CHANGE IN THE FABRICS OF SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS IN NIGERIA: IMPLICATIONS FOR AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT.

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ABSTRACT

Every social institution serves to provide the basic social needs of people in any given society. These institutions in traditional times function in such unique ways that they were able to satisfy society's basic needs. In Nigeria, as in other African societies, the fabrics of traditional social institutions have undergone several changes due largely to colonization. In contemporary times however, several factors including modernization, urbanization and migration have contributed to the sustenance of change in the fabrics of these institutions, which have affected several sectors of the social system, including agricultural development. This paper examines the nature and role of traditional social institutions in Nigerian society vis-à-vis the changes that have occurred over time. The five basic social institutions, namely, the family, religion, education, government, and economy are the focus in this paper. It was evident that changes occurred in these institutions and these are discussed in relation to their functions as well as implications for agricultural development. The paper also suggests the way forward.

INTRODUCTION

The significant alterations in the social structures of society, including consequences and manifestations of such structures embodied in norms, values and cultural products and symbols constitute what sociologists refer to as social change (Ekong, 2013). However, it is to be noted that the direction of change in any society is not unilineal as it is sometimes alluded, rather it spreads out to the extent that some directions may actually denote retardation and not progress. This agrees with opinion of Ekpenyong (2000) who held that sometimes change that results in war may bring about some seeming retardation at first, even if that may ultimately lead to progress.

Societies are constituted and held together by a network of complex roles, norms and statuses, which knit social structures together for the accomplishment of specific goals. This network of roles and norms patterned and standardised to become acceptable procedures for meeting society's needs and actualising its goals is referred to as social institution (Henslin, 2003). The Nigerian society as observed by Brown (2011) is laden with challenges that are associated with weak institutions including widespread poverty, corruption and unemployment. These challenges according to Ukpong-Umo (2012) are due in parts to some obvious social programme disconnect that create some maladjustment between traditional and modern social structuring, leading to improper articulation of social transition programmes for institutional change. Some of these are found in the five basic traditional social institutions discussed below.

Family institution

Murdock (1949) cited in Fulcher and Scott (1999) defined the family as a social group characterised by common residence, economic co-operation and reproduction. From this early definition of the family evolves many others, all aiming at capturing the changes that have ensued.

The common residence provided an enabling platform for family members to co-operate and function as a unit for agricultural production, especially food and fibre for subsistence (Brown, 2011).

Comparatively, he noted that the modern family is marked by a variety of new family forms, most of which encourage isolation- a process by which component members of the family live away from each other. Shepard (1993) identified these new family forms as including single parent families, child free marriages, dual employed marriages and career bound marriages. In contemporary times, we find many couples who for various reasons including employment, academic pursuit, and business, live hundreds of miles away from each other, and only pre-arrange times for mating.

In traditional Nigeria, customary marriage was the only form of nuptial practice recognised, but as deduced in Modo (1994), two additional forms of marriage, civic and religious, are now recognised. While civic marriage is conducted according to statute provisions, religious marriage is conducted in accordance with Christian, Islam or other religious rites.

Shepard (1993) made a comparison of six major characteristics of traditional and modern families as tabulated below.

Table 1.1: Major characteristics of traditional and modern families

Characteristic	Traditional Family	Modern Family
Family structure	extended, also some nuclear	nuclear, also some extended
Basis of family bond	blood (consanguine)	marriage (conjugal)
Line of descent/ Inheritance	Patrilineal (male lineage), matrilineal (female lineage)	bilateral (dual parental lineage)
Locus of control	Patriarchal (male dominance) matriarchal (female dominance)	Democratic (sexes share power)
Place of residence	Patrilocal (husband's parents) matrilocal (wife's parents)	Neolocal (independent)
Marriage structure	Monogamy (one spouse), polygyny (several wives).	Monogamy (one spouse)

Source: Shepard (1993)

In contemporary times, there is a general lack of convention in terms of the processes and actual procedures during marriage ceremonies- for instance many elements of modern family forms such as the use of exquisitely baked wedding cake, administration of exotic nuptial ring, use of invitation cards etc, have been introduced into contemporary "traditional" marriage. More so, the commencement time for traditional marriage has shifted from the conventional night hours to any time of the day (Ekpe, 2000).

Religious institution

It is obvious that man lives in the physical natural world, but any attempt to adequately explain human existence must go beyond the physical, the natural and the familiar. This is because there are several manifestations of the unfamiliar, terrifying and mysterious experiences of life (flood, sickness death, etc), which lack reliable explanations in the physical domains including modern sciences (Udofia, 2001). This informs mankind's cleavage and inclination on religion for supernatural solace and comfort in times of need.

