

A review of traditional authority and its impact on the acceptance of agricultural innovations in Western Nigeria

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Abstract

The paper examines the nature of traditional authority in a typical African setting and dealt with it at three levels of articulation - the kingdom, the community and the family. It defines that traditional authority as the system of uncodified rules, customs, beliefs and practices which a people have and subscribes to for regulating the pattern of social behaviour among individual members of the society.

The analysis came out with the conclusion that the most important impact of agricultural innovations could be found at the community and the family levels. At both levels, traditional authority could be used to discourage or encourage the adoption of agricultural innovations by farmers. Several concrete examples from empirical research findings and field observations by the author were used to demonstrate this phenomenon.

Introduction

Before the European contact with West Africa, the peoples of this area were organised into Kingdoms along ethnic or language groups. The peoples of these kingdoms traditionally are town dwellers, they settle in relatively large conglomerates of communities. Each kingdom consists of many town and numerous small communities called villages which are in some way subordinate to the large towns. The people of these towns and communities have evolved from generation to generation, through a process of oral tradition, a system of well defined social order backed up with strict social norms which are jealously guarded and transmitted from generation to generation for the maintenance of peace, harmony and the well being of its members. One of the processes of maintaining social order is the system of traditional authority.

This paper sets out to examine the nature of traditional authority among the Yoruba people of Western Nigeria. Three levels of social organisation - the kingdom, the community, and the family will be discussed to illustrate the impact of traditional authority on the individual innovativeness.

By traditional authority in this context is meant a system of rules, customs beliefs, and practices which a people have for regulating the pattern of social interaction among individual members of the society.

Review of literature

The purpose of this section is to place in perspective previous relevant work on how power and authority works in practice. Coser and Rosenberg (1969: 133), said that power, is the ability to determine the behaviour of others according to one's own wishes. They went further to say that although philosophers and political theorists had started to show some interest in the social as well as human consequences of power and authority, the major sociological contributions started with the writings of Weber and Simmel. According to them, other sociological theorists such as Pareto, Michels and Mosea, all of the 19th Century Italians have also contributed to our present sociological perspective of power. The most significant work in this assignment is that of Marx Weber. Weber (1946) distinguished between three types of authority based on the legitimacy from which the authority derives. The first is *charismatic authority*, which he referred to as a rule over men, to which the governed submit because it goes beyond human qualities. The legitimacy rests on the supernatural. The second type of authority is legal legitimate authority. This has been further explicated by Goldharmer and Shils (1969: 145). According to them, legitimate power is legal when the recognition of legitimacy rests on the beliefs by the subordinated individuals in the legality of the laws, decrees, directives promulgated by the power holder. A typical example of legal power is the power of arrest by a policeman vested in him by the laws of the State.

The third type of authority is the traditional authority, which refers to the psychic attitude set for the traditional work-a-day and to the belief in the everyday routine as an inviolable norm of conduct.

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The legitimacy rests on the belief in the sanctity of traditions by virtue of which the power holder exercises his power and in the traditional sanctity of the order which he issues.

If one examines the literature on the adoption of innovations, there are relevant research data from the developed and developing countries of the world which demonstrate the influence of social structure on the behaviour of individuals within a community. Some two or three decades ago, there were uncritical devotion to individual level research and analysis of data in order to proffer explanations for adoption behaviour and the diffusion process in agriculture. Due to the later development of better research tools and skills, it has been shown that group and community level variables are very important in explaining adoption behaviour and innovativeness of farmers.

The modifying influence of the community and of groups to which an individual belongs on his attitudes, feelings, sentiments and on his social behaviour generally has long been recognised. In this study of locality groups influence on the adoption of new farm practices in 47 Wisconsin townships, Van den Ban (1960) concluded that the social structure and culture of the locality groups are the major factors influencing the adoption of new farm practices. He discovered that a man with high level of education on a large farm, and with high net worth, but residing in a township with low level of adoption of new farm practices, adopted fewer new practices than he would, if he farmed (in a township) where the average adoption level was high. The low adoption townships were said to have a population that were mainly of calvanistic Dutch origin (82%) characterised by greater social isolation and strict inform social control. The high adoption townships on the other hand, had a population that are Lutheran by religious conviction and are characterised by free individual action. Mesher (1966: 65) observed that the community in which a farmer lives "is this chief source of security It is largely on his community that a farmer must depend for social approval. Community tradition defines what sorts of conduct are proper for each person. They define the actions an individual may undertake on its own, and those for which he should first obtain community consent. In India, Fliegal et al (1968: 52) discovered that social psychological factors

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contribute to a mental isolation' which is an important community level variable in adoption of innovation. They claimed that "traditional norms and beliefs remain a strong obstacle to adoption and will likely remain a long-term problem until they are overcome." May also showed that there is a negative direction of relationship between the concentration of formal position in a few hands and the adoption of innovation.

