

Historicizing Nigeria's Traditional Institutions and Local Governance: A Case of Anambra State, 1979-1999

Oluchukwu N. Orizu; Nwachukwu J. Obiakor; Ngozi E. Ojiakor

Department of History and International Studies
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Anambra, Nigeria
Email of corresponding Author: nj.obiakor@unizik.edu.ng

Abstract

The role of traditional rulers in grassroots' governance cannot be over emphasized. Prior to the advent of colonial rule, governance in different parts of Africa was synonymous with traditional institutions and their rulers; and local administration was mostly centered on them. In other words, their role was enormous and was largely felt within their communities or areas of jurisdiction. This explains why the British indirect rule system was adopted and used the traditional rulers under the Native Authority System and Warrant Chiefs so as to protect the political and economic interest of the British political power. Therefore during the colonial rule, the sole function of rulers were maintained, but were not allowed to govern their communities according to local traditions as it was in the pre-colonial period. On the contrary, in the post-colonial period, following the 1976 Local Government Reform, the traditional rulers were jettisoned or relegated to play an advisory role which was not enforceable on the local government functionaries. The need for this study is to historicise the changing roles of traditional rulers in local governance, so as to be well informed on the transition, functions, and roles of traditional rulers and institutions in local government process in Nigeria from the colonial era to present with emphasis on Anambra State. In achieving this, this paper adopts the chronological, narrative and historical method of data analysis with reliance on dependency theory. The study largely employed the use of secondary and primary sources of data, as challenges confronting the roles of traditional rulers in local government process in the 21st century were also discussed. Over the years, findings showed that the relevance of traditional rulers/institutions in local governance is evident and crucial, thus, there is need for its integration into the contemporary local government system, as they still record a high legitimacy in the eyes of the people and as such can assist in harnessing the political and economic development at the grassroots.

Keywords: *Anambra, Local Administration, Local Government, Traditional authority system, Traditional institutions, Traditional rulers*

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Introduction

Traditional rulers and institutions formed the nucleus of governance. Local administration was generally centered on the traditional ruler who was considered the repository of religious, legislative, executive and judicial functions, with few exceptions like in the South-east amongst the Igbo communities of Nigeria (Afigbo, 1972). Traditional rulers in Nigeria during the pre-colonial era exercised political authority in their respective communities at varying degrees as provided by their tradition and customs. In the Hausa/Fulani traditional political system, traditional rulers exercised the powers of an absolute monarch. Accordingly, the emirs combined the legislative, executive and

judicial powers of government. The traditional ruler in the Yoruba traditional political system was a ceremonial monarch. Under the system, the political powers of the Obas were limited by those of their council of Chiefs. In Igboland, the traditional ruler represents an extreme case where the people practiced an egalitarian republican form of government. In this system, various groups like the community chiefs, council of elders, society titled men, Age grades, and women associations shared in the political authority of the “state”. To this regard, traditional rulers exercised very insignificant political powers to the system. Also, it must be noted that the authorities of the traditional rulers are within the area of their jurisdiction, and that no traditional ruler ever had jurisdiction over the entire geographical or modern Nigeria.

However, issues relating to tradition and its institution are handed down or transmitted from the past. Its authority is mostly unquestionably accepted, adhered to and its principles practiced with reverence. Its practice reflects continuity with the past for which its continuity is usually understood to link generations (Sokoh, 2018). Tradition therefore weaves together both social and political system of a society; the social defines and directs how people of an ethnic group ought to live and relate, the political enforces adherence to traditional norms of a group by exercising authority to secure obedience from the people. It is difficult to determine the exact origin of traditional institutions in Nigeria, but it is certain that most of the non-state scattered across the territory now named Nigeria had traditional institutions that played significant role to their growth, influence, development and dominance of other societies. At the head of every traditional institution sits the traditional ruler who exercised sovereign power over the people.

