

**Title: Traditional Institutions and Democratic Governance for African Renaissance**

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**Abstract**

*Despite the general outcry for African Renaissance anchored on the spirit of Pan Africanism and the spirit of securing African solutions to African problems, the continues to suffer from multifaceted challenges including a democratic governance deficit. This paper seeks to explore the role of traditional institutions in enhancing democratic governance for African Renaissance. A qualitative research design was adopted, while data was collected mainly from secondary sources including published and unpublished works from the internet. Data was analyzed thematically based on inductive reasoning within the theoretical framework of Max Weber's theory of power and the theory of participatory democracy. Findings revealed that many Africans still strongly adhere to traditional leadership which they consider to be very legitimate, and indispensable in contemporary democratic governance processes. Their claims are backed by several positive practices associated with traditional authorities including that they act as promoters of transparent and accountable leadership, political mobilizers, peace-makers, symbols of unity, as well as architects of participatory governance and social justice. Hence, this paper argues that African traditional institutions should be revived and effectively integrated under an 'African House of Chiefs Secretariat' to enhance democratic governance for African Renaissance.*

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## 1. Background

Discourse and efforts towards reviving various sectors of development in Africa has become increasingly central to most Africans including the African Diaspora fondly baptized as the ‘56<sup>th</sup> African State’ or ‘6<sup>th</sup> African Region’<sup>1</sup>. Among such key spheres in desperate need of revival is the current wave of democratization (Gilley, 2010) and bad governance prevailing across many African countries (Mo Ibrahim, 2017). According to a study conducted in 2015 and 2016 by this author, African citizens trust their traditional leaders more than their elected and appointed local officials of government. In addition, the performance approval levels for traditional leadership are higher than for democratic representatives (AfroBarometer, 2008). Still, according to Afrobarometer surveys in 2009, 45.1% of African citizens believe that traditional leaders have “some” or “a great deal” of influence in governing the local community. It is vital to recall here that on 30<sup>th</sup> January 2007; the AU member States adopted the ‘African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance’ as a guiding framework towards accelerating democracy and good governance in Africa. The Charter stresses amongst other issues under Article 35 that: ‘Given the enduring and vital role of traditional authorities, particularly in rural communities, the State Parties shall strive to find appropriate ways and means to increase their integration and effectiveness within the larger democratic system’. As if to corroborate the preceding Charter, Article 14 of the African Charter on Cultural Renaissance reiterated that ‘Elders and traditional leaders are cultural stakeholders in their own right. Their role and importance deserve official recognition in order for them to be integrated in modern mechanisms of conflict resolution and the inter-cultural dialogue system’. In countries like Cameroon, traditional leadership is governed by decree No. 77/245 of 15 July 1977 organizing the chiefdoms. This decree attributes to traditional rulers the role of ‘Auxiliaries of Administration’. Other democratically advancing countries like Botswana, South Africa, Nigeria, Ghana, Swaziland, Uganda and Lesotho, have equally witnessed incredible contributions of traditional rulers in enhancing governance and development. However, several studies reveal that there is no harmonized and proper co-ordination of the system of governance by African traditional leaders across national, regional or continental

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<sup>1</sup> As a way of emphasizing the importance and close attachment of the African Diaspora to the rest of the entire African continent, there is increasing discourse by the African Union and other proponents of the African Renaissance project who fondly describe the African Diaspora as the 6<sup>th</sup> African Region. This justifies why there has been growing consideration and representation of the African Diaspora during most of African Union related strategic meetings based on the indisputable role of the African Diaspora towards development of the continent and efforts towards realization of the Africa Agenda 2063.

levels. And despite the general outcry for African Renaissance anchored on the spirit of Pan Africanism and the spirit of securing African solutions to African problems, the continent continues to suffer from multifaceted challenges including a democratic governance deficit. These persistent challenges thus prompted the motivation and main goal of this paper which seeks to explore the role as well as to advance more feasible strategies on how to revive and effectively integrate African traditional leaders in democratic governance processes within the framework of African Renaissance.

To realize the goal of this paper, an attempt shall be made to address such questions as what qualifies African traditional authorities as indispensable stakeholders in advancing democratic governance across Africa. And how can these authorities be revitalized to boost democratic governance for African Renaissance? In order to answer these questions, we adopted qualitative research techniques comprising mainly of review and critical analysis of existing literature (both published and unpublished sources) and substantiated by the author's participant observations. The analysis of findings are based on thematic interpretations and inductive reasoning within the theoretical framework of legitimacy and power borrowed from Max Weber as well as theory of participatory or direct democracy as discussed by Christian Fuchs. The analysis are established following findings from few country level cases cited in this paper to induce on the general African continent despite obvious reservations of socio-cultural and political diversity across Africa. The paper is thus structured to cover some conceptual clarifications, theoretical framework, review of existing literature, discussion of findings, conclusion and policy implications.

## **2. Conceptual Clarifications**

Before delving into the substance of this study, it is imperative to clarify certain concepts which include traditional institutions, democracy, governance and African Renaissance.

### ***2.1. Traditional Institutions***

Authors like Max Weber have often used the terms traditional institutions as synonymous to Traditional Authority which refers to 'legitimate' power handed over from one generation to another in the form of 'ascription' and such power is not contested (Aletum, 2008; Evans-Pritchard & Fortes, 1940). According to Article 2:2 of a 1977 decree sanctioning existence of traditional authorities (TAs) in Cameroon, it states that:

A traditional Chief is a member of a Chiefdom selected by persons (King Makers) traditionally responsible and installed as a leader and a ruler of a given Chiefdom with temporal and spiritual functions and whose authority is recognised and respected as a matter of traditional ethics and laws of the Chiefdom concerned.

