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**Assessing the Effect of New Income Patterns on the Chieftaincy Institution in Nembe, Bayelsa State, Nigeria**

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| **\*Corresponding author**  *Golden MI*  **Article History**  *Received: 23.08.2017*  *Accepted: 28.08.2017*  *Published: 30.09.2017*  **DOI:**  10.36347/sjahss.2017.v05i09.013  **C:\Users\Habibur Rahman\Downloads\SJAHSS.png** | **Abstract:** In Nembe community from the 1980s the income patterns have changed. New income patterns have become prominent and men in these new occupations are more and more becoming chiefs. The objective of this study is to look at the effect these new income patterns on the chieftaincy institution in Nembe today. We adopted the expos facto research design. The study population is the entire membership of the chieftaincy councils in Ogbolomabiri and Bassambiri sections of the town. The total membership was 315 as at 2014, out of which a sample of 180 was purposively chosen. Stratified sampling was used to draw 90 each from Bassambiri and Ogbolomabiri. The 90 were obtained by convenience sampling. A structured Likert 4 point scale questionnaire was served on face to face basis. Result is presented in tables and simple percentages and analyzed with the arithmetic mean. The entry age into the institution has come down considerably. 47% of them were below age 40 when they were installed. More chiefs were installed within 2001 – 2010 (52%). All chiefs have had some form of formal education. 98% of chiefs receive income through new occupations, and they completely disagree that chiefs should reside permanently in their communities and should not hold political appointment.They are in complete agreement with the formalized entry requirements into the institution. These new income patterns have had tremendous effect on who becomes a chief, the politics of the institution and its relationship with the rest of the society.  **Keywords:** New Income, Income Patterns, Chieftaincy Institution, Nembe, Bayelsa State |

**INTRODUCTION**

The chieftaincy institution is as old as the day social segmentation began in society with the production of surplus value capable of sustaining a non-producing class. This institution has existed in all societies at one time or the other and in one form or the other and under different nomenclatures. The size and institutional structure differ from one society to another, but this elitist institution has always been there and structured as a center of hereditary devolution of power [1].

Today the chieftaincy institution is considered very unique in Nigeria. Apart from being an institution that wields power, the totality of our culture revolves around it. It represents the norms, values and life of the people [2, 3]. This institution with peculiarity to every community is one of the most visible cultural assets that have persisted despite the deliberate intention of the technologically stronger culture of the west to annihilate indigenous cultures. It is the root that presently anchors the social relationships and co-existence of the people. It is an indigenous institution of governance with executive, judicial and legislative powers [4]. Customarily it has the statutory functions of settlement of disputes of all kinds in the community and the codification of all customary rules and laws. It also provides leadership in the pursuit of the socio-economic development of the community [5, 4].

Official recognition of the institution began with the Ordinance of 1916 enacted by the colonial administration to protect the warrant chiefs and the few constitutional village monarchs who played comprador roles in the exploitation of the colonial territories. In present times, installed chief begins to function on receiving approval from the governor of the state, symbolized by receiving a staff of office and a certificate classifying the chief into a particular category [5, 6]. Chiefs enjoy certain economic and social privileges from the government as leaders of their communities. This has made the institution very attractive to many [5,6].

In present times, the institution is still highly revered, though the level of reverence varies from community to community. The institution has at the same time generated intense debate on its relevance in a constitutional democracy which emphasizes achievement rather than ascription [7]. Some feel the institution has lost much relevance because it has shed much of its adjudicatory powers to modern legal institutions. As Sorgwe [8] pointed out, from the colonial times laws were made not only to reduce the powers of the chiefs, but also to deprive the communities of their autonomy. Today many people prefer to go to the regular courts to have their disputes settled than to go to the chief’s council [6].

Some people have called for outright abrogation of the institution because they think its nature is now anachronistic to modern form of societal organization. They also say the behavior of some chiefs has been self-centred and very detrimental to the interest of their communities [2, 9]. But the institution has continued to subsist. It owes this to its relevance in keeping order and discipline in many communities, and is the institutional personification of the collective aspirations and culture of the people. But much more importantly it has adapted successfully to the contemporary socio-political setting in Nigeria [7, 10]. It now works in strong partnership with government institutions which has allowed control of the institution by the government [6]. This has consequently reduced the powers and relevance of the traditional rulers, making them subservient to the government [11].

