

Traditional Institutions and National Integration for Sustainable Development in Nigeria

Abdullahi Garba, PhD

Department Of Public Administration, Hassan Usman Katsina Polytechnic, Katsina – Nigeria

Ibrahim Mohammed Jirgi

Kampala International University, Kampala – Uganda

Jummai Mamman

School of Technical Education, Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University, Bauchi – Nigeria

El-rufa'I Tijjani Abdullahi

Department of Economics and Development Studies, Federal University, Dutsin-ma

Abstract

Available evidence has shown that pre-colonial Nigerian societies had a formal and organized system of government before the advent of colonialism. Non participatory roles of traditional institutions in the present day Nigeria as compared to their roles in managing both men and materials in pre-colonial Nigeria is accounting mainly for the decades of social conflicts that is manifesting itself in our socio-economic and political circuit. This development does not only render traditional institutions irrelevant but also creates threats to peace, security and stability in the country. The aim of this paper is to critically examine the two concepts traditional institutions and National Integration in Nigeria. The methodology employed by paper is by use of secondary data and observation. Some of the recommendations of the paper include constitutional role have to be given to those institutions, promotion of cordial relationship between government and those institutions will reduce conflicts among the locals, . Recognition of traditional institutions by the government at all levels will enhance their performance especially in managing issues related to grassroots integration and development in the country. Constitutions roles have to be given to traditional institutions in Nigeria to allow them a say in the administration of their various localities not advisory role alone; but to participate in the development of the country.

Keywords: Traditional Institutions, National Integration, Nigeria.

Introduction:

Socio-cultural norms and values embedded in traditional institutions have remained an integral part of every organised society in Africa. Apart from being the powerful human tool for survival, the defined cultural norms and values also form the bases of existence of every civilized society that bring order which in turn makes the society devoid of any state of lawlessness. For centuries before the advent of British rule, governance in different parts of present-day Nigeria was synonymous with traditional institutions and their rulers. As observed by Olusola and Aisha (2013) traditional institutions in pre-colonial Nigeria, have norms and values which formed the bases upon which traditional institutions exercised governance, power and authority or influence over their subjects. Furthermore, these institutions of traditional rulers were virtually the only institutions of governance which played critical roles such as custodians of customary law and communal assets, especially land and resources; guardians and symbols of cultural values and religious practices; dispensing justice, enforcing contracts and also resolving conflicts. After colonization of Nigeria, British government employed the system of indirect rule for convenient administration of these colonies. According to Abdullahi (2007), indirect rule is a system of governing colonies through the use of local chiefs or other approved intermediaries and traditional laws and customs with British officials merely supervising the administration.

Nigeria's effort at achieving national integration has remained largely unrealized. The integration crisis facing Nigeria as a nation centred on the issue related to religious conflicts, ethnic politics, resource control, youth restiveness and so on. These have jointly generated the disintegration of the productive sector, insecurity, deterioration of the physical and social infrastructures in the country. Ifeanacho (2012) observed that the situation in Nigeria is characterised by inter community/intra-community, inter-ethnic and intra-ethnic, inter religious and intra-religious strife. He further maintained that some of these conflicts are as old as the history of the Nigerian nation itself.

Conceptualization:

It is difficult to provide a universally accepted definition of a traditional institution or authority in Nigeria because of the diversity in the political and administrative components of traditional systems in different parts of the country. Traditional Institutions is a body of an ethnic group or clan who hold the highest primary executive

authority in an indigenous polity, or who has been appointed to the positioning accordance with the customs and tradition of the area concerned by instrument or order of the state government, and whose title is recognised as a traditional institutions title by the government of the State (Ola and Tonwe 2009). This difficulty notwithstanding, traditional institution can be defined as the indigenous polity which existed before the advent of the colonialists (Adewumi & Egwurube 1985) in (Tonwe and Osemwota 2013). To Egwurube (1988), traditional institutions can be described as a body of individuals or groups of individuals who occupy communal political leadership positions by immorality and are through the consent of community members granted authority and legitimacy to direct the affairs of particular ethno-cultural or linguistic groups in an ordered manner. Dasuki Committee report (1988) regards traditional institutions as a body of person who by virtue of their ancestry occupies the throne or stool of an area and who has been appointed to it in accordance with the customs and tradition of the area. So we can understand that traditional institutions are those indigenous political arrangements whereby leaders with proven track records are appointed and installed in line with the provisions of their native laws and customs.

