Governance of Nigeria's Villages and Cities through Indigenous Institutions

By

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Abstract

This article seeks to understand how Nigerian urban and rural communities are organized for self-governance in the face of the failure of state-based structures in Africa. Utilizing inputs from research findings by a network of Nigerian researchers, the article affirms the existence of local institutions for self governance across selected urban and rural communities in Nigeria. These local institutions which include political, administrative, socio-cultural, development and economic institutions are providing most of the goods and services needed by the people. The article identifies the various forms of local non-governmental organizations or local development organs and concludes by identifying the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats which characterize these local institutions. It is the contention of the article that these elements be taken into consideration in attempting a possible convergence of state and society institutions if the search for good governance in Africa is not to end in failure.

1. Introduction

The formal structures of government in Nigeria have increasingly become a fiction in governance. The services they provide have declined sharply in quality and quantity. In several respects, these services are no longer being delivered by government agencies - either because of long strikes arising from workers' protests at their poor pay or because of the lack of essential equipments (e.g. health care) or the loss or absence of the culture of public service (e.g. the police, the military, postal and civil services). Poor quality service or absence of service, has led to the development of alternative institutional structures for providing essential services either in terms of security, improvement/maintenance of roads, water facilities, etc. These alternatives come either as private provision or community based provision. The latter are usually based on traditional structures.

The failure of governmental structures inherited from the colonial state in Africa, has stimulated renewed interest in indigenous knowledge and institutions in recent years(Ake, 1990; Sawyer, 1993; Wunsch & Olowu, 1990; Ayittey, 1991; Davidson, 1992; Landell-Mills, 1992, Warren, 1992; Duany, 1992, V.Ostrom, 1993; Wynne, 1993; Wellard et. al., 1993 etc.). This renewed interest is based partly on the fact that these institutions have proven to be resilient and the fact that they are more effectively institutionalized and are relied more upon by African people to provide them with required goods and services in the face of the failure of the formal, colonial-based structures. Such goods and services include; security, roads, bridges, schools, post offices, mechanisms for conflict resolution, common-pool resources management and credit provision to mention a few.

On the other hand, there is a recognition that these indigenous institutions also have their weaknesses - their small scale, dealing with heterogeneity, digesting and processing information from external, formal institutions and their external context. (World Bank, 1992).

Indeed, the Mamadou Dia-led AM 90s research project at the World Bank argues that if they (i.e.traditional/informal /indigenous institutions) cannot digest and process information from external, formal institutions and their external context, they will not be able to adapt to changes and new challenges in the global economic environment. Their possibilities to grow and their ability to cope with increasingly complex and competitive choices will be stunted. If they do not adapt to the external formal environment, these informal institutions will gradually become irrelevant.

Not offering viable alternatives (especially to the growing number of young-generation Africans), it is contended, they are

increasingly coming to be perceived as constraints rather than
coping mechanisms - except in times of dire crisis, when they
provide the only viable safety nets. If these institutions fail to
renovate themselves, they will be discarded as anachronistic relics
of the past, or be used opportunistically as a free-riding system
by those who have lost faith in African tradition and culture but
cannot "make it" in the formal world.

Thus they argue that neither total 'institutional transplant'
(external enclaves) nor 'traditional fundamentalism'
(conservationism) is a viable alternative for Africa's development.
The institutional crisis in Africa cannot be resolved by relying
exclusively on either enclave transplant institutions or purely
traditional institutions.

Elaborating further, the AM 90's research project argues that
the solution is neither in formalizing (or getting rid of) informal
institutions, nor in informalizing of formal institutions, but in
reconciling and encouraging convergence between adapted formal
institutions and renovated informal, indigenous institutions.

It is against this backdrop that the work of the Research
Group on Local Institutions becomes important. In 1993, the
research group based at the Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife,
Nigeria, embarked upon a research and training programme using
funds provided by the Ford Foundation, West Africa Office, Lagos.
The original focus of the research component was to attempt to
understand the governance of villages with the hope that this will
yield important insights for understanding what we referred to as
indigenous administration'. We however found that similar
governance structures such as are found in the rural areas also
exist in the urban centres. This led to incorporate urban centres
in the research project.