In Nembe the chieftaincy institution dates back to the 15th century. It is a product of the centralized structures which ossified early and gave the Nembe people the advantage to control the colonial trade between the coast and the hinterland in the central Niger Delta. In Nembe community the institution exists within a rigid political hierarchy with the amayanabo at the apex and the chiefs or the heads of the war canoe houses below him [12].

Chiefs are the traditional rulers of the community and draw their authority and power from hereditary stools created in honour of worthy ancestors [13], who in their life time were considered great men in wealth and performed extra-ordinary deeds particularly in the service of the community and the king. The subjects are those who could trace ancestry to that personality. Those who are installed chiefs must be able to trace very direct link to the ancestor from the maternal line, but recently descendants from the paternal lines are also allowed. The successors are also expected to be men of surpassing wealth and outstanding deeds in the community.

Wealth has always defined the nature of the institution in Nembe. For a stool to be created the ancestor must have had tremendous wealth in his life time with very large lineages of descendants by blood or by acquisition for domestic or commercial service, though in modern times acquisition does not happen anymore. And all the successors to the stool must be men of power defined in terms of property and influence. This is the product of the unique conception of the chieftaincy institution among the Nembe people as “Houses”, being collectivities of related people expressing their abilities and power in military, economic and political dimensions.

Every chief must have a strong income base as one of the basic requirements at the point of installation, because requirements for installation and responsibilities thereafter are enormous. These enormous expenses used to be collectively met by members of the House, but recently it has become customary for the man ascending the stool to bear it alone. In Nembe a chief is not only expected to provide leadership for the continuous expansion of the personal and commonwealth of the House, but must be socially responsible for the welfare of members. It is his responsibility to make sure the children of the indigent members of the House are properly and gainfully employed within the structures of the House or elsewhere.

The installation of a chief or king in Nembe community is a very colourful festival accompanied by much pomp and pageantry. The crowning king or installing elder always declares on such occasions that the community is installing men who will be leaders of men [13].

At every given period the income pattern of the people has dictated who becomes a chief. Those who have access to the commanding sources of income are more likely to become chiefs than others. This has consequently defined the structure, direction and even the politics of the institution.

Nembe town is located contiguous to the mud flats between the Brass and St Nicholas Rivers of the Niger Delta in Bayelsa State of Nigeria. The people have always naturally eked out their living from the rivers around them and the adjourning forest linking them to the Ogbia mainland. Before the Nigerian Civil War fishing was the dominant occupation of the people. A little portion of the population engaged in trading and subsistent farming in the Mini Ikensi, Oluasiri and Okoroma districts of Nembe Land. Very few were civil servants. And it is always from those who excelled in these sources of income and accumulated enough wealth that chiefs emerged.

Presently the sources of wealth in Nembe have changed. The commanding height is no longer in fishing, farming and petty trading, but in political patronage, senior civil service, patronage from oil companies, high paying jobs in the private sector and high level businesses. These changes are generally engineered by access to education and changes in the structure of the local economy among other factors [14, 15].

Every year more and more men from these new income groups are being installed chiefs. The dominant income source determines not only the characteristics of those who become chiefs, but also the role the institution plays in the community. The chieftaincy institution in Nembe though has lost much of its powers, is still having much impact on the lives of the people. It is not just the major decision making body in the affairs particular to the Nembe people, but is presently the only body that still embodies that feeling of uniqueness that defines them as one people.

Chiefs in Nembe are successful men, captains of industry, academic, excellent politicians, retired army generals, consultants, contractors and business men [16].

What effect are these new income patterns having on the chieftaincy institution in Nembe today? This study intends looking at the new income patterns in Nembe and how these changes have affected the chieftaincy institution. This will show the significant relationship between the sources of income of the members of the chieftaincy institution today and the general character of the institution. It brings better understanding to the politics, the legislative direction and the role the institution plays in the affairs of the community.

