

## Government Policies and Traditional Institutions' Reforms for Efficient Local Governance in Ogun State, Nigeria

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### Abstract

Globally, government policies are made for the purpose of providing services, executing projects and programmes that will make life more meaningful for the citizenry. While reforms are made on traditional institutions to keep them in pace with the emerging trends in development and civilisation and more relevant to local governance since the society is conceived as dynamic and evolving. More often than not, the Ogun State situation in Nigeria has been at variance with this norm. This paper investigated how government policies and traditional institutions' reforms could enhance efficiency in local governance in Ogun State, Nigeria. It used exploratory method and gathered data through secondary source of data. It adopted democratic participatory theory and the efficiency services theory models as its theoretical bases. It observed that government has been making policies to improve the welfare of citizens since colonial era, while traditional institutions' reforms have been made at the grassroots since the commencement of colonial administration. It concluded that this has created a gap between the government and the people, especially with those in the remotest and rural areas of the State, where government presence is non-evident. It recommended that traditional institutions should be given the opportunity to creditably render useful services to the local people in order to make life more abundant for the poor majority. Also, specific functions should be arrogated to traditional institutions through reforms.

**Keywords:** Efficiency, Government policies, Local governance, Reforms, Traditional institutions

### Introduction

In both Western and developing nations, no state exists without a government (Yejoon, 2021). This is to say that government plays a prominent role in socio-economic and political affairs, and security of their respective states, and therefore can never be underestimated. The diverse and culturally segmented nature and the extremely large population of the various nations in the world necessitate the adoption of federalism, with its concomitant division of the nation into three tiers of government namely the federal, state and local for ease of administration.

In Nigeria, however, the local government, which by constitutional provision is regarded as the third tier of government, was created to bring government closer to the grass-root population, politically, socially, economically, and security wise so that life will become more convenient, conducive, secured, peaceful and meaningful to all and sundry. In spite of the little effort made by the government to make them efficient in the aspect of authority, power and

function in 1976, the fact remains that many local governments are still lagging behind in the discharge of their responsibilities, in all aspects of life. Suffice to say that majority of government policies that were formulated did not meet up with the needs of the people and perhaps could not solve the problem on ground even in times of exigency (Ananti, Onyekwelu & Dike, 2021).

Scholars such as Wechie, Ajieh and Egobueze (2020), Ogbette, Idam and Kareem (2018) and Fatile, Fajonyomi and Adejuwon (2017) have advanced various reasons for the above situation. These factors range from the top-bottom approach of government in policy formulation, lack of funds to execute government programmes, cultural variation and 'one cap fits all' perception of government, among others. However, in this paper, attention will be focused on the effect of traditional institutions on the implementation of government policies at the local governance. Traditional institution, which is as old as

mankind, is perceived as an ancient and indigenous arrangement or what can essentially be called administration established by ancient procedures, either by hereditary, nomination or appointment, and on the basis of spiritual merit but saddled with the responsibility of taking care of the political, socio-economic spheres, and security of life and properties of their community, kingdom or locality (Omitola, Akinrinde & Omitola, 2021).

Orji and Olali (2010) explain that traditional institutions represent the indigenous people's right, privileges, laws, customs and traditions, which include the paramount rulers, their councils; the council of chiefs and the council of elders, among others, where these councils were appointed based on their contributions to the growth and development of their respective communities with little or no executive, legislative or judicial power to perform. The traditional institutions assist the structures of the local government by helping to bridge the gap between the citizens and government and as such cannot be disposed of. They serve as the intermediaries between the citizens and the local government. In other words, they understand the needs of the citizens better and thus try to influence the socio-economic and political policies of government to ensure that they align with peoples' preferences (Tonwe & Osemwota, 2013).