Max Weber described traditional authority as distinct from legal-rational as well as charismatic authority. In this paper, the words traditional institutions (TIs), traditional authorities (TAs), traditional rulers (TRs), and traditional leaders (TLs), shall be used interchangeably. These institutions have stood the test of time in Africa as far as their leadership, legitimacy and power are concerned, against so-called modern democratic or Republican governance institutions.

## ***2.2. Democracy***

Democracy is a competitive political system in which leaders and organizations compete to define the alternatives of public policy in such a way that the public can participate in the decision-making process (Schattschneider 1960:141). Democracy according to Roper (1989: 63) is not majority rule: democracy is diffusion of power, representation of interests, and recognition of minorities. From the above definitions one will find out that the strength of democracy lies in the ability of the system to ensure diverse and active participation of citizens to influence the outcomes of decisions that affect everyone which equally is a key expectation from the practice of democratic governance. Regardless of the definition adopted, this study shall borrow more from liberal democratic principles even beyond the scope provided by the authors in preceding lines. Democracy too has sometimes been argued to be closely linked with good governance (UNDP, 2006) and thus it is imperative to understand further what governance itself denotes. To imagine feasibility of democracy for a highly diverse continent like Africa, Claude Ake (2000) thus recommends a form of participatory social democracy (more consociational) that includes all social and cultural groups such as traditional authorities among other stakeholders.

## ***2.3. Democratic Governance***

This is governance based on fundamental and universally accepted principles, including: participation, accountability, transparency, rule of law, separation of powers, access, subsidiarity, equality and freedom of the press (UNDP, 2006). The concept of democratic governance does not so much differ from that of good governance. Rather, when it comes to democratic governance, more emphasis is laid on participation among other core principles

that ensure inclusiveness and effective representation of all citizens that belong to a given polity. Aspiration '3' of the Africa Agenda 2063 stresses on the need for inclusiveness and effective representation of citizens throughout every governance and sustainable development process.

#### **2.4. African Renaissance**

According to the Oxford Paperback Thesaurus edited by Maurice Waite (2012:689), renaissance refers to a revival, resurrection or re-awakening. Renaissance within the context of this study thus entails a re-awakening of those virtues, values, practices, customs, norms, and principles that remain peculiar to African traditional societies and institutions vis-à-vis governance but which over the years have been threatened by forces of colonialism, modernization and globalization. The term owes historical prominence in Africa to scholars such as Cheikh Anta Diop, Theophile Obenga, Joseph Ki-Zerbo, among others who passionately articulated and advocated for 'African Renaissance' (THET-THET, 2013). Although, propounded by Cheikh Anta Diop as early as 1940s, the propagation of 'African Renaissance' has witnessed inconsistent articulation and realization over the decades as it became once more popularized in the late 1990s and 2000s through the efforts of the former South African president-Thabo Mbeki. According to Mbeki (2003), it was with regards to his strong convictions and quest for African solutions to African problems that he and his African counterparts including Abdoulaye Wade of Senegal, Olusegun Obasanjo of Nigeria, and Bouteflika of Algeria (ibid) initiated and championed the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD). This project which tackles the political, economic, social and cultural dimensions for African development lays claim to the era of Africans, generating African solutions to African problems rather than continuous dependence on Western aid (Moyo, 2009) and neo-colonial influence in shaping African development (Mbembe, 2012). Within the context of African Renaissance, this paper shall focus on several dimensions of democratic governance practices worth reviving from different African traditional institutions as have been articulated in line with the ideals of Pan Africanism in the Africa Agenda 2063.

The preceding conceptual clarifications are believed to have demarcated what they all represent or how they shall be applied in this study thereby setting the pace for the ensuing discussion. However, it is incumbent to situate discussions in this paper within some relevant theoretical frameworks including Max Weber's theory of power and legitimacy as well as the theory of participatory democracy.

### **3. Theoretical Orientation**

This paper draws inspiration from two main theoretical frameworks: Theory of Legitimacy and Power by Max Weber as well as Theory of Participatory or Direct Democracy as used by Christian Fuchs.

#### ***3.1. Legitimacy and Power***

The Oxford Dictionary of Sociology by Gordon Marshall adopts Max Weber's conception that legitimacy is synonymous to authority and is accorded to a stable distribution of power when it is valid (Marshall, 1988:363). Max Weber sort to establish the complex relationship between power and legitimacy by distinguishing 'factual power', and the 'authoritarian power of command'. Factual power refers to the subordination exacted on the basis of interests, where control over goods and services in the market involves the actor submitting freely to that power (ibid). While authoritarian power of command implies a process whereby naked factual power justifies itself through a process of legitimation by evoking a sense of duty to obey regardless of personal motives and interests. In this regard, Weber opined that legitimacy maybe achieved on traditional, charismatic, or rational-legal grounds (Aletum, 2008).

The choice of this conception of legitimacy and power by Max Weber is justified on basis that it fits squarely in this paper which discusses the relevance and prospects of African traditional authorities who have continued to enjoy a high degree of legitimacy despite multifaceted challenges. In order to strengthen this theory to suit modern democratic trends, this paper equally draws inspiration from the theory of participatory democracy.

