usually referred as the cradle of Ibibio nation. It occupies the northern fringe of Akwa-Ibom State next to Ini Local Government Area which occupies the northern most fringe of the state. It is predominantly inhabited by the Ibibios, the largest ethnic groups in the state. The people of Ikono trace their roots to a place called “Ibom” in Arochukwu Local Government Area of Abia State, from where they migrated and spread to other parts of today’s Ibibio land.

Ikono is one of the four largest Local Government Areas in the state, the others being Oruk Anam, Ibiono, Ibom, Essien Udim. It came into existence in September, 1996 when it was carved out of Itu Local Government Area. The people of Ikono are great farmers, who cultivates both cash and food crops, palm tree, kolanut trees, cocoa trees, cassava, maize, melon, etc.
They are also traders and among the Peculiar cuisines of the people is a soup called “efere nsanai” which is often prepared during festivities like marriage, burials, civic receptions, etc.

As a result, Ibibio is made up of six (6) sub-cultural groups. These include:
1. Eastern Ibibio or Ibibio Proper.
2. Western Ibibio or Annang.
3. Northern Ibibio or Enyong.
4. Southern Ibibio or Oket.
5. Delta Ibibio or Andomilbeno.
6. Riverine Ibibio or Efik.

The Ibibio people are located in southern eastern Nigeria also as COASTAL SOUTHEASTERN NIGERIA. Prior to the existence of Nigeria as a nation, the Ibibio people were self-governed.

The Ibibio land consists of nine (9) towns which include the following:
- Ibiaku District
- Asanting District
- Mbafun District
- Ekpene/Ediene District
- Ikono South District
- Nung-Ukem District
- Aka Ekpene District
- Ndija Ekpene District
- Itak District

All these towns have heads and village heads in the respective villages and the paramount ruler is the head of all traditional rulers in the local government.

To maintain peace and order, traditional rulers of Ikono now use certain agencies like Age-grades and secret cults like the “Mfam” because the chiefs were the custodians of the tradition and culture of the people. It was their duty therefore to lead their people the chiefs could bestow honor and dignity in the form of chieftaincy title on any citizen. They were judges in settlement they hold the land in forest for the people and they are normally appointed from royal families.

With the constitutional development in Nigeria, the development of political parties, economic expansion, the growth of towns, the spread of western education and the emergence of new elites, that is the professionals like Teachers, Accountant, Lawyers, Clerk etc. The authority of traditional rulers declined when Nigeria is achieved independence the traditional rulers Institution was almost phase out of government.

In the colonial era, traditional rulers were not completely relegated prior to Independence in Nigeria, House of chiefs were created for them. At the local level, they were visually elected to local councils (region)

Finally in the present day, although their power have declined, the still have a role to play as far as contemporary governance activities are concerned in Nigeria.

Statement of Problems

The traditional ruler in Ikono Local Government Area, knowing well of their role and expectation in the area of jurisdiction most often deviate from these role and expectation which brings about change and usher the community into development. Although the traditional rulers have prominent roles in land disputes resolution, they have not been given a constitutional relevance or recognition to effectively and decisively act on land matters. Lack of inadequate training in the area of survey and map hinders them from discharging their duties. There are no adequate map and local survey data in their office and at their local government office that will enable them record and maintain land transportation.

Lack of capacity building in all it’s ramifications that includes human and material to record and maintain such service which land conflict resolution requires on a continuing basis. Lack of constitutional recognition which will support and give legal backing in the discharge of their duties. Many land transaction are not recorded and were the document exist they are usually vague and ambiguous. This certainly lead to litigation and end up being a boundary issue depending on the location and the parties involved.

What then is the role of traditional rulers in community development? What are the constraints facing the traditional rulers in the discharge of their community development programmes? How can the role of traditional rulers in community development be improved in Ikono Local Government Area?

The modernization concept is use to mean introduction of new technology and new organization in colloquial terms, modernization means rendering something that is old fashion new or up to date to suit the requirement of modern time. Furthermore, modernization is characterized by all effort to bring technology, ways of life, social organization and models of production, modernization cut across the phases of life (Ega, 2005).