The overall objective of the research effort is to try to
understand how Nigerian villages and cities are actually being
governed as distinct from the theoretical and formal expectations.
Theoretically and formally, Nigeria is being governed by the
central or federal government from its capital at Abuja, the thirty
state governments and the 593 local governments - which are all
manned by retired military officers or appointees of the military
government. In reality, however, these institutions are not
responsible for the public services enjoyed by most citizens in the
urban and rural areas of Nigeria. Such services are provided by a
variety of non-governmental agencies, some of which are indigenous
(e.g. townships, community based action groups etc.) but some of
which are not (e.g. religious and philanthropic agencies, donor
organs etc.)

Finally, on the basis of our findings, our work intends to
contribute to the attempt at bringing about a convergence of the
traditional/informal/indigenous and modern/formal/state structures

of governance which are at present disconnected in Africa.
We believe this is an important agenda in view of the disastrous
consequences of the interface between informal and formal
structures to-date.

II. **Definition of Terms**

Due to the different usages which it is necessary to define at
this point the key operational concepts in our study. First, we
make a distinction between formal and informal institutions.

Formal institutions are those deriving directly from the
modern state, a legacy of the colonial period.

Informal institutions are those that do not derive their
existence from the formal constitution of the state but are created
and nurtured by the people. They are rooted in African indigenous
history, tradition and culture. An attempt is usually made to
distinguish indigenous institutions from non-indigenous
institutions. To a large extent informal and indigenous
institutions overlap. However, some indigenous institutions such
as the 'Oba', 'Emir', 'Obis', have acquired several characteristics
of formal structures and must be regarded as indigenous formal
structures. On the other hand, the community town-unions and
development associations which are responsible for hosting
community day celebrations are informal indigenous institutions.

Governance relates to the rule-ruler-ruled relationship. In
this sense it has three dimensions:

Functionally, it deals with how rules are
made, legitimized and enforced.

Structurally, it comprises three distinct
institutions, the ruler or the state, the
ruled or the society and the rules or law.
Governance is the relationship between state
and society institutions.

Normatively, it highlights the values
associated with (good) governance. These
include: transparency, organizational
effectiveness, accountability, predictability,
legitimacy, popular participation and
plurality of policy choices.

Cities refer to population concentrations of 20,000 people or
more and/or concentration of municipal facilities such as
telephones, electricity, banks, post offices, major markets, petrol
stations etc. Settlements that do not have either of these
qualities are regarded as villages - however large (agrovilles).

III Specific Research Objectives

a) To examine the patterns and procedures for administering selected villages and cities in Nigeria, using a comparative approach.

b) To identify and characterize the indigenous institutions involved in the governing of the sampled urban and rural settlements in Nigeria.

c) To examine the role(s) being played by each of the identified local institutions in the administration of selected settlements in Nigeria.

d) To highlight and proffer solutions to the key problems of administering villages and cities in Nigeria.

e) Offer suggestions on how to improve on the pattern of governance at the community level and explore how effective collaboration can be achieved between the formal and informal institutions of governing Nigeria's villages and cities.

f) To identify critical values of indigenous administrative and distill salient lessons that can be derived from them.

IV Specific Research Questions

a) What are the major features of indigenous 'administration systems in Nigeria?

b) How does the system handle the provision and production of public goods and services such as:

- law and order/administration of justice

- management of common pool resources e.g. public land, forest etc

- infrastructure provision and maintenance ?

c) How does indigenous administration support productive activities such as farming, fishing, hunting, etc?

d) What is the nature of the relationship between indigenous and state-based administrative systems?

e) What is the role of gender in indigenous administration systems?

f) What lessons can we learn from these indigenous administration systems? How can the system be improved?

V. Methodology and Research Strategy

a) The country was zoned into four - namely North-East; Central; East; and South-West. Two Principal Researchers formed a team to cover each zone, except the South-West which had three teams. Each team was to study two communities (one rural and one urban) selected on the basis of the principal researchers' knowledge of the areas. This is to help facilitate communication and interaction with local inhabitants of the area.

b) A comprehensive interview guide was designed for the collection of information in the field.

c) Historical and official documents are to be consulted if they exist.

d) Focused-Group Discussion/Interview with:

* 3-5 community leaders;

* 2 public servants - teachers, local government or state government workers;

* 2 'strangers' or immigrants living in the community; and

* 2 other relevant personalities who may have knowledge of the community.

(e) Selected Communities:

(i) Mairi (Urban) and Marama (Rural) - Borno state

(ii) Abwa-Mbagen (Rural) and Samaru (Urban) -Benue and Kaduna states.

