# TRADITIONAL INSTITUTIONS INVOLVEMENT IN GOVERNANCE: A PENACEA FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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## Abstract

*The development and underdevelopment of any society are anchored on the capability and credibility of leaders in that society, coupled with the availability of both natural and human resources. Leadership/ administrative role, both in modern and traditional settings, cannot be undermined because it is pivotal in the development or underdevelopment of any society. The political structure and other structures must be carried along and work harmoniously for the betterment of society. The role of traditional institutions in governance cannot be overemphasized in the African political system if properly harnessed and articulated. This study ex-rayed the political development and administration in Rivers State, the role of traditional rulers in the political development and African culture. The study collected data through secondary sources and adopted the dependency theory as its theoretical framework. It was discovered that traditional rulers were highly respected sequel to the attainment of political independence and lost their respect as the event progressed. The rationale behind such ugly development was also enumerated. The study discovered that the more progressive African culture and traditional institutions are devalued or destroyed, the more the society is plough and prone to more serious atrocities characterized by the pathetic excruciating nature of unemployment and underdevelopment. The relegation and denigration of positive African culture and theology are dent to the wheel of progress, peaceful coexistence and sustainable development in Africa. The denigration of African culture to Western imperialism has increased suffering and led to corruption, insecurity, lawlessness, and underdevelopment. Consequently, the paper made recommendations on how peace, progress and sustainable development can be achieved through cross-fertilization between modern and traditional institutions. Africans, sciences, theology, typology, culture, and values should be employed positively in solving our myriads of challenges. Reorientation and reinvigoration of core progressive African cultures and values, to mention but few, are suggested as a panacea for peace, development and progress in African nations.*

**Keywords**: African, traditional institution, sustainable development.

**Introduction**

African nations had a standard system of government that met the need of the people, guaranteed peace, stability and development of the society. The geographical entity called the African continent was formally inhibited by some empires, kingdoms, tribes, ethnic groups, and caliphates. These administrative units were subdivided into other parts for proper delegation, decentralization and administrative convenience before the advent of colonialism.

Africans were surreptitiously and subtly subjugated by the whites to establish their imperial policy. Forcefully Africans were dethroned by the Whites; there was resistance by some African leaders at the initial time the use of a sophisticated weapon by the Whites gave them the upper hand to defeat Africans and establish their colonial policy. African nations were made to accept colonialism at all costs despite stick resistance. For instance, Kosoko of Lagos, Jaja of Opobo, Oba of Benin and King Nana resisted colonial rule but were later subdued.

It must also be mentioned that the same people that came with force, on the one hand, had the Holy Bible on the other hand. The new religion brainwashed Africans and tagged Africa as a black continent. Africans were indoctrinated to believe what they didn't understand, eat what they don't produce and produce what they don't eat. That marked the genesis of Africa's problem of dependency to date.

African kingdoms had a structured system of government headed by a leader with one unique name or the others, such as Emir, Chiefs, Oba, Obi, Eze, Gbenemene, Oha, Amanyanabo, etc. They are saddled with legislative, executive and judicial power. The leader is seen as a representative of the gods standing between the living and the dead. He also performs some religious functions. They operated with an unwritten constitution. There was peace, stability and progress that ensured peace, unity, security and development as of then. There were some developed tribes and kingdoms in Africa, such as Sudan Empire, Mali Empire, Gold Cost Empire, Oyo Empire, Benin Kingdom, Akute Kingdom, Asante Kingdom, Egypt, Ethiopia, and Opobo Kingdom, to mention but a few. The above-named places were speedily developing before interception from the colonial masters with their imperial policy. Africa had a myriad of cultures that met the dear need of the people and the continent.

Colonialism came not only to dethrone African kingdoms it also destroyed most of her cultural heritages that met the need of the people

and ushered in a new religion that encouraged stupendous, dogmatic belief and total submission of oneself, including the person's possessions. The educational system was ill-conceived as there was no emphasis on science and technology but rather on grammar and rectories; foreign languages formed the educational curriculum devoid of African inputs and interests.

The introduction of a new system of administration, culture, religion, language, belief and behavioural pattern completely left Africans in the middle of the ocean, not knowing what to do, either to follow the new culture or to go ahead with their own rich African cultural heritages. Leading to cultural dilemmas, cultural imperialism, religious dethronement, economic slavery, social servitude, educational stagnation, and cultural imbroglio, Chinnah,(2022). What a dilemma for an African child.

From the pre-colonial to the post-colonial era, traditional institutions had a very significant role to play in the day-to-day administration and governance system in the nation till the local government reform of 1976 that relegated, denigrated and reduced the power of traditional rulers and institutions in the country nationwide. The Local Government Reform of 1976 diametrically reduced the power of traditional rulers in Nigeria. Most of them were seen as mere paper tigers and puppets with their traditional title without roles and defined duties.

