

Traditional Rulership and Community Development in Guma Local Government Area of Benue State

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Abstract

The paper examined traditional rulership and community development in Guma Local Government Area of Benue State. The paper adopted a survey design with questionnaire and Key Informant Interview used as instruments of primary data collection. Structural–Functionalism theory was used as a framework of analysis. showed that traditional rulers remain for a variety of reasons, important to the plan and realization of community development projects within the area of control. Findings also revealed that traditional rulers constitute the pivot of community development even though they are not entitled to budgetary allocations, they induced the system for effective development ranging from provision of infrastructural facilities such as local roads grading and construction, construction of markets and educational development among others. The paper further revealed that community development in Guma LGA is failing due to improper implementation of public policies and lack of funds. The paper in line with these findings recommended that seminar and training programmes like workshop for rulership and development of skills should from time to time be organized to respond to self-help development projects of the communities. Also, wealthy individuals in the communities can support the traditional rulers embark on projects such as construction of basic amenities including good health centers, electricity and good roads.

Keywords: Community, Development, Infrastructure, Traditional Rulers

Introduction

Traditional rulers in the early era of Nigeria community which keep to the laws and norms of the society created mutual relationship between the citizens and the rulers, expressing strong concern for community development and mandating sanitation, meet the government as regard to community development project and citizens well- being. Infact, traditional rulers played a significant role in the administrative process before, during, and after colonial governments. These rulers have contributed to the history of the nation. The role of traditional organizations was important and highly respected during these periods. During the colonial rule, traditional rulers were connected to discharge numerous activities, these include but are not limited to the administrative process of the colonial masters of indirect rule, promoting the colonial economy through taxes collection. In relation to political matters, the annexation of the northern and southern protectorates and the demand of the National British of West African State for democratic governance placed the traditional organization at the center stage of politics (Isaac, 2018). In a similar development a study by Nweke (2016), noted that, before the advent of the British government in Nigeria, traditional rulers of governance played very important roles in conflict management and firmness as they exercised robust political impacts in their various provinces.

Immediately after the unification of the two protectorates (Northern and Southern), the traditional rulers were no longer recognized in the society, this is because the Nigeria traditional rulers were seen as informal members. Emirs from the north and the Alaafrin of Oyo supported by official members from Lagos, Calabar, Benin-Warri area. The official introduction of elective rules under the governor general Hugh Clifford in 1922 downgraded the status of the traditional rulers to local administration buttressed through numerous native authority rules declarations, while matters related to politics were left for the elite (Isaac, 2018). This has reduced the power of the traditional institution to native and local authorities at the grass root levels. Indeed, traditional rulers remain for a variety of reasons, important to the plan and realization of development projects within the area of control. Their expected core functions include recruitment of their communities for developmental purposes, articulation of citizens interest for regional and national policies, maintenance of peace and order in their domain, coordination of self-help project through aggregation of felt-needs of people in their communities, among others (Makinde & Olabode, 2019). These functions will enhance the provision of infrastructure for enhanced standard of living within the community and resolving identified

problems in the community and the nation at large.

Guma local government was created out of the then Makurdi local government of Benue state in May 1989. The local government derives its name from River Guma, which traverses the local government from the Northwest and flows into Northern bank of River Benue. It is situated on the North to eastern part of Benue State with a landmass of 240,000 sq. km. It shares common boundaries with Keana and Awe Local Government Area of Nasarawa State, in the North, Tarka and Logo local government areas in the East, Makurdi local government area in the South while Doma local government area of Nasarawa State lies in the West. Gbajimba town, headquarters of the local government area has a strategic location as it is situated at the confluence of two big rivers of the state. River Benue and Katsina-Ala (Terver, 2017).

The main occupation of the people of Guma local government is farming. The local government is endowed with large expanse of fertile land both in the hinterland and along the valleys of rivers within the local government. The Tiv people are by this natural endowment noted for the substantial cultivation of seasonal crops which include yams, cassava, maize, millet, groundnuts, soybeans, guinea corn, white and yellow Mellon (egusi). Special mention has to be made here that Guma local government produces more than three quarters of the total yellow (egusi) mellon produced in the country (Hembe 2014).