Anyanwu (1999) defined religion as an act involving man's interaction with the super natural forces. These forces are believed to have control over the affairs of mankind. In pre-Colonial Nigeria, religion was expressed through the indigenous practices only, but in colonial periods, Christianity was added, though Islamic religion has been established in some regions through trans-Saharan trade. In contemporary times, some others, including Buddhism, Hare Krishna, Guru Maharaji, etc have found their way into the Nigeria society, and are embraced by many.

Religion is universal and is an inseparable element in the nature of mankind. This agrees with opinion of Anyanwu (1999) who posited that religion has to do with man's relationship with the unseen world, and an inescapable involvement of every member of the human race.

Traditional religious practices in Nigeria

In traditional Nigeria, religion was central to social life and the religious training of members was a basic family responsibility (Ekpenyong, 2000).

Every lineage had its own shrine where members of the lineage gathered to offer sacrifices to the ancestral spirits and gods, for protection and providence. Retributive measures were inherent in the system to deter all manners of social ills (Ekpe, 2000).

Since the ancestral spirits are intermediaries, they are expected to be appeased regularly, and particularly during critical times when their intervention will be greatly required especially in seeking the consent of the gods before engaging in critical events such as war, ceremonies and during crises or epidemic. (Inyang, 2000).

In traditional religious practice, there is emphasis on the belief in a supreme being, ancestral spirits and other divinities. As postulated in Ukpong-Umo (2012), the doctrines of African traditional religion are stored in oral tradition and preserved as they are passed down from one generation to another, orally. African traditional religion finds expression in works of arts, myths, songs, dances, proverbs, rituals and system of naming objects.

Religious practice in contemporary Nigeria

There are disparities among the various religions and how they are practised in contemporary Nigeria. For instance, among Christian and Muslim adherents, there exist wide doctrinal differences, though both are monotheists and emanated from Abraham, the father of faith (Reinhart, 1999). Christians belief in Jesus Christ as the son of God and saviour of the world, while Muslims belief in Prophet Muhammad as their prophet. Christians see the bible as a holy writ and believe its content while Muslims see the Qur'an as their holy writ and believe its content (Reinhart, 1999). The difference expands with the new entries in the number of religions which tend to cause 'confusion' in the religious world. In contemporary times however, persisting social conditions does not seem to reflect any positive correlation between increased number of religion and increased activities promoting moral values within the populations. This deduction is made against the backdrop of persisting social maladies in parts of our society. These include suicide bombings, kidnappings, human trafficking, insurgencies, etc.

Education institution

As one of society's basic social institutions, education is significant in its pivotal function to supply the requisite manpower for harnessing society's multifaceted resources, its contributions toward the construction and maintenance of social order, as well as its role in preserving cultural values. Erondu and Obasi (2001) postulated that education is a system of social practices which evolve around some valued functions of society

including socialisation, transmission of culture and social placement. Uyoata (2001) defined education as a process by which every society attempts to preserve and upgrade the accumulated knowledge, skills and attitudes in its cultural setting and heritage, in order to foster the well being of mankind and guarantee its survival. This forms the basis upon which the objectives of education whether traditional or western evolves.

Nature of traditional education in Nigeria

Before the introduction of western cultures the Nigerian society was simple and pre-industrial. Interactions were direct and face-to-face (Uyoata, 2001). Furthermore, parents and the extended family took time to educate and socialize their children by passing on knowledge, attitudes, values and occupational skills, which had been developed and preserved from one generation to another. Fafunwa (1974) argued that education in traditional African societies was regarded as a means to an end and not an end itself. In other words, education was generally for an immediate induction into the society and a preparation for adulthood.

Traditional education emphasized social responsibility, job orientation, political participation, spiritual and moral values. Teaching methods concentrated around direct teaching, observation and imitation and these have been proved to be more practical and therefore more result oriented than theoretical methods which was emphasized especially during the nascent period of the introduction of western education in Nigeria.