The African continent is endowed with numerous material and human resources that are capable and able to transform African nations to be among the best-developed nations in the community of nations globally. African countries have adopted so many development policies, initiatives and programs over the years, but no tangible result is on the ground as the continent still wallows in abject poverty, excruciating hunger, pathetic low investment, high level of insecurity, unfathomable rate of unemployment, and other features of underdevelopment as ostensibly seen in Africa nations. Development has been a problem for developing and developed nations of the world. All attempt made to develop Nigeria has remained fruitless as Nigeria was tagged headquarters of poverty in 2019.

Nigeria, as a nation in the African continent, is not exempted from the development quagmire that has gripped the African continent. Rivers State as a state is not excluded. The issue of sustainable development has remained a serious concern to both developed and developing

nations, international organizations and Non-Governmental Organizations. There are a series of attempts made to develop African nations, Nigeria inclusive and Rivers state in particular. The dramatic irony is that the more policies, programs and initiatives for development are implemented, the poorer the nation gets underdeveloped every day despite resources put in place.

Politics in Africa determine and dictate every other structure and system, which is also replicated in Nigeria. It is seen as the superstructure that drives every other structure in the nation. The nation has, over the year, embarked on so many developmental initiatives since independence with little or no result. These were done with the total exclusion of traditional institutions in pursuance of development in the nation since the local reform government of 1976.
 African traditional institutions played a very significant role in the development of the nation during the colonial and post-colonial eras till 1976. Over the years, precisely from the fourth republic, Nigeria has initiated some policies and programs for development without consideration of Africa's traditional institutions, the environment and culture. The study will examine the role of traditional institutions, why traditional institutions were relegated to the political administration in the country, reasons for poor implementation of sustainable development plans and why development has remained a mirage in Africa despite her human and financial resources. The study will draw the nexus between traditional institutions and sustainable development. Finally, the study recommended the integration of progressive African cultural practices in governance as a panacea for sustainable development in Rivers State, Nigeria.

**Conceptual Explication**
**Traditional Institutions:** The term traditional institution refers to indigenous and natural native cultural ways of doing things traditionally according to the culture and traditions of the people. The above definition etymologically captured the meaning of traditional institutions. Traditional institutions are administrative organizations in the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial eras, headed by a traditional ruler; these institutions are rooted in the history, cultures and traditions of the people, Isaac (2018).

The stereotyped mantra peddled by some Whites and their black cohorts that anything bad comes from Africa and every good thing is from the Western nation is without verifications and proven and should be disregarded as we have uncounted good things from Africa from the

pre-colonial era till date. Not to go into details about this because this paper is not fused on such a historical account of Africa. Achebe (2017) the institution of traditional rulers is an enduring part of our cultural heritage; it plays a critical role as the custodian of culture and traditions.

Orji & Olali (2010) averred that traditional institutions refer to the native political provisions whereby leaders with confirmed track records are chosen and turban in line with the requirements of their traditional customs and laws. Traditional institutions are the indigenous political arrangement whereby leaders with proven track records are appointed and installed in line with the provision of their native laws and customs, some divinely chosen and ordained by the gods and goddesses of the land. Traditional institutions are responsible for the day-to-day administration of the community, which also implies the preservation of the people's customs and traditions. Nweke (2012) posited that traditional institutions are the custodians of people's norms, cultures and practices. Furthermore, Orji & Olani (2010) posited that traditional institutions are symbols of indigenous peoples' rights, privileges, laws, customs, and traditions which include but are not limited to paramount rulers and their councils.

Traditional institutions in Nigeria's context are inclusive of the chiefs–in–council, elders–in–council, and title holders who may be appointed based on their contribution to the growth and development of their communities with little or no executive, legislative or judicial powers, Orji & Oladi (2010). The mode of selection or election of traditional rulers in Nigeria differs from one clan, ethnic group, or community. Some are hereditary, chosen by the gods and goddesses of the people, while some are elected based on basic requirements set by the community.

Traditional institutions, as headed by traditional rulers, are respected and reverend to a great extent; some of them mediated between humans and gods as they performed legislative, executive, judicial and religious roles in the community. This was a much more prominent sequel to the advent of the white man. Colonialism and imperialism reduced the power of traditional rulers and distorted most of our traditional rich cultural heritages in the guise of civilization. The Local government reform of 1979 gave traditional rulers and institutions a technical knock on their role and powers in Nigeria.

**Governance:** What is good Governance? UNDP (2005) defined good governance as the exercise of economic, political and administrative authority to manage a country's affairs at all levels. This includes mechanisms, processes and institutions through which citizens and group articulate their interests, exercise their legal rights, meet their obligations and mediate their differences in pursuit of the collective good. Asian Development Bank (ADB 2009) Defined good governance as how power is exercised in the management of a country's social and economic resources for development. It is referred to as the quality of the institution to make, implement, and enforce sound policies in an efficient, effective and inclusive manner. World Bank (2004) defined good governance to mean promoting fairness, transparency and accountability. This simply means the ability of all the institutions in the polity saddled with various responsibilities to deliver optimally and meet up aims and objectives of that particular society.

