

IGBO TRADITIONAL POLITICAL SYSTEM AND THE CRISIS OF GOVERNANCE IN NIGERIA

Ibenekwu, Ikpechukwuka E.

Institute of African Studies
University of Nigeria, Nsukka

Abstract

The pre-colonial ethnic nationalities that make up the present Nigerian state had leadership structures and systems of governance in place before the arrival of the western colonialists, but the colonialists hoisted a western styled democracy on Nigerians. This system unfortunately has not solved the nation's leadership question, so much so that the call by people for the convocation of a sovereign national conference persists. Scholars hold contending views on the cause and remedy of this trend. Some argue that it is as result of the multi-ethnic nature of the country, others contend that poor economic institutions are the bane and yet many insist that religious intolerance leading to political instability is at the root of the problem. This paper therefore examines the Igbo Traditional leadership system as an alternative to the leadership question, with respect to public good delivery, succession and accountability.

Introduction

Nigeria, just like many other developing countries in Africa, has undergone and continues to undergo political changes of far-reaching proportions. These changes of enormous proportions are most manifest in the area of governance systems. Models of governance and styles/systems of leadership have been attracting attention largely due to political instability and poor economic development performance which has been recorded in Nigeria since the attainment of political independence in 1960. Owing to the prime roles played by governance and leadership in the determination of the rules and behaviour of actors in a polity, governance and leadership has therefore been viewed as key factors which may boost or impede the development process of a country. In fact, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) have severally suggested that Nigeria's inability to develop the economic sector is principally a resultant effect of bad governance and poor leadership.

The centrality of leadership in every society has given unprecedented popularity to the concept of democracy. It is the way that a society is governed that determines whether it is democratic or authoritarian. Such system of governance equally has implications on the values and norms which the society lives by. It is the structure of a society that determines to a large extent the type of leadership that can emerge from it. This is so because the structure of a society has inherently peculiar challenges which correspondingly demand peculiar solutions. Modern liberal democracy, however, assumes a 'one size fits all' approach to the solution of problems (especially that of governance) peculiar to each society.

Pre-colonial Nigeria was characterized by fragmented ethnic nationalities each with its own unique system of government or institutions of governance. Such systems were traditional in nature and structured to suit the peculiarities of the ethnic group involved. While the Hausa/Fulani political system was centralized and autocratic in nature, the Yoruba political system was said to be monarchical and based on the principle of checks and balances while the Igbo political system, on the other hand, was said to be democratic (Chikendu, 2003:14). The lack

of uniformity and peculiar nature of political systems in these three major ethnic groups led to the adoption of matching systems of rule by the colonial masters for these three major ethnic affiliations. Thus while Direct Rule was applied to the North (given that it already had a centralized system of government and taxation), Indirect Rule was applied to the South. This alteration of the traditional system of government by the colonial masters marked the prelude to the introduction of alien systems of government into Nigeria.

The post-colonial Nigerian State thus essentially had to adapt to western institutions of governance which often conflicted with traditional leadership values as well as contemporary socio-economic realities. In spite of giant strides recorded by western liberal democracy in western societies, the post-colonial Nigerian State has been unable to institute a system of governance which has the capacity to facilitate state-building and promote economic development. This failure can be attributed largely to the shoddy implementation of the tenets of liberal democracy by the Nigerian political hierarchy. The resultant effect has been the prevalence of endemic poverty, political instability, widespread ethno-political conflict, electoral conflict, lack of probity and accountability in governance, massive corruption, embezzlement of public treasury, alienation of the public from the government, decayed infrastructure, insecurity of lives and property, winner-takes-all syndrome among other vices.

The above vices are alien to Igbo Traditional System of Leadership. This has led to the questioning of whether these vices are not the fall-outs of an alien system of government which still display traces of the colonial attributes of extortion, exploitation and expropriation. This assertion is in tandem with the position of Ake (2001) to the effect that the indigenous bourgeoisie which took over power at independence were mere stooges. These stooges inherited power simply to further the interests of western capitalism (Ake, 1981) albeit to the detriment of Nigerians. This trend has continued today even though the interest being served has undergone transformation from being that of western capitalism to that of a handful of private cabals who decide who governs and in whose interests the actions and inactions of the government will be channelled. This scenario has plunged the Nigerian State into developmental dilemma occasioned by crisis of governance.