With the emergence of local government administration in 1976, and the consequent institution of traditional institution reforms by the various administrations in Ogun State such as under Governors Bisi Onabanjo, Olusegun Osoba, Gbenga Daniel, Ibikunle Amosun and the current Governor Dapo Abiodun, some local governments have not utilised the opportunity to improve local governance. Some of these local governments began to alienate the traditional institutions instead of working together with the traditional institutions as expected towards achieving a common goal for betterment of the citizens as well as the development of the local areas. They started to see them as burdens that should be sidelined, possibly due to the fact that they are not given constitutional roles and powers. Furthermore, the monetary motivation meant to be given to them, which could enable this institution to freely and conscientiously assist the local

government in achieving its goals in the likes of five percent (5%) local government revenue allocation as well as peanut salaries were argued to be delayed or pocketed except when pressure is mounted on them by the traditional institutions (Aidelokhai, 2022). In the face of these challenges, how can the traditional institutions be able to play their role effectively in order to assist the efficiency of local governance in Ogun State, Nigeria?

In the light of the foregoing explication, this paper investigated how government policies and traditional institutions' reforms could impact on the efficiency of local governance in Ogun State. In order to achieve this, the paper is divided into five sections aside the introduction. The first segment considered the conceptual and theoretical framework, the second part examined the historical perspective of government policies and traditional institutions' reforms; the third part investigated the role of stakeholders in instituting traditional institutions' reforms by placing emphasis on the contributions of government workers, the media and traditional rulers, among others. The fourth part attempted an interrogation of the traditional institutions' reforms and local governance in Ogun state, Nigeria, while the last part gave the conclusion and recommendation.

### **Conceptual Clarifications**

In social science parlance, there is no universally accepted definition on any concept hence, government policies, traditional institutions' reforms and local governance are not exceptions. However, various scholars have given their perception on the above concepts. It is worthy to note that the ones that are most applicable to explain and link this paper are considered here.

### **Government Policies**

Suffice to say that the concept, government policy and public policy are often used interchangeably. To a layman, government policy is a course of action adopted by the government to solve or proffer solutions to societal problems. Scholars have however, defined this concept in a variety of ways. Chandler and Plano (1988) for instance, defined it as the strategic use of resources to alleviate

national problems. These resources may be material and immaterial directed by government to solve national problems like socio-economic, political and security challenges in the country.

For Roberts and Edwards (1991), public policy is a set of decisions taken by a political actor or group concerning the selection of goals and the method of attaining them relating to a specific situation. The proposition of this definition is that policy makers or actors usually chose specific political or socio-economic problems that demand attention on the basis of priority. In the same vein, government policy can also be referred to as everything the government chooses to do or not to do in response to a public problem (Dye, 2002). In respect of this paper, government policies could therefore, be regarded as plans or courses of actions designed, adopted and implemented to bring succour to the citizenry. In this paper therefore, government policies are construed to mean those policies formulated by the government with a view to transforming the lives of its citizenry and making life more meaningful to them.

#### **Traditional Institution's Reforms**

For a better understanding of traditional institutions' reforms, it is reasonable to start with the explanation on the concept of traditional institutions. Omole (2016) regards traditional institutions as those social, economic or political organizations or bodies, which derive their power, legitimacy influence and authority from the traditions of a particular people. He posited further that these set of people that direct and control these institutions in the pre-colonial Africa are referred to as traditional rulers and their subordinates like provincial chiefs, princes and ward heads, among others, while the power, authority and legitimacy of these traditional rulers were derived from traditions.

In the perception of Orji and Olali (2010), traditional institutions refer to the native political provisions, whereby leaders with confirmed track records are chosen and turbaned in line with the necessary requirements of their traditional customs and laws. For these scholars, some of the purposes of these institutions include the preservation of

customs and traditions of the people in that locality, decision making on issues, and management of conflict by laws and customs, among others. By inference from the definitions above, traditional institutions could be referred to as organisation of traditional rulers and their subordinates selected or appointed on the basis of traditions of their land, who were saddled with the responsibility of securing the socio-economic activities, and politics, life and properties, and the future of the people in their respective domains.

Reforms on the other hand to a layman means to make changes mostly in institutions and practices in order to improve its qualities, performance, effectiveness and efficiency (Innes, 2003). Traditional institutions' reforms is thus a terminology of convenience that explains and describes the changes made in improving the qualities and performance of traditional institutions in meeting up or with a view to not just achieve the task of its existence but as well as in meeting up with modern day governance.

