EVOLUTIONARY HISTORY OF CHIEFTAINCY INSTITUTION IN KABO-IBE: ADAGBABIRI COMMUNITY IN FOCUS

Bina Odogu, PhD.1

1Department of History and Diplomacy Niger Delta University Wilberforce Island Bayelsa State

Abstract

The Chieftaincy institution in Nigeria and Africa occupies a special place historically. Prior to European contacts with African communities, the role of the African Chiefs was unique in the day-to-day running of the communities. The Chief oversees every aspect of communal life using his Council of Chiefs whose allegiance to him was unquestionable. However, this special role played by the African Chiefs changed with the incursion of Europeans into the African Continent from the fifteenth century. This was largely due to a clash of interest between the Europeans and the African Chiefs. This clash of interest affected the Chieftaincy institution adversely as most of them who failed to do the “biding” of the “European Overlords” were deposed and replaced with Cronies that were ready to do what the Europeans wanted. This research “Evolutionary History of Chieftaincy Institution in Kabo-Ibe: Adagbabiri Community in Focus” intends to take a historical journey into the chieftaincy institution and the changes it has gone through over the years using Adagbabiri Community as a “spring board”.

A. Introduction

For a proper appreciation of the topic, it is pertinent to do a geographical survey of Adagbabiri Community whose role in Kabo-Ibe history cannot be over-emphasized. Adagbabiri is a community in Sagbama Local Government Area of present day Bayelsa State of Nigeria. The community is situated along the East-West road. It is easily accessible both by road and water. The Niger River flows through an edge of the Community. “Adagbabiri is a member of the Kabowei or Kabo-Ibe clan which embraces Communities in both Delta and Bayelsa states. The community is situated in the northern most of the Kabowei clan. Its northern neighbours are the Abohs of the Ukwani, in Ndokwa Local Government Area of Delta state. In the east, she shares boundary with Sagbama town in Tarakiriowei clan of Bayelsa State. It neighbours to the west includes Patani in Kabowei clan, the boundary between Delta and Bayelsa state and Erohwa an Isoko speaking people of Delta state, and bounded to the south by the River Niger. (Alagoa: A History of the Niger Delta: P.47).

Adagbabiri is situated in Delta mangrove fresh water swamps. There is adequate sunlight and abundance of rainfall. Particularly the area among the community has a fine vegetation, has much characteristics of the Delta lowlands and plains. It is susceptible to annual flooding after the rains which often threaten the Community along the creeks. This seasonal flooding provides both anxiety and excitement in the life of the people. The constant flooding is an impediment to successful farming but provides occupation in fishing, which the Izon (Ijaw) people are known for. The swamps also abound in the Raphia palm from which the palm wine is got and the famous local brew Ogogoro, a dry gin is further produced from. The gin is king of them all at ceremonial and occasion. (Gbenseregha: Adagbabiri: 10/8/2006).

Origin

The Kabowei or Kabo-Ibe are of the (Izon) Ijaw ethnic group and their traditions of origin stands in the main Izon traditions. The Izon tribes domain spread along the long wide coast part of West Africa, “especially from Lagos to Duala in the Republic of Cameroons” spanning thus the Bights of Benin and Bonny. “The origin of any society is a problem which inevitably confronts the historian. This is because the question about origins form part of, and indeed constitutes the first set of question which homo sapiens must ask about himself”. The Adagbabiri is one of the sixteen communities that makes up Kabowei clan, and their origin must be found in the Kabowei and in the general Izon national traditions. (Odogu: A History of Kabo-Ibe: P.9). There are several traditions of origin of the Izon nation which trace her origin to survival planes. The first is that the Izon (Ijaw) people came from Ile-Ife. Ile-Ife connection of
the origin of the Ijaws states that “Izon was one of the sons of Oduduwa who set out to found a kingdom for himself”. He at first settled along the Benin River otherwise known as river ovia, in the present Ovia Local Government Area of Edo State, before finally as a result of conflict with the king of ‘Udo’ was forced to move down to the present Izon Land in the Niger Delta creeks and swamps. There is no cultural or socio-political semblance to show the Ijaws migrated from Ife. Another school points to Benin as the dispersal point of the Ijaw people. (Owonoro: The History of Ijaw and her neighbouring tribes: P.38)

Some Ijaws trace their ancestral home to Benin. They claim to be the original inhabitants of the area around the Benin river. They were forced to flee this area as a result of warfare and conflict from much powerful neighbors. A sub-version of the Benin theory states that “Izon the leader of the Ijaws had committed a sacrilege and was being sort after to be eliminated. This made him gather his people together to moved out of Benin”.