Institute of Governance (IOG 2000) viewed good governance to mean an interaction among structures, processes and traditions that determine how power and responsibilities are exercised, how decisions are taken, and citizens or other stakeholders have their say. It is basically about how power relationships and accountability, who has influence, who decides and how decision–makers are held accountable. Boeninger (1992) Posited that good governance has to do with the capabilities of a political system to exercise authority, will legitimacy, adjudicate conflict as well as carry out effective program implementation. Kukah (1998) said good governance is a government that is responsible, accountable, and transparent in policy formulation and implementation. NEDA (2006) Postulated that the exercise of economic, political and administrative authority to manage a nation's affairs at all levels, which comprises mechanisms, processes and institutions.

From the above definitions of good governance, one can infer without equivocation that good governance has been a serious problem in African nations, Nigeria as a nation and Rivers state in particular, considering the level of natural and human resources in the State, revenue from the federation account and internally generated fund in the state yet nothing to show for it in terms of development, citizens welfare and unfathomable level of underdevelopment, Chinnah (2020).
 Governance in Rivers State has been purely centred on the interest of the few ruling elites since 1960. The fourth republic became the worst. Only a few in power, their cronies and their children have dominated the political arena.

Kofi Annah (UN) posited that good governance ensures respect for human rights and the rule of law, strengthens democracy and promotes transparency and capacity in public administration. United Nations enumerated the following listed eight principles of good governance.

1. Participation; This principle states that people are free to express their views, opinions through legitimate organization or representation.

2. Rule of law. The legal framework should be enforced impartially, mostly on human rights.

3. Consensus-oriented; this means mediating different interests to meet the broad consensus on the best interest of the community.

4. Equity and Inclusiveness; people should have opportunities to improve or maintain their well–being.

5. Effectiveness and Efficiency: Processes and institutions should be able to produce a result that meets the needs of their community while making the best use of their resources.

6. Accountability: Governmental institutions, private sectors, and civil organizations should be held accountable to the public and institutional stakeholders.

7. Transparency: Information should be accessible to the public and should be understandable and monitored.

8. Irresponsibleness: Institutions and processes should serve all stakeholders.

From what is visibly seen in Rivers state, good governance has been elusive since the creation of the state as it got worst from the fourth republic and the period under review. There is no accountability or transparency; people have not been carried along in the scheme of things, no empowerment and employment, to mention but a few. There is a high rate of unemployment and environmental challenges like bunkering, shooting and flooding. All these have stagnated and limited development in the State despite all the natural resources the nation is endowed with. The traditional institution was not also carried along; hence no result was achieved.

**Sustainable Development:** There are many definitions of what the concept of development according to scholars' views on it. For instance, Pearson (1992) averred that development involves an improvement in qualitative, quantitative or both in the use of available resources. He went further to say that development does not only refer to one particular perspective on social order, political and economic betterment, rather a hybrid of terms for myriads of strategies adopted for socio, economic and environmental transformation from current states to desired ones. Development is a process of having better use of

human resources to create a desired improvement in making life useful and meaningful for humanity.

Development is the process that creates growth, progress, positive change or the addition of physical, economic, environmental, social, and demographic components. The purpose of development is a rise in the level and quality of life of the population and the creation or expansion of local, regional income and employment opportunities without damaging the resources of the environment (Sidi-israel.org 2021). Amartya (1997) defines development as a tool enabling people to reach the highest level of their ability through granting freedom of action, that is, freedom of economic, social, and family actions etc. United Nations Development Program UNDP (1990) stated the measurement index for the concept of development through what is called Human Development Index. The concept of development is ostensibly visible and imperatively useful to humanity and the environment, including future generations and can be measured and assessed.

Naomi (1995) posited that development involves economic growth notion of equitable distribution, provision of health care, education, housing and other essential services, all to improve the individual and collective. Chrisman (1984) viewed development to be a process of societal advancement, where improvement in the well-being of people is generated through a strong partnership between all sectors, corporate bodies and other groups in society.

Umezunke (2005) advanced that development connotes the transformation of the nature and living conditions of man as a consequence of his earlier confrontation with the constraints posed by his environment (political, economic, socio-cultural etc.). Rodney (1972) and Nnolin (1981) agreed that development shares the following things in common.

(1) Human-centered rather than artifact-centre
(2) Dynamic process rather than static
(3) Involves a complex interactive relationship between individuals and society.
(4) Predicated essentially on production rather than consumption.

Rodney (1972) said that development in human society is many side process that occurs at three levels, namely the individual, social group and society. At the individual level, it has to do with the increase in skill and capacity, greater freedom, creativity, self-discipline, responsibility and material well-being. Nnolin (1982) posited that development is a

dialectical phenomenon in which the individual and society interact with the physical, biological and inter-human environment transforming them for their betterment and that of humanity at large and being transformed in the process. The lesson and experiences gained in the process are passed on to future generations enabling them to improve their capabilities to make further valuable changes in their inter-human relations and their ability to transform nature oriented.

Tadaro (1985) viewed development to be multi-dimensional nature focusing on re-organization and re-orientation of the entire economic and social system. Oghator & Kobo (2000) posited that development goes beyond the increase in per capita income or economic growth but also includes sustainable improvement in the living standard of the people, which is guaranteed through the provision of gainful employment coupled with the presence and availability of social; and economic infrastructure.