The broad task which this paper has set for itself, therefore, is to appraise Igbo Traditional Leadership System and Liberal Democracy with a view to unravelling which one of them suits the peculiarities of the Nigerian State. Specifically, this paper will undertake the following:

- Describe the Structure, Style of Leadership, Succession and Mechanisms of Accountability in the Igbo Traditional Leadership System;
- Examine the different Systems of Government that has been practiced in Nigeria;
- Examine the Operationalization of Liberal Democracy in Nigeria;
- Propound a Theoretical Framework to underline the Ideals and Applicability of Igbo Traditional Leadership System in Nigeria; and,
- Make a Case for the Adoption of Igbo Traditional Leadership System to address the Crisis of Governance and Development in Nigeria.

Leadership Question

Leadership means different things to different people. This fact may have informed Bedeian's (1986:464) observation that:

To some, it is synonymous with holding an upper-level position. Thus a president, governor, or chief executive is a leader by virtue of holding a high office. Others use the term leadership to mean the possession of

certain personal characteristics such as alertness, perseverance, maturity, and intelligence. Finally, to some, leadership is used to describe a category of behaviour. According to this view, it is a dynamic process in which an individual behaves in a certain manner, thereby influencing others to follow.

To Bedeian, leadership is the art of influencing individual or group activities toward achievement of enterprise objectives.

In the same vein, Koontz et al (1983:660) defines leadership as *influence, the art or process of influencing people so that they will strive willingly toward the achievement of group goals*. Nwachukwu (1988:146) sees leadership as “a social influencing process for the attainment of goals”. Implied here is the fact that leadership provides direction, guides group activities and ensures that group objectives are attained. An ideal leadership employ the attributes of enthusiasm and persuasion in order to effectively mobilize the followers towards the achievement of set goals or objectives. This is why Tilley and House (1969:391) conceptualized leadership as “a process where one person exerts social influence over the members of a group”. Leadership must be accompanied by influence employed in the provision of direction and assistance in the realisation of goals. For leadership to occur, therefore, there must be a social setting with a person, position and situation (Massie and Douglas, 1977:296). In other words, leadership does not occur in a vacuum.

The leadership question crops up when there is a gap in what an ideal leadership system should be. The success or failure of any country, group or organisation is often blamed on the perceived strength or weaknesses of the leadership. In the Nigerian case, Chinua Achebe made it clear that the trouble with Nigeria is that of political leadership. What Achebe implied was that in as much as Nigeria has all it takes to progress, the failure of political leadership has been inimical to development in Nigeria. The leadership question, therefore, has to do with the failure of leadership. This failure necessitated the question of who is capable of providing the ideal leadership a country, group or organisation needs. Such a leader, in the case of Nigeria, should be able to dispense political goods in a transparent manner and also be accountable and maintain some level of fiscal discipline.

Public Goods

Public goods are also known as political goods. Political goods are those intangible and hard to quantify claims that citizens once made on sovereigns and now make on states. They encompass expectations, conceivably obligations, inform the local political culture, and together give content to the social contract between ruler and ruled that is at the core of regime/government and citizenry interactions (Pennock, 1966: 420). Examples of public goods are security and unrestricted political participation. Rotberg (2003:2-3) identified other public goods to include medical and health care (at varying levels and costs); schools and educational instruction (of various kinds and levels) – the knowledge good; roads, railways, harbours, and other physical infrastructures – the arteries of commerce; communications infrastructures; a money and banking system, usually presided over by a central bank and lubricated by a national currency; a beneficent fiscal and institutional context within which citizens can pursue personal entrepreneurial goals and potentially prosper; the promotion of civil society; and methods of regulating the sharing of the environmental commons.

Igbo Traditional Leadership System

Classical social anthropologists like Meek (1937), Green (1947), Forde and Jones (1950), Uchendu (1965), Isichei (1976) among several others in giving historical accounts of the ancient Igbo society have described it as acephalous, segmentary or stateless. This classification is based on the fact that the pre-colonial Igbo society consisted of autonomous villages and village groups ruled via diffused authority without any sort of formalised, permanent or hereditary leadership systems. The Igbos can be said to be republican by nature. They maintained a decentralized and a cephalous society. Igbo society was democratic and egalitarian to some significant extent. According to Onyemaechi (2010:1),

An egalitarian society is characterized by the adjustment of the number of valued statuses to the number of persons, or fixing or limiting of persons capable of exerting power. As many persons as can wield power, whether through personal strength, influence or authority, can do so.