Ega (2005) maintained that, modernization is in grade and society will be considered more or less modernize to the extent that it’s members use inanimate source of power and tools to multiply the effect of their efforts. Therefore, the distinction is between the relatively modernize and the relatively non-modernize is based on the use of animate power than the inanimate power where social organization is based on technical skills. It refers to the kind of social change which led to political and economic break through through transforming Europe to modern society.

Apter D. (1999) one of the contributors of the modernist theory focuses on multi-dimensionist aspect of the concept that is the normative behavioural and structural functional dimension. He sees development modernization, industrialization as related that development is portrayed as more general involving growing systems differentiation and integration of functional roles while modernization is a particular case of development.Involving innovation of flexible social structure and the social framework to provide the skills and knowledge in a technologically advanced world.

Following the assumption of modernization which states it’s help to reshape something that is out of data to suit the requirement of modern times, this shows that prior to modernity, the traditional rulers were autocratic in nature, they took decision without checking or consulting the community, but these decision are binding on the inhabitants, whether it’s in favour or against the community, but with the coming of foreign ideas or ideology, it paved way for democratization which gave room for checks and balances and active participation of the populations in their affairs and development of the community.

Finally, the modernization helps the traditional rules to introduce new ideas for community development such as being democratic in their decision making giving room for the people to participate in the community. Traditional rulers or modern times perform vital roles in their domain like...
emerging on wareness campaign or the sensitization of their community populace on HIV/AIDS epidemic, the construction of classroom blocks and providing learning materials in school to help develop education system, provision of medical facilities and the building of the community health centre.

In conclusion, the strength of modernization theory argued on the basis. That, the sociological imagination is more important than controlling the risk found in contemporary societies, and fulfills the potential for improving people lives. Despite it’s strength the modernization theory has its weakness. It lacks a theory of culture in reality there are differences in culture between a varieties of group in modern societies, significantly, it also affect how people experience social life and behaviour.

**Pre-colonial Traditional Institution;**

Before the advent of the Europeans, societies in Africa had evolved various system of political administrations based on the peculiarities of these ethnic nationalities. These institutions had full executive, legislative and judicial powers in their different domains and exerted sovereign control over their people.

According to Okolo (1976), the traditional ruler under Benin kingdom was at the head of a well-organized system of government. As the sole authority he was the legislature, executive and the judiciary. Traditional institution during the pre-colonial era was quite clear, since law and order were maintained through a normative system that was part of the general social structure through the system was not sophisticate, the machinery of government was organized enough to manage affairs, resolve tension and administered justice in the society. Also the institution was controlled by certain unwritten laws which ensure the security of the institution. This implies that, traditional rulers had positive impact on the evolution of political, economic and social institution in which they had dominant control.

According to Igwe Stephen Ngene Ede-Njoku, the political institution of the pre-colonial societies included the paramount chiefs, the council of elders, age grade and religious organization. The Ibos at the pre-colonial period did not have a single political authority; even though they were a contingent. Since the Ibos shunned the idea of having a single leader at that time, they operated a lineage system as a basis for political organized in such a way that a man could only lead member of his lineage hence, there were many influential and powerful men, their influence was limited to hamlet, clan and village and at that time, they operated a lineage system as a basis for political organization.

This political system was fashioned in such a way that a man could only lead members of his lineage hence, there were many influential and powerful men, their influence was limited to hamlet, clan and village and at most the area in which they lived. In every village, hamlet or clan, there was always a village head who emerged by virtue of age and who in collaboration of other elders settled disputes in that particular village. If the disputes involved another village the elders, led by the oldest from both village came together and resolved the disputes, especially those bothering on elopement and land, which was common at that time.

**The Colonial Traditional Institution:** In the colonial era, the British system of colonial administration employed the system of indirect rule. Indirect rule was a British system of ruling her colonies with the use of local chiefs or other approved intermediaries and traditional laws and customs with British officials merely supervising the administration. Indirect rule used the existing traditional system of administration and it recognized the status of traditional rulers who served as the priest of indirect rule (Barr. Abdullahi, 2007). The Advent of colonial rule ushered in a transformation in the role of traditional rulers. This change was necessitated by the desire to realize the objective of colonialism, which where to exploit the natural resources of Nigeria to meet the industrial needs of the capitalist metro poles. Traditional rulers were there used to serve these objectives.