Nembe is one of the principal communities in the Central Niger Delta with centralized structures, enabling it to establish and maintain an economic interest as the middlemen of the palm oil trade between the Europeans and the hinterland in the 19th century [17, 18]. This gave it a city-state status in its relationship with other communities in its sphere of economic influence which allowed it to accumulate tremendous wealth and power.

Presently, Nembe is one of the principal towns in Bayelsa State of Nigeria, and the headquarters of Nembe Local Government Area. It is made up of two principal contiguous communities – Ogbolomabiri and Bassambiri which co-exist in a union based on coparcenary/confederal principles [19]. It is to be noted though only the confederal principles have subsisted till present day. The Nembe Council of Chiefs is the assemblage of all recognized chiefs of Nembe who have been duly chalked by the king. The 2014 projected population figure for Nembe by the National Population Commission is 47,182.

**MATERIALS/METHOD**

We adopted the correlational research design to assess the relational effect the new income patterns have on the chieftaincy institution in Nembe. The study population is the entire members of the chieftaincy councils in Ogbolomabiri and Bassambiri sections of the town. The total membership is 315 as at the end of 2014. A sample size of 180 was purposively determined to give effective representation above 176 determined by Taro Yamane. Stratified sampling was used to allocate equal number of the sample to the two principal sections. The sample was obtained through convenience sampling technique. A structured questionnaire on a four point interval Likert scale was served the 180 respondents. We administered the questionnaire to the respondents in Nembe on a weekend when the funeral service of a prominent chief was held, where almost every chief was present. All the questionnaires were successfully retrieved. Unstructured interviews were also conducted. The results are presented in tables and analyzed in simple percentages. The data was assessed with the arithmetic mean. A criterion mean of **2.50** was established to interpret the result. Evaluation marks were set as follows: Strongly Agree/Very Fair = **75.01% - 100%,** Agree/Fair = **50.01% – 75.00%**, Disagree/Unfair = **25.01% - 50.00%,** Strongly Disagree/Very Unfair = **0.01% - 25.00%.**

**RESULT**

**Table-1: presentation of demographic information**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **VARIABLE** | **FREQUENCY** | **PERCENTAGE (%)** |
| *Age When Installed Chief* | | |
| 25 – 30 | **9** | **5%** |
| 31 – 35 | **33** | **18%** |
| 36 – 40 | **43** | **24%** |
| 41 – 45 | **64** | **36%** |
| 46 – 50 | **21** | **11%** |
| 51 – 55 | **10** | **6%** |
| 56 – 60 | **-** | **-** |
| TOTAL | **180** | **100%** |
| *Year Installed a Chief* | | |
| 1965 – 1970 | **-** | **-** |
| 1971 – 1975 | **-** | **-** |
| 1976 – 1980 | **6** | **3%** |
| 1981 – 1985 | **9** | **5%** |
| 1986 – 1990 | **9** | **5%** |
| 1991 – 1995 | **12** | **6%** |
| 1996 – 2000 | **45** | **25%** |
| 2001 – 2005 | **48** | **27%** |
| 2006 – 2010 | **48** | **27%** |
| 2011 – 2015 | **3** | **2%** |
| TOTAL | **180** | **100%** |
| *Source of Income When Installed a Chief* | | |
| Fishing. | **-** | **-** |
| Oil palm tree cultivation. | **-** | **-** |
| Palm oil making. | **3** | **2%** |
| Trading. | **15** | **8%** |
| Sea faring. | **3** | **2%** |
| Company worker. | **9** | **5%** |
| Farming. | **-** | **-** |
| Political patronage. | **36** | **20%** |
| Civil servant. | **84** | **47%** |
| Patronage from oil companies. | **9** | **5%** |
| Government contractor. | **3** | **2%** |
| Contractor in the oil sector | **6** | **3%** |
| Lecturer | **6** | **3%** |
| Staff of oil company | **6** | **3%** |
| Commercial deep sea/pond fishing | **-** | **-** |
| TOTAL | **180** | **100%** |
| *Academic Qualification When Installed a Chief* | | |
| No formal education. | **-** | **-** |
| FSLC | **6** | **3%** |
| WASC/NECO/Equivalents. | **51** | **28%** |
| ND/HND/Bachelors. | **93** | **52%** |
| Masters/Doctorate. | **30** | **17%** |
| TOTAL | **180** | **100%** |