Ikime in his book “the peoples and kingdoms of the delta province” also give support to this argument, in his words:

*The Ijaw have traditions which link them with Benin though not necessarily as a place of immediate origin. Thus, this tradition speaks of an Ijaw father... Who lived in Benin but left due to hostility of the Oba. He is said to have settled at some place near ‘Aboh’ for some time before he moved on to the Sagbama creek. (P.92)*

Adagbabiri is a fifth-generation child of Izon. Oporoza gave birth to three children namely Gbarainowei, Kumbowei, and Kabowei. Kabowei in turn had five children which were Preyegbelai, Engilebiriowei, Obodien, Ogbolomaowei and Ayama. The children of Engiblebiriowei, Kabowei’s sons are Asamabiri, Prebiriowei and Adagbabiriowei. As at date only Asamabiriowei and Adagbabiriowei are fortunate to have survived. “According to legends, Prebiriowei owing to and indiscretion had himself and family exterminated by a fairy-Dwarf (Osuowei). Adagbabiri in turn gave birth to Ariwareowei and entolu—which now forms the two major quarters of the Community. After leaving the Benin river as speculated, “the Oporozaowei or Kabowei settle in a creek known and called ‘Kabobulou’ (inside Kabo), situated between patani and Adegbabiri. On the patani side. In the early 19th century Adagbabiriowei led a group who moved out and settled at their present location. (Agbana, Adagbabiri: 12/8/2006).

The people

The Adagbabiri are of the Ijo ethnic group more generally known as the Ijaws. They are a black skinned people. Their life is segmented and based on the family institutions. It had been previously based or organized along the so-called canoe house system. “Their way of life is in variably expressed in aquatic connotations because they occupy the coastal region of the country. The people are a war like and are always ready to take on the enemy whenever the need arose. This is the reason why the Community was made the military headquarters of the whole of Kabowei Kingdom.

Culturally, the people have a very enterprising culture which has continued to survive despite all the intrusions from modernity. This can be seen in the celebration of their annual cultural festival in resemblance of their old custom. “One of such celebration is the “ORU ARU” (Juju boat dance) in which they remember their heroes and recalled past material exploits. Another of such festival is the ‘SEIGBEIN’ (to throw away evil and bad things). “During this celebration everybody is expected to be present and take part in the necessary rites and rituals for the appeasement of the gods”. It is an annual cleansing ceremony by which bad and evil things are both washed and wiped away while the people prayed to the gods for blessings, peace and security. Another great culture of the Adagbabiri people is the respect they have for the dead whom they regarded as their guardians in the other world, the spiritual world. In this ceremony and custom, it is required of anyone who had killed another to perform the necessary rites of ablution, even if the offence were committed inadvertently. If the offender, murderer or killer was dead it became mandatory on his heir and family to save the entire family members from the wrath of the dead. The Ijaw are polygamous people. They marry many wives and also keep numerous concubines and mistresses. Traditionally, girls are given local education to
CEKA – IJHE  VOL.5 NO. 1 SEPTEMBER, 2018

prepare them for womanhood. Life is highly valued by the people, thus it is an abomination for one to take his own life”. Suicides have, no sympathy but were treated with dishonor. They were dumped at the evil forest as a way of discouraging potential misfits as well as a strong warning to the soul of the person in his next life. The same treatment is also given to those who died under strange circumstances, for instance women in pregnancy and child birth and others. (Agbana, 12/8/2006).