Conceptual Clarifications

Traditional Rulers: By traditional rulers, it means to the indigenous political arrangements whereby rulers with proven track records are appointed and installed in line with the provisions of their native laws and customs (Orji, & Olali, 2019). The essence of the ruler is to preserve the customs and traditions of the people and to manage conflicts arising among or between members of the community by the instrumentality of laws and customs of the people. Traditional rulers are the custodian of their people's norms, cultures and practices. In most African setting, just as it is obtainable in many parts of Nigeria, selection of persons into the offices of traditional rulers is hereditary or by selection or election by the instrument of relevant traditional methods. The mode of selection of the occupant of traditional rulers varies in Africa in general and in Nigeria in particular from ethnic groups to ethnic groups or communities to communities. Traditional rulers are symbols of indigenous peoples' rights, privileges, laws, customs and traditions which include but not limited to paramount rulers and their councils. The traditional rulers in the Nigerian context is inclusive of the chiefs-in-council, elders-in-council, title holders who may be appointed based on their contributions to the growth and development of their communities with or little no executive, legislative or judicial powers (Aidelokhai, 2018).

According to Orji, & Olali, (2019, p.112), traditional rulers refer to the native political provisions whereby rulers with confirmed track records are chosen and turban in line with the necessary requirements of their traditional customs and laws. The aims of the traditional rulers are to preserve the customs and traditions of the people in their localities and to make decisions on issues related to the political movement of the people in all the societies across the nation. However, traditional rulers played a significant role in managing conflicts rising between or among the public in their various communities using laws and customs of society. Moreover, a study by Nweke (2012), pointed out that traditional rulers are the custodian of their people's norms, cultures, and practices. In the most African setting, just as it is available in Nigeria, appointing of people into various traditional rulership is hereditary or by election or selection by the relevant traditional rulers or kingmakers. This is in line with the beliefs of dependency theory, which believes that traditional rulers are supposed to have the autonomous power in the society, not to be a man by the politicians, this would help them perform their power in sustaining democracy in their respective jurisdictions.

Community Development: Community development is a term that has been subjected by several authors to various perspectives, each of them presenting definitions to connote their specialization and practice. The assumption is that the definition of community development can easily be arrived at by understanding the concepts of community and development separately. Community development is a broad concept, hence the various views and definitions on the concept. “Development” is a progression that increases varieties. It means new choices, variation, thinking about ostensible issues differently and forestalling change (Ihejirika, 2018; Makinde & Olabode, 2019).

The notion of community refers to a group of people with common traits. Therefore, community development depends on communication between people and cooperative action, rather than individual exploits which some sociologists termed as “collective agency”. Dokubo (2015) asserted that “community development is one of the main boards upon which national developmental policies and their implementation are hinged. The concept of community development is not completely new. What probably may appear new is the mode of application in modern times and its ancestry as a union of community, organization and economic development. However, Makinde and Olabode (2019) conceptualize community development as a continuous process of positive change in the quality and span of life of a person or

Ekong, (2014) cited in Anikeze (2017), sees community development as any action in a locality by any agency with the primary intention of bringing some benefits to such locality. This implies that community development is a movement designed to promote better living for the whole community with active participation and on the initiative of the community.

Traditional Rulers in Nigeria

The role and status of traditional rulers in post independent Nigeria varied though with different administrations, they could be said to have remained agents for the perpetuation of our neo-colonial status, thereby upsetting the ongoing process of development in the country. Nwankwo (2019) stated that chiefs are custodians of the land and they held the land in trust for the people. They served as a link between that rural people and the government. They assist the government in political education and socialization of the rural people. They acted as the custodians of the traditional religion, arts and culture of the people. They explained the customs and tried to preserve. In view of the political administration, traditional rulers have been given limited authority to settle minor disputes. In this regard also Axel (2018) asserts that traditional rulers try to make peace within the community and with neighboring communities. To Axel traditional rulers act as instrument of state control at the local level. Oloko (2019) maintained that the traditional rulers were responsible for nation building task such as the maintenance of the main road linking their areas, the supply of man-power for the kingdom's army, the up keep of the royal capital and collection of taxes and tributes due at various times. In the socio-cultural aspect he continued that in their role as the patrons of the creative and expressive arts of their people, traditional rulers took active steps to encourage the work of talented African carvers, sculptors, potters and so on.