The table-1 shows that 64 chiefs were installed within the age bracket of 41 – 45, making up 36% of the sample, while only 9 was installed within the age bracket of 25 – 30 amounting to 5%. Also 48 chiefs each were installed within 2001 – 2005 and 2006 – 2010 making a combined 54%, while only 3 were installed within 2011 – 2015, making up just 2%. The source of income of 84 chiefs in the sample is civil service making up the single largest group with 47%, followed by political patronage with 36 making up 20%. The least is in palm oil making with 3 chiefs making up 2%. On academic qualification, majority of the chiefs fell under ND/HND/Bachelors with 93 making up 52% and FSLC had the least with 6 amounting to 3%.

**Table 2: presentation of result on issues and direction of the chieftaincy council**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| ITEMS | SA  (4) | A  (3) | D  (2) | SD  (1) | ∑ | X | X% | EVALUATION |
| The chieftaincy stools should have self-recognition from the community and not from government | **54** | **30** | **27** | **69** | **180** | **2.38** | **59.50** | **AGREE** |
| A chief should not be a member or head of CDC | **66** | **42** | **33** | **39** | **180** | **2.75** | **68.75** | **AGREE** |
| A chief should not be a member or head of any functional committee in the community | **36** | **21** | **60** | **63** | **180** | **2.16** | **54.00** | **AGREE** |
| The monetary requirements to become a chief is too high | **54** | **48** | **39** | **39** | **180** | **2.65** | **66.25** | **AGREE** |
| The material requirements to become a chief are too enormous | **30** | **51** | **60** | **39** | **180** | **2.40** | **60.00** | **AGREE** |
| Chiefs should be directly responsible for the welfare of indigent members of the House | **18** | **27** | **75** | **60** | **180** | **2.02** | **50.50** | **AGREE** |
| Members of the House should have right to recall erring chief from the council | **39** | **87** | **21** | **33** | **180** | **2.72** | **68.00** | **AGREE** |
| All chiefs should reside in the community where the stool is domiciled | **6** | **9** | **78** | **87** | **180** | **1.63** | **40.75** | **DISAGREE** |
| No chief should hold political appointment | **16** | **24** | **70** | **70** | **180** | **1.92** | **48.00** | **DISAGREE** |
| There should be a written code of conduct for the chiefs | **81** | **84** | **15** |  | **180** | **3.36** | **84.00** | **S/AGREE** |
| The chieftaincy council should publish annual income and expenses statement. | **48** | **60** | **39** | **33** | **180** | **2.68** | **67.00** | **AGREE** |
| Grand Mean / Mean % |  |  |  |  |  | **2.42/** | **60.61** |  |

**(SA – Strongly Agree, A – Agree, D – Disagree, SD – Strongly Disagree, ∑ - Total, x – Mean, x% - Mean Percentage).**

The evaluation in Table-2 shows that of the variables presented the respondents strongly agreed with one item with 84 x% and disagreed with two variables with 40.75 and 48 x% respectively. They agreed with the rest items with x% ranging from 50.50 – 68.75.

**Table 3: presentation of result on evaluation on specific requirements to become a chief**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| ITEMS | VF  (4) | F  (3) | U  (2) | VU  (1) | ∑ | X | X% | EVALUATION |
| Must make one million naira non-refundable deposit. | **51** | **57** | **48** | **24** | **180** | **2.75** | **68.75** | **FAIR** |
| Must be married | **123** | **45** | **12** |  | **180** | **3.62** | **90.50** | **V/FAIR** |
| Must have personal house at home. | **99** | **63** | **18** |  | **180** | **3.45** | **86.25** | **V/FAIR** |
| Must have children | **63** | **57** | **60** |  | **180** | **3.02** | **75.50** | **V/FAIR** |
| Must be at least 30 years old | **111** | **54** | **9** | **6** | **180** | **3.50** | **87.50** | **V/FAIR** |
| Grand Mean/Mean % |  |  |  |  | **180** | **3.27** | **81.70** | **V/FAIR** |

**(VF – Very Fair, F – Fair, U – Unfair, VU – Very Unfair, ∑ - Total, x – Mean, x% - Mean Percentage).**

This table-3 shows that the respondents considered all the requirements very fair with the highest x% of 90.50 going to item 2, except item 1 which they considered just fair with x% of 68.75.