#### **Local Governance**

Governance has been defined in various ways by many scholars like Keping (2018), Adegbami and Adepoju (2017) and Katsamunskas (2016). Fukuyama, (2013) for instance, conceives it as the ability of the government to make and enforce rules and deliver services regardless of whether that government is democratic or not, while local is a restrictive word referring to the rural environment thus implying the grassroots. In essence, local governance infers the ability of the government to make and enforce rules with a view to delivering public good to the people at the local level, that is, the grassroots.

#### **Theoretical Framework**

Since the debate on local government and traditional institutions is not only complex but multidimensional in nature and scope, two mutually reinforcing and complimentary theories were adopted in an integrating manner to explain the discourse. These theories are the democratic participatory theory and the efficiency services theory. The democratic participatory theory has existed in various forms since the Athenian democracy however

its modern theory was developed by Jean Jacques Rousseau and later promoted by John Stuart Mill (1969) and G. D. H. Cole. Possibly from the point of view of the notion that he who wears the shoes knows where it pinches most, the democratic participatory school posits that local government exists for the purpose of advancing democracy and providing opportunities for political participation, while at the same time educating and socialising the people at the grassroots (Ola, 2007). The perception of this school is deeply ingrained in John Stuart Mills (1969)'s doctrine of utilitarianism, in which he espouses that the good form of government is the representative government because it enhances liberty, equality and fraternity (Makinde, Hassan & Olaiya, 2016).

In the course of democratic practices, opportunities are created for series of political activities and actions through which people come to interact and relate to one another. Within this context, they come to realise the need to look beyond their personal interests, recognise the just demands of others thereby promoting political education, participation and communication, and thus grasp the understanding of the notion of justice, fair play and peace.

In the light of the above explication, this school avers that government is truly representative when all classes of people irrespective of age, gender, ethnic background, social status, religion or colour come to freely participate in it. In this sense, local government has thus become a training and recruitment ground for emerging politicians and leadership. Available records show that this trend abounds worldwide. In Britain, a study conducted by Keith Lucas, for example, revealed that the number of British members of Parliament who had served on local government demonstrated the importance of local government as a recruiting ground for British Parliament (Agaba, n.d). Also in Nigeria for instance, the former civilian governor of Ogun State, Bisi Onabanjo (1979-1983) evolved from the Ijebu-Ode Local Government administration of the 1976, which was heralded by 1976 Local Government Reforms of Olusegun Obasanjo federal military administration.

On the other hand, the leading exponents of

the efficiency services school are William Machenzie (1954). This theory canvasses that the critical responsibility of the local government is to provide services to the people. As such, the only instrument for gauging the performance or success of any local government is to measure the success they achieve in providing services, which must be measured by national standards (Ola, 2007).

### **Historical Perspective of Government Policies and Traditional Institutional Reforms**

From time immemorial, as far back as the era of state of nature, which was characterised by the absence of law and order, where the mighty oppresses the weak, scholars like John Locke, Thomas Hobbes and Rousseau have identified the critical problem as absence of government and hence suggested the forming of social contract in order to overcome the problem of all waging war against all. The prescribed antidote to solving the menace was for all to surrender their liberty, property to a body called Leviathan, which will be seen as being above all and could oversee the socio-economic affairs of men (Pettit, 2005). This development signaled the establishment of today's modern government. In the course of administration, a lot of socio-economic, political and security crises had evolved, while public policy has also been put in place to overcome such challenges.

However, in Nigeria, records indicate that little of such efforts have succeeded while many public policies have woefully failed. Samson and Stanley (2014) observed that some of the policies have faded from the beginning and some midway to achieve their desired objectives. Many reasons have been put forward to justify this trend. These include failure of the policy to meet desired beneficiary, poor human capital development and inadequate funding. Others reasons canvassed are political instability or change of regime and failure to involve the beneficiary in project design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, among others. In spite of the fact that policy is expected to be an instrument of effecting a change and development and moving the society forward, its failure despite the enormous amount of resources spent on government projects and programmes had consequently led

to the underdevelopment of Nigeria.