The Adagbabiri people are from the Kabo clan, they speak the Izon language. According to Kay Williamson, “Ijo of the Niger Delta belong to the Niger Congo language family”. She further classified the various tribes in their respective category. Kabo people came under the category of north-western dialects of the Izon which is the largest language of the Ijoid family of language. The most widely practiced occupation of the Adagbabiri people is fishing as with other inhabitants of the riverine region. They are also noted for their canoe building (local boat industry) and other crafts. These boats travel easily across the creeks ferrying people and goods from one point to another promoting social interactions, commerce and other human activities among the people and their neighbors. Cane weaving is also another craft, Adagbabiri people is noted for. These canes are used in manufacturing cane chairs, baskets and also for building of their huts. (Agbana, 12/8/2006).

Little hunting is practiced by the people who hunt for such animals like alligator and bush rabbit. They also practice some farming, planting such crops, as water-yam, plantain, cocoyam, potato and cassava (from which other bi-products are produced). “Farming in Adagbabiri is carried out by the women folk rather than men, there is this stereotype myth that rather, the men-folk fish while the women attend to little farming. The people are predominantly adherents of African traditional religion, but in recent times have widely embraced the Christian faith. Although the people have turned around to embrace the Christian faith in recent times “however, the tradition worship of “KENA” a (deity) is still in practice”. The “KENA” deity is reverenced not only by the Adagbabiri people but the whole of Kabo-Ibe Kingdom. Some sort of popular reverence for it still permeates the community even among the Christians. The shrine (temple) of the goddess is still visible, attended by adherent. This is more so as the chief priest remains an important village figure and even beyond. (Gbenseregha: Adagbabiri: 10/8/2006).

Kingship among the Ijaws and Adagbabiri

Although, it could be said that there is uniformity in life style, religion, language and arts of Ijaw people, nevertheless, each clan has its own peculiarities and values. Such variations are relevant to the subject at hand as the different names and titles now adopted by the clans to identify and honour their chieftaincies. For example, in the eastern area clans such as the Okrikas, Kalabaries, Bonnies, Opobos refer to their head chiefs as Amayanabo. In the Yenagoa area they are known as Ebeni-Ekeng, while in the Brass or Nembe areas they are known as Amananaowei or Ebedaowei, while in the western area places like Mein, Tarakiri, Kumbo and Kabowei clans they refer to their head chiefs as ‘Pere’. It is abominable and cultural sacrilege for a single village or town within any of the aforementioned clans to identify or honour its head chief with any of the above titles. Town or village head chiefs are usually given the title Amadaowei or in some case Amananaowei with a small ‘a’. These titles unlike those assumed by the clan heads, are not hereditary and the incumbent enjoys the august position only in his life time or at the pleasure of his town.

In Kabowei clan:

The Pere was accordingly having authority over the whole Ibe (clan). He determined the date of the yearly festival and presided at its performance. He was regarded as the owner of the kingdom. (Gbenseregha: 10/8/2006).

In this institutional set up, there are clan chiefs who are installed by the Pere to help in the administration of the clan as a whole. The Pere and his council of chiefs also has the power to appoint community chiefs who help him in administering the various villages that make up the kingdom. In addition, there are palace chiefs whose duty is to see to the welfare of the royal
household. They are mostly confined to duties within the palace. The Adagbabiri as have been noted in this research are a sub-clan of Kabowei Clan (Kingdom) among the Niger Delta Ijaw. As a sub-clan of the Kabowei they are subject, so to say to the traditional authority of the “Pere” of Kabowei. However, in day to day ‘local affairs’ the Adagbabiri run a quasi-autonomous administration under the leadership of the ‘Amadaowei’ (Community head), and elected Kinglet assisted and other consultative assemblies and institutions in order to achieve the Community consensus. One of the recent innovations in Adagbabiri is the phenomenon of the Community development union otherwise called the Adagbabiri progressive union which actually in this democratic and modern day wield executive powers, thus relegating the Chieftaincy institution to the background as a united Monarchy. As it were the Amadaowei reigns rather than rule.