In the pre-colonial era, most of the traditional institutions had well-structured system of governments that was basically centralized and access to ruler ship was hereditary, dispersed or even a cephalous. It is therefore remarkable to note that because of the aura of respect, power, and authority to traditional institutions motivated the British to utilize the institution as Native Authorities during colonial rule. During colonialism, the colonial government restructured and incorporated the indigenous system to serve the interest of the colonial state and the metropolitan authority. By this, the colonial authority ruled through the traditional political structures, which were incorporated into colonial administrative machinery. But the traditional institutions were not allowed to enjoy any autonomy but were required to operate within the demands of colonial masters (Sokoh, 2018). This was the origin of the active involvement of traditional institutions/rulers in governance at the grass root level. On the contrary, during the post-colonial period, precisely after the Local Government Reform of 1976, the duties/ roles of traditional institutions/ rulers were reduced to advisory.

In view of this, existing literatures on local government, with particular emphasis on traditional rulers examined various themes such as problems/challenges of traditional rulers in security administration, elective politics, governance and pathways of resolving the challenges. Uthman Abdulqadir (2016) examined the traditional rulers and security administration in Nigeria, using the legacies of traditional authority of the Sokoto Sultanate and Nigeria in general. He identifies the vital roles the traditional rulers can play in security administration and if properly annexed, can assist in ending the insecurity problem/issues in the 21st century Nigeria. In similar vein, William F.S Miles points out that although the paramount of chiefs was undone by colonial rule, traditional rulers have served as important adjuncts in development process in both Africa and Oceania (Miles 1993). Relatively, J.I Udegba posits that traditional rulers represent symbols of unity and also serves as a link between the government and the masses (C. Reed, 1982).

It is in view of the above perception that Emordi and Osiki (2008) agrees that the traditional rulers remain the closest government and most effective mobilizers of the people at the grassroots. Additionally, they rightly noted that it is in the realization of this fact that traditional rulers remain a focal point of the people’s collective aspirations that government at all levels always want to identify with traditional institutions in Nigeria. In essence, they should be supplementary to the government, influencing and mediating between varying factions during national crisis so as to avert complete anarchy in the country.

It is pertinent to note that this paper finds it important to engage on this research since much attention has not been focused on “the role and challenges of traditional rulers/institutions in local government process in Anambra State, from 1979 to 1999” by scholar, as there have been literatures with emphasis on problems of traditional rulers in

security administration and other issues on elective politics. Thus, the study focuses on giving a historical overview of Igbo traditional institutions/rulers in local governance, from pre-colonial era upto 1979; this is followed by the role of traditional rulers/institutions in Local Government in Anambra State, 1979-1999, and finally challenges and criticisms confronting traditional institutions in the contemporary Nigerian society. Therefore, in order to gain more direct and practical insight about the subject matter, the study employed the use of primary sources of data in form of archival records, and secondary sources, having employed collaborative and sources and analysis of data respectively.

Conceptual Clarifications

For the purpose of clarity, the following terms (Local Government, Local Administration, Traditional Authority, Traditional Ruler/ Traditional Institutions) utilized in the body of the work will be defined below.

Local Government: This is the third tier level of government created for the purpose of efficient and effective administration of the localities. Thus, Odenigwe (1977) defined local government to mean;

The system of local administration under which local communities and towns are organized to maintain law and order, provide limited range of social services, public amenities and encourage cooperation and participation of the inhabitants in joint endeavor towards the improvement of their conditions of living.

Ugwu (2000) also avers that out of the three tiers of government, local government provides the greatest scope for grassroots development, and it is also at that level that the practice of democracy has the greatest possibilities as it offers tremendous opportunities for popular participation. Specifically, local government is generally conceived as a form of public administration which, in a majority of contexts, exists as the lowest tier of administration in a government system either in federal or unitary system of government (Ugwuanyi, 2017).