#### ***3.2. Participatory Democracy***

This theory relies on the twentieth-century reincarnation of the ancient Greek idea of government of the people, by the people (demos) and for the people. Participatory democracy is direct democracy considering that all citizens are actively involved in all important decision making processes (Fuchs, 2008:226; Marshall, 1988:482; Ake, 2000). Such decision making processes are often conducted through a face-face meeting of the whole group or community which results in some form of consensus (Mo Ibrahim, 2017). The rationale of this democratic practice is to ensure inclusion and representation of not just every citizen but equally ensure that developmental policies and governance processes are reflective of the people's plight (Ake, 2000). This approach to democracy and governance permanently enhances the bond

between individuals to their groups, community and country through their active involvement in search for common interest goals.

This theory once again reinforces the previous one on legitimacy and power of traditional authorities earlier postulated by Max Weber. The two theories are thus expected to play a complementary role as far as discussions in this paper are concerned. But before delving into discussions, it is incumbent to revisit some historical experiences of African traditional authorities and democratic governance to better comprehend the past and present of these institutions before daring to establish their prospective role as integral actors of governance for African Renaissance.

#### **4. Revisiting the Dynamics of Traditional Institutions and Democratic Governance in Africa**

This section examines the various tenets of traditional institutions and their role in fostering democratic governance across Africa. This examination unfolds first from categorized dimensions of 'governance' in Africa from pre-colonial era, through the colonial era to contemporary era. While the tracing of governance experiences during these eras cannot claim to be in-depth, the major preoccupation is to examine how traditional authorities have been able to exercise their authority throughout different phases of African political history as deemed relevant within the sphere of democratic governance in this paper. The challenges faced by traditional rulers during exercise of power are reflected in this section considering that different historical periods come with distinct challenges for these traditional institutions.

##### **4.1. Traditional Institutions and Governance in Pre-colonial and Colonial Eras**

As widely proclaimed, power relations before colonialism had been in favour of traditional institutions (TIs) considering how strong African Dynasties, Empires and Kingdoms were by then (AfroBarometer, 2008/2009). In pre-colonial Africa, there existed well organized political systems such as that of the Nuer of Sudan (Evans-Pritchard, 1940), Egyptian Kingdoms and their Pharaohs, Empires such as the Songhai, Kanem Bornu, Ashanti, and the Meroe kingdoms (Diop, 1974). Hence, despite the fact that we may not explore the details of organization and functioning of pre-colonial African political systems cited above, the following discussion would reveal some of the peculiar values and features that were/are inherent in the latter systems making them key stakeholders in enhancing democratic governance in Africa.

Memories of the famous Samoure Toure of the Mandinka Empire who staged a long resistance against the French colonialists remain testimony of how well politically established his Empire was to be able to sustain his legitimacy and governance of his people from whom he received maximum support to resist French invaders (Ki-zerbo, 2008). Similarly, the successful resistance of Italian colonisation under Emperor **Menelik II** of Abyssinian continues to be celebrated by Africans as it remains a big source of inspiration and pride for Pan Africanism and African Renaissance in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Even the series of Egyptian Kingdoms and African Kingdoms that strongly resisted colonial rule such as the Kabaka (King) of the Baganda and the Zulu Kings against the British, exemplify the strength of these kingdoms before arrival of the imperialists.

Several scholars have demonstrated that traditional African governance structures were mainly centralized or decentralized (Cheka, 2008, ECA, 2007; Kinni, 1988). Although this categorization into two (2) broad classes is often adopted by analysts mainly for easy analysis, the Governance Report for Africa published by ECA (2007) opines that such dualistic typification does not properly reflect the diversity and intricacies observed and experienced within various African governance systems. The report, states that:

In large parts of Africa, pre-colonial political systems were highly decentralized with law-making, social control, and allocation of resources carried out by local entities, such as lineage groupings, village communities, and age-sets. These systems were largely based on consensual decision-making arrangements that varied from one place to another.

Emphasis is laid on existence of decentralized systems of government in many parts of Africa as well as ‘consensual decision-making’ which has remained a fundamental practice within many African traditional circles. Effective decentralization is compatible with democratic governance as it enhances participatory democracy, inclusion, and sustainable development. Examples of decentralized African governance systems include but are not limited to: The Ibo village assembly in eastern Nigeria, the Eritrean village ‘baito’ (assembly), the ‘gada’ (age-set) system of the Oromo in Ethiopia and Kenya, as well as the council of elders (kiama) of the Kikuyu in Kenya. The Teso, and Lango of Uganda, the Tonga of Zambia, and the Nuer of Southern Sudana (ECA Report of 2007). These examples are not exhaustive considering that within various African countries, there were/are fondoms, chiefdoms, kingdoms, emirates, etc. which either practiced decentralized or centralized governance peculiar to the political, social,



economic and cultural environments (Kinni, 1988). A good example here is that of Cameroon with over 250 ethnic groups (Nkwi, 1967) and with glaring practices of both decentralized and centralized systems (Cheka, 2008; Abe, 2006; *ibid*).