The chieftaincy itself, that is to say the Amadaowei is also of recent origin, an innovation necessitated by the social and political climate of the day. The Chieftaincy institution in Adagbabiri has its root in the colonial era when the Community was required to produce people that would assist the colonial government in the administration in the native authority system. These were first colonial chiefs and community leaders in Adagbabiri. The position of the Amadaowei of Adagbabiri is the most recent innovation in the evolution of the chieftaincy institution being only first conferred on ‘Chief Markson Okoloba Agbana’ on the 23rd day of April, 1987. This appointment was well received by the people being popular choice.

The chieftaincy institution was introduced into Adagbabiri as we have noted above as a result of the need of the native authority system of the colonial administration. However, the current ‘exalted’ office of the Amadaowei of Adagbari was created not very long ago in (1987). “The introduction of the institution of Amadaowei of Adagbabiri into the cultural heritage of the people stems from the exigencies of the time”, in other words the need to bestow on somebody who will be the custodian of the traditional and cultural values of the Community, as well as representing the Community before government.

The position of the Amadaowei is elective and has no element of hereditary succession. When an Amadaowei is elected into office, he holds the office all through his life time. The selection of an Amadaowei is from the two quarters of Ariware and Etonlou.

Similarly, each of the two major families in that quarter shall also rotationally provide a candidate-again with respect to which family provided the last Amadaowei from that quarter. The Amadaowei is thus chosen rotationally from one of the following four major families, namely:

1. Ekpena of Ariware quarters
   Or
2. Tonpregha
3. Oketebefua of Etonlou quarters
   Or
4. Momo

Where a family fails to produce a suitable candidate, the choice falls on the other family in the same quarter. Should the other family also fail in this respect within the period of six weeks, it then becomes mandatory for the next family in the other quarter to produce the Amadaowei. The same condition also applies, but the choice must be made within six weeks. The four major families, each have the right to produce a chief to sit on the council-of-chiefs. Similarly, two other chiefs, one each to be jointly produced by Ariware and Etonlou respectively to also sit in the council. Thereafter, the Amadaowei has the power to assign titles to each of them. This is the only right the Amadaowei exercises at his direction.

The residence or palace of the Amadaowei is vested in the community. Any person who is chosen to this post shall reside in the official residence or palace from the first day of his installation. In the unfortunate event of the Amadaowei being removed from office “he shall vacate the palace within one traditional week-Akenbai to Akenbai”. The traditional week is when all the Community and towns in the Ibe (clan) meet for the settlement of intra-city or Community strives under the Pere of Kabowei and is also when the Community
different Villages meet during their market days. The traditional week lasts for ten days a little longer than western week. (Gbenseregha: 10/8/2006).

Amadaowei as the ruler of Adagbabiri has limited powers over the citizens. “He has power to confer chieftaincy titles on distinguished and well-deserved indigenes of Adagbabiri and non-indigenes who respect and accept the tradition”. All such conferment shall be agreed upon by the members of the council of chiefs, at the instance of the Amadaowei. He is the chairman of the council of chiefs.

In Adagbabiri community, The Amadaowei of Adagbabiri has the right to private life, but he is not to engage in any full-time public office. He is free to accept short term appointments from government and serve in government committees. (Gbenseregha:10/8/2006)

The Council of Chiefs in Adagbabiri

There is a council of chiefs which assists the Amadaowei in his day to day duties for the good government and progress of Adagbabiri town. The council of chiefs comprises the Amadaowei as chairman and the following chiefs in order of seniority:

1. The Ekiopreowei
2. The suo-ala
3. The Bebeariowei
4. The Amabenemowei
5. The Ogbowei
6. The Zorudaowei

The Eyikariowei (Priest), the Amakosowei (Eldest man), and the Eretibiara (Head of women), and her assistant may attend meetings as observers at the request of the Amadaowei-in-council. This request according to the constitution of Adagbabiri must not exceed four times within one year. Furthermore, this request is only made when very crucial matters affecting the welfare of the people is to be addressed.

