

Modern role of chiefs in community development



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THE ROLE OF TRADITIONAL AUTHORITIES IN THE DECENTRALISATION OF POLITICAL POWER. A STUDY OF THE AKUAPEM TRADITIONAL AREA IN THE EASTERN REGION OF GHANA.

AN OUTLINE OF A THESIS

Introduction

Background to the study

Traditional governance system, is an age-old method by which the Indigenous people administered their own affairs prior to and after the advent of the Europeans into the region of modern Ghana. This system of governance is led by leaders multifariously referred to in English as chiefs, traditional authorities, traditional rulers, monarchs, kings, nobles, aristocrats, and natural rulers in a variety of African and other context. Traditional system of governance varies considerably among the different peoples that occupied the region of modern Ghana. While some groups developed very complex hierarchical structures, others had simple kin-based structure.

Several definitions of traditional societies rely on the distinction between pre-colonial colonial and post-colonial times. For example, the International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention no. 169 states that: “ A people are considered indigenous either because they are descendants of those who lived in the area before colonization; or because they have maintained their own social, economic, cultural and political institutions since colonization and the establishment of new states.

And according to the Martínez Cobo Report to the UN Sub-Commission on the Prevention of Discrimination of Minorities (1986), indigenous peoples may be identified as follows: “ Indigenous communities, peoples and nations are those which, having a historical continuity with pre-invasion and pre-colonial societies that developed on their territories, consider themselves distinct from other sectors of the societies now prevailing in those territories, or parts of them. They form at present non-dominant sectors of society and are determined to preserve, develop and transmit to future generations their ancestral territories, and their ethnic identity, as the basis of their continued existence as peoples, in accordance with their own cultural patterns, social institutions and legal systems.”

The office of traditional Authorities has been transformed as it has performed various functions back from the pre-colonial era through the colonial period to the present. Before the colonial period, traditional rulers had considerable influence and exercised considerable sovereignty within their areas of jurisdiction with their authority in both spiritual and secular matters.

During the colonial period, they became virtual sub-agents of the colonial government in the areas of local government and judicial matters. In this period, various legislations and statutes enacted by the colonial authority prescribed the traditional ruler's political role.

Decentralization is basically described as the practice of the administration in a state by which considerable autonomy is given to sub-political governmental bodies at the local level to take decisions and implement programmes and policies. In Ghana it is also known as the local government

system or the district assembly concept. The idea behind this system is to get the local people to use local resources to develop their localities. The present local government system has three-tier structure comprising the Regional coordinating council, the District assemblies and the Area, Town and Village Councils or Unit committees.

Although the local government system in Ghana dates back to the colonial era, precisely 1859 when the first Councilors for James Town, Accra were elected, the current system is only a few years old precisely 1988 when the PNDC L207 was passed.

The 1992 fourth republican constitution of Ghana gives credence to the system under chapter 20 with the title Decentralization and Local Government. The local government act 462 of 1993 has replaced the Local government Law 207 Of 1988. The head of the local government institution is the Minister who is charged with the responsibility of overseeing the operations of the institution.

Traditional authority also known as the chieftaincy institution has lived on in Ghanaian society and is still a vibrant force in many ways. However Since independence in 1957, there has been little, if any, effective participation of chiefs in decentralization in Ghana. Indeed, the relationship between chiefs and local government units has been ill-defined, even though the history of local government cannot be written without the institution of chieftaincy.

Even though some people argue that chieftaincy and modern local government are incompatible, one should not lose sight of the fact that the deep cynicism of some Ghanaians about politicians and their promises have
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compelled them to find in traditional authorities something that is “reassuring rather precisely because of its ambivalent position in what has become the disturbing discourse of failing modernity” (Rathbone, 2000: 164).

Traditional Authorities in some time past were involved in local government functions like local development under the Native Authority System during the colonial days. Similarly, during the post-colonial period, the role of traditional Authorities in local governance and development has not been questioned

The Ghanaian Constitution recognizes and protects the office of traditional Authority, thus creating a parallel system of governance. In fact, the Constitution forbids the Parliament from making laws that interfere with the chieftaincy institution.

Statement of the problem.