#### **4.2. Traditional African Institutions and Colonial Experience of Governance**

The colonial experiences have remained the major source of reference and critique as to when Africa's path towards her destiny was really thwarted by the western colonial imperialists (Dumont, 2012; Rodney, 2000; Said, 1978). As Ali Mazrui (2000) contends, Africa's wrong path to development was determined during what he termed 'The Curse of Berlin, 1884-5' referring to the Berlin Conference that rallied western powers to lay down modalities for the eventual partition and colonisation of Africa without Africans themselves. Several others including Walter Rodney (2000) trace Africa's current mishaps to the era of slavery and slave trade as well as colonialism during which Africa was deprived of her able-bodied men and women through the Trans-Saharan and Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. On the question of governance in Africa (especially Sub-Saharan Africa) during the colonial era, Rene Dumont (2012) simply captures the situation in his book titled '*L'Afrique Noire est Malpartie*' ('Sub-Saharan Africa Took the Wrong Direction'-**author's translation**). Such broad-based categorisations of Africa's failures abound, but how precisely power relations between TAs transpired against colonial invaders in Africa, remains the bone of contention in this section.

Before delving into the core of discussions here, it is vital to recall that governance in African societies during the colonial era varied with respect to the colonial master (ECA, 2007) reason why the manifestation and degree of negotiation of power relations by various parties depended on the environment and political leadership in place. For instance, the colonial legacies on governance systems in Africa mainly reflect the colonial policies of the French and British. This paper thus focuses more on the French and British influence considering that this duo left very visible legacies in many colonies that they occupied in Africa.

For instance, the British are famous for their adoption of the 'Indirect Rule' (Chabal, 2009) while the French widely used the policy of 'Assimilation' (ECA, 2007, Cheka, 2008; Kinni, 1988). Each of these policies was applied depending on the political organization/system of the particular colony whether centralized or decentralized. Generally due to her quest to reduce expenditures and investments in the colonies with the use of British tax payers' money, the British mainly applied the 'Indirect Rule' policy (Belaunde et al. 2010; Cheka, 2008; ECA,

2007; kinni, 1988) in their African colonies. This policy entailed the use of traditional authorities and their indigenous institutions for the administrative purposes of the British (ibid) and to particularly serve the imperial interest of this same colonial master (Mazrui, 2000, Rodney, 2000). Based on the colonial and post-colonial evaluation of the legacy of British 'Indirect Rule' and French 'Direct Rule' (Assimilation, Association and Paternalism), the remains heated debate that the former's approach largely benefitted or empowered the traditional authorities as far as consolidating their governance role was concerned.

While we have been able to briefly expose some of the African governance experiences of power-relations and 'negotiation' for political space by the African TAs and foreign invaders from pre-colonial era till date (neo-colonial era), scholars have widely argued that little has changed from the colonial through the post-colonial to contemporary neo-colonial era (Mbembe, 2000). In fact, the post-colonial experiences as undergone by TIs have seen little changes such as total dissolution of TIs in Guinea Bissau after independence and no re-introduction till date. Attempts of dissolution of chieftaincy in Ghana by former president Kwame Nkrumah failed thereby justifying the current re-introduction and complementarity between chieftaincy and modern institutions in Ghana (Dzivenu, 2008) among other countries such as Botswana, South Africa, and Nigeria with strong traditional institutions in place.

## **5. Presentation and Discussion of Findings**

This section particularly explores various qualities and roles that African TAs have continued to uphold from pre-colonial era till date against all odds and in congruence with the Pan African ideals as spelt out in the Agenda 2063. A summary of various attributes and roles of TRs in enhancing democratic governance include but are not limited to:

Figure 1: **Some Attributes of African Traditional Authorities**

- Promoters of Consensus/Participatory Democracy
- Promoters of Transparent and Accountable Leadership
- Force of Political Mobilisation
- Architects of Social and Restorative Justice
- Strategists in Conflict Prevention, Resolution and Management
- Symbols of Peace, Security and Unity
- Custodians of Cultural/traditional Heritage
- Custodians of community development
- Architects of local governance

**Source: Adapted from Nsaidzedze (August 2015)**

The preceding figure 1 captures some of the main findings on qualities and roles of African traditional rulers. But in order to stay more focused on the core of this paper that is democratic governance, the various qualities and roles stated above shall be reformulated under four themes and discussed in this section. These themes include among others traditional rulers and accountable leadership, traditional rulers and participatory democracy, traditional rulers and promotion of the rule of law, and traditional rulers as epitomes of mobilization for development. It is worth noting that though categorized mainly under four main themes, the discussion of each of them inevitably engulfs some others highlighted in figure 1. Hence, each of these sub-themes shall therefore be presented and examined following our theoretical framework.

### ***5.1. Traditional Rulers and Accountable Leadership***

Although highly contested, Pre-colonial African traditional authorities often practiced some high degree of transparent and accountable leadership in compliance with norms of democratic governance. The traditional authorities and their advocates argue that aside kinship, ascription and de facto modalities, any potential heir to a throne must show proof of good moral character, sound health, proper reasoning faculty, good leadership skills, to be able to satisfactorily serve the people as well as to foster peace, security and unity in their respective communities (Mouiche, 2005). This justifies why it is on the basis of demonstrated leadership potentials that most of the African traditional rulers acquire their legitimate power from the people in line with Max Weber's conception of the various sources of power and legitimacy. Based on how they obtain power and traditional mechanisms of control such as the various councils of elders,

women, youth, men, and sacred societies that ensure checks and balances throughout the mandate of their King, the latter are bound to be transparent and accountable to the people. In fact, findings revealed that there are stricter rules of governance for traditional rulers than even the case of so-called elected and appoint government officials. It was however revealed that corruption has equally infiltrated these traditional systems due to poverty, ‘politics of the belly’ (self-centred politics), and westernization. The example of the Ashante King as well as the process of selection and enthronement of Fons and Chiefs in the grass field area of Cameroon, are good examples to cite here.

