



**REPUBLIC OF GHANA**

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## **THE CHIEFTAINCY INSTITUTION IN GHANA: A MODEL FOR AFRICA**

Reading through the novels of the celebrated African writer, the late Chinua Achebe of blessed memory, I found this adage which has fascinated me so much. It is about the proverbial lizard which says if it jumps from the high iroko tree and nobody praises it, it will praise itself. Why not?

This is to admit the fact that there is nothing wrong to praise oneself if need be. So the proverbial lizard will look up and down several times by raising the head and say to itself, I have done well. Perhaps taking a cue from the proverbial lizard, the chieftaincy institution in Ghana may also be congratulating itself for becoming the centre of attraction for other chieftaincy institutions in Africa over the last couple of years, notwithstanding its own challenges. The Institution has become the toast of many and the pace setter in Africa when it comes to chieftaincy matters, attracting scores of friendly visits to under study our system. Unfortunately, the irony of the situation is that whilst the institution locally is being seen as the stone unfit for the building; it is becoming the very cornerstone of the building for others.

In recent times some suggestions have gone round advocating for the abolition of the institution on the grounds that the institution has outlived its usefulness. That it has become outmoded, a historical and cultural relic of the past. This will be the subject matter for another lovely day. By and large, the chieftaincy Institution is gaining prominence. Over the last couple of years since the establishment of the Ministry, many prominent delegations including chiefs and people from traditional local authorities across Africa have been here to under study how our chieftaincy system works.

Last year, 2013, two such delegations from Sudan and Zambia respectively were in the country. The Zambian delegation, by far the largest consisted of eleven prominent chiefs, and officials from the Zambian Ministry of Chiefs and Traditional Affairs led by the sector minister herself, Prof. Nkandu Luo. The visits were in recognition of the important role of the chieftaincy institution in Ghana towards peace and national development. There are indications that this year many other similar delegations from other countries including Malawi and possibly La Cote d' Ivoire will also come to share their experiences with us.

**Opinions:** The chieftaincy institution in Ghana is described as the kingpin of our culture and heritage. According to Prof. Irene Odotei a distinguished scholar on chieftaincy, the institution is one of the most enduring traditional institutions in Ghana, and has displayed remarkable resilience from pre-colonial through colonial and post colonial times. Chiefs combine executive, legislative, judicial and religious roles. Bofo Arthurs also contends that chiefs are (hold) political and social power centers in their areas of jurisdiction. The Institution symbolizes socio-political and sacred power vested in chiefs in many parts of Ghana.

The story is told of a couple who found themselves in a strange community at dead of night when they lost their way. Having no relatives or friends in the community, they requested to be sent to the chief's palace. There they had the best of attention. They requested for a few more days at the palace. This shows the security and comfort the institution provides.

In exception of very few cases, the institution has been able to hold many societies together from falling apart. It has also played a key role in bringing development to various communities over the years.

**Interest:** The interest of many African countries to come and understudy our chieftaincy system and also share their experiences with us as a result of several factors. One is the fact that our chieftaincy system has been able to withstand the influence of foreign cultures and values. It has remained the king pin and the anchor of our traditional governance and heritage. These observations were echoed by the Zambian Minister of Chiefs and Traditional Affairs Prof. Nkandu Luo by describing our institution as "vibrant and robust". The Ambassador of the Republic of La Cote d' Ivoire His Excellency Bernard Koutou also disclosed that our chieftaincy system is a great model.

Another factor for the attraction is the way our chieftaincy system has effectively been blended and integrated into our formal political governance system and administration. One recalls the British Colonial Administrative policy of Indirect Rule where chiefs played a key role. This has been the practice since then though with some modifications here and there by successive governments. For instance, per Article 276(1) of the 1992 constitution, a chief shall not take part in active party politics; and any chief wishing to do so and seeking election to parliament shall abdicate his stool or skin. There are good reasons for this. The caveat however is that notwithstanding the above clause of the constitution, a chief may be appointed to any public office for which he (including she) is otherwise {(Article 276 (2)}. The system and practice is different in some other African countries. This is certainly one of the beauties of our country's democracy.

