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SOME PROBLEMS FACING CHIEFTAINCY TODAY

by

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Much has been said and written during recent times to give those who have no clear idea of the role of the institution of Chieftaincy an idea of what chiefs were created in our society to stand for and the role the institution was meant to play.

2. I feel however that many persons are apt to forget easily that institution has been with the people of this country for many many generations and during the period some aspects of Chieftaincy had to evolve in response to the impact on it of the economic trends generally and particularly as regards the view of life and the universe held by the various ethnic groups in our society.

3. There is also this point to be kept constantly in mind namely that the areas consisting of ethnic groups headed by Paramount Chiefs, which we now call Traditional Areas, and which until 1961 were known as states, were before the British settlement Act of 1887 sovereign states possessing sovereign powers over all within the several areas, and shouldering all the responsibilities of a Government.

4. It follows therefore that in Ghana the institution of Chieftaincy from time immemorial represent the head of state and the Government for the time being, for any particular area, That is to say it represent at any material time the Government of the particular area over which the institution exercised jurisdiction. This role and status is in face the sum total of the Traditional place of the institution, other aspects of Chieftaincy e.g. religious, cultural and social are I believe, based upon the view of the community of life and the universe.

5. Then I feel it is pertinent when thinking about Chieftaincy today to remember that it was the advent of the European Colonisers that brought about the confederation of states which was called the Gold Coast and that to try solve governmental problems that were inevitable in the governance of a number of independent states mostly antagonistic to each other, which were brought together in a Colony, the administrative device if indirect rule was resorted to. This device was to ensure for the Colonial Power the maintenance of peace, Law and Order under the terms of the Colonial Power. A glance at the Bond of 1844 indicates this clearly.

6. Chieftaincy since 1844 had endured for over a century, and to my thinking mainly because it was indispensable to the Colonial Power for it has its roots deep in the land as it is the Colonial Po

authority the people knew and cherished. But during the early colonial days a lot was done either by design or due to genuine error, to undermine the institution and retard its best line of development.

7. For instance the introduction of District Commissioners and Provincial Commissioners at the close of the 19th century though in itself an acceptable administrative arrangement, the fact remains that the Provincial and District Commissioners were made the rulers over the chiefs and people and not the advisers of the chief in council to ensure proper development of indirect rule to achieve reasonable appreciation of the complexity of modern Governmental machinery by the chief and his council. This succeeded in undermining Chieftaincy and retarding its progress.

8. Other factors achieved the same end. The Lieze-Fare outlook of the British Colonial Administration between 1887 - 1920s, was to a great extent responsible for most of the problems confronting chieftaincy today.

Now one may well ask why then did Chieftaincy survive. My answer to this is:-

- (a) Mainly because the institution has its roots sufficiently deep in the consciousness of the people of this country to withstand the battering it received.
- (b) Secondly the British were unwilling to use armed force to uproot chieftaincy once the institution served their purpose in maintaining peace, Law and Order and permitted the Colonialist to exploit the country and
- (c) Thirdly because the climate and mosquito would not permit the sort of colonization on the pattern of Southern Africa which could make the Colonialist wish to settle and therefore to remove any power that might create trouble for them. The Colonisers did not see the need for rigid control.

9. With this preamble I wish to turn to the problems facing Chieftaincy as of today. What I said so far indicates that by our tradition the role of the institution is to provide the Government of the various traditional areas and by this, I mean to undertake leadership in all spheres of existence of the people. The extent of that leadership was unlimited until the British Settlement Act of 1887 and the Foreign Jurisdiction Act -1874 made it obligatory for the Colonial Government to undertake a number of major Governmental responsibilities such as, Defence, Finance, Judicial Administration, Health and Communications etc., The Colonial Government however left over many other Governmental

responsibilities to the Chiefs and his council.

10. A very pathetic aspect of what one might term the devolution of responsibilities from the Colonial Government to the chiefs was that no financial arrangements were made to enable the chief shoulder these responsibilities. It was not until, by the Native Authority Ordinance 1944, that effective Local Self Government was introduced in Ghana. By that Law the chief and his Council were constituted into a Native Authority with powers to levy taxes and perform all the functions which by traditions chiefs are expected to perform in the area of their States, and by western standards, Local Governments are expected to undertake.