**DISCUSSION**

We can see from the result that more and more men in the new income categories are becoming chiefs. The old income sources that appeared in the sample (trading and palm oil making) combined to make only 10%. Day after day people in Nembe community are moving away from the old income sources to the new income sources for which their education has prepared them. Educational opportunities are many in the state, and education is the single largest factor for social mobility in Nembe and many parts of the world [14, 15]. This is reflecting also in the age at which many are being installed. The occupations most of them are engaged in do not require many years of drudgery before one becomes significantly wealthy enough to take a chieftaincy title. The rate of social mobility is higher now. They have literally abandoned the old occupations that go with much drudgery. It is significant that 47% of the sample became chief when they were 40 years and below. Observations have shown that in the past a man of 40 years was considered too young to become a chief.

In table II the respondents agreed to items 3 and 6, but it is instructive to observe that their evaluation marks are weak on the positive side. They barely moved over the dividing line. Item 3 had 54.00 X% while item 6 had 50.50 X%. This shows the articulation of self-interest the chieftaincy institution is capable of. In both sections of the town chiefs are members of, and at times chairmen of functional committees, which completely negate the traditional political structure of the community which recognizes chiefs as only policy makers and do not involve themselves with policy implementation. These committees especially those on electricity, water, oil & gas and revenue collection from satellite and fishing settlements are steady sources of good income. In 2010, struggle over control of revenue from an oil and gas company operating in the Okoroma area of Nembe led to open crisis in the chieftaincy council in Ogbolomabiri. It only subsided with the intervention of the king leading to the expulsion of one of the parties from the council.

Nkuaku [5] had similar findings when he studied the problems of chieftaincy succession in Enugu-Ukwu in Enugu State, Nigeria. The position of the king and other chieftaincy positions were seen primarily as sources of wealth accumulation. They readily disregard historical and customary procedures and requirements of succession the moment they are not favoured, at the costly expense of peace, service and development of the community.

Taking direct responsibility for indigent members of the House is not agreeable to chiefs now. As the income sources changed so has the structure of the individual Chieftaincy Houses. The wealth that enabled the chief to ascend the stool is no longer a product of collective effort. The chieftaincy house is no longer an economic unit bringing in commonwealth. Every chief now sponsors himself. He therefore does not feel any obligation to spend his money on other members of the House except very close relatives. The chiefs have almost completely shed the traditional responsibilities they owed the members. The act of *ira twein* whereby the chief presents a new wrapper of appreciable quality to every female member that gives birth to a child, which indicates the right the chief has over children born into the House, is no longer practiced.

It is much easier to accumulate wealth through these new income sources than the old occupations, and the formal environment in which many chiefs work have made the chieftaincy council more money-based, and the entry procedures and requirements are now definite and highly formalized. The very fair evaluation mark on all items in table III is very significant. This also reflects in the strongly agree evaluation in table II in respect of having a written code of conduct. The flamboyance accompanying the office of a chief made possible by their new occupations has made the institution very attractive to all. The desire to be a chief is now so strong among the people that bickering over who should ascend a particular stool has become common in all the chieftaincy groups [10].

It is common knowledge in Nembe that before now it was not common to see people put themselves forward to occupy any stool. They had to be convinced and at times pressurized to ascend the stool. The institution has responded to the current high desire by allowing the balkanization of existing chieftaincy stools to smaller ones since the early 1990s, at the same time filtering who comes in with the high monetary and material requirements to maintain the air of reserve and respectability. The Wikipedia Free Encyclopedia [6] also noted that in present times in Nigeria competition for royal stools has become very intense due to the privileges the institution attracts.