(iii) Ubomiri (Rural) - Imo state

(iv) Ifetedo (Urban) and Olode (Rural) - Osun state

(v) Abeokuta (Urban) - Ogun state

(vi) Ilawe-Ekiti (Urban) and Awo-Ekiti (Rural) - Ondo state.

(vii) A 'SWOT' (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis of each institution was to be carried out by the investigators.

VI. Summary of Major Findings

1. Indigenous institutions exist for the governance of villages and cities in all the sampled communities. ·However, these

institutions exist in various forms are either traditional (i.e. carry-overs from pre-colonial times) or relatively recent indigenous responses to the limitations of the post-colonial state institutions. These include political /administrative institutions centered around newly created 'chiefs', trade and professional guilds, age grade associations, town/village unions, community development associations, women's groups and associations, as well as religious and social organizations.

2. The increasing inability of formal state structures to tackle problems confronting the society has given new impetus and virility to this institutional form. In some societies informal indigenous are more potent than the formal indigenous institutions. The reverse is the case in other communities.

3. Although most of the communities are governed by traditional rulers, these rulers are not despots. Instead, they range from constitutional monarchs to ceremonial ones. Power and authority therefore tends to be dispersed both vertically and horizontally. Vertically, through a hierarchy of chiefs down to the family head. Horizontally, through heads/chiefs of territorial sub-units (quarters and compounds) and again terminating at the level of the family head. These chieftaincy institutions act as checks and balances on the power and authority of the traditional ruler who cannot govern without their consent and indeed active involvement in the process of governance.

4. Informal indigenous institutions like Town/Village Unions and Community Development Associations (CDAs) also serve as checks on formal traditional authority. In fact, in some communities, the town/village union or community development association is the <u>de facto</u> supreme political and administrative institution.

5. Informal indigenous institutions such as community development associations, trade and professional guilds, women's groups, religious organizations, social clubs, kindred, age-grades, thrift and credit unions etc. play active roles in socio-economic development. Some examples are; construction of roads and bridges, building of schools and health facilities, management of markets, construction of police stations, court houses, community banks, revenue generation and labour mobilization for community projects and for mutual aid and welfare.

6. Indigenous institutions play active roles in the administration of justice, maintenance of law and order, peace-keeping, provision of security and conflict resolution.

7.   Apart from the islamized communities in the north, and some
      communities in the middle-belt of Nigeria, women play
      important roles in the governance of communities and in socio-
      economic development.

8.   Some of the communities can be referred to as federal while
      others are highly decentralized. Policy and decision making
      are therefore to a significant extent consensual and in some
      cases, democratic.

9.   Linkages exist between indigenous institutions and state
      institutions.   These could be formal or informal. Examples
      of formal linkages include: ratification or appointment of
      traditional   rulers   by   government   which   pays   their
      salaries/stipends; membership of traditional chiefs in
      customary courts established by government; membership of some
      traditional rulers in the traditional councils of the several
      states and joint execution of some development projects.
      Informal links would include collaboration between the police
      and vigilante organizations in fighting crime and the use of
      influential members of the community (usually resident in
      urban areas) in seeking assistance or in channelling resources
      and development projects from state institutions. The local
      government councils also make use of influential community
      leaders in collecting taxes.

10.   Linkages exist between indigenous institutions in rural
      communities and indigenous institutions in urban centers.
      For   instance,   branches   of   rural   community   indigenous
      institutions are usually established in the urban centres. In
      this way, indigenes of rural communities resident in Urban
      centres participate in the governance of their communities and
      also protect the interests of community members resident in
      the urban centres.

11.   Indigenous administration is facing series of problems or
      threats and challenges.   These include; disputes over
      succession to traditional rulership, the weakening of
      traditional authority by state institutions, challenge of
      traditional authority and values by the youth in particular
      and the educated - christianized elite in general.

        In the next section, we proceed to synthesize the major
findings

VII   **Synthesis of Major Findings**

        From the summary of major findings listed above, three types
of indigenous institutions are identifiable. These include;

(a)   Political and Administrative Indigenous Institutions,

(b) Socio-Cultural Organizations and
(c) Development and Economic Institutions.