In fact, it is due to the rigorous and clearly enshrined process of choosing traditional authorities that earns them ‘internal legitimacy’ (Belaunde et al, 2010) which often sustains their mandate and popular support from their local ‘subjects’ or population. However, recognition of ‘external legitimacy’ of African traditional rulers remains highly debatable within and beyond Africa. For the purpose of ensuring inclusive participation, accountability, transparent leadership and pursuit of common vision and interest in line with various tenets of good governance, the Bamoun people often subject their Sultan to a thorough leadership audit during the ‘Ngu’on Festival’ organized every two years (Aboubakar et al, 2007). The persistence of these forms of governance practices thus validate the assertion that African traditional rulers still play an indisputable role towards enhancing democratic governance in Africa worth rekindling within the framework of African Renaissance.

### ***5.2. Traditional Rulers and Participatory Democracy***

Another critical finding made in this paper is that African traditional institutions and leaders are well known for their participatory and consensus oriented governance (AfroBarometer 2008/2009, as cited by Mo Ibrahim, 2017). These institutions believe in inclusion of all community members represented in various associations whose leaders are often charged with regular consultation of the people (participatory social democracy according to Claude Ake, 2000) regarding their welfare, then channelled through the quarter heads to council of elders then the Chief for final deliberation and decision. These democratic governance practices are consistent with conception of direct democracy as employed by Christian Fuchs (2008) which lays emphasis on proper representation, active participation of citizens and consensus often arrived at through direct consultations (ibid). This finding once again prompt reflections on the urgent need for a review of the democratization process across Africa which authors like Bruce

Gilley argues has been regressing rather than progressing as articulated in the NEPAD project (Gilley, 2010).

The preceding findings are equally consistent with several previous studies which revealed how African traditional rulers have often enhanced democratic governance throughout history. A good example is that of HRM Usoufo Usei Tutu Li of the Ashante Kingdom in Ghana who proclaimed in his keynote address to the 2004 ECA's forum on 'Traditional Rulers and Governance in the Modern state' that:

Before the advent of colonial rule, the traditional leader's role encompassed numerous functions which revolved around the cardinal theme of guiding, protecting, defending and providing for the needs of the society he served...These holistic approaches involved religious, military, legislative, executive, judicial, social and cultural features...In most of these states, there was provision for participation in decision-making by groups of the citizenry, either indirectly through the heads of their clans' lineages or families, or more directly through various types of organizations like the Asafo Companies of the Fantes in Ghana.

King Usoufo further addressed one of the most advanced criticisms of 'anti-democratic' practices within traditional systems by contending that:

Invariably, they almost always involve the devolution of power by ascription. A person inherits governmental authority or position mainly by virtue of membership of a particular family or clan. However, in many cases, the choice of the political leader is based not solely on the circumstance of birth, but involves other criteria, such as the character or other personal qualities. Where this is the case, there usually is an election between several eligible persons from the same family or clan...

These revelations by the above traditional ruler himself portrays a lot especially regarding the spirit and consciousness of 'legitimate' leadership (Belaunde S. et al...2010, ECA, 2007, Kinni, 1988), accountability and participation of people in decision-making and implementation within their respective polities. It is such accountable and consensual governance systems that ensured the confidence and consolidated connection between the indigenes/rural populations with their authorities as Cheka (2008) asserts thus:

Traditional authority incarnates a reassuring institutional stability and certainty to the masses, which elected officers (who come and go) do not provide in republican institutions. The vast majority of the population feels distant from the concept of 'republic' at grassroots level, where traditional authority remains the de facto institution of local governance.

Drawing from the ensuing arguments, it is convincing to establish that good governance principles including transparency, accountability, fairness and participation transcended pre-colonial African governance institutions despite any dotted short-comings. These recounted experiences reveal how much the TAs retained astounding authority over the democratic governance machinery at the time. Hence, despite persistent political challenges plaguing TAs, they have continued to exercise a significant role in local governance processes as seen in Ghana.

Another point worth stressing from our findings is that the practice and process of participatory governance often ensures a sort of checks and balances (transparency and accountability) regarding decision-making and practices. However, some of the chiefs have been accused of authoritarian leadership through excesses as the case of the Lamido of Rey Bouba in the North Region of Cameroon (Abe, 2006). This phenomenon of authoritarian leadership remains one of the major challenges among traditional rulers in Cameroon which rather destroys the fabric of democratic governance. This has been a fertile angle from which some proponents have tried to discredit the legitimacy and power of these rulers as lacking the legal backing. But, the direct consequence is that any traditional ruler who violates customary norms often loses his/her legitimacy, popularity and loyalty from the subjects as has been the case across several kingdoms in Cameroon. A good example here is that of several Chiefs who have been dethroned in the Western Grass fields of Cameroon as well as Sultan Ibrahim Njoya of Bamoun whose mandate has witnessed tensions and contestations from his people due to his multiparty political stance (Mouiche, 2005).