The influence of the family on the individual has been known to be very strong. A person, first and foremost belongs to a family. Whether a son, daughter, father, mother or a relative of these, each member is expected to conform to the role expectations of the family in order to maintain a position of esteem within the family, and consequently in his neighbourhood and in his community. Several empirical studies have shown that family members often serve as referents or consultants in decisions to adopt new farm and home practices. One of such studies was by Lionberger (1960: 74) who showed that family values positively associated with the acceptance of innovations or improvements in farming were (a) desire for higher educational attainment of children and the assignment of priority to this over expenditure for farming operations; (b) high value placed on social status and participation in formal social groups and (c) high priority on possession of improvements and conveniences in the home as a family goal. In the same study, Lionberger showed that at least three studies in New York adoption of farm and home practices are associated with the family structure. For example, women with small children have adopted more home practices than older women and those without children. An Indiana study revealed that the stimulation received by husbands from their wives is highly important in getting the husbands to adopt new agricultural practices.

Levels of traditional authority and their forms of expression

Traditional authority among the Yoruba flow from her socio-political organisation. This can be analysed at three levels. The first is the State, which is organised into kingdoms, each kingdom has a crowned Oba or King. Located within semi-autonomous communities which make up each kingdom are heads of these communities called Bale. The Bales owe allegiance to

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the king and pay homage to him. The Bales are ranked according to several factors; the size of the community over which they adjudicate, the size of their annual or periodical tributes, and the personal influence of the Bale. At periodic intervals, the king may send to the Bales in his domain and request them to make contribution in cash, in materials and men towards an event such as a festival being held by the king. Once a year, all able bodied men led by hunters in each community go a-hunting for the king and the games are presented to the king. When the king's house needs repairs, he makes contributions in cash materials and personnel for the repair, rebuilding the palace or the construction of a new one. In some parts of Yoruba land, namely among the Egba and Oyo Yoruba, certain chiefs in the two are allocated tributary communities, and the chief acts as their patron and receive tributes on behalf of the king. However, Fadipe (1970: 201) pointed out that it was chiefly in regard to the conduct of external affairs as well as in the collection of revenues and in raising military levies that the capital town exercises great influence. In some communities, conquered villages had political residence in their midst who ensures that the annual tribute was duly collected and remitted to the king.

The king wields both authority, and influence which calls forth spontaneous loyalty to him by his subjects. Fadipe (1970: 205) said that the king is regarded with a respect approaching veneration. A popular maxim for the king is "Oba Alase Igba Keji Orisa - the king, the commander and wilder of authority and god's deputy." This stem from the belief of the people that the king occupies the highest position in the land, and hence in terms of authority and greatness, he is next to God, because the king rules for and on behalf of God on earth. However, inspite of this immense sacred aura of kingship, the chiefs in council can by their collective authority depose a king for gross misdemeanor and send him on banishment or forced to commit suicide.

The second level of traditional authority is at the village level, where the 'bale' with is appointed council of chiefs adjudicate in all matters of concern to the community. In some cases the traditional authority of a king or 'bale' is more symbolic than functional. The Bale or the king seeks the advice of his chiefs, and the Bale simply expresses the unani-

mous or consensus opinion of his councillors, as if it were his own. There is a paradox, that the Bale or the king whatever may be the case is installed as Bale or king by a king-maker chief in the first instance, once installed, the incumbent is no longer subject to the authority of the chief who installed him; rather the chief who installed him must pay absolute homage to the king and the chief thenceforth becomes one of the king's subjects.

The chiefs meet regularly with the Bale to discuss the affairs of the village. Quarrels which are not within the powers of family heads to settle are usually referred to the Bale who sits in council with his chiefs to bring about settlement between two parties in conflict. Each community is organised into age grades in their chronological order of birth. Individuals belonging to each age grade will usually be between plus or minus one to five years in their age differentials. The various age groups are organised within each community to perform specific social functions such as defence, communal work for the entire village or inter-village activities. Each age group also carries out mutual aid activities within the group. The age groups are subject to the authority of the king and his council of chiefs to whom the age groups give their unquestionable loyalty. On the other hand, group norms and group sanctions foster solidarity and conformity by the individual members of the group.

