

EZESHIP RECOGNITION AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT IN IBO-LAND: AN ANALYSIS

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Abstract

The pre-colonial ibo-society was republican in nature. It could be described as "Acephalous or decentralized" political system. It never had as part of its system, the Ezeship stool. The indirect rule of 1914 colonial Nigeria bequeathed the Ezeship on Ibo-society. Since then, the institution has undergone series of reforms. These reforms encompasses the criteria for recognition by the government and communities respectively. The uncompromising attitude of government criteria and that of the communities most times creates community problems and retards development at the community levels. The aims and objectives of this paper therefore is to analyze, examine and then proffer necessary solutions or way forward.

Keywords: Ezeship Stool, Acephalous, Community, Government, Republican.

Background to the Study

The Ezeship stool has come to stay as the mirror of traditional custom in Ibo-land. The pre-colonial Ibo-land was republican in nature. In other words, it was cephalous or decentralized and never had as part of its systems, the Ezeship stool.

The arrival of the 1914 Lord Lugard constitution and the subsequent indirect rule system in Nigeria, bequeathed the Ezeship stool in Ibo-land as a whole, since then, till now this institution has undergone series of reforms. These reforms encompass the criteria for recognition of an Eze or Iqwe of a community in Ibo-land by the government and the local customs of various communities as the case may be. The uncompromising attitude of government criteria and that of the local customs of various communities have always exposed the developmental strides in so many communities to danger.

Objectives of the Study

Is to analyze, examine and then proffer necessary solutions or way forward.

Conceptual Analysis: Ezeship or Igweship, Community, Development

Ezeship or Igweship

This simply means the stool an Eze or Iqwe of a community occupies. It now represents a symbol of customs of communities in Ibo-Land. The Eze or the Igwe is the person selected and appointed both by the community and recognized by the government as the custodian of culture of the people/ community.

His functions are as follows:

1. Representing his autonomous community on ceremonial occasions.
2. Receiving important visitors in the community
3. Acting as the custodian of culture, custom and tradition and advising the community on them.
4. Assisting the government in the maintenance of law and order in the community.
5. Deliberating with the town union on issues bordering on the security of the community.
6. Assisting the state and local government in-charge of the community in the collection of taxes and rates.
7. Promoting stability and peace in the community.
8. Attending meeting, summoned by the chairman of the local government area from time to time for the purpose of consultation and advise.
9. To maintain a good relationship with the town union of the given community. (Section 11, Imo State of Nigeria, Traditional Rulers and Autonomous Communities Law No 3 of 1999).

Community

The community is all the people who live in a particular area or place. It can also be seen as a group of people who are similar in some ways (Oxford Dictionary).

Development

Development is a Tri-dimensional concept. It has a utilitarian or consummatory dimension, which connotes increase in the quantity of usable items available to man in society. It also has behavioural or rational dimension which defines the nature of the relationship among men in society and among societies. It also has an institutional and legal dimension which defines the institutional and legal framework, circumscribes the behaviour of men and streamlines their relationship, while they individually and collectively seek to gain greater access to material things of value in society (Ogochukwu, 2010). Development simply means to improve, to make progress, change for the better, higher income or better living

standard, increase in the quality of goods and services available to the people, the quality of their social lives and material advancement which enable them to gain greater control of their environment. United Nations Publications (1963:1) defines development as the process of allowing and encouraging people to meet their own aspiration.

Criteria for Ezeship Recognition in Ibo-Land

1. Community perspective
2. Government perspective

Community Perspective

Section 5 (1) of the Traditional Rulers and Autonomous Communities Law No. 3 of Imo State 1999 provides as follows:

Each Autonomous community shall identify, select and appoint its Eze and present him to the local government council over the said autonomous community.

Where an Autonomous community has unanimously and successfully identified, selected and appointed its Eze, it shall be incumbent on the autonomous community to set down on paper in detail its method, manner or tradition of its identifying, selecting, appointing the Eze, and shall submit the document to the chairman of the local government on the day of presentation of its Eze. The document shall contain among other things, the following.

The full personal names of the Eze, his adopted designation or title and the customary code of conduct to which the Eze must subscribe.

1. The date on which he was appointed as the Eze.
2. A full account of the customary law of the community regulating the process of identifying, selection, appointment and installation, suspension, deposition, rights and privileges of the Eze of the community.
3. Where a laid down procedure for the identification, selection, appointment and installation of an Eze does not exist in an Autonomous community I either because there has never been one before or because of a joining together of two or more communities having different procedures into one Autonomous community which has failed to adopt any of the procedures of the component units, or any other reasons, then the Eze stool shall rotate among the component units starting from the most senior member community in traditional ranking provided that where seniority cannot be determined, then the most populous unit takes precedence and the rest rank according to population.

Section 6(1) Provides as follows:

1. The presentation of an Eze of an Autonomous Community for the purpose of his recognition under this law shall be carried out on a date and at a place and time fixed by the Autonomous Community with approval of the local Government council such place being a place to which members of the public or community have access.
2. The date, place and time shall be publicized within the Autonomous community.
3. A written notice of a proposed presentation and of the date, time and place thereof shall be delivered to the Local Government Council concerned.