The phenomenon of contesting or discrediting traditional authorities based on the partisan role they have played since the advent of democratization across Africa from the 1990s remains an interesting area to investigate further. But, within the context of this paper, the theory of participatory democracy as presented above does not seem to have been able to resolve the increasing misunderstandings between those who contend that traditional rulers should equally exercise political rights of militancy in any political party versus those who argue that these

rulers should not involve themselves into multiparty politics which nurtures seeds of division and discrimination within their areas of jurisdiction. Given such an environment, the fabric of active participation and consensus decision-making process is weakened rather than strengthened to ensure a more effective process of direct democracy according to Christian Fuchs (2008). Based on the aim of this paper, it would be highly recommended for traditional rulers to be more constituted and focused on uniting their people while facilitating the process of participation that is urgently needed to revitalize the current democratization process in Africa. This leads us to the mobilization role of traditional rulers within contemporary democratic spaces.

### ***5.3. Traditional Rulers as Epitomes of Mobilization for Development***

Another crucial finding from this paper is that of the role of traditional institutions in enhancing democratic governance and development using their mobilization capacity. In line with Max Weber's conception of traditional leadership among other good leadership skills, some chiefs have been able to thrive within the realms of democratic governance by often mobilising their people for community development purposes as obtains among traditional rulers in South Africa, Botswana, Ghana, Uganda, Nigeria and Cameroon (Mouiche, 2005). The mobilization capacity of these rulers stems from their internal legitimacy, power, and charisma which sustain their popularity and loyalty among the local masses. Secondly, despite growing criticisms against traditional rulers who engage into party politics thereby rendering themselves vulnerable to political elites, the latter continue to boast of indisputable popularity when it comes to mobilising their people to actively participate in matters that concern the development of their respective communities.

The mobilization role of African traditional rulers equally remains critical towards ensuring the process of direct democracy which has been overtaken by more liberal and representative democracy in Africa. worth noting is that liberal democracy as imposed on most African countries by so-called Western Democracies like the USA, France and Britain has so far not been effective as it does not comply with Africa's socio-cultural and political realities (Dumont, 2012; Ake, 2000). This once again justifies the emphasis on the need to strive for an Africa of good governance, democracy, respect for human rights, justice and the rule of law based on the ideals of Pan Africanism as elaborated in the Africa Agenda 2063. All these examples and arguments are proof of the critical role traditional rulers play in enhancing democratic governance across Africa and thus need to be reviewed, reformed and better

consolidated as part of a political renaissance process for Africa. Aside their mobilization potentials, traditional rulers have been applauded for their role in fostering the rule of law and justice in their respective communities and within the general African conflict resolution as well as peace building efforts.

#### ***5.4. Traditional Rulers and Social Justice***

Further revelations from this study hold that traditional institutions continue to play a vital role when it comes to promoting social justice, maintaining law and order as well they represent an embodiment of peace, security and development in their communities (Cheka, 2008). Emphasis here is on the promotion of restorative justice which aims at reconciling people with the hope of maintaining African communitarian life commonly described as 'Ubuntu'. A society of social justice and communitarian life among the people ensures social cohesion and an environment for direct democracy to prosper. Borrowing from the theory of direct democracy as used by Christian Fuchs (2008), social cohesion, continuous interaction and collective sense of belonging to an entity are all critical features to ensure effectiveness of participatory democracy. It is however unfortunate that since embracing the wave of democratization from 1990 onwards, many African countries continue to witness all forms of social injustice, conflicts, political instability, among other factors which help to disintegrate rather than re-integrating the colonially polarised Africa. However, given the potentials for fostering unity, social justice and peace as often incarnated by African traditional rulers, effective practice of participatory democracy would accelerate better governance and hence African Renaissance.

A good example of how traditional rulers mediate, arbitrate, manage or resolve conflicts within their political systems in the Kgotla system in Botswana, are reminiscent of the key role these institutions play in enhancing social cohesion, peace-building, stability and co-existence among citizens of given polities. These traditional institutions have been commended for fostering restorative justice enshrined in the African Ubuntu philosophy unlike retributive justice which bases on the capitalist spirit of 'winner-takes-all' or 'zero-sum' (Wiredu, 2004). Many Africans have equally argued that traditional justice systems are more 'just', cost effective, easily accessible and available to all contrary to 'modern judicial systems' which are highly discriminatory, difficult to access, very costly and often benefit mainly the 'highest bidders' (Moumakwa, 2010). Hence, many Africans still prefer to exploit their traditional justice mechanisms which have for over centuries, fostered peaceful co-existence and stability necessary for democratic governance.



The unfortunate situation with contemporary chieftaincies is that of inherited anti-good governance practices from the colonial and post-colonial administration (s). The direct consequence has remained the greedy, corrupt, power hungry and autocratic (Mo Ibrahim, 20017; ECA, 2013; Schraeder, 2004)) leaders orchestrating governance processes in neo-colonial Africa. In fact, Alemazung (2010) argues that neo-colonialism incarnates a political culture of rulership for the good of the ruler to preserve power, enrich himself including his supporters and followers at the detriment of the people and the nation-state. This is what Bayart (1998) described as ‘politics of the belly’ that has been embraced by most post-colonial African leaders with a more ‘factual approach’ to leadership as Max Weber postulated (Marshall, 1998). This corrupt phenomenon continues to encroach on traditional institutions which needs to be tackled before it becomes too rampant as the case of many African Republican institutions today.