The word integration suggests a process of structural linkages between two or more parts of a system or system (Onwuka 1982). Its essence can be discerned from the functionalist view of society Anele (1999) in Ibaba (2009) sees integration as functionalism in human society as a social system comprising sub units or interdependent parts. These subunits are interdependent on each other and are functionally interrelated. What this means is that every phenomenon found in the society performs useful functions towards the survival of the entire system or society. It equally means that the sub units of the society otherwise referred to as social institutions such as the family, religion, polity economy, education, technology; are integrated and interdependent and all perform useful functions towards the survival and stability of the society. Integration at the national level mainly conceived as political integration, which is the outcome of a process whereby political actors of different ethnic nationalities or groups in a country abandon primordial ethnic loyalties, and embrace national identify (Hassi 1958). National Integration can be seen as the awareness of a common identity amongst the citizens of a country. It means that though we belong to different castes, religions, regions and speak different languages we recognize the fact that we are all one. This kind of integration is very important in the building of a strong and prosperous nation (Iyang, 2012). Generally, national integration can be seen as that process that attempts to erode the presence of micro-nationalities in place of a spirit of nationhood. This is achieved through the breakdown of ethnic barriers, the elimination of primordial ethnic loyalties, and the development of a sense of common identity. It is clear that individuals are the units of integration, and members of a nation are integrated as they share common identity. Thus, the national integration is not applicable to a single nation, but involves two or more nations.

On the other hand sustainable development is an effort at improving the environment or natural resources for the purpose of improving the quality of human life in such a way that the needs of the future generation are not jeopardized (Adebayo 2010). To this end, sustainable development is the ability to preserve the existing resources of the state for the collective use of the citizens while conscious efforts are made to conserve the resources for the use of future generations. Sustainable development entail so many things; to Mohammed (2013) refer the term as the type of economic growth pattern where the use of resources meets the needs of the human population while conserving the environment at the same time. Sustainable development means resources are used in such a way that both current and future human needs can be met. Guga (2014) observed that sustainable development, it's a situation where basic operating structures and processes that would ensure the continuous development of a nation have been established and are working efficiently.

The Roles of Traditional Institutions in National Integration for Sustainable Development in Nigeria:

The role of traditional institutions in Nigeria has been changing over the years. Roberts, (2004) asserted that pre-colonial Nigeria was made up of a combination of traditional societies with numerous similarities and differences. It was made up of kingdoms representing cultural entities that were different in many ways including their traditional institutions of governance. There exist two main types of traditional institutions in the pre-colonial Nigeria. These include centralised authority structure and decentralised authority structure. In tracing the contours of the role of traditional institutions especially in the north which was based on mixture, African political values and Islamic political system, two other distinct geographical regions are discernible, the south-west and the south-east. Oguntomisin (1996) maintained that the roles of traditional institutions in pre colonial Nigeria are more of governance; the traditional rulers had to shape appropriate policies, order priorities and generate revenue to meet the needs of their communities in the exercise of these functions especially in the north. With the advent of colonialism, the British colonial administration recognised the strategic and influential position occupied by traditional institutions in Nigeria. The colonial administrators had a number of problems, which includes limited British personnel, limited finance to run the country, poor communication and so on. Adesoji (2010) maintained that British colonial policy was to generate cost of running colonies and managing the volatile law and order situations from the colonies themselves. Indirect rule was later introduced into the

colonist as a convenient strategy to govern the people through their traditional institutions. Indirect rule is a system of governing colonies through the use of local chiefs or other approved intermediaries and traditional laws and customs with British officials merely supervising the administration (Abdullahi 2007). Some of their roles during colonial era include expected to maintaining law and order, initiate development at local level and to mobilise people to undertake communal works, they are also charged with educating people concerning colonial government policy, submitting regular reports on a range of matters (Olusola and Aisha 2013).

After independence, the political elites continued to try to reduce the influence of traditional institutions in governance. Traditional institutions used to have a constitutional role. The 1960 and 1963 constitutions created a Council of Chiefs for them in the regions and some of them were even regional officials. Minority councils created in the Eastern and Western regions further reduced the roles of traditional rulers to mere advisory. By 1966 when the military seized power, the extent of influence of traditional institutions was greatly influenced by which side of the political fence they faced (Orewa & Adewumi 1983). By 1979 the Federal Military Government in consultation with State Governments attempted to institute a uniform role for traditional rulers throughout the country through the 1976 Local Government Reform. Traditional institutions were insulated from politics and formally assigned advisory roles in local decision-making through Traditional/Emirate Councils. However, the advice of the traditional institutions is not binding on the elected local government councillors.