Section 6(2) provides that the Eze of an Autonomous community shall be deemed to have been presented to the Governor for the purpose of his recognition under this law, if "on the date, and at the place and time publicized in the manner specified in subsection (1) of this section and in the presence of members of the autonomous community, such Eze is presented to the local government council concerned or any other person appointed by the Governor in that behalf.

Government Perspective

Section 7(1) of this same law provides as follows:

1. Where the Eze of an Autonomous community is presented to the Governor as provided under sections 5 and 6 of this law, the Governor may by an instrument (in accordance with the provisions of this law) recognize such a person as the Eze of the Autonomous community, subject to the confirmation of Imo State House of Assembly.
2. The Governor shall not recognize any person as Eze of an Autonomous Community unless he is satisfied that such a person.
 1. Was identified, selected and appointed in accordance with the customary law of the Autonomous Community concerned.
 2. He is not under twenty five (25) years of age.
 3. Is not a full-time public servant.
 4. Has not been convicted in any part of Nigeria of a capital offence or any offence involving fraud or has not been sentenced to death or if term of imprisonment, he has been so convicted and sentenced has received a free pardon.
 5. Has not, under any law for the time being in Nigeria been found or declared to be of unsound mind or adjudged to be a lunatic or if he has been so found, declared or adjudged has received a certificate of sanity.
 6. Has not been adjudged or declared bankrupt.

7. Has a good reputation, meaningful and veritable means of livelihood.
8. Is not a member of secret cult?
9. Has a secondary school certificate or its equivalent as minimum educational qualification.

Section 9 provides as follows:

The Governor may at any time after the date of publication in the official Gazette of the recognition of an Eze of an Autonomous Community, issue a certificate of recognition of such as Eze to the Eze.

Section 10 of this same law provides that -

After the Governor has recognized a person as the Eze of an Autonomous Community, any person who:

1. Installs or purports to install another person as the "Eze" of that Autonomous Community or
2. Allows himself to be installed as the "Eze" of that autonomous community in place of the person so recognized "Eze" for that community.
3. Holds himself out as or
4. Allows himself to be addressed as or.
5. Carried out the functions of a recognized Eze of that community in place of the rightful person already recognized shall be guilty of an offence and liable on conviction to imprisonment for six months or a fine of N10,000 or to both such imprisonment and fine.

Recognition and Community Development: Prons and Cons

If we go by the precise definition of the United Nations (1963:1) development is the process of allowing and encouraging people to meet their own aspirations. This paper has detailed the legal procedures requires before a person is recognized as an Eze or Igwe, it is no doubt true that this paper relied only on the traditional rulers and autonomous communities law of No. 3 1999 of Imo State, but it is also no doubt true that all other laws of various states in Ibo-land in respect to the topic in question are all the same. The only different may be the caption and the state but the contents of these states laws are all the same.

The intendment of this paper is that where the legal requirement or procedure for recognition of the Eze of an Autonomous community are strictly followed, development and growth in such communities are stable and peaceful, United we stand, divided we fall. It is also the intendment of this paper that 90% of conflicts and obstacles to various communities and their development is traceable to the Modus Oparandi of recognition of such Ezes of Igwes. Politics, money bags and

corruption have taken over these planned and well structured legal procedures for recognitions of Ezes and Igwes in Iboland. The resultant consequences of those violation of legal procedures and recognizing a person not anointed or ordained by the community perspective has been the causes of conflicts and obstacles to community developments in Ibo-land.

Conclusion

The overview of Ezeship stool and community development in Ibo-land has been the subject matter of this paper. The paper has analyzed the legal procedures for recognition of an Eze or Igwe though relying solely on the Imo State Traditional Rulers and Autonomous Communities law No. 3 of 1999. This paper nevertheless, stressed deeply into the meanings of a community and development, Because most communities are berates of development, the reasons are traceable to the imposition of Eze's or Igwes on the communities rather than allowing the due legal requirement of doing so.

Recommendations

This paper is of the opinion that most communities operate with a constitution which govern the activities of community officers in the discharge of their functions. The same constitution stipulates among other issues, the mode of selecting or appointing their Ezes. Where the selection of Ezes have as a result of historical agreement been taken notice of, such agreement if it does not offend the rules of natural justice, equity and fair play, should be adhered to and properly be reduced into writing or rather be made as a component of the constitution of such community. But where this agreement offends the rules of natural justice, equity and fair play I such agreement should be jettisoned. The government should from time to time organize seminars or workshops for autonomous' communities. This will go a long way in educating them in respect to dispute resolutions and community administrations.

Furthermore, the government should also hands off in middling in community polities and allow the communities to strictly select or appoint their Ezes according their laid down rules or procedures. Where such rules or procedures are not followed, the government should have the political will to say so. This is the only leeway for peace and development in our communities.

References

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