11. After 1944 however, the native authorities in the Colony became active agents for the provision of those local services - education, health, roads etc which are expected of local authorities. The following figures show how the native authorities grew from strength to strength in the few years that they were allowed to operate as local government bodies:

Revenue	1943/44	1944/45	1945/46	1946/47	1947/48	1948/49
Colony	186185	242563	293194	398772	497154	625324
Ashanti	72329	109920	167035	264500	343489	464673
	85715	105035	132727	133737	206535	302929
Expenditure	1943/44	1944/45	1945/46	1946/47	1947/48	1948/49
Colony	174470	229390	287829	339640	484306	569715
Ashanti	58497	87207	137576	235476	307774	387413
	79648	92504	114950	136856	185484	254327

Revenue and Expenditure of Local Government for the year ending 31st March, 1949 (No.VI of 1950).

12. Official comment in Revenue and Expenditure of Local Governments for the year ending 31st March, 1946, No. 6 of 1950 was as follows:-

From the above figures it will be seen that great progress has been made. The revenue and expenditure of the combined native authorities in the Colony has passed the half million mark and the revenue in Ashanti in 1948/49 is nearly ten times as great as it was in 1942/43. It will be seen from the table that Local Authorities all over the Gold Coast have in the last ten years made rapid progress in building up their financial strength that is required to enable them to undertake public services and development in their areas.

13. For instance, out of a total expenditure of #569,713 in 1948/49 by-native authorities in Colony, #55,875 (i.e. above 10 per cent) was spent on extraordinary works, and #110,859 (about 20 per cent on education. In the Northern Territories, during the same year, education took 20 per cent of native authority expenditure, while capital works and water supplies received 12 per cent respectively of a total expenditure of #254,327.

14. The important point I wish to make is that the institution of chieftaincy was only by 1944 given the opportunity to demonstrate what it can achieve in modern government and it proved itself worthy.

Had it been allowed a little more time it could, on the evidence of its performance in the year 1944 - 1949 turn chieftaincy from the concept of a traditional to a modern Governmental institution. What chieftaincy could have achieved had it been guided since 1844 or even since 1887 by Laws such as the Native Authority Ordinance 1944 could well be imagined.

15. The past 15 years saw a most violent disturbance to chieftaincy, this lay not so much in the detention of chiefs or their removal from the stools or even the arrogation to itself by the C.P.P. Government of the power to make or unmake chiefs, but much more in the act of divesting chieftaincy of all public functions. Another calculated at to destroy chieftaincy was the removal of the Traditional members from the Local Councils in 1958. These were meant to be the beginning of the end. The aim was a not too slow process of encouraging chieftaincy to atrophy and certain death.

16. May I now turn to specific problems facing Chieftaincy today. I do this in the context of the Chiefs place being among his people. This is his basic place. His first call for service is to his people. In the field of administration, the problems do not appear to be unsumountable, that is if the Nation now recognises that the chief must play a decisive role in Local Government, for his is made chief precisely for that purpose. All who believe that the institution can and must survive should therefore accord chieftaincy that role.

17. But what about illiterate chiefs can they properly fill this role in modern Local Administration which is becoming more and more specialised? I answer yes, if the institution is assisted by high caliber staff who will work as executive officers not of the Central Government but of the Local Government body the head of which is the chief. It is only a pessimist of the lowest order who will not see chiefs being progressively literate in the near future.

18. There is another very significant field in which Chieftaincy could with profit to the Nation provide leadership

namely in the economic field. Here there is a real problem which only foresight and bold action can solve in a lasting manner. It has already been indicated that chieftaincy had during Colonial days devolved to itself by the Central Government considerable amount of responsibility in Local Administration, welfare, health and other fields without any financial backing to enable it shoulder these responsibilities. Besides the stool farm, and other land revenue which are both uncertain and unorganised the chief has no other sources of revenue either to maintain himself and his status or to discharge his responsibilities.

He therefore constantly faces financial incapacity and embarrassment always making his efforts feeble and impotent.