The council is the highest organ of administration in Adagbabiri and has powers to settle all misunderstandings and dispute between individuals, families and quarters in the town, and to make rules and regulation for peace and harmony in the town. (Amamiebukuro, Yenagoa:14/8/2006)

No misunderstanding between individuals, families and quarters is expected to be taken to any court of law without first being heard by the council-of-chiefs. The Amananowei-in-council has right to delegate any of his chiefs to settle lesser misunderstanding and disputes within the town. The council’s ‘settlement’ or decision in any major or lesser issues brought to it for settlement is final. “Chieftancy titles taken outside Adagbabiri town do not take precedence over Adagbabiri titles”. Only chieftaincy titles awarded by a properly installed ‘pere’ of Kabowei are regarded superior to and therefore take precedence over that of Adagbabiri town.

B. Duties of Chiefs

The chiefs perform general duties as custodian of the traditions and cultural heritage of Adagbabiri. In addition, the chiefs see to the peace and harmony in the Community through the settlement of disputes. The chiefs in collaboration with the Amananowei run the administration of the Community and also act as the mouthpiece of the people. Honourary titles are bestowed on those who have used their influence in bringing certain amenities to the people. Apart from the general role of chiefs certain offices carry certain responsibilities.

1. The Ekiopreowei: He is the most senior chief in Adagbabiri and acts in the absence of the Amananowei in running the administrative system of the town. In other words, he is the traditional prime minister. He is the chief adviser to both the Amananowei and the council-of-chiefs. He represents the Amananowei in delegation or otherwise in functions or meetings in and outside Adagbabiri town.
2. The Suo-Ala: “The Suo-Ala is the warlord of Adagbabiri and derived his power from ‘Kena’ the god of war of the Kabowei clan”. He leads the people of Adagbabiri in ritorial protection of the town are in charge of organizing the ‘Kena’ Ogile (war dance) and war
regattas with other related activities. He is expected to revive the lost military traditions of the Adagbabiri people.

3. The Bebearowei: He is the official spokesman of Adagbabiri. He is usually well versed in the Ezon language and can hold his own. Manner of speaking for the people of Adagbabiri.

4. The Amabenemowei: He gathers the people together on any important occasion and he is also the custodian of the traditional and cultural activities of the people of Adagbabiri.

5. The Ogbowei: The ogbowei is the leader of the youths. He is entrusted with the responsibility of advising and educating the youths in the proper and tradition and culture of the people of Adagbabiri. In the annual cultural festivities especially during the ‘Seigbein’ festival, he is to ensure full and proper participation of the youths20.

6. The Zorudaowi: He is the chief organizer of all forms of entertainments in the town. Such as community festival and led the people to invited events. (Amamiebukuro:14/8/2006).

Differences in the Institutional Practice

Basic differences exist in the chieftaincy institution of Adagbabiri in relation to other Izon kingdoms, towns or Villages. In the first place Adagbabiri is not a clan but a member of a clan like Villages like Asamabiri, Trofani, Agbere to mention a few “Adagbabiri has a democratic set up”. The office of the Amadaowei of Adagbabiri or any chieftaincy position is not hereditary but those of the eastern ijaw Villages for instance Buguma, Bonny have the “Amananaowei” which is hereditary and of royal blood. The “Amananaowei” in those Villages are not responsible to anybody unlike the Amadaowei of Adagbabiri who is responsible to the “Pere” of Kabowei Kingdom. The Amadaowei has his council of chiefs, a prerogative not enjoyed by other Villages within the kingdom and in the neighbourhood. The Amadaowei of Adagbabiri participates during the installation of a new Pere and infact he and other members of the council of Chiefs of the late “Pere” form the new council of chiefs, or act as a regency until a new Pere is installed. This prerogative does not extend to other Community heads in other clan or kingdom. He is thus a king maker at the clan level. While the Amadaowei of Adagbabiri is classified as second-class chiefs, those of other Villages in the kingdom are recognized as third class chief. (Amamiebukuro:14/8/2006).