Uchendu (1965:41, 46) summed up the traditional Igbo leadership system as *an exercise in direct democracy on the village level with a representative assembly on the level of the village group*. Aside from the representative assembly, some Igbo communities, especially trading cities along the Niger like Onitsha and Oguta, according to Nzimiro (1972) and the Nri ancient kingdom (Afigbo 1981:31-68) had elaborated chieftaincy institutions in pre-colonial times. In all, the Igbo political system, comprises of established ranks and positions of honour. Political organisation is also markedly different. Thus there are Ezes/Igwes/Obis as well as other honorary. Ascendance to the top is open and free for any individual irrespective of age or family background.

In the words of Chikendu (2003:18) concerning the traditional Igbo society:

The basic unit was the family, the most operative unit being the kindred, then the village and the town. The village groups were not organised in kingdoms. The function of government was carried on by a council of elders who shared power in various levels of intensity with various other groups – age grades, titled men, women, ritual priests, etc.

Such a fragmented pattern of government, as shown by Chikendu, is a manifestation of egalitarianism, individualism, achievement motivation and the clear absence of group solidarity.

Structure of Leadership

The Igbos occupies the former Eastern Region (now South-East geo-political zone) and a part of the former Mid-Western region. The Igbos, unlike the Yoruba and the Hausa – Fulani, had a complex and complicated system of administration in pre-colonial era. Igbo society is reputed to have had a more decentralized political structure than any other major group (Coleman, 1986:28). There is equally strong evidence of a cultural emphasis upon individual achievement affecting rank status (Coleman, 1986:28, 30). The basic social unit among the Igbo has been a single extended family or kindred composed of several such families and the largest political unit has normally been the village group. The Igbo, generally had no kings or chiefs. They operated a democratic system of government. The executive, legislative and judicial powers were vested in

the Oha-na-eze, the council of elders; the family; the Age – Grades and the Umuada. In fact, Onuoha and Omenma (2007:147-149) observed that there are basically four levels in Igbo Political System. These include the family (under the headship of the father and comprises of nuclear members of the family which is usually large depending on the number of wives a man married); the Kindred (a smaller social unit made up of the head of the nuclear family – the Father or the Okpara); the Village (comprises of kindreds and cluster of kindreds and headed by the Okpara of the most senior kindred by order of birth); and, the Town (the highest political unit among the Igbo and is made up of villages which are collections of kindreds with attachment to the land [Ala or Ani] as a common bond).

With regards to the sub-cultural area of Igboland to which reference is being made, there were lineage headships, influential age groups, and powerful titled and secret societies. There were also individuals carrying the title Eze or Obi, indicating a special degree of influence and power, though not independent of the person and, especially, the wealth it could mobilize. The majority of such leadership positions were held by men. However, there were also female assemblies and individual leaders, and female titles in some places, in what has been described by Okonjo (1976) as a ‘dual-sex political system’ with gendered complementary structures. Some of the leadership positions were restricted to elders, often of certain lineages only; others were based on individually achieved status and purchasing power, especially the ozo-titles.

Some authors (Uchendu 1965; Coleman 1986; Allen 1997 etc) contend that as regards to these leadership positions, a common feature is their high degree of local diversity, in two ways. First, the rules by which an individual obtained a position differed from place to place. Second, while certain Igbo communities (especially Nri and Arochukwu) exerted a certain wide-range commercial or ritual influence, the leaders of these communities did not exert direct power outside of their own community.

The structural organization of Igbo political system can be summed up as being premised on the following grounds:

Village Administration: A village is seen as inhabited by a group of related families. Each family head held the Ofo title and all of them put together formed the council of Elders. The council governed the village.