Brown (2011), in his assessment of the ideals of traditional education in Nigeria posited that participatory education through ceremonies, rituals, imitations, recitations and demonstration was the order of the day. He added that education then was an integrated experience combining physical training with character building, and manual training with intellectual training. There were provisions for continuous assessment that enables the performance of the learner to be well monitored. The continuous assessment exercise eventually culminated into a passing out ceremony or initiation into adulthood. Brown (2011) insists that the nature of the programmes in traditional educational scheme was such that certification was secondary if applicable at all. The comprehensive outlay of programmes was routinised to fully integrate the learner into the life and activities of the people and to adequately prepare them to be self reliant and to be capable of contributing meaningfully to nation building. He however noted some major limitations of traditional education to include absence of a known system of writing, lack of research prospect and narrow scope of programmes.

Nature and purpose of non-indigenous education in Nigeria

Non-indigenous education refers to the knowledge, skills, attitudes and general training that was transferred and initiated by early merchants and religious groups during their adventure to Africa. This was facilitated through the efforts of Islamic and Christian Missionaries. They operated on the platform of schools and emphasized the use of expanded curricula in obtaining training. Fafunwa (1974) argued that early missionary schools educators were interested in inculcating the skills of writing and reading to service the need for clerical officials, Pastors and Catechist in order to sustain their merchandise and missionary objectives. Therefore little or no emphases were placed on science and technology.

New trends in Nigerian education system

In contemporary times, there is a reverse of trend especially as Nigerian leaders and intellectuals have come to realise that education is an instrument for effecting national development. Based on this, government has facilitated the

setting up of the country's educational goals and national policy on education, which among other things help to regulate policies affecting education, and aid in the monitoring and maintenance of academic standards across all levels of education.

Political institution

The institution of government is very important in all societies. It has been defined by Ezeadi and Asiegbu (1990) as the institution of a state which specializes in the management, direction and control of public affairs of a given state or group of people. It is also the exercise of political authority, direction and restraints of communities, societies or states.

As people live within the communities and continue to interact as well as relate with other people outside the family unit, the need to be properly organised became urgent and this prompted the formation and establishment of government to see about the welfare and conduct of citizens of the society (Robertson, 1987).

Following this, Schaefer (2005) posits that in all societies, someone or some group make important decisions about how to use resources and how to allocate goods, whether it is a tribal chief or a parliament or a dictator.

Change in the nature of governance in traditional Nigeria

The traditional political structures in Nigeria vary according to the different sub-regions and ethnic groupings. This idea is captured in Ekong (2001), in a study of the traditional Ibibio society in south-south Nigeria, which used to be organised on the segmentary unilineal principles. This was also true of Igbo speaking societies in the south-eastern region, while Yorubas of the west and Hausa/Fulani of the north were organised around the tribal authorities and in kingdoms. Ekong (2001) also observed that several changes have occurred in these societies over time, and

acknowledged that the previously unilineal segmented authorities of the Ibibio for instance have been replaced with defined central chieftain at the tribal level. Also there is in place the democratic system at every local, state and national levels of governance in the country.

Some of the changes that have however occurred in the political structure and process have been applauded because of their benefits. This is deduced from Ekong (2001) who observed that despotic rulers with unlimited powers dominated kingdoms as they ruled within the limitations of their ideas. Ejere (2013) noted that such political systems have potential problems of succession which often precipitate crises, including war, and this have the tendency of slowing down prospects for development.

On the other hand, many traditional, political and cultural values have been eroded due to change- for instance, the political process of selection and induction of any political leader used to follow laid down procedures, and the requisite leadership qualities including honesty, selflessness, and diligence were not compromised for any reason. The aftermath of these changes has left scars of wreckage, which is listed in Ekong (2010) to include:

1. Confusion in functions and general framework and structures of the new political system. Since this was borrowed from another culture, wholesale adoption created problems of adaptation in the new culture. For instance, the roles and general guideline for operation among the different tiers of government were not clearly defined; therefore each region adopted any method considered suitable. Thus a variety of disparate forms of government existed at the various levels, leading to gross ineffectiveness, inefficiency and waste.

2. Widespread corruption and malpractices arising primarily from the lack of identification with the system, lack of moral involvement and partisanship.

Economic institution

The economic system in any society consists of norms and patterned ways that regulate the production of goods and services as well as their distribution and consumption. Its importance have been stressed by scholars including Akpakpan (1999) who noted that collectivities must endeavour to produce sufficient resources and motivate members to contribute to the well-being of all, as those who fail to do so would be heading for a disappearance.

The economic production in any society depends largely on their mode of subsistence (the way in which they adapt to the environment through the production of goods and services in order to secure sufficient food and protection for individual and collective survival). This was the observation of Nwanunobi (1992) who also argued that the early stage of economic development in African societies were characterised by communalism and devoid of exploitation of individuals and groups by others. However, as a result of contact with powerful neighbours, they have been infested by all kinds of exploitative relationships, one of such is capitalism.

