



**MINISTRY OF CHIEFTAINCY &  
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**REPUBLIC OF GHANA**

**A LOOK AT THE CHIEFTAINCY INSTITUTION**

Do you know that the Chieftaincy Institution is one of the most important Cultural Institutions and Heritage of Ghana?

The Institution is as old as the history of the country. Though it is one of the oldest Cultural Institutions and traditions of Ghana, it continues to play very significant and relevant roles in national development. The good news is that the Institution continues to survive the challenges and influences of the western values and practices. How much of the institution do you know? First and foremost, the Chieftaincy institution is not only limited to Ghana. It is practiced in many other African countries. Though there are similarities, there are also differences in the structure, operations and functions of the Institution from one country to the other.

**ORIGIN**

How did the Chieftaincy Institution begin? There are different accounts of oral tradition relating to the origin of the Institution. According to one of the stories, at a point in time when a group of people settled at a particular place and began to structure their society, they thought it prudent to nominate or elect someone who will be their leader. Most often they looked out for somebody who was outspoken, pro-active and had leadership qualities. With time, it gradually metamorphosed into a well-structured system which today has become the institution of Chieftaincy with the creation of stools and skins as symbols of kingship and authority. This is only one version of the story on the origin of the Institution. Today, the Institution has become a well-established one with defined rules, functions and structure. It is one of the best means of projecting and promoting our Culture and Heritage. The Chieftaincy Institution in Ghana is guaranteed by the **National Constitution of 1992. Article 270(1)** of the Constitution of Ghana clearly states that the Institution of Chieftaincy, together with its Traditional Councils as established by customary law and usage is hereby guaranteed.

## **WHO IS A CHIEF?**

According to the Chieftaincy Act 795(2008), a chief means a person who hailing from the appropriate family and lineage has been validly nominated, elected or selected and enstooled, enskinned or installed as a chief or Queenmother in accordance with the relevant customary law and usage. This is also stated in Article 227 of the 1992 Constitution.

**CATEGORIES:** The categories of Chiefs as stated in section 58 of the Chieftaincy Act 759 are:

- The Asantehene and paramount Chiefs
- Divisional Chiefs
- Sub-divisional Chiefs
- Adikrafo
- other Chiefs recognized by the National House

A person does not qualify to be a chief if that person has been convicted of high treason, treason, high crime or for an offence involving the security of the state, fraud, dishonesty, or moral turpitude. Article 276(1) of the Constitution and Section 57(3) of the Chieftaincy Act (2008) state that a Chief shall not take part in active party politics. This is quite important because Chiefs are supposed to be above reproach. They are the custodians of our Culture and Heritage. They play the fatherly figure role for all members in the community. They are therefore supposed to be politically neutral and see to it that there is peace, unity and understanding in their traditional areas.

**The Chieftaincy Institution is a noble and revered one.**

**TITLES:** Chiefs have different titles in Ghana which reflect the geographical location of the chief. In the Volta region, the most popular name (title) is Togbe (which also means an elderly man). In the Akan speaking territories, the most common one is Nana (Chief) Ohema (Queen-mother). The people of Ga origin call their Chief "Nii". There are other titles. The Asantehene for instance is His Majesty Otumfou. Every chief has a stool or skin and they sit on these stools and skins during special functions and occasions.

**FUNCTIONS:** Chiefs perform various functions. Culturally, they symbolize the Culture and Heritage of the people often projected at festivals. Politically, they are the traditional heads and authority in their traditional areas. They see to the peace and unity of their people. They also exercise executive, legislative and judicial powers since pre-colonial times. Chiefs also see to it that there are development projects in

their areas for the benefit of their subjects. The best place you can find them dressed elegantly and beautifully in their gold ornament (especially in Southern Ghana) is during festival times.

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