The Age Grade: The age grade is an association of people that belong to the same age group. Members of an age grade are selected based by virtue of being born within a particular period. Thus while some Igbo societies select age group members based on those born in a particular year, some memberships span two years. In Igbo traditional society, the age grades perform the following functions:

- Perform the public duties such as: clearing the paths, construction of roads, and markets etc.
- They were involved in the administration of the villages
- They served as army for the defence of the villages against external enemy.
- They acted as the police force for the maintenance of law and order.
- They helped in the implementation of policies made by the council of elders.
- They assisted in checking abuse of powers by the paramount rulers and the council of elders.
- They also perform ceremonial and cultural functions during important ceremonies in the village or communities.

The Age Grade System, according to Igwe (2005:6), is *among the Igbo the fundamental institution of government and principle of traditional political organisation, which is also*

variedly developed in the cultures of some other African nationalities. The Age Grade System is a manifestation of the republican way of life of the Igbos as well as their popular system of direct village democracy. The roles played by the Age Grades has in recent times expanded to incorporate that of security, military, economic development, policy making and policy implementation among several others. As a multi-functional institution, the Age Grade System through the creation of opportunities for systematic political participation by every member of the community strengthens the popular democratic process as well as the stable development of the political and other related institutions.

It is also pertinent to identify some general attributes of the Igbo traditional leadership system. These are that the affairs of the village are discussed from time to time by family heads; the villagers make laws for themselves and even the age-grades are empowered to enact laws which the elders would accept based on its merit; succession to leadership position was not hereditary in Igbo political system; the political system was of a Republican nature; decisions were reached by consensus, different institutions played different important roles in the administration and powers were shared by them; and, that wealthy and influential men in the community or village are given the Ozo title. This title makes the holder to be recognized in the society and could then preside over meetings about issues affecting the community with elders. The conferment of the Ozo title is often based on achievement.

On the administration of justice, minor disputes in the Igbo traditional society were settled by the family while major disputes were handled by the council of elders or Amala. The final adjudication of cases was left to the deities. Similarly, the age – grades resolved cases that are minor within themselves. The Earth goddess (Ala) plays a great role in judicial functions, for example, offences such as homicide, murder and birth of abnormal children are crimes against Ala. The Chief Priest or native doctor (dibia) also takes part in judicial settlement; the whole village may equally constitute itself into a court for the purpose of settling disputes.

By way of summary, certain salient features of the Igbo political system should be outlined. Firstly, Igbo social structure is defined through blood line. This is traced by patrilineal linkage. The family is the nucleus of Igbo society followed by the clan, village level and town. These blood relations constitute the bedrock on which associations between people and their neighbours are formed. The development of social organization is from the form of an extended family to a kind of village government coupled with a strong tie to religion, trade and marriages. Consisting of associations of age groups; men with titles, poor and rich citizens interact with one another in war or in peace who jointly participate in community affairs, decision-making and all development efforts the defining principle of Igbo culture is the emphasis placed on individual achievement and initiatives, prestige and egalitarian leadership (Onyemaechi, 2010:2).

Secondly, Igbo traditional society equally recognises old age. The Igbo village is made up of several compounds. Each compound is based on patrilineal relationships. Status is accorded to the male in order of seniority in spite of whether the family is polygamous or not. In the family, therefore, the first son is the head and is entrusted with the family heirlooms like *Ofo na Ogu*, *Chi*, and *Obi*. The first son (known as *Opara*) holds the symbol of the family authority. Within the family, there are two Igbo positions of esteem which are formally institutionalized. These are *Opara* (first son) and *Ada* (first daughter). The first two male and female children, namely *Opara* and *Ada*, are accorded higher status in the Igbo family. In a monogamous family, the birth order follows. The younger is required to always give respect to the older brother(s) or sister(s). This seniority and respect accorded to old age is one of the fundamental beliefs among the Igbos.

Thirdly, Elders are generally respected and honoured. Elders are often approached in both good and bad times for advice. A leader is always expected to speak the truth at all times. The village head often combines the village priest. An elder may equally be a titled person who presides over traditional functions in the family compound and in the village. To this end, therefore, it is safe to conclude that the Igbo Political System is segmentary, a representative democracy, and a bulwark of the entire members of the family or kindred against any form of injustice (Onuoha & Omenma, 2007:150).

Liberal Democracy in Nigeria

Dahl (2000:35-40) expounded two dimensions of democracy. The first dimension, explained Dahl, conceives democracy as:

... an ideal, goal, aim, or standard, one that is perhaps unachievable but nonetheless highly relevant not only for classifying and judging political systems but also for fashioning strategies of democratization, designing appropriate political institutions...