(a) **Political and Administrative Institutions**

Indigenous political and administrative institutions were found to be in existence in the communities studied and they play very useful roles in the governance of their communities. Often, these consist of the traditional leadership structures as modified by colonial rule and post-independence governments. In Borno State in the North-East of Nigeria, Mairi (urban) and Marama (rural) communities were studied. The findings indicate that the traditional structure of governance is hierarchical. The Shehu of Borno and his council administer the entire emirate. The next level is the district which is governed by the district head and his council. Next are the villages whose affairs are handled by the village head (Lawan) and his council. The base of the system consists of wards which are governed by the hamlet or ward head (Bulama) and the council of elders (Dlakwa & Okafor 1995).

In the south-west, variations on the above structure were observed. For instance, both in Ilawe-Ekiti (urban) and Awo-Ekiti (rural) in Ondo State, available evidence indicates that governance of both communities centres on the Oba (king) and his council of chiefs. Although there are different hierarchies of chiefs, the important point to stress is that the Oba does not rule alone but in council. The chieftaincy hierarchy is such that the interests of all citizens are represented including the women who have their own chiefs (Ayo and Awotokun, 1995).

Also in the south-west, the study of Abeokuta (urban) in Ogun State reveals some distinct peculiarities in spite of the presence of a hierarchy. Three issues from the Abeokuta study deserve mention. First is the fact that Abeokuta is said to be a federal system made up of 143 distinct communities. Second, is the finding that the system operates a federal parliament where community wide decisions are taken. Third is the discovery that the <u>Oba</u> (king) of any of the constituent communities reigns but does not rule. He is seen as the symbol of authority whereas actual decisions are made by different chieftaincy institutions. For instance, the <u>Ogboni</u> chiefs headed by the <u>Oluwo</u> combine administrative and judicial functions. The <u>Ode</u> chiefs are responsible for policing, the <u>Ologun</u> or <u>Olorogun</u> chiefs are responsible for defence and the <u>Parakoyi</u> chiefs are responsible for commerce. This structure is said to exist in all 143 constituent communities or states which make up Abeokuta or the Egba federation or confederacy (Oludimu, 1995).

Ifetedo (urban) and Olode (rural) communities in Osun State in the south-west reflect the same hierarchical structure with some peculiar variations. Ifetedo has an <u>Oba</u> (king) and a hierarchy of chiefs, while Olode has a <u>Baale</u> (sub-king) and a council of chiefs. Ifetedo's case is interesting because succession to the throne is

by the most senior chief in the Oba's council. Olode's case is interesting because it is a community of 'strangers' drawn from virtually all parts of Nigeria by the imperatives of commerce. Although a tributary community to Ile-Ife (hence it has no king), members of the community have been able to craft traditional institutions for their own governance.

In the south-east, our case study was Ubomiri (rural) community in Imo State. Here, the pattern of governance is radically different from what exists in the south-west and north-west. Although Ubomiri has an <u>Eze</u> (king), he appears to be a post-colonial resurrection of the discredited warrant chiefs of the colonial period by way of an Imo State government edict of 1978. To all intents and purposes, his role in community governance is purely ceremonial. The political and administrative system of Ubomiri has its base in the family from which the next level, the kindred is constituted. Kindreds in turn constitute a village, and the associated villages comprise Ubomiri 'autonomous' community with the town union as the <u>de-facto</u> supreme governing unit. Other indigenous institutions like <u>Ndichie</u> (Council of Elders) still plays some role in conflict resolution. However, <u>Nde Nze</u> (Council of <u>Ozo</u> title holders i.e. men of achievement) has been so bastardized that it is no longer useful because anybody who has money can buy the Ozo title even if he does not have the qualities usually taken into consideration in the pre-colonial times. What actually makes the Ubomiri case unique is their development of the art of association. In fact, from the family upwards, there are associations either for men or women. These associational forms were already highly developed by the time the Europeans arrived in the region(Dike 1985).

Our last two cases are Samaru (urban) community in Zaria metropolis of Kaduna State (North Central) and Abwa Mbagen in Benue State (Middle Belt). While Samaru belongs to the traditional area of centralized emirate rule in the north, Abwa-Mbagen lies in the middle-belt where, centralized and hierarchical administrative structures were largely absent before British colonial rule.

The traditional administrative structure of the two communities thus highlight two contrasting principles of administration. The first is the territorial-based administration consisting of emirates under the authority of the <u>Sarki</u> (Emir). The emirate had districts each of which was under a district head <u>(Hakimi)</u>. Each district was further subdivided into villages under the authority of the <u>Dagachi</u> and wards ruled by the <u>Mai anguwa</u>. The traditional ruler of Samaru is called <u>Dagachi or Sarkin Samaru</u> (chief of Samaru).