Ahmed (2007) posited development to mean the general uplifting of the material, social and psychological condition of a given society. Ajagun (2003) opined that development is a state of advancement which makes life more meaningful in its various aspects, which include the economic, administrative, political, social, and religious aspects, that development is encompassing and multi-dimensional. Onah (2010) averred that development is not static but a continuous improvement in the capacity of the individual and the society to control and manipulate the forces of nature for the enhancement of the living standard of the people in a society; it deals with human beings.

Rivers state, despite all her numerous human and material resources, is yet to have a glimpse of what development is as all characteristics of underdevelopment are on multiple dimensions in the state. Then we asked ourselves and our leaders what they have been using our huge numerous resources for. Is Rivers State allergic to development? It is a naked truth that the state is still wallowing with poverty and other agonizing torturous condition of underdevelopment despite all her richly endowed and exploited natural resources, namely, oil and gas, arable land and others too numerous to mention. No good road, no good pipe-born water, no employment, low per capita income, high infant mortality, no hospital, no infrastructural facilities and social amenities. The worst is that the natural environment is destroyed daily, Chinnah (2021).

The point raised above has degenerated into insecurity, frictions and crises, calls for secession, formation of ethnic militia, and the society engulfed with social vices and other anti-social practices perpetrated on daily bases as a result of the failure of the existing federal structure and system to produced desired dividend of federalism which is equity, justice, and sustainable development, Chinnah (2020).

African traditional institutions were denigrated and dislodged as a result of the crisis for equity, development and a better life for citizens of the nation, leading to development stagnation.

**Sustainability**
Jeffery Sacks (2018), in his work, promotes sustainable development as that which believes in growth and development to raise the standard of living for citizens of the world today through relating to the needs of environmental resources and the coming generation of the citizens of the world.

Stoddart (2021) viewed sustainability as the efficient and equitable distribution of resources intra –generationally and inter–generationally within the operation of socio-economic activities within the confines of the fitness ecosystem. Thomas (2015) posited sustainability brings into focus human activities and their ability to satisfy human needs and wants without depleting or exhausting the productive resources at their disposal.

Tjarre & Zenite (2016) averred that sustainability is a concept relating, connoting, improving and sustaining a healthy economic, ecological and social system for human development. Bein-Eli (2015) sees sustainability as a dynamic equilibrium in the process of interaction between the population and the caring capacity of its environment such that the population develops to express its full potential without producing an irreversible adverse effect on the caring capacity of the environment upon which it depends.
Furthermore, DESA-UN (2018) stated that the ultimate objective of the concept of sustainability, in essence, is to ensure appropriate alignment and equilibrium among society, the economy, and the environment in terms of the regenerated capacity of the planet's life-supporting ecosystem.

To understand the duo, concepts of sustainable development were best conceptualized by UNO (1987). Their definition is the most comprehensive and widely accepted by the World Commission on

Environment and Development (UNO) in 1984 under the chairmanship Gro Harlem Brundtland, in October 1987, submitted a report which contained the definition of sustainable development. In that report, it defined Sustainable Development "as the development that meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of the future generation to meet their own needs".

This definition is measurable and focuses on two main points, namely, the environment and human beings. In qualifying and quantifying growth and development, the two must be taken into consideration in terms of developmental projects, programmes or policies aimed at improving the lives of the people and having a better natural environment for the present with the future generation not put in jeopardy Chinnah (2021).

Sustainable development has been a mirage in African nations right from the pre-colonial era till date. African nations are tagged developing nations or third-world countries by the Western developed nations of the world with little or no resources, but they parasitically depend on African nations for survival. What is wrong with African mentality and their leaders?

**Methodology**
The research made use of secondary data from textbooks, peer review journals, periodic publications, newspapers, and other relevant documented literature, both soft and hard copies; while content analysis was used to analyse data objectively.

**Theoretical Framework**
The dependency theory of development was adopted as the theoretical framework for this survey. The importance of a theoretical framework cannot be undermined in a study like this as it is seen as a road map for which the study is anchored; it gives credence to the paper. According to Nweke & Nyewesira (2009), dependency theory was developed by scholars from third-world countries and put together in the sixties by eminent writers like Luxemung (1964), Frank (1969), Santos (1970), Rodney (1972), Ake, (1981) etc.

The theory is an offshoot of colonialism and imperialism. This Marxist theory averred that Global Capitalist System started as far as the 16th century via colonialism and imperialism whereby the rich nations of the world tied the economy of other less developed nations of Africans, Latin American and Asia countries in a relationship of exploitation and

dependency directly and indirectly for the survival of the wealthy developed nations. The erstwhile colonial masters exploited and are still exploiting her colonies through neo-colonialism. This theory states that for so long as this dependency relationship exists, African nations cannot be developed, that for development to take place, there is an imperative need for that relationship to be broken or isolated and join the free market for them to develop.

The dependency theory of development attributes the lack of African development to the adverse effect of continuous endemic exploitation of exploration by powerful nations of the world even after independence. This relationship is a systematic process whereby Western developed nations (core) accumulate wealth by extracting resources from the peripheral developing nations for their own economic and social development. This unbalanced relationship accounts for African underdevelopment as African nations are left with pandemic excruciating features of pathetic underdevelopment.