Therefore, in the context of this paper, an apt definition of the term local government is contained in the *Guidelines for a Reform of Local Government in Nigeria 1976* which states that:

Government at (the) local level exercised through representative council established by law to exercise specific powers within defined areas. These powers should give the councils substantial control over local affairs as well as the staff, institutional and financial powers to initiate and direct the provision of services and to determine and implement projects so as to complement the activities of the state and federal government in their areas, and to ensure, through active participation of the people and their traditional institutions that local initiatives and response to local needs are maximized (Federal Government, 1976).

Local Administration: The term local administration is established by the federal government for the purpose of administering the localities under its control (Ezeani, 2004). It could also mean a system of delivering federal or state government services to the local communities and for collecting taxes, rates or fees from them as well as generating their support, (financial or otherwise) for the planning and implementation of development programmes. This objective could be achieved by means of local administration boards which are appointed by the federal or state government (Okafor and Nwatu, 2008).

Therefore, in the context of this paper, local administration is the administration of the affairs of the locality by the officials of the higher levels of government. Also a better definition of the term is viewed by Roudinelli, (1981) and it states:

A form of de-concentration in which all subordinate levels of government within a country are agents of the central authority, usually the executive branch, regions, provinces, districts, municipalities and other units of government headed by or are responsible directly to a central government agency... and the heads of the local administration serve at the pleasure of the nation's chief executive.

It must be noted that the Majekodunmi administration set up by the federal government in the then Western Region of Nigeria after the declaration of a state of emergency over western Nigeria in 1963, was a local administration (Ozor, 2003). Furthermore, sole administrator system and caretaker committee of management established by both General Ibrahim Babangida and General Sanni Abacha governments are good examples of local administration.

Traditional Authority System: It is difficult to provide a universally accepted definition of a traditional system of authority in Nigeria because of the diversity in the political and administrative components of traditional systems in different parts of the country. This difficulty notwithstanding, traditional systems of authority may be defined as the indigenous polity which existed before the advent of the colonialists (Adewumi, & Egwurube, 1985). The power of the traditional authority is rooted in tradition; given its deep root in group beliefs and values, its powers is not to be underestimated because it is intricately attached to spiritualism or cultural level of giving meaning to people's lives, of allowing them to experience a sense of belonging. Hence, traditional authority derives its powers by appealing to customs and tradition (Sokoh, 2018). Traditional authorities is hierarchically ordered and structured on the basis of status; it is a compound of factors such as honour, prestige, and power. It is characterized by the person's role, rights and duties in relation to the other members of that order (Sokoh, 2018). However, because of the gap between the people and the state, Nigerians have strongly affiliated with traditional institutions for protection.

Traditional authority as used here relates to the system of rulership and it's headed by a traditional ruler. While during the British colonial rule, they were greatly employed to administer their area and are charged with the responsibility of local administration and government within his domain in colonial period. But the British administrators ensured a close guidance to the traditional rulers and institutions.

Traditional Rulers/Institutions: Traditional rulers refer to people who have traditional authorities in their communities. It also refers to traditional heads of ethnic communities whose stool confers on them the highest traditional authority (Ugwuanyi, 2017). Traditional rulers in Nigeria go by various names or titles like the Emir, the Saraki, the Shehu, the Mai or Lamido in the Hausa/Fulani traditional community. In Igbo traditional society, a traditional ruler may go by the title Obi, Igwe or Eze. In the Yoruba traditional society, a traditional ruler may go by the name Alafin, Ooni, Oluwo, Alake or Olomu. In the Edo traditional society, a traditional ruler may go by the name, Odionwere or Enogie. In Kalabari, Igala, Tiv and Calabar, traditional communities' traditional rulers go by the names Amanyanabo, Alta, Tor and Obong respectively.

However, based on the review of various strata laws, Ola and Tonwe (2009) argue that a traditional ruler may be defined as:

the traditional 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 accordance (sic) with the customs and tradition of the area concerned by investment or order of the state government, and whose title is recognized as a traditional ruler title by the Government of the State.