The new role for traditional rulers in Nigeria is to allow for traditional bureaucracy, so that rulers can intercede for the common man and modern state making it possible for the institution to broker- a new development and projects due to their closeness to the people as most traditional rulers are now educated, enlightened and well-travelled. Traditional rulers in Nigeria remain for a variety of reasons, important to the design and implementation of development projects within his area of jurisdiction. Their core functions include mobilization of their communities for developmental purposes. This includes the provision of infrastructure for enhanced standard of living within the community. Sometimes, traditional rulers initiate development projects and secure the support of both internal and external development agents for the

responsibilities to their people (Axel, 2018). This apparently, traditional rulership ties its pragmatic social responsibilities to the essentially means the inter connectivity's of people and the shared responsibility for each other in ways that would be of benefits to the overall development of the society. In today's role, traditional rulers played the role of upholding the values and administering the affairs of their domain. They were saddled with the responsibilities of working with municipalities to identify the needs of their communities and be involved in the shaping and participating in service delivery (Adesoji, 2020)

Traditional rulers work in conjunction with their subjects and therefore carry the whole community along to accomplish development projects that will be of benefit to the entire society. Traditional rulers today, the rulers promote peace, foster cohesion and traditional rulers provided rulership in ensuring that societies utilized available land to increase agricultural output and enhance food security so as to alleviate the challenges of poverty, criminality and underdevelopment in rural areas. Thus, traditional rulers are part of the society who have some functions to perform and contribute to the maintenance of the society (i.e. their communities) such function include the contribution of their quota in the maintenance of the internal peace and security in their domain which is the only way development can take place in the community. They help in revenue generation and community tax assessment, determination of religious matters and settlement of conflict arising there; they also contribute in community development efforts of their respective communities like building of health center, town halls, market shop, post office, electricity, construction of road networks, bridges and culverts.

Traditional Rulers and Community Development in Benue State

There is no gainsaying the fact that the traditional rulers occupy a strategic position in modern Benue State. This position was substantially recognized by different communities even before the period of colonization. It is this importance that influenced the colonialists to use it in order to achieve their selfish motives. One singular characteristic of the traditional authority is the capacity to change, as the situations and conditions change. Okpeh, (2020) in his study argued that, traditional rulers in Benue State are perceived as assisting the government in maintaining law and order in the communities as well as promoting peaceful co-existence of people of different religious, ethnic and social backgrounds. The way of life of ordinary Benue citizen is deeply rooted in their culture and traditional rulers are central to maintaining their cultural values and traditions. They found that, the traditional rulers are

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more accessible to the ordinary people in times of need and problem than government officials and elected politicians. In addition, traditional rulers treat their people without discrimination. People generally trust and respect their traditional rulers (Okpeh, 2020).

Furthermore, the traditional rulers in Benue State mobilizes available community resources which involve getting the members of a community together to act with concerted effort to ensure self-reliance and programme sustainability (Adama, 2019). Ijah (2013) in Dokubo (2015) sees community resource mobilization as a means of wiping up sentiments for positive action to be taken to achieve felt needs. Dokubo (2015) described it as a process through which group of people assembles material and non-material resources and places them under collective control for singular purpose of pursuing and achieving group interest through collective action. Dokubo (2015, p.11), further observed that mobilization “involves creation of awareness and raising the consciousness to the masses to turn around their mental and psychological facilities for attitudinal changes towards improvement of their welfare”. Community mobilization empowers members by providing adequate information, relevant education, technical support and decision-possibility so as to enable them share in the opportunities and responsibilities for action in the interest of the community. When the people are filled with zeal and enthusiasm to sustain the tempo of community development, the result is that they are motivated to increase participation, making for effective time-bound of accelerated operations. The aim is to enlist high level of commitment and make the community feel and belief that a particular project belongs to the community.