The functions of the chief include maintenance of law and order, the collection of taxes, the settlement of minor disputes (although most disputes now end up with the police and the courts), the supervision of the market (even though this function is now

largely performed by a Market Chief (Sarkin Kasuwa) appointed by the local government), and the endorsement or regulation of all land transactions. In fact the traditional institutional framework puts the traditional ruler at the centre of all land transactions both as witness and as the authority endorsing such transactions for approval and issuance of certificates of occupancy by the local and state government. Consequently, the average Samaru resident may not encounter the person or authority of the Sarki until he acquires or wants to acquire a piece of land or to sell some landed property. Although more and more of the functions and powers of the traditional ruler are being taken over by other institutions of government, the traditional ruler is still very powerful here more for the immense influence he wields than for the formal power he controls.

The residents of the town, many of whom come from places far removed from the traditional areas of emirate rule, do not only have little room for participation in this system, but may not even be familiar with its basic structures and values. This has had implications for their loyalty to the authorities of the town as well as their compliance with rules, regulations and decisions emanating from this authority.

To get around this problem, a system has now been evolved (not only in Samaru, but in most major urban settlements in Nigeria with a substantial number of non-indigenes) of appointing chiefs or 'tribal leaders' for the major ethnic groups with a sizeable population of residents. These 'chiefs', along with other identified community leaders from different parts of the town, sit in an advisory council to discuss security and other matters and to advise both the Sarkin Samaru and the District Head of Bassawa (to which Samaru belongs), in the maintenance of law, order and peace (Nkom & Sorkaa, 1995).

Unlike Samaru, Abwa-Mbagen is a village in the Mbaakuru District of Buruku Local Government Area (LGA) of Benue State. It used to operate the traditional system of governance in Tivland - the kinship based system of administration which is decentralized or segmentary and based on clans, lineages and families with the compound as the main unit of political organization. Effective political authority rested mainly at the level of compound and kindred units. The compounds were headed by the oldest male member. His authority depended largely on his personal qualities. As the spokesman of the compound he could only enforce his decisions if they had been arrived at by consensus. If any member of the compound strongly disagreed with his style of governance, he could break away to form his own compound. This was a strong check on leaders who had autocratic tendencies.

The kindred level was the smallest segment of the lineage in which "all the agnatic descendants of a single ancestor with their farms form a single territorial block" (Dorward; 1969). Authority

within the kindred was the purview of the elders. . Agreements at the council of elders meetings were arrived at by consensus as the council also had no executive⊧ powers to enforce any unpopular decisions. The Tiv traditional set-up was thus a highly decentralized system with well entrenched egalitarian values. (Bohannan; 1969).

When the British came, and in pursuit of administrative centralization, they appointed prominent people and invested them with authority as <u>clan chiefs</u> and back stopped with instruments of coercion. The people rebelled against this autocratic system and the British reacted by creating a Tiv Division with a central administration. This comprised a three-tier system of local administration made up of kindred councils, clan councils and the Tiv council. This system was still not very satisfactory as there were popular uprisings against its excesses in 1939. With little modifications, this system continued through independence in 1960 with further uprisings in 1960 and 1964.

Abwa-Mbagen was the headquarters first of the Mbagen clan council and later, the Mbaakuru District. Under the present political set-up, the districts form part of the local government and are thus the lowest formal administrative unit below the local governments. The district heads and their subordinates, the village and kindred heads, are part and parcel of the traditional administrative structure and are thus appointed by the paramount traditional ruler - the <u>Tor Tiv</u>. Their salaries are paid by the state government, and consequently they form part of the normal state apparatus for the maintenance of law and order and the implementation of state policies and directives.

With the incorporation of the institution of traditional rulership into the state structure, this particular institution has the ambivalent or Janus-faced character of functioning both as part of the formal state structure as well as an indigenous institution recognised by people as deriving from their history and tradition.

In Abwa-Mbagen, the kindred head is only listened to when he 'speaks the mind of the community'. He has very limited executive powers. In the face of the weaknesses of this structure, the people of Abwa-Mbagen have forged another institution to allow for some level of popular participation in local governance and socio-economic development. This is the Mbagen Development Association (MDA) which we shall address shortly.