Matunhu (2011:69) …. To succeed in the improvement operation, the metropolis destroyed the traditional pre-capitalist structure of Africa to pave the way for super-exploitation and appropriation of surplus value.

The powerful nations of the world used their sophisticated weapon to subtly subjugate African nations, established their dominance and imperilled policy based on economic exploitation. The centre nations saw the periphery countries as prey for their survival; hence the sources for raw materials, both human and material from them, were exploited by them.

Colonialism changed many things in African nations, altered the development system of Africa, distorted the organized political system, and changed the mode of dressing, feeding, farming, consumption, production, religion, culture and social activities. For instance, Africa was to produce what we don't eat and eat what we don't produce. Local Government reform of 1976 and the appointment of a warrant chief created problems in traditional African institutions. The new system of administration altered many things, from the policy of indirect rule to direct rule down to the attainment of political independence, not economic independence kept Africans in a dilemma, not knowing much about African culture and of what culture. This has quagmire development in African nations.

This dependency theory was inherited and transferred to African leaders by their colonial masters. This unbalance relationship is a dent in the wheel and progress of development in Nigeria. Imagine we produced oil in abundance here in Nigeria, but we don't have a functional refinery. The Ajokuta Rolling Meal is a clear point to buttress this point. The new system of administration in African nations created conflict and friction in African nations. Rodney (1972) argued that the political independence of Africa from colonialism did not alter the dependency arrangement. Rather, it deepened it; the end of colonialism has not deterred the imperialist from African domination.

Akani (2010:124) averred that it is plausible for one to argue that the intractable problems in Africa of late are precipitate of the merciless looting, imposition of assumed complexity and disorientation of the continent. African traditional institutions were destroyed and disorientated.

The relevance of this study to this survey is that the same dependent scenarios were inherited from our colonial masters and are still maintained to date. Exploitation has been the order of the day as big nations dictate the pace of progress in African nations.

**The Role Of Traditional Institutions In Governance**
For stability, peace and equity in any society, there are leaders; rulers saddled with the responsibility to legislate, execute and adjudicate in the society with other institutions through decentralization and delegations of authority. These leaders/leaders are headed by traditional rulers in African nations with one nomenclature or the other, for instance, Emeir in the North, Obas in the West, Obi in the East, and Chiefs in the East, to mention but a few. The head of the traditional rulers ruled with his cabinet, and laws and order were maintained and development achieved. A traditional ruler is an individual occupying a communal political leadership position and enjoying the legitimacy of those particular communities to direct their affairs, Egwarabe (2018). In a similar vein, Gambari (2021) stated that traditional rules are not honoured, and honorary chiefs, he is a traditional heads of an ethnic community whose stool conferred the highest traditional authority on the incumbent. Traditional institutions are piloted by traditional rulers that rules according to the culture and custom of the community. The traditional ruler does not rule alone. He has his cabinets and delegated powers and authority when necessary for effective leadership to maintain peace, stability and harmony.

Traditional rulers were highly respected; their stool was a great symbol of power, authority and leadership. According to Sun news online (2016), Traditional rulers were not just monarchs but theocrats, as in Nigeria. To speak ill of them was regarded as a taboo. The chief's authority is sanctioned in religion, and it is a sacrilege to flout it, except in extreme cases of tyranny and oppression. They had excess power within their domain and were able to lead with ease.

Sequel to the advent of colonialism, traditional rulers had much respect and honour, saddled with greater responsibilities than we have in this current era. Traditional rulers are, by implication, traditionally the head of their ethnic group, clan, or community. They hold the highest executive authority in such communities and has been appointed to the position following the people's culture, custom and tradition, Igunbu,(2020).

In Nigeria, the local government reform of 1976 saddled traditional rulers (institutions) with the following function. As stated already, traditional rulers' powers were reduced drastically by the advent of imperialism and colonialism, which was transferred to the era of neo-colonialism.

Traditional rulers were no longer involved in the direct local government administration. They performed ceremonial functions by being present when an important personality visited the local government, for example, the governor or a minister etc.

He advises the local government officials on matters that concern the customs and traditions of the people. They mobilize people in their community to participate in government at various levels. As a custodian of the people's customs and traditions, he helps to preserve the customs and traditions of the people. They help to maintain law and order in their communities; they try and punish law offenders and settle disputes etc. They mobilize their people to engage in community development projects.

Traditional Rulers link their community and the government by explaining government policies and programs to the people and their problems to the government. Local Government Reform of (1976)
Traditional institutions (rulers) are elements of divinity; cultural custodians and embodiments of collective identity ascribed to traditional institutions are keys to the promotion and preservation of traditional institutions in Nigeria and beyond, Salihu & Yakubu, 2020).

Traditional institutions preserve, conserve, protect and promote the culture and traditions of the people from going into extinction because of globalization.

