

# **THE ROLE OF TRADITIONAL INSTITUTIONS IN INTELLIGENCE GATHERING AND COMMUNITY CONFIDENCE BUILDING.**

A PAPER PRESENTED AT THE 1<sup>ST</sup> KEBBI STATE SECURITY SUMMIT ORGANIZED BY THE KEBBI ELDERS FORUM ON 27<sup>TH</sup> AUGUST 2025 AT THE PRESIDENTIAL BANQUET HALL BIRNIN KEBBI.

The above topic has two distinct parts, but before delving into the parts let me set the ball rolling by putting in context the use of the term traditional institution.

## **1. What is Traditional Institution?**

Here we are discussing traditional institution in the context of Northern Nigeria which came about subsequent to the 1804 Jihad led by the revered scholar Sheikh Usman bn Fodio. By the 1860's when the Sokoto Caliphate was at its peak, and administrative structure had emerged, which is a blend of the Hausa kingdoms the Jihadist had conquered and an Islamic system of leadership based on the Prophet Muhammad system of administration in Madina. (Burham, Peter Murray last (1994). The Caliph and the Emirs under him, ruled under Islamic Law with powers falling to the emirates which made up the Caliphate. Mededith Martin (2014).

The major Administrative division was between Sokoto and Gwandu Emirates, as in 1815 Usman dan Fodio retired from the administrative business of the State and divided the area taken over

during the Jihad between his brother Abdullahi bn Fodio ruling the West with Gwandu as Headquarters and his son Muhammadu Bello taking over the East with Sokoto as the Administrative Headquarters.

The Emir of Gwandu retained allegiance to the Sultanate and Spiritual Guidance from the Sultan, but he (the Emir of Gwandu) managed the separate Emirate under his supervision independently from the Sultan. All the other Emirates were governed through this Administrative Structure with absolute loyalty of the Emirates to the Sultan. Though there was a series of revolts but Sultan Bello tactfully controlled them by granting the leaders (Emirs) title to land (Lovejoy, Paul E. (1978) Other crisis came about like the ones in Adamawa and Kano Emirates (Njeuma, Martin) (2012) and notably in the city states of Gobir which was crushed by Sultan Muhammadu Bello. Murray last (1967) The structure in the Emirates, is such that the Emir was at the helm of affairs, with District Heads under him. Below the District Heads are the Village Heads, under them are the Ward Heads or (Mai Unguwa) under whom are Village Elders, Heads of artisan groups such as Sarkin Noma, Sarkin Aski, Sarkin Fawa, Sarkin Ruwa, Sarkin Daji etc. Each leader is in charge of his Flock in terms of guidance, discipline etc. This structure is still in existence, in fact with modernization, came about the inclusion of groups like Head of Drivers, motorcyclists, hoteliers etc etc. By 1860s, the Sokoto Caliphate ,under Caliph Ahmadu Rufa'i (1867-1873) had reached the maximum extent,

covering a large swath of West Africa. (Falola Toyin (2009). Historical Dictionary of Nigeria. The boundaries of the Caliphate extended to parts of present day Cameroon, Burkina Faso, Niger and Nigeria. Jennifer (2021) stretching for over 1000 miles, from east to west. Dr M M Tukur mentioned that at its peak, the Sokoto Caliphate covered an area of almost 400,000 square kilometres. By 1837, the Caliphate had a population of about 20 million people becoming the most populous empire in West Africa (Falola, Toyin (2009). Under the Caliphate were some 30 large Emirates, while some Emirates had other sub-Emirates under them with Adamawa having the most of them with over 40. Lovejoy, Paul E {2016} According to historian John Iliffe, Sokoto was “the most prosperous region in tropical Africa”. According to Wikipedia, The legacy of the Sokoto Caliphate and Usman Dan Fodio’s teachings have left a lasting impact on the region’s history, including contemporary Nigeria and West Africa, The Sokoto era produced some of the most renowned writers in West Africa with the three main reformist leaders, Usman, Abdullahi and Bello, writing more than three hundred books combined on a wide variety of topics, including, logic, tafsir, mathematics, governance, law, astronomy, grammar, medicine, and so on. Some other famous scholars of the era were Shaikh Dan Tafa, and Nana Asma’u. All the scholars are still being widely studied around West Africa and some as far as the Middle East. Tales and Whispers, have this to say, that Sokoto Caliphate was not just a political

empire, it was a center of Islamic learning, trade, and culture. Education became a cornerstone of the society. Schools, Mosques, and libraries flourished, and Islamic Scholars were highly respected. Sokoto became a hub of scholarship, attracting intellectuals from across West Africa. Usman Dan Fodio himself was a prolific writer, and his works on Islamic law, governance, and reform influenced Muslim communities far beyond the caliphate's borders.