The Institution Today

The chieftaincy institution in Adagbabiri has come a long way from a humble colonial beginning. The institution today is carried on in some pageantry forms. Although, it is a modernized one, a development of the modern day. Most participants in this institution today are of the educated and enlightened elite class who unlike previously are no longer ashamed to be associated with the traditions of their people. People come from the cities to take various titles to add up to their bag of achievements unlike previously when it was greatly thought that only illiterates and Idol worshippers needed such honors. Some old traits have continued while new ones have been added. Both have further acted to recommend the institution to all. It has been able to accommodate the demands of modern society without sacrificing actually, the rich cultural heritage of the people. In recent past, chiefs were selected by the Community council, but today, it has to have the approval of the Amadaowei and his council of chiefs. Any adult can be made a chief irrespective of age, but the Amadaowei must be over forty years (40 years) of age, fully resident in Adagbabiri on his installation.

He must also be married and considered of good character. This also applies to the other chiefs. In addition, all chiefs must be versed in the Adagbabiri and Kabowei culture and traditions. However, the demands of modern day have made it mandatory that the Amadaowei must have attained reasonable education, to be capable of reading and writing, and also communicating freely in English Language which is the official national language. This educational standard does not necessarily apply to other chiefs who only need to be verse in the tradition of the people. From the very beginning, the chiefs were allowed to perform their duty side by side with their private business or works, but the Amadaowei by tradition ought to relinquish any full-time public office held prior to his installation.(Ekiye, Yenagoa: 20/08/2006).

Before the introduction of the stool of the Amadaowei, the chiefs then had collective responsibility for the general welfare of Adagbabiri town in a quasi-republican government, but today the chiefs are responsible to the Amadaowei who is their fountain, their superior not just
among equals. In any case once a chief is installed he cannot be removed in his life-time but curiously enough the Amadaowei can be removed if he breaches the traditions, in the following ways; where he puts himself over and above his subjects; fails to command their respect and loyalty; if he were found guilty of insulting the cultural values of the society; if found guilty of embezzlement, adultery or any other crime or where he voluntarily abdicate his office. Thus, while the Amadaowei is highly exalted and appears to be the alpha and Omega, the case is actually that he holds office at the grace of his chiefs and people.

The phenomenon of honourary titles is a new one in Adagbabiri, a way of acknowledging the good deeds of non-indigenes in the Community. While it was usually not the case to grant women titles, times have indeed changed in Adagbabiri that women are now admitted into the “sacred” order. Thus, thanks to today’s modernization, women are now being given titles as a way of appreciating their contributions in the community. The first Adagbabiri female chief is chief (Mrs) Esther Adibiliakumoh Offeh, the “Ere-Bolodare” of Adagbabiri installed in May 1990. (Ekiye: 20/08/2006).

The mode of paying homage to the chiefs has not witnessed any modification but has been extended to the Amadaowei stool also. Males bow before the Amadaowei and chiefs, raising their right, clenched fist, in the case of Amadaowei and looking straight on and saying “DaaTimiNendu”, meaning “Live long my father”. In like manner, the females knelt in greetings before the chiefs and Amadaowei and in the case of the latter raised their two arms with outstretch palms facing the Amadaowei and looking straight on and saying “DaaTimiNendu”. All enter the palace; without shoes, the men take off their hats. The chiefs and Amadaowei must acknowledge the people’s salutation by raising the traditional white horse tail.

C. Maintenance of the Chieftaincy Institution in Adagbabiri

To maintain the institution the government pays the Amadaowei and his council of chiefs’ monthly stipends, this does not cover all the chiefs but only the senior ones who sits in-council with the Amadaowei. Prior to this, all the chiefs got was from people who paid homage to them, and revenue for peace settlement. However, the community also had arguments that the Amadaowei’s stipend by a personal monthly allowance of two hundred thousand naira (₦200,000.00) and impress of the same amount to enable him meet his public relations and entertainment needs. The institution is also maintained by revenue raised from levies, sometimes the rate of ₦ 200.00 per male and ₦ 100.00 per female per month.

In addition, top civil servants, businessmen and women are welcomed to make periodic voluntary donations towards the up-keep of the stool and the institution together. Title holders, especially the honourary chiefs contribute generously towards the Amadaowei’s up keep.