It is gratifying to stress that traditional institutions are as old as the ancient society and these institutions in the olden days are the pillars upon which the administrative organisations revolve in Nigeria. These institutions have played a significant role in the administrative process during the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial periods and even till date. In the pre-colonial period, studies have affirmed the resilience, legitimacy and relevance of African traditional institutions in the socio-cultural, economic and political lives of Africans, particularly people at the grassroots, that is, the rural areas (Omole, 2016). The Nigerian traditional institution is not exempted from the above statement. Nweke (2012) further posited that the institutions have played the role of decision making, peace building and conflict management in the traditional setting.

In the colonial era, the British adopted indirect rule and the traditional institutions were reduced to mere instruments and subservient to the colonial masters. Mustapha and Hadiza (2019) observed that during the colonial period traditional institutions were made to discharge numerous activities, which include but not limited to the administrative process of the colonial masters of indirect rule and promoting the colonial economy through tax collection. Furthermore, in relation to political matters, the annexation of the Northern and Southern Protectorates and the demand for the National British West Africa state for democratic government placed the traditional organizations at the centre stage of politics. This development gave room for scholars like Nweke (2012) to criticize the traditional institutions in their declination in meeting up with their traditional duties of decision making, peace building and conflict management.

During the post-colonial era, which pervades between 1960 till date, at the early period, governments have criticised the traditional institutions of not being effective in their responsibilities, while some have regarded them as mere institutions. With the introduction of local government reforms in 1976, which gave birth to the modern local government, the roles of holders of traditional institutions were altered. Makinde and Olabode (2020), noted that the 1976 local government reforms

changed the leadership roles of traditional rulers, placing emphasis on the fact that the traditional emirate will remain, although, with changes in function in order to be in tune with present day circumstances and realities. This development made William (2007) to observe that significant traditional institutions via its rulers have been reduced to adjunct in the administration of post-colonial government.

The 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria came with development in the post-colonial period that passed another problem on the traditional institutions as it failed to provide specific roles to the traditional institutions but placing them under local government. This development consequently made traditional institution an appendage to political appointee, who has the legal power to install and remove traditional rulers at will.

Even during electioneering, the traditional rulers were called upon by the politicians with no specific functions in policy making, implementation and evaluation. Suffice to say here that the failure to give constitutional function to traditional rulers also led to lack of source of fund for the traditional institutions. It is in the light of these challenges that some scholars like Ota and Ecoma (2016), Tonwe and Osemwota (2013) and traditional rules like the Awujale of Ijebu-land, Oba Sikiru Kayode Adetona called for specific roles and powers to be allocated to traditional rulers, which should be backed by constitution, in order to be effective as an institution and fulfill its expected objectives to their respective localities.

From the foregoing, one could argue that despite all the reforms made by the government between the 1976 Local Government Reforms and the 1999 Constitution of Nigeria as amended, in respect of traditional institutions, not much seemed to have been done to strengthen these traditional institutions in enhancing local governance. Much of these reforms appear to have paid lip service to strengthening these institutions in the real sense. Rather, they have further been made subservient to the whims and caprices of the local government.

### **Role of Stakeholders in Instituting Reforms in Traditional Institutions**

Protagonists of traditional institutions like Obi-

Obiora and Asaizobor (2021), Igwubor (2020), and Ota and Ecoma (2016) averred that these institutions are instruments and agents of socio-economic development, which have performed multifunctional roles in their respective localities in the pre-colonial era, while such roles included the advisory role, decision-making role, conflict management and resolution, among others. These people argue that instead of making the institutions an appendage or subservient to the local government, they should reform the traditional institutions and upgrade it to meet the standard of modern governance, with a view to working in collaboration with the local government in line with their respective specific role and power backed by the constitution. This they argue will enhance their effective performance to achieve socio-political and economic development of local governance.

Recently in Nigeria, some state governors have felt and recognised the efforts of traditional institutions. And have therefore, given their support to strengthening and improving productivity and effectiveness of the traditional institutions with a view to meeting up with the reality of modern governance (Ibrahim, n.d). In order to achieve this goal, the Kaduna State Government (KDSG) for instance, introduced series of reforms, which included: addressing the welfare of monarchs by renovating their palaces apart from improving their living conditions. The government equally gave official vehicles to all the thirty-two (32) graded monarchs, while eighty-eight (88) district heads were also given official vehicles to boost their morale and motivate them for efficient performance (Ibrahim, 2021).

