The importance of genuine collaboration between African Governments and their Traditional Leaders in promoting Peace, Security, and Sustainable Development.

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The African continent is now at the forefront of development concerns, with its leaders engaged in finding solutions to enable the continent to play a leading role on the international stage. It is necessary, if not essential, to consider a new form of collaboration that includes real engagement and effective involvement of Traditional Leaders or Chiefs, who are capable of contributing to addressing various challenges such as those related to peace, security, and sustainable development.

It is important to recall the grand project of the African Union's (AU) Agenda 2063, closely linked to the United Nations' Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development. Many AU member states have developed national development plans to translate their national visions into programs and projects aimed at national development and social progress. However, the implementation of such plans faces several obstacles and issues, including the lack of effective involvement of Traditional Leaders who could sincerely collaborate with their leaders to represent the direct will of the people and serve as a basis for political decision-making.

This reality justifies and encourages the mission of the Royal Assembly of the United Africa (UARA), which aims to unite Traditional Leadership across Africa and support the aspirations of

Agenda 2063 of the AU as well as the Sustainable Development Goals, by promoting peace, security, good governance, and stability through initiatives addressing hunger, education, indigenous knowledge systems, health, economic growth, and environmental protection, with the aim of contributing to holistic development.

It is worth noting that among the values advocated by the Royal Assembly of the United Africa is also collaboration, working in partnership with stakeholders to achieve common goals and aspirations for Africa's prosperity. Collaboration in this development context implies the consideration of inclusion, recognizing that every individual is a full member of society and can participate meaningfully. This justifies the need to involve Traditional Leaders in making certain decisions, as they have the power to enforce respect for Traditional and customary values among their populations.

Referring to the fifth and sixth aspirations of Agenda 2063, the AU aspires to have an Africa with a strong cultural identity, common heritage, shared values, and ethics. It wishes for Pan-Africanism and a community of history, destiny, identity, heritage, respect for religious diversity, and consciousness of the peoples of Africa and its diaspora to be deeply rooted, aiming to promote African cultural renaissance. Furthermore, it supports the exploitation of Africa's rich heritage and culture to ensure that creative arts contribute significantly to Africa's growth and transformation, as well as the restoration and preservation of cultural heritage, including its languages.

Aspiring to an inclusive Africa where no child, woman, or man will be neglected or excluded based on gender, political affiliation, religion, ethnicity, locality, age, or any other factor means directing efforts toward people-centered development, leveraging the potential of women and youth, and caring for the well-being of children, where all African citizens will be actively involved in all aspects of decision-making.

Role and Attributes of Traditional Leaders in the Pursuit of Peace, Security, and Sustainable Development

1. **Attributes of Traditional Leaders**

It is undisputed today that empires, kingdoms, and royal and Traditional Chieftaincies across Africa have either a positive or negative influence on their respective populations. Aimé Dounian (2022) explains that while before constitutional renewal, the Traditional Chief was considered a mere collaborator of the administration, with the new constitutionalism, he now appears as a Traditional organ endowed with multiple powers within his command territory as a guarantor of customs and traditions.

Illustratively, as in several other African countries, in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), customary Chiefs play a major role, which has never been questioned since colonial times and has even been reinforced by institutional and political developments since independence. In a country-continent made up of vast rural areas where the state does not have total control, customary Chiefs are the first police officers, magistrates, tax collectors, and land managers. These tasks were enshrined in colonial laws and reaffirmed in the recognition of the law on the status of customary Chiefs adopted in 2015.

Image 1. Reception of some Congolese Traditional Leaders by President Félix-Antoine TSHISEKEDI

In the context of the DRC and several African countries, Traditional and modern political powers mutually influence each other, with each borrowing certain characteristics from the other. Hence, the hybridization of Traditional and modern political powers.

Although Traditional power is recognized, the existence and contribution of Traditional Leaders seem to be only partially acknowledged by some African governments, even though they have supported decentralization as a new mode of public affairs management. This framework has allowed for the promulgation of laws establishing the status of customary Chiefs and recognizing customary authority. However, a Traditional Chief is the representative of Traditional command insofar as they are the custodian of customs and traditions as stipulated by the legislator. The consecration of the Traditional Chief as the guardian of customs and traditions implies that they are the repository of Traditional command in their territorial community. Traditional command is the power to impose respect for the Traditional and customary values of a community on its subjects. As such, these values vary from one community to another, and the Traditional Chief is their guarantor.

2.   **Role of Traditional Leaders**

As for their roles in our societies, we recognize that collaboration between African governments and Traditional Leaders is important for peace, security, and sustainable development in Africa. Traditional Leaders have a deep understanding of their community and its needs, making them crucial partners for governments in implementing effective policies and programs. Their guidance can contribute to conflict resolution, the promotion of social cohesion, and the preservation of natural resources, all fundamental elements for sustainable development. By closely collaborating, governments and Traditional Leaders can create more inclusive initiatives tailored to the specific needs of communities, thereby fostering peace, security, and sustainable development in Africa.