Explaining further, Dahl (2003:37) noted that ideal democracy is therefore commensurate with a political system that might be designed for members of an association who were willing to treat one another, for political purposes, as political equals. Such a system requires certain criteria for effective functioning. This include a set of fundamental human right of citizens, democratic political institution to boost citizens participation in electing representative, to freedom of expression, inquiry, discussion and so on. One important thing is that these rights and opportunities must not just exist as merely abstract moral obligations, but must be enforceable and enforced by law and practice (Dahl, 1989: 106 – 131; 1999: 35-43, 83 – 99; 2000: 37-38).

The second dimension of democracy expounded by Dahl has to do with *democracy in practice, as opposed to democracy in theory*. Dahl (2000: 38) pointed out that this has become important due to the fact that *having rights and opportunities is not strictly commensurate with using them*. In other words, the mere fact that democratic society concede certain rights, for example to vote and be voted for, to their citizens, is not a guarantee that all qualified citizens will participate in these activities. In the Greek city-states for instance, slaves were not allowed to air their views at public gatherings. In fact, a person to be recognised as a free citizen in the Greek city-states must own land, a house and must be married. This betrays some form of unequal relationship in the Greek democratic system. El-Din (2003:5) sums up democracy within the context of its origin in Athens during the Greek era as an exclusionary phenomenon, where women and slaves were deprived of any political rights.

Liberal Democracy has gained dominance in the 21st century. Liberal democracy may assume several constitutional forms – Republics as practiced in the United States, India and France; Constitutional Monarchy as practiced in the United Kingdom or Spain. It may have a Presidential System (United States), a Parliamentary System (Westminster System, UK and Commonwealth member nations), or even a hybrid, semi presidential system as obtained in France. Wiredu et al (2006:451) contends that the term liberal democracy refers to adherence to the ideology of political liberalism. One of the major characteristic features of liberal democracy is the constitutional protections of individual rights from the powers of the government.

Contemporary Liberal Democracy is characterized by the availability of universal suffrage (that is the granting of all adult citizens the right to vote and be voted for). To be able to exercise this right, the citizen is obliged to be duly registered before being able to vote. Elections

are equally required to be free and fair within a competitive environment and at least two political parties.

The constitution, under liberal democracy gives meaning to the character of the state. Here the constitution clearly exists to place some limitations on the excesses of government. Not only that, there will also be emphasis on the separation of power, checks and balances, independent judiciary.

For a better understanding of the concept of liberal democracy, some scholars prefer to discuss it as an ideology. One of such scholars is Omotola (2009:14). He adopted Lane's (1962) contention that ideology is *a systematized and interconnected set of ideas about the socio-economic and political organization as a whole*. Expanding further, Nnoli (2003:177-183) observed that ideology essentially serve to provide collective legitimization of governmental actions and/or inactions, as well as a basis for popular mobilization in support of such actions. With the triumph of the liberal ideology at the end of the Cold War, liberal democracy has continued to spread to various parts of the globe. Liberal democracy is now employed as an instrument for the mobilization of citizens, states and actors in the international system. This, according to Baylis, (1995); Allen, (1997); and Diamond, (2001) is highlighted by the fact that donor states and institution have now come to link their development assistance/aid to democratization. The same condition has equally been set for any form of concession on the Third World quest and clamour for debt forgiveness/cancellation.

In as much as there are no specific indices for the measurement of liberal democracy which adequately captures the entire dimensions of democracy, scholars like Cutright (1963), Bollen (1990), Dinneya (2003) etc have variously attempted to propound comprehensive indices for the measurement of liberal democracy. However, any comprehensive indices for the measurement of democracy must have institutional, procedural and behavioural dimensions. These dimensions must encapsulate, in the words of Omotola (2009:18), *element such as participation, competitiveness, inclusiveness, openness, civil liberty, level of toleration of political opposition, succession credibility, legitimacy standing of government, independence of electoral bodies, mass media and judiciary, quality of governance, level of democratic dividend and the general environment of politics*. These indices provide the benchmark for the measurement of liberal democracy. However, the practice of democracy in principle is skewed especially in Africa. This is the position of Jinadu (1997); Bratton (1998); Adejumbi (2000); Omotola (2004) and Omotola (2009). The summary of their analysis is that:

...every country of the world today claims to be democratic, even if its democratic credential is not beyond the level of teleguided elections, with little or no chances of leadership alternation, as has mostly been the case in Africa.