At this point, it should be noted that the above definition of traditional ruler avers the office to be susceptible to state government's appointment and manipulation of who occupies the office and as such it becomes a challenge that is witnessed even in the contemporary Nigeria. In other words, the above definition has its short falls.

In the context of this paper, the Dasuki Committee 1986 definition of a traditional ruler seems more acceptable, it states that:

A traditional ruler is a person who by virtue of his 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 and has suzerainty over the people of the area. (Sokoh, 2018)

Three salient points were made by the above definition by Dasuki Committee, (a) a traditional ruler throne is hereditary, which implies that the office is gained through inheritance, (b) traditional rulers can be appointed, which contradicts the view that their thrones are only gained through inheritance and (c) their “appointment and governance are governed by tradition and customs. This therefore implies that traditional rulers offices are either hereditary or by appointment and as that such appointment, inheritance and governance must be subjected/ governed by the peoples traditional norms and customs, and as such their offices should not be subjected to government appointment, rather their ascendancy to the throne should be merely “recognized” by Government because the legitimacy of his political authority does not stem from popular election, but is derived from and consistent with the people’s tradition and custom.

A Historical Overview of Igbo Traditional Institutions/Rulers in Local Governance, from Pre-colonial Era up to 1979

In the pre-colonial Igboland, republican system of government was practiced; the political authority of the community was not vested on the individual. But with the introduction of colonial rule and subsequent indirect rule system, the British colonies were governed with their colonial institutions. In areas which do not have any ruler like the Igbo communities, some individuals were selected and installed as “Warrant Chiefs” and were given powers to govern at local levels. This was basically one of the reasons for its failure and subsequent collapse in the area. In the 1930s, the colonial government created new local Native Authority Councils and courts composed of mainly elders and other members of the local elite, and this was regarded to as Native Authorities. Subsequently, in the 1950s the “Eastern House of Chiefs” was established granting recognition to some members of chiefs and graded them as “first class” and “second class” chiefs, while some were appointed to serve in the House of Chiefs (Eze, 1997) his arrangement remained even through the civil war period, up until the 1976 Local Government Reforms.

According to the Anambra State Government *Chieftaincy Edict No. 8* of September 2, 1976, a traditional ruler is defined as “a traditional head of an autonomous community, identified and selected by this people according to their tradition and usages”(Local Government Official Gazette, No. 31, Vol. 1 of 25th November, 1976). The edict further laid down the criteria rulers. Thus, the floodgate of requests for recognition of traditional rulers by government in Anambra State began, and in some areas this resulted to disputes, conflicts and litigations by aspirants over leadership crisis. However, on December 14, 1976, the first set of 124 Traditional Rulers were accorded government recognition and were presented with certificates and staff of office by the military Governor of Anambra State, Colonel John Atom Kpera at an impressive ceremony in Enugu. This was followed by another set of 84 traditional rulers who were equally accorded recognition in February and March 1977, and by October 1979, when the military government handed over to the incoming civilian administration, a total of 405 Traditional rulers were accorded government recognition in Anambra State (Okeke, 1994). During the democratic governance, the Anambra State edict was modified in 1981 by the State House of Assembly and passed as “*Anambra State traditional rulers Law 1981*”. In the new law, only recognized traditional rulers were entitled to bear the title of “*Igwe*” or “*Obi*”. In Imo State, the Traditional Rulers were recognized as “*Eze*” (Eze, 1997). However, it is worthy to note that in the pre-colonial period, the traditional chiefs, institutions, rulers are tasked with making appropriate policies, regulations, for these growth of the community in accordance to their customs and tradition. In the North, the *Emir* exercised executive, judicial and religious powers while in the South-west, the *Oba* was a ceremonial monarch and his powers were limited by those of their council of Chiefs. In the South-East, the indigenous political system reveals a great deal of popular participation and was highly decentralized and fragmented with authority

being exercised at different levels, from the house hold level to the village level with an absence of centralized executive authority (Tonwe, & Osemwota, 2013).