Furthermore, the government enacted a law to reform the traditional institutions. This law clarified succession process for every chieftom and emirate and insulates the institution from political interference and capricious decisions of political leaders. This law also provides for the posting of well trained and experienced personnel to staff the various traditional councils with a view to helping the traditional institutions in discharging their duties. David (2020) reports that Governor Rotimi Akeredolu of Ondo State at the 4<sup>th</sup> birthday Symposium of the Ooni of Ife, Oba Adeyeye Enitan Ogunwusi

called on the National Assembly to grant constitutional functions to traditional institutions in the country so as to strengthen the informal roles of the royal fathers to continue to mobilise their subjects for the maintenance of security.

Since the emergence of modern local government in 1976 in Nigeria, the traditional rulers have been lending their voice to the call to give the traditional institutions a definite role to play in the political arrangement. On many occasions, they have clamoured on the need to constitutionally empower traditional rulers on specific roles, define their powers and fund the institutions to enable it perform effectively with the local government (Aidelokhai, 2021).

Another institution, which has been agitating for the constitutional empowerment of traditional institutions, is the media. In many of its reportage and editorials, it has defended the traditional institutions with a call to the government and specifically the National Assembly to give some responsibilities to these institutions since they are the closest to the grassroots with the government being far away from the people, especially at the rural areas where government presence is not felt or non-evident (Iyeh, 2014).

### **Traditional Institutions' Reforms and Local Governance in Ogun State**

Since colonial era when local administration began with Lord Fredrick Lugard, to the post-independence period, a lot has happened in terms of reforms and transformation of local administration. At the attainment of independence, much of the colonial legacies in local administration were retained. With the creation of Ogun State in 1976 and the initiation of local government reforms in 1976 by the Obasanjo military administration, local government administration has assumed a new dimension. It signaled the first time when local administration will officially be accorded the third tier administration in Nigeria (Aina, 2006). People at the local level were given the opportunity to run the affairs of their government with limited interference from the above.

With the emergence of civilian administration in 1979, Bisi Onabanjo made reforms to bring the local government nearer to

the people by increasing the number of local government areas to thirty (30) and also improving its funding. During Olusegun Osoba's administration, more reforms were made such as upgrading the status of the most senior Oba in Yewaland to a first class Oba: the Olu of Ilaro was promoted to the level of a first class Oba to be at par with that of the Awujale of Ijebuland, Alake of Egbaland and Akarigbo of Remoland. This was perhaps done in order to give a balance political consideration to the ethnic identities that constitute the state. The role of the traditional rulers, however, remains advisory (Tobi & Oikhala, 2021). It was the Gbenga Daniel's administration that expanded the reform spree by building a House for selected traditional rulers to meet regularly and chart a course for the government. This is purely on advisory capacity. His government tremendously improved the living conditions of the traditional rulers, allocating expensive and luxurious cars to the first class Obas, which matched their status, while their remunerations were increased (Adeleye, 2010).

### Conclusion and Recommendations

In this paper, efforts have been made at clarifying the concepts of government policies, traditional institutions, reforms and local governance, while two reinforcing theories have been used in an integrating manner to explain the discourse. The paper also delved on the historical perspective of government policies and traditional institutions' reforms, and evaluated the roles of stakeholders in instituting traditional institutions' reforms. It equally examined traditional institutions' reforms and local governance in Ogun State Nigeria. In the course of the investigation, the paper observed that the government and the political leaders have not been sincere with the issue of traditional institutions' reforms. Instead, it appears that they have just been paying lip service to the issue, possibly because they perceive the traditional institutions as competing instruments that must be checkmated or sidelined if the government and the political class intend to hold sway on Nigerian politics.

However, there is the need to emphasise that the government and stakeholders should get engaged possibly to hold a conference on the

issue, where all these challenges will be discussed and fears of every party allayed on the platform of give and take. Since the government is in most cases far from the grassroots, where the traditional institutions hold sway, the traditional institutions should be given the opportunity to creditably fill such gap and render useful services to the local people in order to make life more abundant for the poor majority. Also, specific functions should be arrogated to traditional institutions through reforms, while training should be organised on a regular basis to acquaint them with contemporary practices that would make them useful and relevant in local government administration in contemporary era.

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