A similar finding worth revisiting is that of various atrocities on governance and political processes at post-colonial Africa perpetrated by both so-called former colonialists and the neo-colonial African elites (Shivji, 2011). The situation becomes even more complicated when paying keen attention on TIs whose leaders have been ‘watered down’ (ibid) to the extent that they have to compete for political space (Mouiche, 2005; Keulder, 2007) to survive and consolidate (Awason, 2003) their rule in the post-colonial dispensation.

Although the experiences and findings recounted so far about TIs and governance in Africa seem to remain gloomy, all hope is not lost when Keulder (2007) posits that:

In Namibia, as is the case elsewhere on the African continent, traditional leaders’ relevance for the postcolonial political order and State-craft stems from their control over (predominantly) rural communities. Traditional leaders continue to control most of the important rural survival strategies: allocation of land, natural resources, communal labour practices and in some instances law and order.

This citation stands to be widely challenged in Africa considering the political diversity, varied colonial experiences and current global trends.

Other African political systems that have persisted against all odds from external and internal threats include but are not limited to the Baganda Kingdom of Uganda, just like the Muslim Caliphates in Northern Nigeria and Northern Cameroon (Abe, 2006; Blensh et al, 2006; Osaghe, 1998). Most of the Kingdoms, Fondoms and Chiefdoms from the grass field area of

Cameroon still uphold their traditional governance practices despite being tampered with by the colonialists and still being threatened by neo-colonial forces (Belaunde et al, 2010; Cheka, 2008).

While the findings and thematic aspects discussed in this section are not exhaustive, they have so far demonstrated clearly that African traditional rulers still continue to wield some legitimacy and power which enables them play multifaceted roles towards fostering democratic governance across Africa. It is therefore imperative at this stage to state some concluding remarks as well as policy implications emanating from this paper.

## **6. Conclusion and policy implications**

This paper so far unravelled the critical role of African traditional institutions often incarnated by traditional authorities who have since pre-colonial African era played vital roles in enhancing democratic governance. In fact, prior to the colonial demarcation of the continent, several African traditional political systems were well-known for their “highly participatory nature” of governance. Community gatherings offered a wide platform for citizens to express their concerns and take part in the decision-making process (Mo Ibrahim, 2017) in consistence with the theory of direct or participatory democracy (Fuchs, 2008; Ake, 2000). The terms used for these community gatherings varied across the continent including: Pitso-Lesotho, Shir-Somalia, Kgotla-Botswana, Baraza-Kenya, and Kwi-for/Ngwerong/Ngomba in Cameroon. The authority of traditional institutions emanates from their traditional legitimacy as postulated by Max Weber in his distinction of various forms of authority as well as concepts of power and legitimacy. However, the influence of traditional rulers during the colonial period drastically changed due to the impact of French policy of ‘Assimilation’ and the ‘Indirect Rule’ policy of the British (Cheka, 2008). While the Assimilation policy instituted a more centralized system of governance with less powerful chiefs and limited participation of ‘subjects’ in decision-making, the Indirect Rule policy marginally empowered traditional rulers through a more decentralized system of local and participatory governance. The experiences of traditional rulers in the grass field regions of Cameroon are reminiscent of the influential role traditional rulers like the Sultan of Bamoun play in enhancing democratic governance in Cameroon. Whatever the shortcomings of traditional rulers in contemporary Africa, their positive role in enhancing democratic governance through transparent and accountable leadership, direct democracy, social justice, and architects peace, security, unity and prosperity remains critical for the African Renaissance process as emphasized in the African Agenda 2063. It is therefore

imperative to consider some policy implications geared towards revitalizing the role of traditional institutions to foster a new era of democratic governance that meets the ideals<sup>2</sup> of Pan Africanism, relevant to satisfying the political, social, economic and cultural aspirations of all Africans.

### ***6.1. Policy implications***

It is paramount for TRs across Africa to take stock of their institutional operations from time immemorial with focus on how to revitalize and consolidate those democratic governance practices, values, and cultural responsibilities which they have shouldered overtime. This must involve other stakeholders including representatives from the public sector, private sector and civil society. Such a forum could be in form of regular annual consultation meetings to be structured in such a way as to accommodate TRs from all over Africa who should be able to meet, and establish a continental organization, as well as elect a coordinating body to champion collaboration and operational modalities alongside the ‘Republican’<sup>3</sup> governance machinery across the continent.