According to Aidelokhai (2008), traditional rulers before the advent of colonial rule in Nigeria were the political, cultural, economic and social administrators and lords of their various domains. The status of traditional rulers changed with the advent of colonial rule as the colonialist who imposed their power on traditional rulers unsurped their sovereign authority. This development was meant to enable the colonialist perfect their exploitation through the use of traditional rulers.

Crowder (1978) asserts that chieftaincy institution were maintained and used by the colonialist for colonial interest. The indirect rule in northern Nigeria attests to this phenomenon. Arguing further, Crowder believes that whether they had fulfilled the entire traditional pre-requisite for assumption of office, which would have allowed them rule in pre-colonial days, their right to rule depend on the colonial authorities.

Afigbo (1972) asserts that the British instituted native courts and installed chiefs by warrant that controlled them. This was because the British believed that African people had to be governed by chiefs, therefore maintaining the organic unity of the Nigerian society. In effect many warrant chiefs solely constituted colonially backed usurpers of power and had little legitimacy beyond the fact of being installed by colonial state. Nevertheless, they had power and used it for their own gain. Their main source of power was control of native courts and labours for example; for colonial road and water way construction (Oforngoro, 1982). Enugu warrant chief Onyema was described as an “African god” by his grandson (Onyeama, 1982). He controlled the follows of labour to the emerging coal mining industry and established himself as a powerful ruler combining wealth, terror and magical power over his people.

Inspite of the subordination of the British overloads, it could be argued that the powers of traditional rulers were not eroded. Rather, the positions of rulers were strengthened. The Emir for example exercised stronger participatory roles in administration. This was because more powers of coercion were accorded to the native courts and the British Treated Emirs with caution. The rulers also exercised executive powers as sole native authorities which determined the pace and direction of local administration subject to British guidance and needs.

The above description of the role of traditional rulers in Nigeria during the colonial period show that, change occurred and traditional rulers assumed a new status. They were co-opted to perform roles that were completely opposed to the wishes and aspiration of the colonized societies. By the advent of the colonial era, the British system of colonial administration employed the system of indirect rule. Indirect rule was a British system of ruling her colonies with the use of local chiefs or other approved intermediaries and traditional laws and customs with British officials merely supervising the administration. Indirect rule used the existing traditional system of administration and it recognized the status of traditional rulers who served as the priest of indirect rule (Barr. Abdullahi, 2007). The Advent of colonial rule ushered in a transformation in the role of traditional rulers. This change was necessitated by the desire to realize the objective of colonialism, which where to exploit the natural resources of Nigeria to meet the industrial needs of the capitalist metro poles. Traditional rulers were there used to serve these objectives.

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**The Post-Colonial Traditional Institution.**

The role and status of traditional rulers in Post Independent Nigeria Varied Through with different administrations, they could be said to have remained agents
for the perpetuation of our neo-colonial status, thereby upsetting the ongoing process of development in the country.

Nwankwo (1992) stated that chiefs are custodians of the land and they held the land in trust for the people. They served as a link between that rural people and the government. They assist the government in political education and socialization of the rural people. They acted as the custodians of the tradition religion, arts and culture of the people. The explained the customs and tried to preserve it. In view of the political administration, traditional rulers have been given limited authority to settle minor disputes.

In this regard also Axel (1998) asserts that traditional rulers try to make peace within the community and with neighboring communities. To Axel traditional rulers act as instrument of state control at the local level.

OlokO O. (1976) maintained that the traditional rulers were responsible for nation building task such as the maintenance of the main road linking their areas, the supply of man power for the kingdom’s army, the up keep of the royal capital and collection of taxes and duties due at various time. In the socio-cultural aspect he continued that in their role as the patrons of the creative and expressive arts of their people, traditional rulers took active steps to encourage the work of talented African carvers, sculptors, potters and so on.

Nwankwo (1992) identifies some relevant roles played by traditional rulers in Nigeria during pre-colonial, colonial and even modern times. He states that traditional rulers perform amongst others the role of making or contributing to law making and judgement, adjudication in disputes in their communities. They also maintain peace, order and security.

Kusamotu rightly, observed this and said “recognition of the role which the traditional rulers is expected to play in the administration of his local community, the colonial government introduced the system of indirect rule which made the Nigeria traditional chiefs the central figure around which system of administration is resolved”.