Installation Rites:

Chiefs: The installation ceremony for all category of chiefs is the same. The would-be chief usually gets a minimum of six month notice. He is thus forewarned to begin his preparations early. On the actual day of installation everybody gathers at the Community square or town hall as the case may be and the Amadaowei then reads the names and the titles are called, each with a written oath of office in hand. The Amadaowei then asks them to read the oath jointly while the illiterates are to repeat after the Amadaowei. Thereafter, appropriate incantation and water (BoiBeni) in turns and prayers of blessing are rendered.

At the end of the blessing ceremony, the chiefs will rise and bow before the Amadaowei and in turn round to bow to the audience. They now prepare to leave for their seats after each of them presenting, in turns, the following gifts to the community; Presentation procedures is as follows: in order of seniority, the first chief makes his presentation thus, “I chief ................. The ................... of Adagbabiri with gratitude to God and the community present the following gifts to the Adagbabiri community in appreciation of the rare honour done”.

a. One healthy goat
b. Two bundles of plantain;
c. Three cartons assorted beer;
d. One bottle of gin (local brew), one bottle Gordon gin, schnapps or Brandy or whisky, and one crate of mineral also;
At the end of the presentation of gifts by all the chief, the Amadaowei, sitting thanks the chiefs jointly on behalf of the community and thereafter, merriment starts and extends late into the night.

Amadaowei: The installation ceremony of a new Amadaowi is an elaborate one and covers a four-day traditional week–AKENDUOMBAI, BIRIBAI, AKENLAMBIA AND AKENBIA. Before the beginning of the ceremonies at least six calendar months must have lapsed to enable the Amadaowei-elect and town to prepare for the intensive and elaborate ceremonial activities. “During the preparation period lasting four days, the Amadaowei-elect is held in-communicado except the members of his family and king-makers are the only persons allowed to have contact with him. The event and activities are thus:

Akenbuombia: This is the day the ceremony is expected to kick off and the community is expected to provide the following: one healthy cow; a large quantity of plantains and yams, a tin of palm oil and also cash of (₦2,000.00), these items are used in providing for general entertainment of visitors with these the town is thrown into a festive mood and there is staging in various traditional dances and processions. This continues to the following.

Bribbia: the second day of the ceremony is the “BOUKEMA CEREMONY” in which the Amadaowei-elect and kingmakers enter the “LELA” (Bush) to perform the various rites from early hours of the morning till dusk. Back in town occasional canon and gun shots and merry making continue. The Amadaowei-elect provides the following items with which the elders and king-makers proceed to the “LELA”: a healthy he-goat; plantain and ingredients; one bottle of Schnapps one bottle Gordon gin, and one bottle of gin (local brew) and a keg of palmwine.

Akenlambia: The Amadaowei-elect ‘rests’ on this day and prepare himself fully in readiness for the final installation ceremony. This day is used for entertainment of important visitors by the Amadaowei-elect, there is firing of canon and gunshot drumming, singing, processions and general merry-making is the order of the day. Later in the evening the Amadaowei is treated to a boat regatta, the first is the women’s display on river while the second is the “OruOgile” (war boat dance) performed by the youths displaying their past glories.

Akenbai: This is the actual day of installation of the Amadaowei for the dawn rites at the water front, the Amadaowei. For the dawn rites at the water front, the Amadaowei-elect provides the following: “Benikema” ingredients (things used in appeasing the water goddess) and cash of (₦50.00). After the rights are performed the Amadaowei-elect is led back to town for an interval of rest. At noon the “Opuozi,” (big drum) is sounded to give notice to the Amadaowei-elect that Kena (The god of war) is ready to receive and bless him. He is then led to the shrine in procession accompanied by the eldest man (Amakosowei), the two Egide (quarters) Okosiowei’s and other king-makers. At the end of the rites the Amadaowei-elect presents the following to Kena: a healthy bull, three bundless of plantain, seven bottles of gin (local Brew), a bottle of schnapps, bottle of Gordon gin and a bottle of Whisky in addition hundred-naira cash (₦100.00).