Aafigbo, 1972 cited in Osakde et al. (2015) posited that long before the advent of British colonial rule, the government in diverse parts of present-day Nigeria was tantamount to traditional institutions and their rulers. The pre-existing administrative structure was derived primarily from traditional rulers who were considered the fountain and custodians of culture, parliamentary, executive, and judicial functions, thereby considering the basis of governance.

Cookey (2010) stated that traditional rulers are perceived as assisting the government in maintaining law and order in the communities as well as promoting the peaceful coexistence of people of different religions, ethnicity, and social background; traditional rulers treat people without discrimination, he added.

In traditional institutions, its authority is mostly unquestionably accepted and adhered to, and its principles are practised with reverence. Its practice reflects continuity with the past, for which its continuity is usually understood to link generations. Osakede et al. (2015) opined that pre-colonial Africa posse's visible, established and well-defined hierarchy of administration where acts of legislation were implemented and conflict and inter–tribal classes were resolved.

The above-narrated functions of traditional institutions via traditional rulers in the pre-colonial, post-colonial and neo-colonial. Society will degenerate into a state of nature, as posited by Hobbes, without traditional rulers. The functions of traditional rulers cannot be circumvented by either Western civilization or the effect of globalization; any attempt or group of attempts will end up in friction, anarchy and underdevelopment of the community.

**Challenges Of Traditional Institutions (Rulers) In Governance In Nigeria**
African organized traditional institutions that met the need and development of African nations, tribes and ethnic groups at that material point in time met stick opposition and were challenged as a result of the imperial colonial power of the Western nation domination anchored on economic interest.

The appointment of African chiefs, via the use of direct and indirect rule systems, was purely to maximise profit by the imperialist power with no intention to develop Africa and Nigeria in particular, which was also inherited by Nigerian leaders after the attainment of independence.

The advent of Western domination, to a great extent, demystified and reduced diametrically the power of traditional institutions in African society. This scenario was much more pronounced after the local government reform of 1976 that transferred the traditional ruler's functions and role to the head of the local government area. This affected their relevance and functions in their domain. They had the following challenges that limited their authority and operations.

Elias (2016) stated that native authority was beset by such challenges as poor funding, control, checks and no clear-cut functions. Traditional institutions were tied to local government areas, with no sources of revenue; the local government areas were either underfunding traditional rulers or not funding at all. Money is needed for day to day administration of any organization. The absence of funds makes it impossible for any administration to achieve its goals. Traditional rulers had serious and excessive checks from local government areas chairmen, governors and other political office holders in their areas.

The local government reform of 1976 transferred the roles and functions of traditional rulers to the local government area. This not only limited traditional rulers' powers and authority but made them puppets and errand boys for politicians. They were left with little or no function. they were allowed to perform ceremonial functions.

Traditional institutions (rulers) have no constitutional provision and backing in the nation's constitution. This, to a great extent, hindered and limited their operations in terms of legislation, execution and adjudication of justice. Adeniyi (2016) opined that even though traditional institutions remain the oldest surviving cultural political institution, which has always served as the pivot for social security, national cohesion and meaningful socio-cultural development, the operative constitution has failed to make any provision for the existence of the institution. Ibrahim (2018) averred that traditional rulers cannot help the government on security issues without legal backing and so stressed the need to define constitutional responsibilities for traditional rulers in the constitution.

Another challenge facing traditional institutions (rulers) is the use of modern government institutions, mechanisms and machinery in governance, like the use of courts, police, army, and security agencies in the administration of justice. Nwani (2011) noted that the emergence of the public court destroyed the use of our traditional conflict resolution mechanism because it encouraged people to bypass traditional court to go to regular court. Abdulqadir (2016) averred that the instruments of coercion, the police, courts, and prison, were removed from its control. There is no constitutional provision for the enforcement of the resolutions reached in arbitration. Alagoa (2001) stated that traditional institutions no longer have full reign of operation since they have to operate in a context where their authority is limited; without the means to enforce resolutions reached in arbitration, the parties may refuse to abide by the terms reached.

The negative influence of Western culture and the education of our people is a major challenge. The Western culture, mostly education and religion, was seen as an eye-opener. As a result, some educated, civilized Africans challenged some obnoxious, draconian policies and programs of traditional rulers in churches, shrines, juju and courts. They won this reduced the power and authority of traditional institutions.

Another challenge facing traditional rulers is the issue of corruption and the struggle for political leadership and affiliation. Many traditional rulers have left their divine roles and functions as demanded by humans and gods to their selfish aim and desire for material resources. They collect bribes to pervert justice and embezzle community money for development. This has led to crises in many communities, mostly those communities endowed with natural resources like oil, gas and companies. Adesoji (2010), Olali (2010) and Onaja(2010) the mentioned authors in their respective findings concluded that traditional institutions in modern Nigeria are confronted with several matters, such as the struggle for headship among traditional leaders in the association of traditional rulers, participation in biased politics for individual gains and given support for the reigning government are problem militating against traditional rulers.

Akani (2010) African traditional rulers have also contributed to destroying the traditional African institution as a result of their unending attitude in joining party politics. It must be mentioned that the creation of states, local government and the emergence of autonomous communities in the already nation has weakened the

powers and authority of traditional rulers in their domain. This balkanization had a lot of negative influence and impact on traditional institutions; some of their subjects were either removed or added to them, which created room for a lack of respect and disobedience on both sides.