It suffice to state that during the interventions with the various foreign delegations, the minister for chieftaincy and Traditional Affairs, Dr. Henry Seidu Daannaa emphasized

that in spite of the mutual relationship between the government and the chieftaincy institution, the government does not interfere into chieftaincy matters by determining who becomes a chief or otherwise. This is the opposite story of some African countries with its attendant consequences. The chieftaincy institution in Ghana albeit the challenges has been able to hold itself together for decades, and provided leadership at all levels in our national life.

There were times when the intervention of Nananom was the panacea to national crisis. The nobility and reverence accorded the institution in Ghana has also contributed significantly to its positive image on the local and international scene. Our chieftaincy institution over the decades continues to play the unifying role in our diverse socio-cultural, political and religious environment, projecting our values and culture.

**Comparism:** Unlike the system of practice in many other African countries where the structure and operations of the chieftaincy institution is not well defined, we have a well coordinated structure and system, starting from the Divisional/Traditional Council through the Regional Houses of Chiefs to the National House of Chiefs.

Again the chieftaincy institution in Ghana is anchored firmly under Article 270(1) of the 1992 constitution which explicitly states that “The Institution of chieftaincy, together with its traditional Councils as established by law and usage is hereby guaranteed.” Again, though the process of installing a chief may differ from one traditional area to another, the ceremonies often associated with these events are most often national in character. A lot of dignitaries and other traditional rulers attend such festivals and durbars.

Interestingly, our system in Ghana does not permit Parliament the highest legislative body in the country to enact any law which confers on any person or authority the right to accord or withdraw recognition to or from a chief for any purpose what so ever or (b) in any way detracts or derogates from the honour and dignity of the institution of chieftaincy {(Article 270 (2)}. The purpose of the chieftaincy Act, Act 759 (2008) an Act to revise and consolidate the chieftaincy Act 370 (1971) is to bring the provisions of the institution in conformity with the constitution and to provide for related matters. The Act has since become a reference document for most African states on matters of chieftaincy.

**Reforms:** The chieftaincy institution in Africa is going through reforms. These reforms according to one renowned scholar on chieftaincy are to make the Institution of Chieftaincy stronger, enduring and more responsive to the needs of modern times. The chieftaincy institution in Ghana is not left out in these reforms. To borrow the words of the minister for Chieftaincy and Traditional Affairs, of the institution of Chieftaincy will survive the next century, it depends on chiefs themselves, the stated.

One of the major reforms executed by the National House of Chiefs , facilitated by the Ministry of Chieftaincy and Traditional Affairs was the development of the Code of Royal Ethics for chiefs which was launched last year. In his preface, the President of the National House of Chiefs Wulugu Naba Pugansoa, Naa Prof. John Sebiyam Nabila stated that 99 percent of chiefs (as respondents) agreed to having a code for the institution. This is a demonstration of the fact that this code of royal ethics for chiefs has a phenomenal support of both chiefs and non-chiefs, he concluded. The representation of Queenmothers at both the Regional and National Houses of Chiefs is another reform by the National House in collaboration with the Ministry of Chieftaincy and Traditional Affairs and other stakeholders. (see Ghanaian Times, Wednesday October 30, 2013 and Editorial, Daily Graphic, Friday, January 3, 2014).

It is expected that these reforms will go a long way to improve the chieftaincy Institution and Administration in the country and promote a more vibrant system. The undeniable fact is that our chieftaincy institution and Administration has made a tremendous positive impact on the continent of Africa. It behoves on all of us therefore in our individual and collective capacities to uplift the image of the institution which is perhaps the last of our cultural heritage. Hold on! Do you know for a fact that the chieftaincy institution in Zambia does not allow a chief to give birth to twins?

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