However, with the advent of colonialism, the British colonial administrators recognized the strategic and influential position, occupied by traditional rulers in Nigeria, and thus decided to effectively utilize them in governance through the indirect rule system. Although, there were a lot of reasons behind the British adoption of indirect rule system of administration in colonial Nigeria, among them includes, limited British personnel, limited finance to run the country. Thus, it was convenient to govern the people through their traditional institutions and rulers while ensuring close guidance by British Administrators, and by so doing, the allegiance of the people was secured via their traditional rulers.

It is remarkable to note that the colonial era marked the beginning of the traditional authority in the power structure of its communities. Also, monarchical institutions (traditional ruler ship) were not popular among the people east of the Niger before the advent of colonialism. Colonist has to introduce a variant of monarchical institution called “Warrant Chiefs” to facilitate their administration. The indirect rule system gave absolute authority in local administration and traditional rulers. It involved levels of government like, the Central Administration headed by the High Commissioner (Later, the Governor-General/Governor), and the native administration headed by the traditional ruler. Under the *Native Authority Ordinance* of 1916, the traditional ruler was the *prime facie* ruler of his Native Authority area subject to the supervision, control and guidance of District Commissioner/Resident Officer (Okafor & Nwatu, 2008). The traditional ruler (*Emir* in the North, *Oba* in the West and Warrant Chiefs in the East) was the Native Authority, and as a local ruler, he combined the legislative, executive and judicial functions of government.

The traditional rulers governed their subjects during colonial era with their existing traditional institutions, with regulations, local laws and policies, in accordance with their traditions and customs provided that they are not repugnant to British laws and tradition (Okafor & Nwatu, 2008). On the other hand, directives, rules, proclamations and orders issued by the political officers (resident and district commissioners) to the natives were passed through the traditional rulers to give the impression that these were made or issued by them, thus providing an important communication link between the natives and the British Council officials. They are empowered to check crime, arrest, detain, assess tax, collect other revenue, exercise judicial powers through the native court proclamation of 1906 which vested paramount Chiefs full and unlimited rights to adjudicate in all civil matters and try criminal proceedings in the native courts (Okafor & Nwatu, 2008). In the fragmented society of eastern Nigeria, many “autonomous” communities were grouped to form native court areas. In other words, native courts in Eastern Nigeria combined the judicial, legislative and executive functions of the native authority under the traditional ruler but subject to the control, direction and supervision of the district commissioner and the resident. Thus, a chief appointed under the Native Authority is constituted as the guidance of political order in the area to which he is appointed and is vested with power over all natives residing in that area (Abdulqudir, 2016).

The 1946 Richard’s constitution which created representative regional assembly, the Eastern House of Assembly composed of educated elites who had long been excluded from the Native Authority, hurriedly prepared memorandum which gave birth to the 1950 Local Government Ordinance. Thus, the Ordinance replaced the Native Authority system, and provided for largely elected councils, with non-elected members not expected to exceed 25%. The chairmen of the council were to be elected from amongst the elected councilors (Orewa & Adewumi, 1983). The 1950 Local Government Ordinance was emphasized on democratization of the local government system; this invariably made the local authorities in the South-east to loose executive role for a participatory role in the affairs of local government. The extent to which traditional rulers were involved in decision making process at the local level during this period depended on how much influence individual traditional rulers yielded in the eyes of the political actors at this level. Subsequently, after independence and few years beyond, the political elites continued to reduce the influence of traditional rulers in local decision-making. Hence by 1963, all first and second-class chiefs have now been made appointed members of their respective country councils. This is similar to inherent traditional authority (National Archives, Enugu). In essence, traditional rulers were not scabbed out completely in local governance because it is considered that the traditional elements in the social system of the region have a vital part to play in the well-being of local government. Thus, before 1966, the role of traditional rulers in local government