As a consequence of this, the government is devoid of legitimacy. Furthermore,

Basic human rights as simple as that of freedom of expression, right to vote and be voted for and the like are not only being violated with impunity, the economic rights of the people particularly the peasants have been effectively mortgaged through the elevation of the capitalist component of liberal democracy to a dizzying height. This is usually done through economic reform agenda built on chronic opportunism and political patronage that made the accumulation of private capital dependent on the state, to the disempowerment of the masses (Omotola, 2004 & 2005).

This scenario, according to Ake (1996 & 2001) voids the argument that democracy is a precondition for development – at least in the African context. In fact, democracy as practiced in the Nigerian context can be said to be inimical to development.

Systems of Government Practiced in Nigeria

Nigeria has experimented with several systems of government since independence. Nigeria was a federation of three regions. At independence on October 1, 1960, the government inherited a replica of the British Parliamentary system of government. Under such a system, Her Majesty, the Queen of England was the Head of Government and was represented by the Governor-General. The Federal Parliament consisted of the Queen (represented by the Governor General), the Senate and the House of Representatives. Under the Independence Constitution, the Senate consisted of 44 members while the House of Representatives consisted of 312 members. The Governor-General was empowered to choose from the House of Representatives a member who appeared to command the support of the majority of the members as Prime Minister and on the advice of the Prime Minister appoint other Federal Ministers (Dare, 1987:149/). For the Regions, there was a Regional House of Assembly and a House of Chiefs. The Governor-General also had the prerogative to appoint as Premier from the House of Assembly, the member that commands majority of support in the House. Post-independence Nigeria, therefore, had a Governor-General, a Prime Minister as well as three Regional Premiers.

This system of government was unacceptable to many Nigerians. This was not helped by the crises that rocked the country between 1960 and 1963. Not only that, Chikendu (2003:50-51) noted that a Political Bureau set up by the Babangida administration Reported that:

At Independence in 1960, Nigeria inherited a weak political structure, a defective and imbalanced federation, an intensification of ethnic consciousness and rivalries, a subverted indigenous ethos of government and culture, and above all, an inexperienced leadership.

All these culminated in the abrogation of the monarchical British Parliamentary system of government in Nigeria.

At the instance of the Prime Minister, an all-party conference was summoned in Lagos in July 1963. It was at this conference that the Republic system of government was adopted. The President of Nigeria was vested with the same powers and responsibilities as that of the Governor-General under the Independence Constitution. Under the Republican Constitution of 1963, the President was elected by a joint meeting of the two Houses of Parliament for a five-year term. The Republican Constitution retained the Parliamentary system of government but however abolished appeals to the judicial committee of the Privy Council in England. The Nigerian Supreme Court was created to perform such roles hitherto performed by the judicial committee of the Privy Council. It should be noted that, this system of government came to an abrupt end with the incursion of the military into Nigerian politics on January 15, 1966. This military coup plunged Nigeria into a thirteen-year period (1966-1979) of military interregnum.

To herald the Second Republic, the Nigerian 1999 Constitution was drafted. The Constitution was very much like that of the United States of America with three arms – Legislature, Executive and Judiciary being separated together with the operations with the operation of checks and balances. The Presidential system of government was recommended by the fifty-member Constitutional Drafting Committee (CDC). The members of this committee

argued that a good Constitution should seek to eliminate cut-throat political competition based on the system of rules of winner-takes-all.

The Presidential system of government came on board with much fanfare. However, it did not take time for Nigerians to discover that this expensive system of government is just another avenue for unscrupulous politicians to milk the nation dry. This is aptly captured by Chikendu (2003:64) when he asserted that *every aspect of the Presidential system that gives it a peculiar character was not only bastardized but also was made a travesty of the American practice. Thus, the ingenuous lobbying system became a platform for cut-throat political horse trading; the impeachment device became a perilous 'Sword of Damocles' hanging over the head of the of the President and State Governors, special assistantship became an avenue for the employment of 'electoral rejects' who in most cases misadvised their masters.* Thus we had a resurrection of the old leadership, schooled in the politics of intrigues, insincerity, deceit and the manipulation of ethnic and regional sentiments to sustain themselves in power.