Isaac (2018) noted that, the role of traditional rulers in community development most especially as it involves Benue State includes civil administration and providing socio-bveconomic well-being for the community they rule. In addition, traditional rulers are valuable because they could influence subjects at the grass-roots positively to support any sitting government or vote one out. He noted that, traditional rulers are vital for the success of the local government administration. They are mostly highly influential and experienced citizens, are available to give wise counsel to local government chairmen and their counselors when they consult them. This helps local governments to make good decisions and increase their competence. In addition, the local government works with them to provide projects that are beneficial to ,generality of the people, such as health centers, maternities, boreholes, and repairs of local roads, and schools.

Theoretical framework

The study adopts the Structural–Functionalism theory as propounded by

Augustus Comte (1950), Herbert Spencer (1898), Emile Durkheim (1858) and Talcott Parson (1951), who later refined and reformed the theory. The theory which was dominant in sociology views the society as a set of interconnected parts which together form a whole. However, the theory witnessed a significant drop from the discipline of sociology, partly because of criticisms against it, was adopted in political and administrative studies.

The assumption of the theory likens society to a living organism with different part that functions independently and is inter-related to sustain the whole. Thus, the theory assumes these institutions work together for the survival of the society

The theory regards society as a system which is made up of subsystems. The various sub-systems of the society are seen to be interrelated and taken together to form a complete system. In understanding any part of the society, such as the family or religion, the parts must be seen in relations to the society as a whole.

Functionalists believe that all standardized cultural beliefs and practices as well as part of the system exist because of their beneficial function to the system as a whole. This implies that, the continued existence of an institution may be explained in terms of its effects. Thus, once an institution has originated, it continues to exist as if it has no balance beneficial effect on the system

Functionalists also assume that an entire way of life can lose its purpose of functions through the process of change when this happens, the various structures of the society can become poorly integrated and what were formally useful function can become dysfunctional.

Functionalists argue that stability in the society is explained as a body made up of different parts functioning together to maintain stability, conflict is therefore explained as part of dynamics of the complex network of relationships resulting from the interrelation and therefore necessary and expected, since institutions are affected by the wind of change, conflict are bound to occur and hence conflict cannot be eliminated in the society, approach of state intervention should be adopted.

For the purpose of this paper functionalist perspective is more suitable. This is because it throws more light in understanding the afunctions performed by traditional rulers. Not only performing their core functions of maintaining peace and order, settlement of dispute and resolving conflicts, but also developing and transforming their communities through the provision of boreholes, rural roads, formation of co-operative societies, setting up of markets, construction of culverts, construction of earth dams, mobilizing people for health programmes and resolving disputes within their domains.

Methodology

The paper adopts a survey design with the population drawn among the traditional rulers in Guma Local government area which include Second Class Chief (Ter Guma), Third Class Chief (Mue Ter), The District Heads (Utyombaivorov), Kindred Heads (Mbatarev), Tax Collectors (Ator-Akpande). It also included residents of Guma local government area in the six council wards selected for the study.

Table 1: Council Wards and their Projected Population

S/N	Council Ward	Projected population
1	MbayerYandev	25,616
2	Nzorov	20,106
3	Uvir	18, 612
4	Mbadwem	16,416
5	Saghev	13,308
6	Nyiev	12,311
	Total	106,369

Source: NBS, 2021

The study adopts Taro Yamane formula to determine the sample size for the study. Thus, the formula is stated below;

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Where;

n = Sample size

N= the study population

1= Constant

e=level of significance = 0.05 or 5%

Therefore, using the study target population (106,369), the formula will be applied as;

$$n = \frac{106,369}{1 + 106,616 \times (0.05)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{637}{1 + 106,369 \times 0.0025}$$

$$n = \frac{106,369}{265.9225}$$

$$n = 400$$

Data Presentation, Interpretation and Analysis

This section of the paper discusses issues relating to traditional rulers and community development in Guma Local Government Area of Benue State. It is a presentation of the questionnaire results as collected from the respondents from the study area