It could be seen here that the colonial masters cleverly used royal fathers so as to be able to reach the grassroots in their colonies. Ironically now, they are being prohibited from going near to political terrain. The same colonialists, according to Nnanna, introduced” The policy of removing traditional rulers from civic and political relevance by improving the policies of their home country, the doubtful position of these royal fathers confuse issues at times Oshisada quoting from Guardian of Friday, may, 17th 2002 said that “the Benin monarch lamented the sharp difference in position in subsequent to national government he said the military in particular had no role for them except when it felt back on them in times of crisis as means of arming the policies when the imperial government was faced with the problem of effective administration of this big country, contending issues made it expedient for the British government to resort to the native system of government. In this system of government, defended traditional rulers constitutional role is a matter for concern.

President Olusegun Obasanjo once suggested that the traditional rulers’ role be enshrined in the constitution. He further said that the traditional rulers had “serious role to play in the social, economic and cultural lines of their people.” According to guardian this was not the first time that the president show interest in assigning a role to royal fathers. At this first meeting with the Obang of Calabar, the president had said “that he was personally in Favour of assigning a role to role to traditional rulers “whatever the subsisting 1999 constitution was amended” he said that the non-provision of a role for traditional rulers was one of the main deficiencies in the 1999 constitution”. Like father they are made to maintain peace and security in their different communities. This and other things ancillary to this great role should be their concern. Assigning them any other constitutional role might as well mean putting them into partisan politics which may not be the best for a father who should have the duty of reconciling his children whenever they have differences. The royal fathers are custodian of the different cultures in their different domains, knowing and being the custodians to their cultures enable them to work as advisers to the government through the institution have their natural role the customary law of different ethnic groups or tribes or clans in Nigeria, the following roles seem to have been assigned to traditional rulers.

- Preservation of Public Peace
- Settlement of disputes among their subject
- Assisting in the collection of their subject when the above things/issues are taken care of, there is bound to be community development, socially and culturally. It is when these one functional that, there will be what called community development.

Data Discussion

It was also gathered that traditional rulers help the government law enforcement agencies in maintaining peace, order and good governance in their rural areas. They mobilize the efforts of their people towards, the implementation of government policies and programmes and also ensure that such policies and programmes are given optimum support by their people and this is done due to the implementation of recruiting educated people who have royal connections into the institution.

Ruler’s institution as a veritable tool for reaching the people and getting them accept, promote and appreciate governments policies and programmes. They also assess taxes in consultation with the local government council.

Conclusion

The paper reveal precisely that traditional rulers are the major agents in transforming the attitude of the rural people provided they are transparent and ever ready to carry their people along.

Recommendations

The following recommendation, are hereby offered for better performance of traditional rulers in community development in the future.

1) Traditional rulers should be made to have more power in their communities in order to shape their political and socio-economic landscape to suit the wishes of the people at the grassroots level.

2) The spirit of honesty, transparency and accountability should be the watch word of any traditional ruler.

3) Seminars and training programmes like workshop for leaders and development of skill from time to time be organized to enhance the roles of traditional rulers.

4) Traditional rulers should be the principal agent of mobilization for all government policies.

5) Traditional rulership consultative and programmes management committee should be set up, local government chairmen and councilors are elected officially and therefore, cannot have executive council sessions with traditional rulers. However, to achieve the goals of good governance, grassroots participation and community/rural development,Local
Government – Traditional Rulership consultative and programme committee (LGTC PMC). They also, like other leaders should have constitutionally approved remuneration in view of the enormous burden they carry in maintaining law and order in their respective communities and mobilizing their subjects for self-help efforts in the absence of local, state or federal government’s presence.

Consultative and programme committee (LGTC PMC) should be set up in each local government council. In this, the elected of finals and the grassroots governors (traditional rulers) should consult and exchange ideas on issues of concern and mutual interest affecting the local government areas and individual communities which the grassroots governors and their traditional council of chief would supervise, monitor and ensure equitable utilization and protection of such projects.

This approach will not only bring local governments nearer to the people but also make the elected leaders and traditional rulers accountable and to see to the welfare of their citizens, subjects and communities as may be the reason for their existence.

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