Apart from age groups there are several political and cultural organisations among the Yoruba who wield political and traditional authority on its members and on the society at large.

The Ogboni Secret Cult had traditional political function among the Yoruba. It is secret, because admission into the society is by special initiation. It has its traditional symbol of authority known as "Eda". When an accredited messenger of Ogboni carries the "Eda" this represents the authority of the messenger in issuing summons to individuals to appear before a special tribunal constituted by the executive of the society. According to Fadipe (1970: 244) the symbol was often used for the purpose of restoring peace and quiet between two fighting individuals who refused to be appeased by any other forms of appeal. In such a circumstance, "the arrival of 'Eda' and the placing of it in the hands of one or both of the principal combatants was tantamount to an order, too peremptory to be ignored, for the suspension of the

fight. The ignoring of this order meant defiance of the collective authority of the Ogboni, an act which was visited with dire penalties," Peter Lloyd (1967: 38) in his own discussion of Ogboni said that Ogboni's authority include pronouncement of death sentences. In some areas, the function of Ogboni is limited to dealing with chiefs - a court which can administer justice without fear or favour to any chief no matter how powerful.

One cultural organisation is the Hunters' Guild. It serves both the society and its members in several ways. It helps to defend and keep watch over the community during war and peace times, against invaders and night marauders. They have their own officers and possess certain jurisdiction over their members. They regulate matters of professional interest to their members, mutual help and in exercising disciplinary measures against members who violate their code of conduct. The guild takes over the performance of funeral rights of its members.

Occupational associations is another feature of Yoruba communities. Since most professions are along sex lines, most occupation guilds and associations also follow sex lines. An admission fee is charged in cash and in kind for new entrants, and no one is allowed to practice a profession unless he is a registered member of the guild. A member of professional association in one community on transfer or migration to another community has to perform the duties of a new entrant before being allowed to practise his profession.

The third level of this analysis of traditional authority is the family. In this context, the family actually refers to the extended family or the descent group in which male or female trace their relationship from one named ancestor within the community. New members are added through marriage and procreation while the dead ones are believed to retain their interests in and influence over the group from another world beyond, so that there is an element of perpetuity to the group or the extended family. The oldest male member of the family is usually the head of the family. If he is a titled chief, he represents a symbol of greater authority in the family circle since he is conversant with the happenings in the community at large. Every member of the family consults him and obtains his approval for most things they wish to do. In marriage, whether of his own direct sons and daugh-

ters or of his close kin, the head of the family speaks and carries out or accepts marriage obligations on behalf of the members of the family. The head of the family and the most elderly members are responsible for finding mates for their sons and daughters. In most cases the agreement between the parents of would-be parents-in-laws would have been negotiated before the young couples are informed. In this respect, the mother of a potential bride and the young girl are in this category of being merely informed after the father or the head of the family has given his blessing to the union.

The invitation of young adults in the family into various social and cultural organisations is through the head of the family who literally hands over the initiate to his or her age group or other society. Usually, as the children grow up say to about age eight years and upwards, they work on the farm for the head of the family and they will continue like this until they are ready to get married. Until that time they do not own any farm or property of their own. In case of a man, some land and farm is allocated to him a couple of years before his marriage. It is only at marriage that the young man graduate from his absolute stewardship. Marriage however does not preclude him and his wife from contributing labour towards the farm of the head of the family, especially during peak labour requirements on the farm.

There is strong sensitivity to the age difference between members of the same family. Authority usually devolves on the most senior member in any occasion. The wives in the family are by rank lower than the children born into the family before the women are married into the family. Therefore such wives are expected to pay the children due respect by kneeling down to greet them in the morning, and by not calling the children by their given names but by an appellation. It goes without saying that it is the collective responsibility of every adult member of the family to help bring up the young ones.

The influence of modernization

There is no doubt that traditional authority, at the three levels of analysis thus presented has been waning and some aspects have almost completely disappeared. The first impact to be noticed was in the imposition of colonial administration in which

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the authority of the traditional rulers was conferred by the colonial administration. By a system of indirect rule, people of the various communities became subjects of the British Crown and their kings became literally servants of the British Crown. The king thenceforth collected taxes and levies not for himself but on behalf of the colonial government. In recognition of his services, the colonial government paid the king salaries out of the taxes collected in his domain. The annual tributes from bales and members of tributary villages seized.