Nigeria has been practising the American Presidential system of government since 1979 albeit with punctuations occasioned by military intervention in Nigerian politics. As it stands, the presidential system has only got more sophisticated with huge sums of money going to the maintenance of the executive and federal legislatures. Such huge expenditures can as well be channelled to the provision of food and security to a larger percentage of the Nigerian poor living mostly in the rural areas. This is trying to say that the presidential system of government is very far from fostering sustainable socio-political and economic development in the country.

Theoretical Framework

Leadership is central to democratic and socio-economic development of any political system. This is true as it relates to the Igbo political system. The Igbo political system, over the years, has maintained a high level of democratic governance peculiar to Igbo traditional society. In the Igbo traditional society, the level of political awareness of the populace is high, the mechanism of checks and balances which has enshrined probity and accountability as well as general administrative efficiency is in place and development in both human and material conditions through self-help efforts has become a norm.

An examination of institutions of leadership in the Igbo traditional leadership system will show that none is mutually exclusive. What is obtainable is that the Council of Elders has the powers to represent each of their respective clans, decisions are taken and then the elder returns home to summon his people and give them details of what transpired in the meeting of Council of Elders. Through this mechanism, every elder will endeavour that his own people clearly understood what is at stake and is prepared to abide by such decisions as has already been reached. Default is collectively punished especially in extreme cases.

Furthermore, elders and chiefs can be expected to be torn between the options of advancing self-interest at the expense of that of the community or to curb the self-interest of the individual members of the community in order to promote the community interests. The Igbo traditional leaders are expected to live above primordial sentiments by putting the interests of the community over and above that of any individual member.

Similarly, legitimacy plays a crucial role in the usefulness of a traditional leader. A leader without legitimacy will be made to face the opprobrium of the society. In order to maintain a leadership position in the Igbo traditional society, therefore, a person must be found, just like Caesar's wife, to be above suspicion. Such a leader will also be deposed ones questions are

raised over his integrity. In the Traditional Igbo Leadership System, it is perform or get dethroned.

Thus the most basic self-interest of a traditional leader in Igbo land is likely to revolve around the preservation of his position, which is predicated largely upon effectiveness in negotiating and addressing the demands of the community. These two sets of interests may often conflict with each other. In other words, traditional leaders are motivated by the desire to maintain legitimacy through the allegiance of their communities, which requires responding positively to community demands.

In spite of the heterogeneity of each Igbo community, its demands are likely to revolve primarily around issues of development and democratic governance. The level of political awareness and level of education of the community can also be expected to affect the ability of the community to articulate its demands and exert pressure on their leaders. In a democratic environment where the population exercises control over the activities of the leaders, the demands that the community places upon their leaders can be expected to coincide purely with those of the communities.

Thus the need to maintain one's integrity and self-preservation is likely is one reason that propel leaders in the Igbo traditional society to serve as agents for the advancement of local interest, which in turn will inadvertently coincide with the promotion of development and democratic governance. In this process, however, the traditional leadership are most likely to be transformed. In other words, a traditionally democratic society like that of the Igbo demands for leaders that can contribute to the empowerment of their communities in order to sustain their legitimacy and the more empowered rural communities become, the more likely traditional authorities are pushed to become agents of development and democratic governance.

Merits of the Igbo Traditional Leadership System

The Igbo traditional leadership system has many positives attached to it. Firstly, it is by nature democratic. It is democratic in the sense that it involves all adults, albeit in groups. By converging at the village square or other designated meeting points, issues affecting the community are deliberated on and actions to be taken on such an issue will be jointly voted on and the majority votes will prevail. Decisions thus reached are jointly implemented and more often than not, a monitoring team will be constituted to oversee the implementation process.

Secondly, leadership in the Igbo traditional society is representative. It is representative in the sense that every adult male is entitled to one vote irrespective of age, social class or religious affiliation. Even in situations whereby clan leaders (usually elders) are required to serve as representatives of their respective clans, they bring feedback home. This is unlike what obtains in liberal democracies as practised in Nigeria in which representatives only visit their constituencies when they want to canvass for re-election. Through this means, every member of the community is kept abreast of issues. The principle of ignorance is no defence is demonstrated here because measures are put in place to ensure that nobody deviates or breaks a rule simply because of not being aware of such a decision having taken effect.