had been essentially ceremonial. Also, during the Gowon Military administration, the traditional rulers lost their major role in local administration in the Eastern State, for example, traditional rulers ceased to be members of the local government councils. Indeed, in the East Central State, Chiefs (except three-*Obi* of Onitsha, *Igwe* of Oguta and *Eze* of Arochukwu) were not recognized. Even these three recognized Chiefs were not given any role in Local government (Federal Govt. of Nigeria, 1963).

The Federal Military Government in consultation with State Government instituted a uniform role for traditional rulers throughout the country, through the 1976 Local Government reform. The reforms were Federal Government response to the recommendations of Udoji Public Service Review Commission. The aim of the reform was to make the local government more effective in their primary role of bringing development to the grassroots. The reform established a multi-purpose single tier system throughout the country with the same structure and functions. Local government was recognized as a third tier of government within the Federal structure. The reform of the local government was intended to stimulate democratic self-government and to encourage initiative and leadership potential, as well as mobilization of the human and material resources for local development. However, in 1976, the new Local Government system in Anambra State was launched, by dissolving all Divisional Administrative System with effect from 1st August, 1976 and Administrative officer's in-charge of Division were appointed Sole Administrators until the new Local Government Councils were established. Next, the Government promulgated Edict No. 9 of 1976, Local Government Edict, 1976. *The Chieftaincy Edict*, No. 8 of 1976, had earlier been promulgated to make provision for Traditional Rulers or Chiefs who are to occupy significant position in the reformed Local Government System. Edict No. 9 which took effect from 1st September, 1976, was quickly followed by the Local Government (primary and secondary) electoral regulations (Adamolekun and Rowland, 1979). Furthermore, Local Government Areas were created and the number increased from 453 in 1988 to 500 in 1991, and currently (i.e. 2022), there exists 774 Local Government Areas in Nigeria.

The Role of Traditional Rulers/Institutions in Local Government in Anambra State 1979-1999

The 1976 Local Government Reforms was a historic achievement in the development of local government system in Nigeria. The Federal Military Government was motivated to stabilize and rationalize government at the local level, thereby ensuring the decentralization of State governments to local levels so as to properly harness local resources, and ensure rapid development. Thus for a complete democratization of local government system, 301 local Government councils were created and the control of local government by the traditional rulers was tactfully removed from the system (Ojiakor, 2007). In essence, traditional rulers were insulated from politics and formally assigned advisory roles in Local decision-making through Traditional/Emirate Councils. The advisory roles of the traditional rulers are not enforceable on the elected local government Councilors and Chairman to adopt. The uniform advisory role of traditional rulers of local government in the 1976 Local Government Reform received its strongest opposition and was more significant to traditional rulers in the Northern Nigeria because prior to this time, they still played a significant role in the decision making process at local level. While to the traditional rulers in both South-East and South-West such advisory role by the 1976 Reform was only a stating in "black and white" what they had been doing over the decade (Tonwe, & Osemwota, 2013).

The provisions of the 1976 reform document were incorporated into the *1979 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria*. The 1979 Constitution section 7, sub-section (1) provides that "the government of every state shall ensure the existence of Local Government under a law which provides for the establishment, structure, composition, finance and functions of such councils" (Federal Govt. of Nigeria, 1979). Invariably, the local authorities were State creatures and in little or much degree, their relevance, strength or degrees of power were subjected to government influence and control. Also, the 1979 Local Government reform required each State to adopt one that is suitable or appropriate for the area, either active president or ceremonial presidents of the local government councils for the traditional rulers. The composed traditional councils were charged with key functions like

- (a) Formulation of proposals as advice to local governments.
- (b) Harmonization of activities of local government councils through discussion of problems affecting the generally, and giving advice and guidance to them
- (c) Co-ordination of development plans of local government by joint discussion and advice.