The Caliphate's prosperity was further supported by the trans-Saharan trade routes, which had long connected West Africa to the wider Islamic World. Goods such as gold, salt, leather, and slaves moved through the Caliphate's territories, bringing wealth and economic strength to the region. The Caliphate's trade networks extended from North Africa to the Middle East ensuring that Sokoto remained economically connected to the broader Islamic World. Hugh Clapperton a Scottish explorer who visited Sokoto in the 1820s during the reign of Muhammadu Bello was amazed by the internal security of the entire Caliphate and has this to say that it was as if .....

"A woman can walk on foot, alone, with a basket full of gold, from Kano to Sokoto , without fear of molestation." This statement highlights the high level of peace and tranquility established under the Caliphate.

The above observations give a picture of a very large empire with the people leading their lives in a very conducive atmosphere with abundance of food for human and animal consumption as well as

agricultural produce for their local industries and for export. It gives an image of high level security which enables everybody to go about his business with ease. What is responsible for this high level success?

The administrative Structure mentioned above is such that it gives the emirates a loose control with a high degree of independence but with strict allegiance to the Sultan in Sokoto. The pyramidal structure that emerged ensures that from the Sultan at the top of the pyramid down to the lowest level of the strata, each leader enjoys a level of autonomy but answerable to the next level. A problem emanating from the lowest level of the pyramid is quickly analyzed and dealt with, where the leader at that stage cannot solve it, he quickly passes it to the next level and so and so forth until it reaches the level that can solve it and it is done away with, otherwise it can go as far as the Sultan and his Council which is like the present day Supreme Court. Equally so an instruction that is intended to the lowest level from the highest level is given to the next level who gives it to his immediate subordinate until it reaches its destination. Each level along the way is aware of the instruction to ensure follow up and compliance, even if it was not meant for him. By this structure, there is a guarantee for the flow of information from top to bottom and vice versa. Equally so, each leader of the administrative structure guards his territory as best as he can so as not to be found wanting. It is such that each trade has its own membership by which it will be almost impossible to

have an individual without a group, the whereabouts of every individual is known and the presence of a new face is always recorded and action taken as to who he is and what he was in the community for. Such was the case in the old Soviet Union where virtually everybody was a KGB agent trying to help the State remain in peace and in control. This is to the effect that a visitor on a visit to a locality quickly identifies with the people of his trade who will receive him and through their interaction with him they will quickly know whether he belongs to them or not, hear the purpose of his visit and attend to him. On the other hand if they suspect him as not being one of them, he is quickly identified and his case dealt with. This is how through the traditional setup, intelligence report about each individual in the community is built. Other information on the individual also becomes readily available like his worth when it comes to determine his tax for example. The leader of his trade will certainly know that. So also when his child is due to attend school, or due for immunization in the present day context. Most certainly the Village Head, Community Elders and leader of his trade must have attended his naming ceremony, or when it comes to how many wives a person has etc, etc. It is through this administrative set up that the traditional Institution can gather intelligence report of people in their domain. It is also through this pyramidal administrative structure that any intelligence report passes to the desired end. Any intelligence

information known to the member of a group is available to the leader who in turn passes it to the village head and on to the highest level depending on the weight of the information and its relevance, or its desired destination. Beside the formal traditional positions, there are also an array of traditional titles and stakeholders that play important roles and are informally recognized to keep an eye on the movement of things. Both the formal and informal titles are called with different names in different places across the Northern part of Nigeria but generally play the same roles.

The second segment of the paper deals with the role of the Traditional Institution in Community Confidence Building.

Still going back to the establishment of the Sokoto Caliphate and the way it flourished is not just through beginning of the Jihad in 1804 which is the beginning of the traditional institution as we have it today. The institution has metamorphosed over time undergoing different process of perfection to its present form. It is a historical fact that at its peak in terms of human, structural and economic development, the leaders of the Sokoto Caliphate incorporated both the administrative dexterity of the different civilizations that have transformed the people in different communities over time. Empires that rose and fell to the present day, Empires under the astute leadership of notable figures like Mansa Musa, Sundiata Kaita, Askia The Great and one of our own The Great Kanta of Kebbi all helped in

polishing administrative processes and transforming the people through their charismatic leadership. What Sheikh Usman bn Fodio and the Sultans that followed after him did is to introduce Islamic Principles of leadership coupled with the best practices of the conquered territories and came out with the best of the two, bringing out a structure that is tested and trusted.