The office of the traditional Authority has evolved right from the pre colonial period through the colonial era to the establishment of party politics within the region of modern Ghana. Indeed, in Ghana, the institution dates back several centuries and remains the prime custodian of Ghanaian culture. The institution is much revered and held in awe since it provides a renewed sense of belonging as well as being a Powerful agent of social cohesion and harmony.

Traditional Authorities are expected to play Lead role in fighting for social, economic and political development of their people and perform arbitration

and representational roles as well as have the potential to facilitate accountability to their people. Perhaps these roles have been summarized by the Asantehene, Otumfuo Osei Tutu II (2002). Our predecessors engaged in inter-tribal wars, fighting for conquest over territories and people. Today, the war should be vigorous and intensive against dehumanization, poverty, marginalization, ignorance and disease... Chieftaincy must be used to propel economic development through proper lands administration, through facilitating investments in our communities, and through codification and customs and traditions making it impossible for imposters to get enstooled and creating unnecessary situations for litigation.

However modern democratic dispensations has restricted the role Traditional Authorities to acting Custodians of tradition and culture as well as the embodiment of the spirit of the ancestors and a link between them and the living Community. Ironically, democratic governance in Ghana, in all ramifications, draws its strength from the traditional governance structure and it is fair to say that national politics would not be this tolerant were it not for the effective and impartial handling of the people by Traditional Authorities, particularly when one considers the stabilizing role they play during national and local elections.

Both traditionalists and modernists often see traditional authority and elected political leaders competing for power in the community. The struggle between the two for political power and legitimacy is seen as a zero-sum game. This is because whatever powers a traditional Authority wrenches from the state is considered as a loss for state leadership. Far from being in competition with elected leaders for the public's regard, traditional leaders

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and elected leaders are seen by the public as two sides of the same coin. Popular evaluations of both traditional and elected leaders depend on the leader's leadership skills. An individual's level of modernization plays a much smaller role in shaping perceptions of traditional authority.

There has been the lack of empirical evidence concerning popular perceptions of how traditional leaders support elected leaders in a democratic system of governance. There is the question as to how much space traditional Authorities should be given within the context of modern democratic decentralization in Ghana. This is because since independence Traditional Authorities have lost virtually all the formal governmental, judicial and other roles they played before, during and after colonial rule.

Nevertheless their status and autonomy is guaranteed under the 1992 constitution of Ghana. Yet not all politicians in Ghanaian society see it as legitimate or are prepared to allow it to work. Even where the legitimacy of traditional leaders is not challenged, their mode of selection and the way they carry out their functions often generate deep concerns. Therefore there are no simple solutions to the question of how to define the role of Traditional Authorities in the decentralisation of power in the Ghanaian political systems. Individual local context is important. With many modern and highly educated individuals now occupying positions as traditional leaders in Ghana, it should be possible for the national government to work with these traditional leaders for the development of the country.

Significance of the Study

The study will provide useful information on the modern role of chiefs in community development. Chieftaincy no doubt is one of the most enduring traditional institutions in Ghana, which has displayed remarkable resilience from pre-colonial through colonial to postcolonial times. Nowadays, chiefs are under pressure to achieve good governance in their traditional areas. They are challenged to integrate tradition and modernity, a process about which there is considerable debate.

Also the study will help to identify the role of traditional leaders in the decentralisation of power and demonstrate their active participation in the political development of their communities.

Finally study will also add to the knowledge base on the role of traditional Authorities in an increasingly globalised world where the accent is on democracy, human rights, health delivery, and human development and discover if Traditional rulers have really outlived their usefulness. Their ability to come to terms with these challenges will provide an indication of their relevance.

Purpose of the study/ Objectives

The main objective of the study will be to examine the role of Traditional Authorities in the local governance process in the Decentralisation of power. A study of the Akuapem Traditional area of the Eastern region of Ghana. The specific objectives will include the following.

- To reveal and analyze the political role of traditional leaders in the decentralisation of

Power in democratic Ghana to achieve good governance.

- To discover the extent of which elected or appointed governments officials allow themselves to be closely linked with the traditional leaders in the political development of the community.
- To find out the involvement and recognition of traditional Authority in the political process of Ghana's young democracy in the local area.
- To discover the relevance of the role of Traditional authorities in the decentralisation of power and how the government can support them without pushing them to oblivion.
- Access and make recommendations on how Traditional Authority can be incorporated into the formal local government system

Research Questions

The following research questions will inform the study.