Other functions assigned to the Traditional Council were assistance in tax assessment and collection, custodian and support of art and culture, Chieftaincy matters, control of traditional titles and offices, settlement of disputes, communication and representation of community opinion, community mobilization and community development (Okafor, & Nwatu, 2008). The same 1979 Constitution failed to mention the role of traditional rulers in local government. Thereafter, their advisory role to democratic elected local government councils provided in the 1976 Local Government Reform which was not guaranteed by the 1979 Constitution was the subject of heated debates during the Second Republic from 1979-1983 and was unresolved till another seizure of power by the military in 1983. Perhaps, in response to the non-constitutional recognition of the role of traditional rulers, or their rigorous pursue to enhance their status and role in politics, General Babangida inaugurated the Constitution Review Committee (CRC) in 1987, headed by Dasuki, they recommended advisory role for traditional institutions at local government level. So based on their recommendations, Government recognized the role of traditional institutions in the constitution, but only in an advisory capacity. According to Bello-Imam, Babangida observed in relation to the traditional institution that the problem that arises is how best to integrate them in the machinery of government without undermining democratic ideals and without destroying the respect and affection they enjoy (Bello-Imam, 2004).

With the advisory role of the traditional rulers and recognized in the 1989 and 1995 Constitutions Schedule Part II, they were denied any form of executive, legislative and judicial roles and socio-religious functions at the local government level. Additionally, the Anambra State Rulers Laws of 1981 as amended encouraged the traditional rulers to “corporate with the local government council” and assist them in the collection of taxes, and should be consulted in all land matters (Eze, 1997). They are to promote community development, engage in peace-keeping process within their community and their neighbours. From the forth going, the *State Chieftaincy Edict* did not provide any role for the Traditional Ruler beyond his community, which was contrary to what was obtained in the First Republic, when some first-class Traditional Rulers were appointed members of the “House of Chiefs”, and thus legislated for the entire region.

Challenges and Criticisms Confronting Traditional Rulers/-Institutions in Local Government in the 21st Century

It is remarkable to note that the 1976 Local Government reforms introduced a uniform local government system in Nigeria, and in furtherance, provided it with its specific roles and functions so as to achieve its decentralization from the State control, thereby enabling it to assist in the developmental process of the community which is essential. However, the supervisory role of the State was retained, making the State to continuously influence the functions and activities of local government; even the traditional institutions are not left out of the control of the State government. The practice is that traditional institutions are only recognized after the State government has issued Staff of Office. This scenario further undermines the traditional selection of traditional rulers, and most times, for reasons of continued relevance, the traditional institutions often dance to the whims and caprices of the State Government. Thus, the above scenario often generates the problem of power tussle and in some cases, leads to dual leadership or dual authority, as this has been the situation in Aguleri and Awka communities of Anambra State in the last five years. In addition, the traditional rulers sometimes receive shabby treatment and lukewarm attitudes from the local government functionaries while performing their advisory role in their local government areas. Also, the local government functionaries portray any role of traditional rulers in governance as an unnecessary burden, despite five percent (5%) of statutory revenue of local government areas are mandatorily required to be remitted to

traditional council for their upkeep, which was put in place by Sanni Abacha's Military Decree 1995 (Sokoh, 2018). However, in contemporary times, (Sokoh, 2018) avers that most state government often fail to pay this stipend to any traditional ruler who they perceived as unsupportive to their government. In essence, many traditional rulers are forced to compromise and support the government in power, thereby making them a mere stooge for government control or face being suspended and non-recognized by the State government with the withdrawal of their staff of office and the appointment of new traditional ruler. In such senerio in Anambra state, the above resort to power tussle between the two traditional rulers and or dual leadership between the two traditional rulers. For instance, on 11th August 2020, the Anambra State government, under Governor Willie Obiano suspended 12 traditional rulers over alleged visitation to the president without the Governors permission as this has been the situation in Nawfia, Agulu, Ezira, Ikenga, Abacha, Aguleri communities among others on 18th December 2020. (Vanguard Newspaper, August 11, 2020)