As modernization progresses in every town and in every small community coupled with the influences of education and mass-media there is the mass-exodus into towns and cities by young men who used to work under the aegis of their parents for long years without asking for reward. Such young men, depending on their level of education and training on migration to town take up paid employment as labourers, artisans, skilled workers, clerks, executives, etc. The direct effect of this is several fold. The first is that the potential agricultural labour which is being lost to the towns and cities is not being replaced in equal rate as the rate of loss, hence there is a decrease in total agricultural labour on the farms. Second, the young men, who now live a distance from their communities and families are no longer subjected to the obedience and adherence to small community values and familial role expectations. There is decidedly the slackening of community as well as familial authority on the individual. Old men left behind in the villages bemoan the attitudes of present-day youngsters who have no respect for traditional authority. Those social structures such as the age-grades, which help to keep together people of the same community and subject them to traditional norms and values have disappeared even in places like Ekiti where it used to be most virile in every community. However, rural-born, urban-settled sons and daughters still maintain close ties with their original home in several ways. By making periodic contribution towards self-help projects in the community, by erecting modern houses in their communities, and by returning there at retirement or old age to settle for life. Sometimes, they return to their communities to select their wives and husbands. It should be noted that those who exhibit these characteristics are those who have managed to succeed in their occupational and other endeavours in the towns. Others who could not make it

in the town have no motivations for returning home, or for participation in the development activities of their home and consequently become a loss to their community.

The same argument goes for the family circumstances. Children are no longer looked upon as an economic asset in providing labour for the family farm. Even at younger age before they are ready to migrate, most children are in school and consequently are not available for five days of the week to work on their fathers' farms. During vacation, the children would have made their own arrangements to spend their holidays with their brothers, sisters or relatives who live in the town. Having seen the potentials of town life, they could hardly wait to finish their education in the village schools before they migrate to town. All these factors lead to the slackening of traditional parental authority on their children. A typical example of this is the change in the traditional role of parents in securing a suitable marriage partner for their sons and daughters. It is part of the traditional authority of the parents to see that their child marries from a family known to them which is free from any family disease and notoriety. But those who move away from their communities, more often than not meet their would be husband or wife where they abode and would have consummated their love affairs before asking for token approval from their parents.

But apart from these changes in the influence of traditional authority there are some other areas where the traditional authority could still exert its influence. These will be discussed with respect to agricultural development.

The impact of traditional authority on the acceptance of innovations

This section of the paper addresses itself to the influence of traditional authority on the acceptance of agricultural innovations in Western Nigeria. From the experience of the author, there has been no systematic study in which traditional authority has been operationalised in the adoption of studies, but there are adequate indications in some studies and the field experiences of the author which go to show that traditional authority has exerted influence in the past on the adoption behaviour of farmers. Perhaps the most important levels of traditional authority to

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the adoption of agricultural innovations are the last two levels of authority - the community and the family. Some of those areas in which the community exercises its influence on groups and individual choices are discussed below:

Community Land: Until the recent decree which vested land in the state, the right of ownership of land belonged to either the community or the family. Individual members of family living in each community only had usufructory rights. But at the head of each community, the Oba or Bale and his chiefs in council hold the community land in trust for every member of that community. At the level of the community, there are certain agricultural innovations which require group or community adoption and thus consequently need to be adopted by popular support and acclamation of the community before it can succeed. A good example of this is the Farm Settlement Scheme which the government of Western State of Nigeria tried hard to establish in the early 60s. One of the requirements was that a community or groups of land owning families should donate enough agricultural land on which the farm settlement scheme was to be established. Efforts of government to establish plantations and farm settlements in some communities have failed and such projects had to be moved elsewhere because the community refused to donate land for the project. Some communities which agreed to donate land did so only on one condition - that only people from the community who originally donated the land shall be settled on the land. Although there were laws which made it possible for a government to acquire compulsorily a large tract of land for public good, successful acquisition could only be achieved by the tacit agreement of the owners of the land to surrender the land. In certain communities in Bendel State, which was part of the Western Region at the time some government officers who went to survey a tract of farm land for a proposed farm settlement were matched for 'trespassing' on a community land. The F.A.O. (1966: 336) report on the Farm Settlement Scheme has this to say:

(1) F.A.O. Agricultural Development in Nigeria: 1965-80, F.A.O. Rome 1966

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"One of the delaying factors has been the difficulties which the Regional Governments have experienced in obtaining suitable areas of land for growing crops proposed as sources of income for settlers and the opposition from local inhabitants before, during and after occupation of the settlement areas. In some cases in the Eastern Region, they have had to abandon projects as a result of uncompromising opposition of certain villages (e g Afougin). Similarly in the Mid-Western Region work had to be suspended at Ekpoma, and hostility and opposition from local people has continued even after part of the area scheduled for settlement had been given back to one of the local villages."