Another challenge faced by traditional rulers is their involvement in politics. In Nigeria, politics is seen as the best and quickest means to make money and remain relevant in the scheme of things in the nation. Many traditional rulers abandoned their customary role to dance to the wins and caprices of political leaders' actors and gladiators for the sack of money. Ganiyu et al. (2016) traditional rulers have become pencils in the hands of elected political officeholders who determine for them what to do and what not to do ….. As a result of this, many traditional rulers lost their authority and influence, both physical and spiritual, in their domain.

**Traditional Institutions And Sustainable Development In Rivers State**

The political-administrative structure has swallowed some of the powers, respect, authority and duty of some traditional institutions in Rivers State as a result of the 1976 local government reform nationwide in Nigeria. River State was within the eastern region during the first republic before the creation of the state in 1967. The creation of Rivers State in 1967 marked the birth of a new administrative system in the created state. Rivers state population as of the 2006 census is 5,185,400, the sixth populous state in the country. In 1996 Bayelsa State was created out of rivers state.

There has been a traditional ruler's council in existence before the creation of Rivers State. In 1953 Council of Rivers Chiefs was formed, renamed in 1954 as Rivers Chiefs and People Congress and in 1956, changed to Rivers People Conference. The organization was made up of traditional rulers from all the ethnic communities, clans, and groups in Rivers State.

Africans had a well systematic incumbent dynamic system of administration before the advent of imperialism. Boege (2006) averred that traditional African societies indeed had well organized and well-established system of administration where public orders were provided and maintained, where laws were made and implemented, and where inter–communal and intra –tribal conflicts were settled. This was before the coming of the colonialist, and they saw that it was good.

That was why they retained most of it and destroyed those cultures that were against their imperial policy and religion.

Rivers state can be described as a loose federation with many other ethnic groups, both major and minor, different languages, cultures and religions. The state is heterogeneous and pluralistic under one umbrella. In Rivers state, we have the following ethnic groups Ikweerr, Ogoni, Ekpeye, Ogba, wakirika, Etche, Kalagbari, Okirika, Igbani, to mention but few. There are traditional rulers in all the ethnic extractions with their unique nomenclatures as names. For instance, in Ikwerre traditional rulers are called Nye-we ali, and Eze, Ekpeye is Eze, Ogba is Oba, Ogoni is Mene, Kalagbari is Amanyanagbor. The role of traditional rulers has already been explained in the previous page. They performed their role with other people that formed the cabinet and also delegated authority to other organs of administration under their jurisdiction.

The government of River State recognized traditional rulers; there were first class, second class, third class and what I refer to as the village class or family class. The first-class traditional rulers have an association called Rivers State Council of Traditional Rulers, under the headship of His Majesty King Jaja and King Dr Dandeson Douglas Jaja traditional rulers.

In Rivers State, we have the legislature, executive, judiciary and traditional rulers. The traditional rulers are just like advisory bodies with no specified legitimated authority over their powers. They exist to whims and caprices of the governor of the state. There are cases where some traditional rulers were deposed because of party politics. Some were not recognized, and some were derecognized. The upgrading of these traditional rulers is politically done based on party loyalty.
Rivers State has embarked on so many projects and development initiatives sad to note that the state is highly underdeveloped compared to the human and material resources available in the state. Rivers State is only one city-state apart from Port Harcourt no other city is developed; the state has the highest unemployment in the country NBS (2021). Federal projects are not exempted.

Federal allocations to the state, local government and internally generated revenue, if well utilized, are more than enough to put the state topmost in the community of developed states in the world. Resources are siphoned by political actors and gladiators through corruption and bribery. Contracts are awarded, nobody cares for its implementation and completions, monies are shared in bags, stores for

future political electioneering processes, and stomach infrastructure with nothing to show. Traditional rulers are bought, and as puppets, they cannot do more than a hanging shirt. Marginalization and deprivation, denial of employment, empowerment, social amenities and other infrastructural facilities and amenities that make life enjoyable led to confrontations, conflicts, frictions and public disorder.

Lack of empowerment and employment has made led to an increase in the level of criminality in the state, illegal refining of crude oil, and other ugly development in the state. The high level of lawlessness has been on the increase from early 2015 to 2019. The state witnesses a high level of criminalities, lawlessness and kidnapping. The security agencies were doing nothing to combat the activities of these miscreants. Hence palpable fear was created everywhere in the state.

The state government called on traditional institutions (rulers) to help restore normalcy in the Rivers state. The first of its kind was initiated first in Omoku, a town in Ogba Egbema Ndoni Local government area of the state. ONELGA came up with the ONELGA Security Peace and Advisory Council (OSPAC) set up in 2016 when there was war, total disorder and anarchy in ONELGA because of the activities of some cult groups that overthrew both the traditional rulers and the modern political system under the leadership of Don Wani. The local civilian militia group was able to contain and subjugate the activities of the hoodlums, cultists, and miscreants through African science and protection from gunshots and anything metal. What the security agencies couldn't do was perfectly done by the traditional intuitions in Omoku and its environs. There were cases when OSPAC from Omoku came to Ahoada to sanitize the area using African science.