- What are the roles of traditional Authorities in the decentralisation of power in attaining good governance and political stability?
- To what extent do elected or appointed governments officials allow themselves to be closely linked with the traditional leaders in the political development of the community.
- How relevant is the role of traditional Authorities in the decentralisation of power.
- What kind of institutional framework will help to promote the integration of Traditional Authority into the formal district assembly structure?

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Introduction

This chapter examines theories, perspectives, conceptions and models on development, endogenous development, good governance, traditional authorities and local governance. It ends with a discussion of the synergy model of traditional authorities and formal government that will be suitable for the study.

Relevant literature will be reviewed.

Decentralization is defined as “ any act in which a central government formally cedes

powers to actors and institutions at lower levels in a political-administrative and

territorial hierarchy” (Ribot 2001: v., citing Mawhood 1983 and Smith 1985).

Three main types of decentralisation are commonly identified:

- *administrative decentralisation or deconcentration* i. e. the re-location of branches of

the central state to local areas, entailing a transfer of powers to locally-based officials

who remain part of, and upwardly accountable to, central government ministries and

agencies;

- *Fiscal decentralisation* i. e. the transfer of fiscal resources and revenue-generating

powers, inclusive of authority over budgets and financial decisions, to either

deconcentrated officials and/or central government appointees or to elected

politicians; 1

- *Political decentralisation or democratic decentralisation or devolution* (of power) i. e.

the transfer of powers and resources to sub-national authorities which are

“(a) largely

or wholly independent of the central government and (b) democratically elected”

(Manor 1995: 81-2). 2

METHODOLOGY

This section will discuss the research design and the methods that will be adopted for collecting and analyzing data. It will also deal with the research design, validation and reliability instrumentation, population, sample and sampling procedures or techniques to be used for the research.

Research Design

For the approach of the study, a case study will be used as the research design type. According to Babbie (2007: 298) a case study is “ the in-depth examination of a single instance of some social phenomenon, such as a village, a family, or juvenile gang”. Also in Wisker (2008: 210), Robson (1993: 52) opines that a case study is “ a strategy for doing research that involves empirical investigation of a particular contemporary phenomenon in its real life context using multiple sources of evidence”. From the two definitions, common features that can be identified are that a case study focuses on a single instance or a particular phenomenon and the in-depth and empirical study of such a phenomenon.

The study will also employ the use of descriptive, explorative and cross sectional survey as well as the use of multiple sources of evidence to conduct the study.

Population

The targeted population will be natives and residents in the Akuapem Traditional area.

Sample

The sample will be made up of 200 people. The target population will be the of heads of households, traditional authorities and local government officials which will be put into groups of three. Five communities will be randomly sampled from the Akuapem Traditional area.

Sampling Technique

As a qualitative research, it will involve techniques such as the use of interviews, administration questionnaires, and focused group discussion. The interviews will be transcribed, coded, and analyzed. In selecting participants for the study, the researcher will make use of purposive sampling technique.

Instrumentation

In conducting the study, the researcher will employ conversational interviews for the collection of data. This conversational style of interview will be appropriate and effective because the respondents will feel free to share their views. The interview section will help the researcher to elicit information from direct person-to-person encounters. The interview will be structured and unstructured. This will help the researcher to learn enough so as to formulate questions for subsequent interviews (Merian, Page 75).

Data Collection Procedure and Method

A questionnaire and interview guide will be administered. Largely, data that will be collected will be presented and analyzed qualitatively.

Thesis Structure/Organization of the study

This study will be organized into five chapters. Chapter one will be made up of the introductory overview of the whole study. This will include the background to the study, statement of the problem, objectives of the study, research questions, and the relevance of the study.

Chapter Two will be the review of relevant literature related to the study as well as the theoretical and conceptual issues. Chapter Three will be the

research methodology, which will include the description of the study area, target population, sampling procedures, data collection techniques, data analysis and limitations of the study. Chapter Four will present the results of the study. And finally Chapter five will provide the summary of findings, conclusions and recommendations.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

PROBLEMS/OPEN QUESTIONS

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