(b) <u>Socio-Cultural Organizations</u>

Socio-cultural organizations represent another form of indigenous organizations through which Nigerian communities govern themselves. These organizations are largely voluntary associations crafted locally for the peculiar needs of like-minded individuals or reflect religious and gender solidarity. An example is the

Zumuntan Mattar Ekiliziya (Women Christian Fellowship) in Marama community in Borno State.   In the main, they provide welfare services to members in times of need.   In this category could be included age-grade associations, which are used partly for socialization and education of specific age-grades into roles they are to play in the community.   They are also used for the implementation of decisions taken by superior institutions e.g. in respect of sanitation, construction of roads and buildings, and in the management of common pool resources.   These associations exist in one form or another in all the communities under this study and by extrapolation, all over Nigeria.

(c)   **Development and Economic Associations**

A third category of indigenous institutions identified in the study may be referred to as 'Development and Economic Associations' since their activities are aimed at infrastructural and economic development.   These institutions could be traditional (i.e. pre-colonial) or relatively recent responses by the communities to the perceived weaknesses of the traditional structures on the one hand and the ineffectiveness of state-based structures on the other hand.

(i)   Traditional

These could be in the form of market women associations (especially in the south-west) which regulate markets and monitor prices of goods, or the Parakoyi chiefs who are in charge of commerce in Abeokuta.   Others are trade and professional guilds, age grade associations, and thrift and credit associations (ESUSU).

(ii)   Informal Indigenous

In this category belong community development associations (CDAs), Town/Village Associations and Cooperatives.   In some of the communities, these associations are not only taking over political and administrative roles from the traditional structures, they have also been responsible for most of the self-help economic and development projects executed by the people themselves or in collaboration with state-based government structures.   A good illustration is the Mbagen Development Association in Benue State.

The Mbagen Development Association is the most popular and the most important institution for mass mobilization for development and governance in Abwa-Mbagen.   It has been adjudged as the most successful C.D.A. in Benue State (Sorkaa: 1990, 1994).   The association has branches throughout the major towns of Nigeria where a sizeable number of people from Mbagen are found.   The association has established a sizeable number of key institutions in the community whose leaders or managers have become very central to the governance of the village.   These leaders include the superintendent of the Comprehensive Health Centre, the Principal of

the Comprehensive Secondary School, and the Bank Manager of the Mbagen Community Bank.

These leaders being enlightened members of the community, in association with prominent sons and elites of Abwa-Mbagen resident in urban centres, have become the central pillars for the mobilization of the youth for productive activities, and for the initiation of peace meetings with neighbouring villages to resolve land and other conflicts.

The decision- making structure of the Mbagen development association is made up of three main bodies. These are, the National Executive Council, the Traditional Council headed by the most senior district head of Mbagen, and the committee of the Elites. The last committee is particularly influential in local governance as it operates as the major think-tank of the community. Its recommendations affect the day-to-day administration of the community as well as the resolution of major conflicts in the community especially those relating to land.

The Mbagen development association has in fact become an important leadership training ground for sons of Mbagen aspiring for National Politics. People who prove themselves capable in running the affairs of the association often end up achieving higher political posts or status in the wider society (Nkom & Sorkaa: 1995).

In other communities across Nigeria, similar associations have been responsible for the building of schools, court houses, primary health centres, roads, police posts, post offices, and markets. They have also been behind the impetus for direct economic activities like community banking, fish farms, and construction of feeder roads to facilitate the movement of produce and goods to and from the communities.

Of course, there have also been failures. For instance, an attempt to organize a CDA in Samaru floundered and collapsed after a short time apparently because the diverse communities of Samaru have not been able to forge a community of understanding to which the various groups owe allegiance.

Another example of failure was the attempt by the Women Association of Marama to engage in fish farming by constructing a fish pond. Unfortunately after heavy rains, the pond was breached and some of the fish escaped, while those left were illegally harvested by non-members of the association. As a result, the women abandoned the project (Dlakwa & Okafor: 1995).

VIII. <u>Analysis of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats</u>

As an on-going project, the findings which we have attempted to articulate above may be regarded as tentative although they have

provided a clearer understanding of how Nigerian communities are actually governed. In particular we have tried to identify what constitutes Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) which have to be taken into consideration in attempts to reconcile 'renovated' indigenous institutions with 'adapted' state-based institutions in the search for good governance in Nigeria and indeed in Africa in general. Below are some of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats that were identified.