The successful operations and achievement of peace in Omoku as a result of OSPAC made other local government areas and communities do similar things, namely Emohua, Ikwerre, Etche , Omuma, and many others. The introduction of OSPAC in Rundele, Rumuji, and Elele made East-West Road passable at any point in time, both night and day, which government security agencies couldn't do for years. From all indications and assessments based on realities on the ground, it is clear that Traditional Institutions have helped to maintain peace, which the government and its security agencies couldn't do.

The relative peace now in ONELGA has attracted speedy development in the area. Those banks that left Omoku are planning to go back, with

new one planning to open branches there. Peace is a requisite for development, either immediate or sustainable.

The fact that traditional rulers were not carried along properly in developmental policies and initiatives has led to the misplacement of the community priority in terms of developmental projects and policies for the people,

**The Nexus Between Traditional Institutions (Rulers) And Sustainable Development**

Sustainable development has attracted serious attention in the global scenario, both in developed and developing nations. The pathetic excruciating features of underdevelopment in Africa and Nigeria, in particular, an alarming rate despite the myriad of human and natural resources the nation is endowed with. It is laughably lugubriously lugubrious. One might ask, what are the factors that negate development in African nations? I have explicitly explained that in one of my papers.

There is a great correlation between traditional institutions and sustainable development. In the first place, development can only be initiated in an atmosphere of peace and stability. Traditional rulers are imperatively needed to help maintain peace and stability in their domain. There are numerous examples of inter–communal and intra – communal crises. It was a traditional institutional mechanism that was used to settle those disputes and conflicts.

Traditional rulers have a direct link with the people and understand the environment within their domain; they know what their people want and the needs and desires of their people. Government at all level should integrate, interact and seek the input of traditional rulers when they want to make policies and program that relates to that particular community. We have seen and read where development projects in some communities led to friction, confrontations and demonstrations because the people were not consulted. This is a misplacement of the priority of the community people, which will not be tolerated by the community of any development projects, policies or initiatives. The success of any sustainable development policies, projects and programs depend on the traditional ruler's ability to galvanise, sensitize and educate their people.

The recent clarion call of all traditional rulers by the governor of the state to ensure that peace and stability are maintained in their domain

and to stop all illegal refining activities in their locality is a clear indication that traditional institutions are instrumental for peace and sustainable development.

In corroboration with the work of Mbouua (2014;67), he states emphatically that African culture has assisted in the development, progress, solidarity, hospitality, co-responsibility and environmental protection, to name but few. I add capacity for sustainable development and stability in the polity. On that note, then, to exclude traditional African institutions from governance is the invitation of confrontation, friction, and crisis as we have in Nigeria today, which, if not addressed, will lead to total anarchy and collapse of the system.

**Conclusion**
The paper examined the role of traditional institutions in government and why their powers were denigrated and relegated by politicians as a result of the local government reforms that made them mere advisory bodies with no legal backing. The challenges faced by traditional institutions were explained. The nexus draw between traditional institutions and sustainable development. Traditional institutions with legitimate authority to act will guarantee peace, stability and sustainable development. African traditional institutions are a panacea for sustainable development as it provides the enabling environment for development to take place—the enabling environment for sustainable development to be initiated and implemented area created by a traditional institution.

Traditional (rulers) institutions must educate, sensitize and mobilise their subjects for any development projects. To report to the appropriate authority whether the developmental projects are carried out or not, in any community, the traditional rulers report to the government, non-governmental organizations or corporate bodies.

The following recommendations were made on how traditional institutions can effectively help to achieve sustainable development in Rivers State.

1.  Traditional institutions should have legal backing in the constitution stating their fundamental roles with authority, not as advisory bodies.
2.  The government, as a matter of urgency, should create a traditional rulers commission and their salaries fixed in a consolidated fund as we have judges.

3. Traditional rulers should eschew corruption and face their traditional roles as a leader not involved in active politics but focused on the maintenance of peace, stability and development in their domain.

4. There should be a pollination of cultures between the Western culture and the traditional system, picking the best that meets the need of the current realities.

5. For accountability, this paper advocates for the use of the African system of oath taken, using one shrine, juju, as all those that looted our resources are either Muslims or Christians. They take the oath of office and still steal our resources. This is not to denigrate any religion, but the duo has failed us when it comes to corruption and siphoning of public funds.

6. The restoration of African values, customs, culture and tradition that meets the need of current realities should be done. Africans are gifted with a good cultural heritage. Ancestral African science and metaphysics should be encouraged positively as it will help us to restore the lost African values in our society. The combination of African epistemology and Western education can strike a good balance.

7. Political officeholders should respect traditional institutions and the laws of the land. Traditional rulers should be apolitical rather be dedicated and committed to their fundamental categorical functions of peace, security and welfare of their subjects.

All developmental agencies, both local and international, including United Nations and other nongovernmental organizations, should work with traditional institutions closely if they succeed in any developmental policies, programs or initiatives.

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