At the end of the presentation an acceptance speech by the spokesman of Kena (diety), the Amadoewei-elect visits KENA’s wife at the sub-shrine and present them with gifts. Thereafter he is led to the Community square or town hall for the final installation ceremony. The Amadaowei-elect kneels down in front of the Amakosowei who dips his hand into a basin of water and pour same on the head of the Amadaowe-elect proclaiming him the choice of the gods as a ruler of the people. At the end of his installation, the Amadaowei proceeds to announce the names of his council of chiefs and confer them with their various titles. Thereafter, the actual celebration begins. Merriments of all sorts, prominent musicians from Ijaw land take turns to entertain the people.

Burial Rites:

a) Chiefs

When traditional chief dies in Adagbabiri it is the Amadaowei or his council of chiefs who announces his death. According to tradition, the council of chiefs who announces his death. According to tradition, the first day is the day the community informs the gods of the demise and perform certain rituals. The second day nobody is expected to
attend his private business but to remain in the Community and mourn the dead, while the third day is the burial day after certain rites to assure the decease of a smooth transition. These ceremonies are extended to people bestowed with honorary titles. It is also important to note that the coming of Christianity has played a great role in changing the institution. So many rites which were performed before are no longer performed.

b) **Amadaowei**

According to the tradition, on the passing on of the Amadaowei, announcement will be made after seven days; thereafter, the succeeding seven days will be declared for mourning and final burial rites. “within the first seven days of his death, the council of chiefs which now acts regent and the elders must perform rites to inform the gods formally of the demise of the Amadaowei. On the first day ten canon shots are fired to inform the people of the passing of their father (Amadaowei). During this period nobody is expected to go to farm or on fishing expedition as a mark of respect for the departed leader. The second and the third day are usually quiet while the fourth day the council of chiefs with the elders go to ‘KENA’ god of war to inform him of the death of their leader. On the fifth day three visits by all to wife and children of the late Amadaowei who according to the tradition pours ashes over their heads and remain in dark clothes not only for the period of the burial but also for three months afterwards. The sixth day is the actual burial day of the late Amadaowei and during the period there is the ‘Owu-Sei’ (dance of the Spirits) by the masquerades of the community. The seventh, which is the last day is set aside for cleansing of the entire community by the river-side.

During this period, only the King-makers and the high priest of the Community god can see the body of the late Amadaowei. All on-going ceremonies must stop during this period, in addition anybody that dies during this period is not given a proper burial until after the late Amadaowei’s burial ceremony is over.

All these ceremonies are “laced” with lots of traditional incantations that gave the impression that the Chieftaincy Institution in Adagbabiri was filled with fetish activities.

**Relevance and Popularity of the Institution**

The institution is relevant not only for cultural activities but it is also important to the government. It provides grass-root mobilization and leadership where the government, as is often the case is located far away from the people. Government places much emphasis on the traditional institution and accords it great respect. Thus, government often tend to seek and satisfy the development needs of the people through the advice of this institution. Thus, the Amadaowei and his council of Chiefs through constant dialogue make the problems of the people known to the government.

The most important work of the institution however and where it is perhaps most relevant, is the handling of disputes between individuals and families in the Community. These disputes must be first heard by the council of chiefs with the Amadaowei as the presiding judge. No one is expected to seek redress in the law courts or take police action unless he had come before the Amadaowei in-council. The Amadaowei is of course also government recognized justice of peace. Thus, the Chieftaincy Institution in Adagbabiri, Community is one that has gone through changes over the years. It has brought prestige and recognition to the Community as the first Amada-owiei enjoyed a peaceful region that earned him respect from Adagbabiri, the Kabo-owiei clan Chiefs and communities outside. The Adagbabiri Chieftaincy experience encouraged other Kabo-owiei Communities to install their own community heads (Amadaowei) following the Adagbabiri model. The Chieftaincy Institution in Adagbabiri has evolved over the years from one that placed priority of the development of the Community to one that places the Community on a first “line charge” through the activities of the Amadaowei who places the development of the community above his personal interest.

**References**


**Literature**