Table 2: Socio-Demographic attributes of Respondents

Attributes	Frequency (N = 389)	Percentage (% = 100)
Gender	183	47.10
Male	206	52.90
Female	389	1000
Total		
Age (years)		
18-25	74	19.02
26-40	170	43.70
40 and above	145	37.27
Total	389	100
Marital status		
Single	175	44.98
Married	214	55.01
Total	389	100

Field work, 2024

Data presented in table 1 is the socio-demographic attributes of respondents. Results obtained revealed that majority of the respondents (52.90%) were females compared to males (47.10%). Majority of the respondents were within range of 26-40 years (43.70%), this was followed by those within 40 years and above (37.27%) and 18-25 years (19.02%). Most of the respondents (55.01%) were married compared to those who were single (44.98%).

Table 3: What are the roles of traditional rulers as it relates to community development in Guma LGA of Benue State.

S/N	The roles of traditional rulers as it relates to community development in Guma LGA of Benue State	True (%)	False (%)
1	Traditional rulers in Guma LGA help to bring development to the rural communities	327(84.06)	62(15.93)
2	Traditional rulers in Guma LGA do mobilize their communities for developmental purposes.	331(85.08)	58(14.91)

3	Traditional rulers in Guma LGA played the role of upholding the values and administering the affairs of their domain	262(67.35)	127(32.64)
4	Traditional rulers in Guma LGA, promote peace, foster cohesion and ensure that the communities utilized available land to increase agricultural output and enhance food security	104(26.73)	285(73.26)

Source: Field Survey, 2024

The roles of traditional rulers as it relates to community development in Guma LGA of Benue State is presented in table 2. Majority of the respondents (84.06%) opined that traditional rulers in Guma LGA help to bring development to the rural communities. (85.08) of the respondents stated that traditional rulers in Guma LGA do mobilize their communities for developmental purposes while (14.91%) opined those traditional rulers in Guma LGA played the role of upholding the values and administering the affairs of their domain. Most of the respondents (67.35%) opined those traditional rulers in Guma LGA, promote peace, foster cohesion and ensure that the communities utilized available land to increase agricultural output and enhance food security

Collaborating the responses above, a participant interviewed stated that traditional rulers in Guma LGA help in the encouragement and stimulation of development projects, assisting the local governments in the collection of taxes, rates, rates and communal levies. These roles have become very relevant “because they are close to the people; they offer advice to government on what the people want and what should be the modalities for ensuring peace

A traditional ruler from Guma Dennis Mberga Semberga interviewed on the 4th Of September, 2024, Stated that

Traditional rulers in Guma LGA are seen as agents of community development. Traditional rulers are essential part of traditional institution that has capability to mobilize local resources for community development that will lead to overall national development. They are effective in maintenance of law and order, mobilization of Community Based Organisation and identification of felt-need for community development programmes.

Table 4: The Impact of Traditional Rulers in the Development of their Respective Communities in Guma LGA

S/N	The Impact of Traditional Rulers in the Development of their Respective Communities in Guma LGA	True (%)	False (%)
1	Traditional rulers in Guma LGA are effective in executing community development projects	334(85.86)	55(14.13)
2	Traditional rulers in Guma contributes substantially to the development of their communities	362(93.05)	27(6.94)
3	Traditional rulers help in educational development and provision of amenities for the betterment of the rural areas	365(93.83)	24(6.16)
4	Traditional rulers helps in employment and appointment and empowering the rural people economically	364(93.57)	25(6.42)

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Presented in table 3 , i the Impact of traditional Rulers in the Development of their respective communities in Guma LGA. Majority of the respondents 85.86% itemized that Traditional rulers in Guma LGA are effective in executing community development projects. 93.05% of the respondents stated that Traditional rulers in Guma contributes substantially to the development of their communities. Majority of the respondents (93.83%) opined that Traditional rulers help in educational development and provision of amenities for the betterment of the rural areas while (6.42%) stated that traditional rulers help in employment and appointment and empowering the rural people economically