Thirdly, the Igbo traditional leadership system is development oriented. This is demonstrated by cases whereby the communities are mobilized to put in place social amenities like electricity, pipe-borne water, health centres, schools churches etc. in fact it is only in very few traditional African societies that the government can be said to have provided electricity for the people. The community usually task themselves to do the wiring and buy transformer. The government then comes to commission and add the name of that community to the growing list of

those from which electricity dues will be collected at the end of the month irrespective of whether there was power supply at all or not. Being able to thrive in the face of scarce resources, the Igbo traditional leadership system is not wasteful as is the case in Nigerian liberal democracy.

Fourthly is the issue of accountability. It has been mentioned earlier that the life-span of a tradition leader in office depends largely on the extent to which it is accountable to the people. Lack of or inadequate accountability is tantamount to political suicide as the leader involved will face public opprobrium and be forced out of office. In order to avoid this eventuality, leaders in the Igbo traditional system make every effort to be accountable to the people. A leader that has been disgraced out of office will have to face the dent not just individually, but alongside the family he comes from.

Another point worth mentioning is the justice system in Igbo leadership system. It is believed that any leader that lives unjustly or that is biased in judgement is exposing himself and his family for repercussion. Thus leaders endeavour to live above board and to make sure judgements are delivered without fear or favour. In most cases, the deity is left to adjudicate matters in which the leaders felt they are incapable of addressing or in which the parties to the dispute elect to table the case before the deity. In this case it is the Chief Priest of the deity involved that takes charge and judgment is instant.

Sixthly, the succession method in Igbo traditional leadership system is such that is based entirely on seniority or achievement. Thus there is no issue of having to fight and spill blood over who is to succeed the current leader except in a few exceptional cases. This is unlike in liberal democracy in which every election is characterized by electoral violence, rigging and political assassinations. Such trends discourage many qualified candidates from coming out to vie for public positions thus leaving politics at the national level in the hands of mediocres. Based on the foregoing arguments, the paper strongly advocates the adoption of the Igbo traditional leadership system for the Nigerian State.

Conclusion

In this paper, we examined the structure, style of leadership, succession and mechanisms of accountability in the Igbo traditional leadership system; evaluated the different Systems of government that has been practiced in Nigeria; examined the Operationalization of liberal democracy in Nigeria; propounded a theoretical framework to underline the ideals and applicability of Igbo Traditional Leadership System in Nigeria and also made a case for the adoption of Igbo traditional leadership system to address the crisis of governance and development in Nigeria.

It was discovered that aside from the parliamentary system of government which was bequeathed to Nigeria by the British at independence, subsequent systems of government adopted have not been able to address the problems of development in Nigeria. Rather, it has managed to compound Nigeria's development woes by constituting waste-pipe for the draining of Nigeria's treasury for the benefit of few privileged individuals.

The paper equally made it clear that the way and manner in which liberal democracy is being practiced in Nigeria is inimical to development. This can be attributed to the fact that it encourages mediocrity, corruption, abuse of office, lack of transparency and accountability among several others. This is in clear contrast to what is obtainable in the Igbo Traditional leadership system which is development and achievement-oriented, encourages individual enterprise, accountability, efficient and effective representation, popular participation and unity of purpose and action.

The central role played by the government in development especially in the Global South cannot be over-emphasised. The centrality of leadership in Africa in particular and Nigeria in general can be situated in the distributive functions of African political leaders. This is to say that their ability to dispense with political goods puts them at the foundation of development. For there to be equitable development, therefore, those in control of public coffers have a duty to use same to foster enduring development. As a matter of fact, they must be accountable to the people and must be held accountable for any misconduct. Implied here is the fact that once a leader loses public trust, he has to quit honourably in the interest of the public. The adoption of the Igbo Traditional leadership system, therefore, will not only ensure that governance will be all-inclusive, it will also ensure that only the best and most competent hands are entrusted with positions of trust. In this way, resources will not only be managed in the public interest but will also be used in the overall socio-economic development of the country