(a) Strengths

A major strength of indigenous institutions is their legitimacy which is recognized not only by community members, but also by government institutions and functionaries and ensures orderly succession to political office. This is closely followed by the fairly stable nature of indigenous institutions over time as opposed to state institutions which are unstable. Checks and balances also exist in the form of chieftaincy institutios which largely prevent traditional rulers from being despotic. A further strength of indigenous institution is their informal approaches to conflict resolution and in the administration of justice. This system works effectively and at low cost. Last but not least is the role played by elites who are not resident in the community. They provide not only resources in terms of cash for development purposes, but also, ideas, initiatives and influence in support of local level development.

(b) Weaknesses

A major weakness of indigenous political institution is that they are restrictive (in some of the communities) in the sense that political leadership is acquired through ascription and political office is often held for life. Moreover, there is a tendency to concentrate power in a few hands. They are not entirely open (transparent) since there is a high degree of secrecy, and divination in some instances and some levels. On the economic/development front, indigenous institutions often have weak financial/capital base, lack effective managerial skills, and are deficient in entrepreneurial qualities. This is illustrated by the frequent resort to ad-hoc approaches to development projects.

On conflict resolution/administration of justice, sanctions can be abrupt and high-handed, often leaving little room for review and appeals.

Another major weakeness of indigenous institutions is the exclusion of women from policy and decision-making in some communities thereby excluding about half the adult population.

(c) Opportunities

Despite the above mentioned weaknesses, opportunities exist

for adapting and renovating traditions that have weathered the storm of time and political assaults but are considered objectionable by the educated or westernised elites. For instance, traditional values and norms which emphasize good governance can be harnessed and promoted by the elites who are increasingly being coopted into the system through honourary chieftaincy titles.

Indigenous institutions also provide opportunities for buidling a better nation by adapting among others: indigenous efforts at decentralization, federal arrangements, and arrangements that enable people from different parts to Nigeria to live together in a community with synthesizing urban and rural resources and elements for constituting or reforming formal institutions for local level development.

(d)   Threats

There are also threats to indigenous institutions. These include: challenge from state-based institutions, challenges from youths and educated and westernized elites especially where traditional institutions have remained glued to the past, and challenges from modernization and monetization which are destroying communal spirit by encouraging individualism.

Conclusion

The research findings reported in this paper underscore three important issues. First, they help us to come to grips with the reality of institutions and institutional analysis rather than the fictional supposition that the state-mandated institutions are the critical institutions on which the life of the mass of the people hang. Indeed, several close observers have often wondered why African people have managed to survive the economic, political and ecological crises with which the continent is confronted. An insight into the vigor and activities of the type of institutions covered in this study provide some sort of answer to this query- the real institutions are often overlooked by policymakers and teachers/students of public administration alike. These institutions are used not only to tackle economic and ecological problems but also to avoid and manipulate oppressive social institutions of the state. For instance, since the promulgation of the land use decree in 1976 by the military authorities, making the state the sole owner (or trustee) of all unallocated land, the various researchers report extensive institutional strategies for the continued sale and resale of land outside the formal state structure. The same is the case with artificial housing and town planning laws imposed on urban communities by state-based authorities.

A second significance of this research is that it underscores the variety of institutions existing in Nigeria. The distinction is not simply between formal and informal structures or between exotic and indigenous structures. Rather, what exists are substantial overlap between these various categories. Depending on the history, circumstance and personalities in each area, one indigenous institution may be relevant or irrelevant.

A final and perhaps most important issue is the challenge of synthesising the various institutional types which exist. The attempts to do this in the colonial period led to the bastardiation of several of the indigenous/traditional institutions. Yet, neither economic development nor democracy without building on the valued social structures which exist and with which the people identify (Tocqueville 1854, Barkan et al 1991, North 1993, E.Ostrom 1993, Mabogunje 1993). Our research and those of others in this area have suggested that some of the values embedded in indigenous institutions and structures need to be studied for possible adoption in reforming the modern state structures. For instance, we discovered through this research that some cities have separate chiefs and chieftaincy institutions for women. These have fallen to disuse yet for the past decade, Nigerian governments have been trying to implement women focussed programmes without reference to this practice which is still widely utilised even in the most modern cities in Nigeria especially in the governance of markets. Similarly, stronger and more responsive and responsible administration of cities can ensure that planning standards are made more realistic and lead to reform in the structure of local governments which will enhance accountability, performance, transparency and rule of law.

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