The 1979 Constitution gave them representation in the National Council of State. The constitution did not provide any administrative role to the traditional institutions. They are to merely serve as advisory bodies to the Governor at the state level on matters relating to customary law, inter communal relations, chieftaincy, peace and tranquillity within their domain. The 1999 constitution of the federal Republic of Nigeria did make any provision for traditional institutions to exercise any political power and neither were they represented in the council of state. Thus the 1999 constitution is the most radical in quashing, abrogating and eschewing the traditional institutions from exercising any political power in Nigeria.

Nevertheless, several measures are still necessary as we continue to uphold the position of the traditional institutions in Nigeria. First is the need for a constitutional provision for the institution. In the present constitutional arrangement (1999), the laws governing the traditional institution are enacted at the state government level only and provide strictly for consultative and advisory functions for the State Traditional Councils set up by these laws. There is no equivalent provision at the Federal Government level. Having withstood the vicissitudes of the colonial and post-colonial regimes and now achieved a workable role within our democratic culture in the country, it becomes imperative that this new balance of roles is well captured and given legal backing in the constitution to enable the institution achieve greater role. The constitution, at the minimum, should also recognise the role of the traditional institutions in communal life such as mobilising the community enlightenment, economic empowerment, peace building, security, and custodianship of traditional culture.

Another important role that traditional institutions can play in the country is that of land management. Traditional authority is a legitimate source of authority, because legitimacy is what people believes in. Where in western world legitimacy is closely related to democracy, in many other countries (especially at the local level in rural areas) democracy is a rather foreign concept and the legitimacy of traditional institutions therefore are social reality, and development efforts at the local level have to recognise these existing structure (George and Wolf 2004). Therefore, traditional institutions in Nigeria can be use to solve local issues especially problems related to land issues currently faced in Nigeria especially in states like Plateau, Benue and Kaduna States.

As an institution custodian and preservation of culture and traditions, traditional institutions in Nigeria can be source of heritage and traditions that can be use to make sure cultures, traditions, people believes are not relegated to the background in our quest for social advancement and general development in Nigeria. They are always call upon by either central government or state government to help ensure peaceful co-existence and promote national unity and political stability as well as help in the security of the nation as a whole.

Another important issue which traditional institutions could be use to achieve sustainable development in Nigeria is the traditional political system and their imperative could provide the needed lessons for the strengthening of democracy in the country, but that the persisting failure of democracy is not unrelated to its disregard of this cultural past. According to Olaitan, (2009) in David et al (2013) maintained that the past is always implicated in the present and that no worthwhile edifice could be built on nothing, it becomes important that modern democratic practice be built on the reality of the past in Africa and Nigeria and this would entail grafting modern democracy on the cultural and institutional pattern which defined the people in order to ensure a link between the modern form of governance and the people.

Traditional institutions can also be involved in the management of information at the grassroots level for sustainable development in Nigeria. The importance of traditional institutions in facilitating modernization in terms of management information at grassroots level lies on the need for an adaptation mechanism, or a translator of new ideas through reference and contrast to pre-existing ones. The traditional institutions in the country could form the foundation on which new concepts on information management on which new concepts are built. Certainly all traditional institutions could, with certain modifications, be accommodated in national

constitution with strong bills of rights. The bills of rights would stipulate that where necessary, local practices be modified to ensure compliance with universal practices in information management.

Some of the Challenges facing Traditional Institutions in Nigeria:

Some of the challenges facing traditional institutions in Nigeria include the respect that surround the traditional institutions/rulers are fading out day by day. They now run errands for those in political office and they can be called upon at any time to attend one function or another either relevant or not. Traditional Rulers who are supposed not to be seen everywhere according to custom and tradition, now parade themselves in government offices looking for one favour or another. They feature prominently in political rallies and become politicians themselves, in order to find favour from those in government. Failure to obey and rally round the politicians often attracts penalty and other forms of punishment that affect the physical development of their communities. Other challenges include lack of constitutions roles to perform, poor working environment, lack of recognition on the side of the government, poor incentive by the government, high expectation on the side of populace and so on.