Nature of traditional economy in Nigeria

The pre-colonial economy in Nigeria was characterised by primary production and in the most part, agriculture based. The subsistent nature of production at the time was relative to the low level of technological development and was one of the limiting factors to the creation of surplus wealth. These also explain why their economies required the participation of the entire population in the task of ensuring that products and services are available to all (Nwanunobi, 1992).

In other words, since traditional production depended on the input of human power (which at best cannot exceed one tenth of a horse power) the contribution of human labour to production was quite minimal, resulting in low power output (Nwanunobi, 1992).

Implications of change for agricultural development

Taking the family institution as point of departure, we find that the traditional family setting where polygamous and the extended family system predominate tended to favour agricultural productions as all the wives married to one man, and their children were continuously used as free labour in cultivating the land and harnessing other local resources for agricultural production. The traditional family was also a platform for training in all kinds of skills and manpower development; including farming and land preparation skills, land cultivation skills, soil texture determination, organic manure production and application, training in crop specie and tree plant seedlings, harvesting and storage of farm produce, the ecosystem, food chain, and skills in varying methods of land cultivation. This was part of what traditional education could achieve. Modern education places emphasis on certificate as credence to efficacy. People who acquire the certificates are likely to turn to white collar jobs at the expense of farm work. But as earlier observed by Murdock (1949) and cited in Fulcher and Scott (1999), one of the characteristics of traditional family is common residence, which facilitated its function as a unit for economic co-operation in an agricultural economy. The various modern family forms as observed earlier are not oriented toward agriculture especially because of the effect of migration, social mobility and urbanisation, among others.

Traditional Nigerian societies had agriculture as about the only economic activity upon which the institution of government made investment. Indeed, agriculture was second to none, in terms of what will today be taken as budgetary allocation and by this, the rate of agricultural growth was comparatively high (Ukpong-Umo, 2012). However, Lewis (1986) observed that for the several past decades, agricultural growth in sub-Saharan Africa and particularly Nigeria has been much slower than population growth, thereby leading to increasing problems of food insecurity and environmental degradation among others. Moreso, Africa's share in the global economy has declined drastically during the past 50 years in term of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), exports, and foreign direct investment. For instance, its share in the global GDP has declined from around 3.5 per cent in 1950 to 2.5 per cent in 2000 (Collier and Gunning, 2000). It must be noted that this decrease in Africa's share of world export and foreign direct investment is even more drastic in the face of global economic meltdown. As noted in Nwanunobi (1992), traditional production depended on the input of human power and such contribution of human labour to economic production will ever remain minimal resulting in low power output.

Way forward

It is noticeable that agricultural production in Nigeria is still in the hands of rural farmers who rely mostly on traditional production techniques. This explains why the sector is growing at a slow pace. As a way forward there must be a persist measure toward a complete breakaway from the traditional to the use of modern agricultural technology for the nation to meet the challenges of producing adequate food and raw materials for her increasing population. Measures including agricultural reforms, use of improved agricultural technologies, farmer empowerment, development of physical and social infrastructure in rural areas as well as improving the management of natural resources (soil, water, forest, wild life and biodiversity) which will lead to an increased agricultural production must be adopted and rural farmers must be fully integrated into the scheme. Moreover, an effective change in the production modes of rural farmers which is the ultimate goal of agricultural extension must be pursued. It is therefore imperative that prospective agricultural extension and rural change agents must avail themselves of sound understanding of the ways of life of the people with who they intend to effect change for development. Government must have the Will to execute the reforms, make available relevant facilities for agricultural production including storage and provide subsidies, subventions, grants and other attractions for those who are practicing farmers

CONCLUSION

Evidences of changes in the fabrics of social institutions have been pervasive in the Nigerian society. These changes have contributed in parts to the challenges associated with weak institutions; including wide spread poverty, corruption and unemployment. It can also be adduced that certain vital traditional institutional elements and core values of virtues (including respect for the rule of law, accountability, and common interest above self interest or individualism) have not been emphasized in contemporary Nigeria due to some of these challenges. These have contributed in no small measure to the dwindling fortunes experienced, not only in Nigeria but in sub-Saharan region. The position of this paper is that whereas some structures of modern social institution have not been very successful in the performance of their functions, the traditional social institutions are

better in some cases. Therefore selective rather wholesale change is recommended.

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