Traditional Leaders have played a crucial role in the pursuit of peace, security, and sustainable development in many societies throughout history. Their influence and moral authority can be used to promote peaceful conflict resolution, encourage cooperation between communities, and support sustainable development initiatives. Their knowledge of local customs and traditions can also be valuable in creating strategies that respect the culture and values of communities. Ultimately, Traditional Leaders have significant potential to contribute to achieving goals of peace, security, and sustainable development in their respective societies.

Since the implementation of the concept of a culture of peace in Africa requires an endogenous, holistic, and transdisciplinary approach involving all stakeholders at intergovernmental, governmental, community, and all sector levels, customary powers are institutions holding autonomous power at the local level. The legitimacy of these Traditional powers lies not only in their immersion in the local environment and social and cultural realities but also in the ancestral foundation they claim.

These land managers are often the sole bearers of information about everything happening on their lands. Collaborating with them would provide accurate information about all events and enable decisive action. Their moral authority and influence can be used to prevent conflicts, address disputes, and promote reconciliation. They are often respected and listened to by members of their community, giving them a unique position to foster dialogue and mutual understanding. Their knowledge of local traditions and customs also allows them to promote solutions tailored to the culture and specific needs of their community. Ultimately, Traditional Leaders have a crucial role to play in promoting peace and stability within their societies.

Regarding sustainable development within their communities, their knowledge of traditions and local practices can be essential for promoting development initiatives that respect culture and the environment. Additionally, their moral authority and influence can be used to mobilize community members in favor of sustainable development projects, such as natural resource conservation, waste management, and the promotion of sustainable agricultural practices. By partnering with Traditional Leaders, development organizations can develop strategies better suited to the needs and values of local communities, thus enhancing long-term success. Ultimately, Traditional Leaders can be valuable allies in promoting sustainable development at the local level.

3. Challenges Faced by Traditional Leaders

Traditional Leaders and Chiefs face several challenges, including:
Internal conflicts within customary power: These often arise in the event of the designation of the customary Chief, usurpation of power, contestation of the boundaries of customary entities and lands of local communities, demands for the creation of new customary entities, succession disputes within ruling families, struggles between Chieftaincies, territorial disputes between two Chieftaincies, and disputes over the status of one Chieftaincy compared to another, etc.

The politicization of customary power and the diminishing role of Traditional Leaders: At the time of independence, several fundamental laws granted the title of customary Chief to Chiefs of Chieftaincies, the title of notable to Chiefs of groupings, and allowed them to be represented by cooptation in the Senate as well as in provincial assemblies. Politicians relegated Traditional Chiefs to a cultural role. Reforms in justice and land law initiated in the late 1960s and continued until the early 1990s were intended to strip Chiefs of much of their power to better establish domination. The cloning or splitting of Chiefs for political purposes, etc.

Lack of training for recycling Traditional Leaders: Few Traditional Chiefs participate in cultural activities and seminars that could help update their knowledge. Yet, most of them have not received formal education. It is the duty of governments to regularly schedule moments for exchanges, seminars, or training to enhance their level of education.

Issue of term limit for the Chief: Generally, a Chief ascends to the throne for the rest of their life. Their mandate is not usually limited. Succession is only possible in the event of their death, removal, or abdication. Death often occurs after the Chief has been worn down by many years of exercising power.
Economic challenges: Traditional leaders often struggle with limited financial resources, making it difficult to carry out their duties effectively and provide essential services to their communities. Additionally, inadequate housing and transportation infrastructure further exacerbate their ability to

serve their communities efficiently. Without proper funding and support, traditional chiefs may find it challenging to address pressing issues such as conflict resolution, resource management, and community development.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In modern African societies, the role that "Traditional Leaders" must play is undeniable these days. It is clear that, since the era of colonial rule, Traditional Chiefs have managed to preserve their authority and Traditional powers. They have adapted to the crises of history, negotiated the preservation of their role with the various regimes that have succeeded, and established themselves as rural intermediaries for urban political elites. This adaptation also reflects their own sociological evolution. They now find themselves at the crossroads of local, provincial, and sometimes even national interests and are necessarily stakeholders in the conflicts experienced in Africa. It is also noted that, even in democratic African regimes, customary authorities have shown resilience and have survived local democracy, proving that their capacities can contribute to the development of the nation once they are truly involved. Thus, for the promotion of peace, security, and sustainable development in Africa, we recommend a frank collaboration between African governments and Traditional Leaders. That African governments organize training sessions and seminars to update the knowledge of Traditional Leaders or Chiefs. That they ensure that this power is not politicized for the selfish interests of certain individuals. We further recommend the development of national policies for the prevention and resolution of inter-communal conflicts to guarantee peace in Africa, knowing that the most persistent conflicts are those related to customary power and land matters.

Citations

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