This leadership is centered on human being and his livelihood, especially with Islamic justice the gives the best in trade and other human interaction such as marriage inheritance, debt, and other interpersonal relationship. Islamic jurisprudence emphasize cooperation and understanding between human beings to attain a harmonious coexistence. The traditional institution serves as the link between the people and the political leadership through whom they channel their grievances. The traditional leaders mediate between the people and settle disputes amicably preventing escalation and maintaining peace. They institute traditional and customary mechanisms of dispute settlement and lead their people in communal self-help projects which inculcates closeness, confidence and collective action. The traditional leaders are the keepers of both Customs, Tradition and Religion of the people which endear the leaders to the followers. This helps a great deal in building confidence, loyalty and admiration between the two. Going by the topic of discussion, which is THE ROLE OF THE TRADITIONAL



INSTITUTION IN INTELLIGENCE GATHERING AND COMMUNITY CONFIDENCE BUILDING, We first defined the context in which we are using the term, Traditional Institution which made reference to its origin being the Jihad of Sheikh Usman bn Fodio of 1804, how the Jihad transformed the area in to the most prosperous region in Africa covering an area of almost 400,000 sq km. How using both the administrative ingenuity of the conquered rulers with a blend of Islamic tradition to come out with a pyramidal administrative structure that is used for intelligence gathering and societal cohesion which leads to confidence building between the leaders and their subjects. The term Sarki Uban kowane depicts a relationship that is more than leaders and their subjects to something more intimate than that. That type of relationship ensures confidence building more than any other thing.

#### **SOME CRITICAL OBSERVATIONS.**

Whenever we are talking about security and the role of traditional institution in the Gwandu Emirate Council, His Royal Highness The Emir of Gwandu always hammers on the importance of the lowest level of the administrative strata the Mai Anguwa, who though is an old position but is currently is not seen as important, but The Emir sees otherwise because of the fact that he is the closest to people and any activity that targets the people directly, the Mai Anguwa must be involved for the programme to succeed, yet he is not given that

recognition. In fact he is not receiving any remuneration from the State or the Local Government. It is only after The Emir hammers of the role and importance of the Mai Anguwa at every opportunity that now some Local Government in Gwandu before the end of the previous Administration have started paying the Mai Anguwa some remuneration. I understand the present Administration of Governor Kauran Gwandu is trying to formalize the position and create a standard remuneration for him. Another aspect worthy of mention again which the Emir of Gwandu lay emphasis on which is also often neglected is the role of Tax and Jangali in the life of a villager and the Fulani herders. In the words of the Emir they see both as security and an identity where ever they go, they also see such meager payment as their widows mite towards Government expenditure for their good living, that even helps in the community to identify with Government projects, protect them and see them their own and in actual fact the projects are theirs. On the other hand, a Fulani man who pays his Jangali has his evidence of payment as his identity and his security. He also feels deserving of inoculation of his herd and sees the Jangali as his widows mite in the exercise. It also gives him an identity and a home as well as a sense of belonging especially now when Fulanis are in a dilemma. Finally talking about security especially in the present context and in the light of the call by Chief of Army Staff for Communities to come out and defend themselves, one of the best

form of self-defense is the age old tradition of Community Policing. It has been tested and trusted. Especially now that it is improved with Nigeria Police Force participating in the Community Policing an exercise that is approved and supported by them. During the last visit of the AIG of Police incharge of Sokoto, Kebbi and Zamfara AIG Augustine G Grimah psc FCAI, emphasized the importance and efficacy of Community Policing incorporating the Nigeria Police Force with local Community representatives. I have personally been a witness of its efficacy at least on three occasions. That arrangement has been very strongly supported by the present administration of Governor Kauran Gwandu who even before the security situation in the State worsened, purchased brand new motorcycles in their hundreds, and distributed to the Vigilante teams in Kebbi State. I have personally witnessed their utility at least on three occasions. I want urge this sitting to support Community Policing especially in the light of the pronouncement of the Chief of Army Staff of the Nigerian Army. After all the issue of security is everybody's business. It is a collective responsibility. The Emir of Gwandu who is well grounded in security issues in the Country not only as a retired general but somebody who served in National Security Advisory Committee during the Obasanjo Regime always insists that Government Officials who come to serve in our State deserve our appreciation and support, especially security officers who are ready

to pay the Supreme Price in our defense. I want to take this opportunity to thank the organizers of this Summit for finding me worthy to give in my little contribution towards the attainment of sustainable peace in Kebbi State.

**ABDULLAHI UMAR,**  
(WAZIRIN GWANDU)

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