Community Structure: Communities in which its members are fatalistic in outlook and whose leaders are traditionally conservative with respect to the use of land generally has a dominant influence on the innovativeness of the members of the community. In a study carried out by Alao (1970) several hypotheses were evaluated to see whether there was in fact any relationship between community structure and individual farmers adoption score within the community. Community attributes were measured in terms of the levels of structural differentiation, where low level of structural differentiation was associated with fatalism and conservatism. A zero order correlation between the normal scores of community differentiation and the mean score of farmers living in the community gave a correlation coefficient of 0.25 $p = 0.01$. This showed that there is

TABLE 1: MEAN ADOPTION SCORE UNDER DIFFERENT LEVELS OF STRUCTURAL DIFFERENTIATION

	High	Medium	Low
Mean Adoption Score	4.1	3.5	2.6
	N = 156	N = 168	N = 119
	F/ratio	14.99	P = 0.005

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a significant positive association between community's level of structural differentiation and adoption score of farmers. In other words the higher the level of structural differentiation of a community, the greater the mean adoption score of farmers living in it. Therefore community structure exerts influence on the adoption behaviour of farmers living in it.

Family Structure: Familial authority is recognised in respect to the common property owned by the family, and in the conduct of family affairs. Traditionally, a son continues to serve his father by working on his father's farm until he is married, when he is entitled to his own farm and his is allocated a plot of land to farm. Before he owns a farm, the adult son only takes instructions from his father on the management of the farm and on the use of production inputs. If he invited his age group to work, it was for work on his father's farm. Therefore he has no incentive to innovate as a young adult.

The most important aspect of familial authority on adoption of innovations can be clearly demonstrated in the discriminatory treatment of 'strangers' or non-members of the family with respect to the use of land. Several surveys conducted in Western Nigeria by the author and other researchers showed that land owning families that grant the right of use of part of their family land to a stranger usually have prescribed for him what crops he could grow or plant. Usually there is an unwritten agreement of a short-term a tenancy period of one to three years. Some agreements have to be re-negotiated for every crop season. The uncertainty created by lack of security of tenure serves as a disincentive on the part of the farmer stranger to innovate or to adopt regular innovations being used by other farmers.

In a recent paper by Otite (1979) on the Urhobo Immigrants to some parts of Ondo State, he noted that the right to use of land granted to a stranger did not involve the exclusive right over the oil palm trees in a given area, often granted separately to the Urhobo farmers does not confer on them indiscriminate farming rights. In which case an Urhobo farmer who signs an agreement to exploit oil palm cannot farm to produce his food crops unless under a separate lease agreement with his landlord. Such a farmer suffers from a disincentive to improve the oil palms and to accept other agricultural innovations.

In the Isoya Project Villages, an integrated rural development project launched by the Department of Extension Education and Rural Sociology in 1968, we discovered that it has always been difficult to get the migrants participate in the innovative extension programmes brought by the Department into these communities, especially in cooperative groups. The explanation is that the migrants are not in any way integrated into these communities, and their interests and privileges derive from their landlord who may or may not be involved in the programmes. Therefore even though the migrant farmers may be capable farmers willing and able to adopt new improved practices, traditional authority and norms preclude them from doing so.

As mentioned in the body of the paper, most informal social organisations in the rural areas are set along sex lines. The pervading authority of the menfolk in the family as husbands, and father precludes women from participating in men's associations because the men are also supposed to represent the interests of their womenfolk. It was not surprising therefore that the first four groups of cooperatives that were organised in Isoya Project villages, there were no women members of the cooperatives. Therefore, the women in the villages cannot participate directly in the innovative programmes that may be introduced to the cooperative groups since women are normally excluded from them. An alternative strategy which we have adopted is to organise separate all-women cooperatives in the villages which now serves as rallying point for dissemination of innovations in home economics extension to the women.

Onigu Otite: "Rural Migrants as Catalysts in Rural Development" Paper read at the Conference of Small Urban Centres, University of Wisconsin, November 9 - 11th, 1978.

Summary

This paper has reviewed the nature of traditional authority in Western Nigeria, which was dealt with at three levels - the kingdom, the Community and the Family. It was suggested that the most important impact of traditional authority on adoption of agricultural innovations could be found at the community and the family levels. At both levels, traditional authority could be used to discourage adoption of agricultural innovations by farmers. Several concrete examples from empirical researchers and field observations by the author were used to demonstrate this phenomenon.

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