

CLASS: SS2
SUBJECT: GOVIC
TOPIC: PRE-COLONIAL SYSTEM
WEEK: 10
TERM: SECOND

THE IGBO PRECOLONIAL GOVERNMENT

The Igbos, unlike the Yorubas and the Fulanis, had a complex and complicated system of administration in pre-colonial era. There was no sort of central authority. What they had was a diffusion of political authority into different groups. These groups that shared political authority included the **village elders**, the **age grades**, the **Ozo title holders**, **Ofo title holders**, **diviners** etc. This is the main reason why the Igbo political organization in the pre-colonial era was described as **acephalous**.

The Igbo pre-colonial administration was therefore based on the principle of village democracy which thrives on the **patrilineal family** group known as **Umunna**. Therefore, the village made up of kindred is the basic unit of political organization. There are two main groups of institutions that made up the village government, these are the council of elders (Ama-ala) made up of heads of families who held staff of authority called Ofo and the village assembly made up of all grown up male members of the village (Ohana-Eze). Political power was not centralized or concentrated in one hand but scattered, which made the society egalitarian. There was no supreme king like the Oba and Emirs, as it was in the Yoruba and Hausa system. Interestingly, however, each village in Igbo society is normally administered like a Republic, independent or sovereign state. Be that as it may, there exist many institutions in the pre-colonial Igbo society, charged with the responsibility of judicial, legislative and executive functions like: the family group, village council, Ozo title holder, age grades and the Ala.

STRUCTURES AND ROLES OF THE COMPONENTS OF IGBO PRECOLONIAL GOVERNMENT

1. **The Family Group:** This is one of the most recognized institutions in pre-colonial Igbo society as the basic unit of every political institution. It comprises people of the same family. Each family group was autonomously headed by the title

holder called '**OKPARA**'. The Okpara controls the family and judges any family disputes. He performs ritual and ceremonial functions on behalf of the family.

2. **Village Council:** This is popularly known as council of elders, it comprises of all the family heads in the village. However, the most important thing is that each village was administered as a SOVEREIGN ENTITY and each family heads (Okpara) were reckoned or named as '**Ofo**' title holders in the village. They have the responsibility of discussing the matters that affect the life of the citizens. They also help in maintaining law and order in the society as well as settlement of dispute between or among group of families. The chairman of this council is known as the oldest of the OKPARAS.
3. **Ozo Title Holders:** This can be seen as the highest title of honour which is given to the specific individuals in pre-colonial Igbo society. To become an Ozo title holder, one must be prestigious, popular and wealthy. The most amazing thing is that the position is not hereditary. Ozos are highly influential. They settle and adjudicate on different disputes. They also rendered valuable advice to the family heads (the Okparas).
4. **Amala Oha :** This is an institution of government as it is a form of general assembly. In this assembly, all adult male members meet to perform legislative functions. In ancient times, Amala Oha meetings were held in the village square. The decisions of the assembly in matters affecting the village or individual were final.
5. **Age grade:** This is another important institution in pre-colonial Igbo society. They are group of young men on the basis of age. These age grades carry out lots of responsibilities like maintenance of peace and order, sanitation of the community, helping each other during harvesting period, enforcement of law, etc.
6. **The Ala:** This is another political institution in pre-colonial Igbo society. Ala is popularly known as the goddess of the land. Cases like murder, homicide, etc. is judged by the Ala. To any Ala, there is a priest called Ala's priest who interprets the pronouncement of the Ala. This explains Igbos belief in Amadioha, Igwe-ka-ala, Ogbaegbu, etc. in terms of needs.

In a nutshell, the Igbos are a segmentary, Republican, fragmentary people and sovereign in nature, because unlike other ethnic groups in Nigeria, they did not build any strong centralized state. They were simply regarded as a Chief-less people. The village was the centre of government where final decisions were

taken by Elders from every family in a form of Gerontocracy. All lineages including Males and Females adults in the village also participated in the political process. The age grade and titled societies were the major instrument of government.

The life of every individual in Igbo land is highly respected, and recognition of an individual was not based on family background but on personal capabilities and age. The elders form the core of the village administration. The male population is divided into age grades corresponding with the youth, middle age or able bodied men and elders. Each age group has its own special rights, duties, obligation and responsibilities within the village.

FEATURES OF THE IGBO PRECOLONIAL GOVERNMENT

1. Powers were decentralized
2. It was republic in Nature.
3. There was no organized system of taxation
4. There was no separation of powers
5. It featured direct democracy when it comes to decision making

ASSIGNMENT

In a tabular form, give five differences between the Hausa/Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo Pre-colonial systems.