Collaborating the responses above, a participant stated that traditional rulers in Guma LGA over the years has influence the establishment and renovation of schools at different levels within the local Government area. He stated that

The establishment of LGEA primary school Ortaver in Mbayer Yandev along Lafia -Makurdi road during the Governor Gabreil Suswam administration was a result of the appeals from the traditional rulership of that council; wards through Guma Local Government Council Chairman and House of Assembly member representing that Area, that gave birth to the establishment of the school (KII excerpt with the kindred head Chief Abur Ashile, 2024

In the area of Employment and Appointment, participant stated that employment of sons and daughters of the LGA in the State and Federal parastatals are influenced by traditional rulership within the local government area. The appointment of supervisory councilor, Treasurers, secretaries, Internal Auditors in the Local Government in the LGA were spearheaded by traditional rulers. They went further to state that even the recommendations of commissioners at the state level from the Local Government and statutory board members in the state were spearheaded by Traditional rulers among others.

Table 5 Factors hindering traditional rulers from carrying out rural development programme(s) in Guma LGA

S/N	Factors hindering traditional rulers from carrying out rural development programme(s) in Guma LGA	True (%)	False (%)
1	lack of funds is a major challenge faced by traditional rulers in the course of achieving a successful rural development project	381(97.94)	8(2.05)
2	There is conflict of interest between local government authorities and traditional rulers and a need to clarify who should do what in local community matters	337(86.63)	52(13.36)
3	Poor road networks, illiteracy and financial constraint to community development	377(96.91)	12(3.08)

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Data presented in table 4 above are the factors hindering traditional rulers from carrying out rural development programme(s) in Guma LGA. Higher percentage (97.94%) was recorded for those who opined that lack of funds is a major challenge faced by traditional rulers in the course of achieving a successful rural development project while (86.63%) was recorded for those who stated that There is conflict of interest between local government authorities and traditional rulers and a need to clarify who should do what in local community matters while (96.91%) of the respondents itemized that poor road networks, illiteracy and financial constraint to community development

A participant stated that in some council wards in Guma LGA there is poor road networks coupled with high illiteracy rate financial constraint which have culminated into affecting community development in Guma local government area of Benue State. This scenario presented lack of access to long distance communities with non-passable roads, lack of understanding of project initiated due to illiteracy as a result of

low participation of community members in most project initiated by traditional rulers.

Also, an interview with traditional rulers in Guma they stated that lack of fund and funding support are a major challenge to achieve the desired goals. Funds play an important role to implement their projects, programmes or activities, which are development-oriented to their communities. Most traditional rulers are finding it difficult to bring about community development project due to lack of funds

Findings

Findings showed that traditional rulers remain for a variety of reasons, important to the plan and realization of development projects within the area of control. Their expected core functions include recruitment of their communities for developmental purposes, articulation of citizens interest for regional and national policies, maintenance of peace and order in their domain, coordination of self-help project through aggregation of feltneeds of people in their communities, among others. These functions enhance the provision of infrastructure for enhanced standard of living within the community and resolving identified problems in the community and the nations at large.

The findings further show that most of the people in Guma local government are aware of the role of traditional rulers in community development, ranging from dispute resolution, infrastructural facilities such as local road grading, earth dam construction, and construction of culverts, market construction, among others. The findings on the nature of community development benefited through traditional rulers in Guma local government reveals that market have been established for them, this indicates that the people can now carry out their socio-economic activities therefore creating wealth and employment for themselves. The paper discovered that traditional rulers initiate projects for community development, traditional rulers enhance conflict resolution for community development in the local government and traditional rulers are involves in felt-need identification for community development programmes

The paper further revealed that community development in Guma is failing due to improper implementation of public policies due to lack of funds This has been the major challenge affecting traditional rulers in Guma. There is also a challenge of conflict of interest between local government authorities and traditional rulers and a need to clarify who should do what in local community matters. The study further discovered that poor road networks, illiteracy and financial constraint were obstacles to community development in Guma local government area of Benue State. This scenario presented lack of access to long distance

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