19. During the C.P.P. regime large sums of money were thrown down the drain to persons who just squandered them and showed nothing contributory to the Nation's economic sufficiency. What if suitably qualified chiefs who possessed land could be assisted financially and guided scientifically to develop the Agricultural and other resources of their various areas to give the nation that economic leadership which the ruling classes of Europe provided to the Western Nations two centuries ago. I do not wish to go into arguments for or contrary to this view here and now. It will be lengthy and we have not the time now. But certainly the general responsibility of good governance of the people is a pointer that chieftaincy should and could provide leadership in the economic development of their areas and so of the nation.

20. The same arguments are cogent for the need for chieftaincy to provide leadership in education but unfortunately, in this sphere, the institution had woefully lagged behind. The reasons for this were mainly the fact that education for the past 60 years was mostly the monopoly of Christian Missions who in most cases were largely antagonistic to chieftaincy because they thought it was an institution protecting paganism. As a result few of the stool dependents and heirs went anywhere near Christian churches. In places like Akwapim, Akim Abuakwa, Manya Krobo where the Missions owed their establishment to the chief who provided land and protected them as "harmless strangers" Chieftaincy did provide educational leadership.

21. In Manya Krobo the first two persons to be educated were both princes and heirs to the stool and as a result education and Christianity had a free way. The case was similar in Akwapim with the result that within the past 40 years Akwapim gave Ghana two University educated Paramount Chiefs. In Akim Abuakwa the Paramount Stool had since 1919 never been occupied by an illiterate chief.

22. The problem facing chieftaincy in the field of education is being gradually solved. In 1942 the late Nana Sir Ofori Atta moved at the Eastern Provincial Council a resolution requiring all stools to embark upon compulsory education of all stool heirs. This was accepted by the Joint Council on the grounds of financial inability of stools to implement the same. Clearly the need is paramount for chiefs and their councillors to be numbered among the most educated sections of the community. If for no other reason, to enable them efficiently discharge their onerous responsibilities to the people who are increasingly becoming better educated year by year.

23. In cultural matters chieftaincy still holds its own only by the accident of our faulty educational system which until Achimota and men like Ephrime Amu led the way, educationists here considered anything connected with our culture uncivilized or pagan.

There is however no doubt that chieftaincy being the central core of our Governmental and Social organization has cherished and protected our culture so far with jealous vigilance and pride. But how many chiefs have been able to produce literary works on aspects of our culture. True it is that chiefs have preserved works of art, the music and dancing of our people, our folk tales and lore, our emblems and proverbs even our conception of the universe (which in the eyes of some people made chieftaincy the last bastion of heathenism). It is obvious that chieftaincy could have done more in providing leadership in cultural matters if its educational backwardness and financial disability had been eliminated earlier.

24. I have tried, I hope to state some of the problems facing chieftaincy and in so doing to indicate the source of those problems. It may be pertinent here to strike this note of warning that two of the most serious problems now confronting chieftaincy and which could deal a most mortal blow to it are, blind conservatism and inability or refusal by the chief to move with the times, and also chiefly disputes. These generally arise because chiefs and their councils have either failed to codify the well known rules underlying the making and unmaking of chiefs or to apply them faithfully. This evident indifference to regulating the procedure and strictly interpreting the rules thereof and enforcing them could harm the institution grievously and pave the way for its self destruction.

25. The Native Administration Ordinance of 1927 attempted to regulate this but this could only be done generally on a national scale. Every chief and Council must record in detail

all the regulations that govern the making and unmaking of chiefs and steps must be taken to rationalise certain taboos. For instance it appears hard and unreasonable to to depost a chief because for health reasons he had to undergo an operation or that though an accident he loses one eye, just to satisfy the taboo that a chief must a "whole" person without any scar or defect on his person.

26. My earlier point about conservatims refers to some chiefs imaging that they live today in the same circumstances as chiefs lived in 1880 or 1900. The Ahinkwa or bhereditary servant can hardly exist today unpaid if you want him you will probably find him a Manager of a company or a lecturer in a University and no chief should expect such a man to run errands or carry his sandals or even willingly take off his sandals when addressing the chief who cannot read or write. These service must be provided for and paid for it they are considered necessary.

27. It is my firm conviction that chieftaincy can fill its - role in modern Ghana with credit to itself and profit to the people if that role is accorded the institution and the people will with sympathy and understanding provide the atmosphere for its development and progress.