Despite this, traditional chieftaincy institution and traditional rulers have continued to exercise considerable influence and play active role in the political administration at all levels of government in Nigeria. For instance, Traditional Rulers play important role in the choice and emergence of electoral candidates in contemporary Nigeria in spite of their non-affiliation to any political party. Also, traditional rulers command great respect and awe among the people in contemporary Nigeria and this account for their patronage by political office aspirants during electioneering processes to receive their royal blessing, support and endorsements to the federal, including presidential aspirants, state and local government aspirations, mostly of first class rulers across the country (Sokoh, 2018).

More so, in the contemporary Nigerian society, political aspirants visits the traditional rulers and institutions not only to solicit their support so as to emerge as political leaders during electoral process, but also seeks heir supports so as to legitimize their reigns and tenures, and for religious purposes, they visit prominent Prophets, Pastors, Reverend for similar reasons. Unarguably, traditional rulers remain the closet governments and most effective mobilizers of the people at the grassroots, and this explains why governments at all levels always want to identify with traditional institutions in Nigeria. Emordi and Osiki (2008) rightly stated that the only problem with the institution is that it is not enjoying any constitutional backing or role and this has been its major challenge since the end of the First Republic. Thus, the traditional rulers have been pre-occupied with efforts to enhance their role in the local government and this has greatly affected their interest and contribution to the effectiveness of local government within their communities.

Finally, it is a truism that traditional institutions play a crucial role in governance, yet the institution has received a lot of criticism and contention over to abolish or retain traditional rulers/ institutions in local governance in Nigeria, which has resulted to the views of "to be or not to be", or the abolitionist and the 'retentionist' schools of thought. Sokoh (2018) went further to identify four major areas of these criticisms, which are: (i) the institution of traditional rulers is an essentially autocratic one and cannot be accommodated under a democratic dispensation; (ii) the institution is bound by tradition and is hence not an effective tool with which to promote modernisation and development; (iii) the institution is essentially male-dominated and contributes to institutionalized gender inequalities at the local (rural) level and; (iv) the institution promotes "tribalism" which is a potential threat to the national policy of nation-building. In similar manner, Adesoji (2010) avers other prominent criticisms of the traditional institutions in contemporary Nigeria which includes: leadership tussle among traditional rulers in the Council of Traditional Rulers, involvement in partisan politics for personal gains, and support to reigning governments whether civilian or military, among others.

However, traditional rulers are in most case found bestowing traditional chieftaincy titles and honours to wealthy and affluent people in the society who have made little or no contribution to the growth and development of the society, mostly for their personal and material benefit. All these and more continue to undermine the traditional institutions often respected as the fulcrum of the people's culture and values.

Conclusion

This paper has given a historical account on the changing roles of traditional institutions and rulers in local governance in Nigeria but with particular emphasis to Anambra State. Native Authority which later metamorphosed

to traditional institutions played active role during the colonial rule in local governance, however, since the creation of local government system in Nigeria in 1976 and traditional institutions have been subjected to advisory role to local functionaries which are not enforceable, despite they are the closest to the grass root. In Nigeria, traditional rulers still record a high legitimacy in the eyes of the people, there is need to integrate the institution into the country's contemporary local government system so as to assist in the success of political and economic developments in the local levels. However, traditional institutions and leaders are not without criticism today as highlighted by some scholars above in the areas of leadership tussle and supporting certain political candidates for personal gains.

Finally, traditional functionaries should not be allowed to exercise corrosive influence on traditional institutions, rather they should be given some legitimacy formally, and in furtherance, be disallowed from any active involvement in party politics as they serve as agents for grass root development.

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