Conclusion:

The machinery of enforcing grassroots governance which was well-organized in the pre-colonial and even post colonial Nigeria to manage affairs, administer justice and resolve tension in the society has totally been eradicated. For the fact that traditional institutions are the closest to the people, and the custodians of the tradition of the people, downplaying their roles in governance of any society will amount to chaos. This is evident in the 2011 electoral and post-electoral strife, and most especially persistence of widespread ethnic and civil conflicts experienced in Nigeria. The traditional institutions in the country could be source of national integration and sustainable development through areas like influencing of their subjects towards realization of nationhood, also serving as advisory bodies for both federal, states and local government's level, mobilizing their subject towards community participation in all aspects of development, and also serving in areas like land management at the local level and lastly serve as information managers at the local or grassroots level.

Recommendations:

The paper will like make the following recommendations as follows;

- i. Recognition of traditional institutions by the government at all levels will enhance their performance especially in managing issues related to grassroots integration and general development in the country.
- ii. Constitutions roles have to be given to traditional institutions in Nigeria to allow them to have a say in the administration of their various localities not advisory role alone; but to participate in the development of the country.
- iii. Improve relationship between government and traditional institutions in Nigeria will virtually reduce frequent clashes between locals on issues related to farm land, culture, religion and so on
- iv. The traditional institutions themselves have to acknowledge their positions in the society and provide leadership by example at the grassroots level
- v. A research study can also by undertake to find more ways in which government and traditional institutions in Nigeria can work together to improve integration and sustainable development.

References

- Abdullahi, W.Z. (2007). *Evolving Of A New Role For Traditional Institutions In The Nigerian Constitution Centre For Local Government Development And Research.*
- Adesoji, A.O. (2010). *Traditional RulerShip and Modern Governance in 20th Century.* The Chieftaincy Institution in Nigeria, Lagos: Concept Publishers for Centre for Black and African Arts and Civilisation.
- Alapiki, H.E. (2000). *Politics and governance in Nigeria,* Owerri: Corporate Impressions
- David, A. K., Fatile J.O. and Aderonke, M. (2013), *Traditional Rulership in Contemporary Nigerian Government System and the Dilemma of Relevance,* Centre for Social Science Research, Enugu.
- Dasuki, I. (1988). *Report of white Paper on Local Government Reforms in Nigeria,* Lagos, Federal Government Printing Press
- Egwurube, J. O. (1988). "Traditional Rulers and Modern Local Government" In Adamolekun, L. et al. *Local Government in West Africa since independence,* Lagos, Unilag Press,
- George, L. and Wolf L. (2004), *Traditional Structures in Local Governance for Local Development,* University of Benue, Switzerland Institute of Political Science
- Ibaba, I.S. (2009). *Education and National Integration in Nigeria,* Journal of Research in National Development, Volume 7, No. 2
- Ifeanacho, M. I. (2012). *Democratization and National Integration in Nigeria,* <http://bangladeshsociology.org>
- Inyang, E. (2012). *Strategies for National Unity and Integration in Nigeria,* Eagle Island Technology, Nigeria.

- Oguntomisin G. O. (1996). *The Yoruba Kingdoms*. In Elaigwu J.I. and Erim E.O. (Ed.). *Foundation of Nigerian Federalism (Pre-colonial Antecedent)*. Ile-Ife: University of Ife Press.
- Olusola, O. and Aisha, A. (2013). *Traditional Rulers and Conflict Resolution: An Evaluation of Pre And Post Colonial Nigeria*. *Journal of Research on Humanities and Social Sciences, European Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, Vol.3, No.21
- Onwuka, R.I. (1982). *Development and integration in West Africa: The case of Economic Community of West African States*, Ile-Ife, Nigeria: University of Ife Press
- Orewa, G.O. & Adewumi, J.B. (1983). *Local Government in Nigeria: The Changing Scene*, Ethiope Publishing Corporation, Benin City.
- Roberts, F. O. N. (2004). *Traditional Rulers, Governance and the Post Colonial State*. In O. Vaughan (ed.) *Indigenous Political Structures and Governance in Nigeria*. Ibadan: Book Craft Ltd.
- Tonwe, D.A. and Osemwota O. (2013). *Traditional Rulers and Local Government in Nigeria: A pathway to Resolving the challenge*. *Journal of Local Governance*, November 2013.
- UN (2010). *Rethinking Public Administration: An Overview*. Division for Public Economics and Public Administration, Department of Economic and Social Affairs ST/TCD/SER.E/27