Their disagreement with items 8 and 9 in table II more than anything else shows the tremendous effect these new income sources is having on members of the institution. The issues here have direct relationship with their source of income. Table I shows that 20% of them have political patronage as their source of income. But in reality it is more than that. In Bayelsa State almost all chiefs even the civil servants are directly or indirectly involved in active politics. Many reap from the process enormous wealth that enables them to finance the installation and sustain their lifestyle. Even government contractors (2%) are a form of political patronage. They are all part of the process of power exercise and control.

Their disagreement with item 8: chiefs expected to reside permanently in the community, is based on the fact that 80% of their income comes from occupations that require their staying in the state capital or other parts of the state. Telling chiefs to shun political appointment and reside permanently in the community is directly opposed to their income and self-interest. Most of the chiefs in the community are active politicians, and politics in the state has found its way into the institution, bringing profound effect on the activities of the institution and the relationship among the members.

Now the institution is subordinated to political powers and the government, and the government through its representatives is now having a strong say in, and in some cases actually deciding who becomes a king, head of the chieftaincy council and who ascends certain influential stools. In 2013, a king was to be crowned in Agrisaba (a prominent satellite community of Nembe), but a crisis ensured because government interest in who should be crowned was very visible and high. At the end of the process the government’s candidate was crowned. This kind of situation has been observed to occur in many parts of Nigeria. The Wikipedia Free Encyclopedia [6] and Omole [11] when analyzing the relationship between the institution and the government in contemporary Nigeria cited similar cases in Kwara, Cross River and Yobe States and the Zazzau Traditional Emirate in Nigeria. They say this situation has consequently reduced the powers and relevance of the traditional rulers, making them subservient to the government.

The government and politicians exercise great control over the institution by giving recognition to kings (the highest personality in the institution) by giving them staff of office, a certificate and periodically reviewing and classifying kings into different categories of recognition accompanied by certain regular monetary benefits. It was customary to see government officials (politicians) pay courtesy call on chiefs and kings in their palaces whenever they visit any locality. What obtains now is the chiefs go to visit the government officials sometimes in groups, and sometimes on being summoned. They obey the summons because the chiefs are politicians and those heading the government are their political leaders.

Political differences among members of the council have generated many crises in the council. Members of the chieftaincy council now hardly work in concert. Particularly in the Bassambiri section of the town, for a long time beginning from 2009, there has not been peaceful succession of leadership in the council. At various times it has been witnessed by the whole community, that factions in the council that is closely linked with government would come assisted by security personnel and remove the incumbent chairman and put another of their choice without regard to the by-laws or the standing rules of the council. These squabbles have been observed to intensify whenever general elections in the state are near. A similar incident happened even at the eve of the governorship election of 5th December, 2015 and was repeated at the eve of the 9th January, 2016 re-run governorship election.

Torulagha [20] concluded in his study of the problems militating against the development of Bayelsa State that political influence has so pervaded the chieftaincy institution that crises and conflicts in the chieftaincy councils in many notable towns have become common. He said this is because many political leaders manipulate the council to use it to gain political control of the communities.

It is noteworthy that table III containing the formalized entry requirements does not include any item on educational attainment. The chieftaincy council did not see any reason to place a minimum educational qualification below which one cannot become a chief. Observations have consistently shown that sound education is not a strong point in Nigeria’s political class. The motor park politics which has become common in Nigeria does not emphasize intellectual discourse on, and understanding of party manifesto and integrity of their leaders, political education and grooming of political leaders. It rather emphasizes win by all means and at all cost. The system therefore favours men who are daring enough to do anything to give victory to their party. Education is not strategic to this achievement. This lack of interest in education is what is reflecting in table III.

This character of the chieftaincy institution in Nembe community whereby they always act in self-interest, moved by wealth and power and aligned with the political class has been extensively chronicled in other studies across Nigeria. Omole [11], Nkuaku [5], Agbese [7], Harneit-Sievers [10], in their analyses of the chieftaincy institution in Nigeria concluded that it has successfully formed a mutually benefiting alliance with government.

**CONCLUSION**

We have seen that in Nembe the income patterns have changed over the decades from the traditional occupations of fishing, farming, trading and junior civil service to political patronage, senior civil service, patronage from oil companies, high paying jobs in the private sector and high level businesses. This has determined those who can become chiefs, the politics of the institution and its relationship with the rest of the society.

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