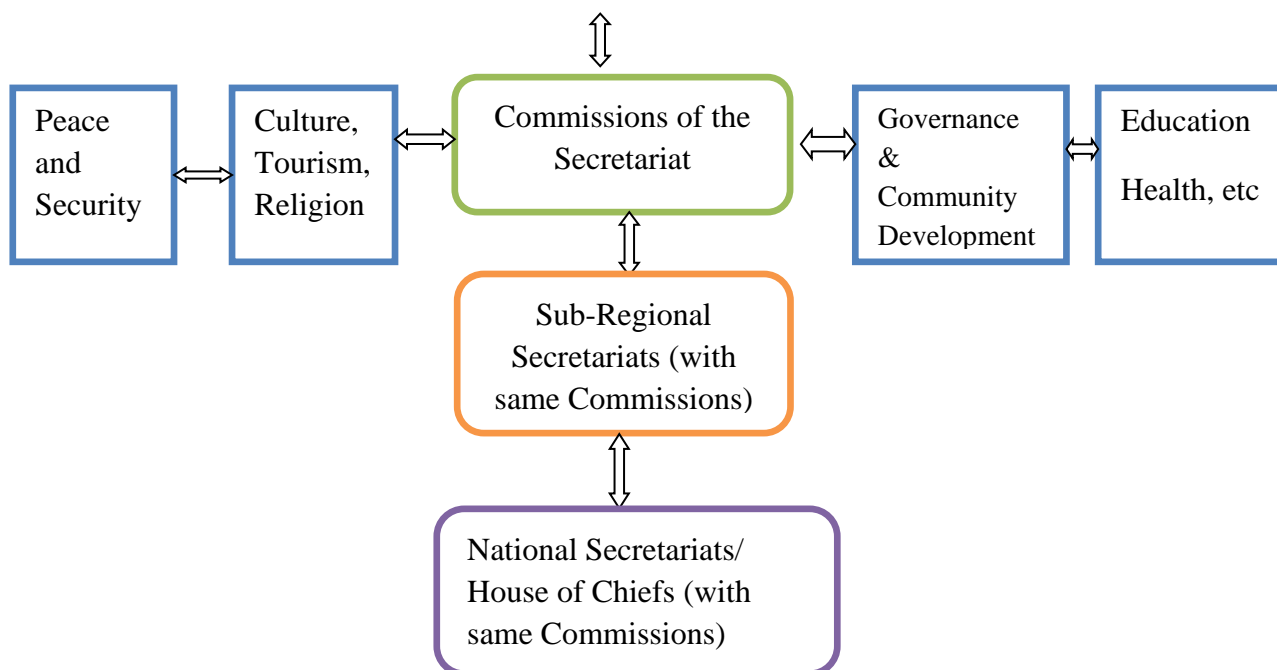
It is crucial that before creating a continental ‘African House of Chiefs Secretariat’, TRs must have reviewed and strengthened their current locally/nationally based Associations. The hope here is that interconnecting TRs creates another dimension of African Unity, leaves room for constant exchange of good leadership experiences especially with prominent African Kingdoms that have stood the test of time including their role in advancing modern democratic governance as in South Africa, Botswana, Ghana, Cameroon, Nigeria, Uganda among other countries across the five main regions of Africa. The following diagram portrays the structure of a possible continental body for African traditional authorities which could be named ‘African House of Chiefs Secretariat’.

**Figure 1: Structure of an African House of Chiefs Secretariat**



<sup>2</sup> Ideals of Pan Africanism are anchored on total liberation of Africa from all forms of colonialism/neo-colonialism as well as emphasis on fostering a strong cultural identity, common heritage, shared values and ethics that transcend the African ‘UBUNTU’ spirit of life. More on these ideals have been clearly articulated in the Africa Agenda 2063. April 2015. Popular Version.

<sup>3</sup> By Republican here, we are simply referring to the current political dispensation of government and so-called Sovereign institutions in conformity with Constitutions of various African states.



Source: **Adapted from Nsaidzedze (August 2015)**

The African House of Chiefs Secretariat can be integrated and operationalized as one of the African Union Agencies to function under the auspices of the African Governance Architecture alongside other legislative structures like the Pan African Parliament. The members of the Secretariat would be Chiefs/Kings from various Sub Regional and National Secretariats or Associations of traditional rulers whose legitimacy has been authenticated by the government. Funding for this structure would have to come from various African governments, the African Union Commission's annual budget as well as other partners like UNESCO and UNECA. Meanwhile, the Agency shall be tasked with their primary role as custodians of African culture, identity, unity, culture of democracy and peace throughout various African Union policies vis-à-vis ideals of Pan Africanism enshrined in the NEPAD Project, African Charter on Cultural Renaissance, African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance, as well as Africa Agenda 2063. The headquarters of the proposed 'African House of Chiefs Secretariat' would be located in any African country to be decided by the members of the Secretariat themselves while every member country would be expected to operate a satellite 'National House of Chiefs Secretariat' as the basic support structures.

Equally, the current African leadership or governments need to urgently reconsider with more seriousness the indispensable contributions of TIs in accelerating inclusive and highly participatory governance towards ensuring 'The Future we Want for Africa' before 2063. It is quite commendable that many African governments including that of Botswana, South Africa, Nigeria, Ghana, Cameroon and Uganda have promulgated laws sanctioning operation of TRs, but more needs to be done in terms of ensuring the effective applicability of such laws with the necessary political will and resources.

Cognizant of increasing demands and proclamations on local governance and decentralization across Africa, governments need to appropriately incorporate traditional leadership structures with relevant ministries charged with local and national governance matters. Other African countries have Ministries of Interior Affairs, Ministries of Local Governance and Development, ex cetera which can incorporate traditional rulers, empower them and provide necessary resources for them to improve their active participation in local governance and development.

Governments equally need to improve the legislative role of TAs in their respective law making houses considering the huge populations that the latter often permanently represent. So critical is the fact that representation of Chiefs/Kings at national legislative houses could be based on say status of the Chief since they are all categorised. For instance, all Paramount and First Class Chiefs can automatically be mandated to either the Council, Parliament and or Senate based on their existence within every given country. All these keeps the people connected, actively involved and engaged in their governance machinery with a stronger feeling of ownership and belonging.

All these recommendations among others are crucial towards enhancing the role of African traditional institutions in democratic governance for African Renaissance based on the ideals of Pan Africanism and the aspiration of all Africans.

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