

# **The importance of Traditional societies in Sierra Leone in Enforcing Traditional Laws and Customs.**

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## **Abstract:**

There are many Traditional secret Societies in Sierra Leone which are ancient cultural institutions such as the Poro, the Bondo the Sande, the Ojeh, the Wonde, the Gbenleh and the Kofo. Initiation into these societies is an absolute central element served to determine the rite of passage from child hood to manhood or womanhood With the exception of the Bondo and the Sande Societies which are predominantly designed for women, all the others are designed for men. These societies are highly considered in enforcing traditional laws and customs of the communities/regions and the country as a whole. They are therefore protected very highly by the traditional elders and government whose mandate is to ensure that the set principles are observed in the cause of operation and law violators are dealt with according to the corresponding penalty of the crime committed.

## **INTRODUCTION**

In Sierra Leone the indigenes were having and still have their own ways of doing things traditionally before and even after the introduction of the western culture. In the governance footing local laws are instituted with corresponding penalties for law breakers. To protect and to enforce the set rules, the fore runners therefore decided unanimously to use their traditional societies for the maintenance of these rules. Secondly to ensure the safety of the land from foreign aggression, protection of properties, for self-help purposes in their agricultural activities, trade and governance, the need for the formation of these traditional societies becomes imminent. Among the formed societies are those designed for men such as the Poro society, the wonde society, the ojeh society, and the gbenlay society .All these are geared to protect the territorial integrity of the country from foreign invasion. The Bondo is designed for women and

is less aggressive. The main aim of this society (Bondo) is to train young girls the different arts involved in their marital homes. Such arts include cooking, laundering, child bearing and protection, fishing and the way of treating their husbands in order to make their homes comfortable. Unlike the Bondo society, the societies for men are highly aggressive and are the most important on the land. To become a member of these societies, men have to be initiated. The initiation ceremony is carried in a sacred bush where only those qualified to be initiated are kept for a period of time. The reason behind the initiation ceremony is that in the governance structure, only initiates are encouraged to participate in negotiations during the electioneering process (local/national). This condition is so hard and fast that in the cause of initiation in all the regions parents are sending their children to be initiated so that they could not be left out in the negotiation process of whatever program. In the case of group's formation to mane their agricultural actives, only initiates are eligible to be incorporated. In the formation of laws of governance only initiates are considered to contribute and to handle positions set by the elders in the region. Therefore, the idea for the formation of these societies becomes paramount both at local and at national level. At local level, the elections of paramount chieftaincy is purely the prerogative of these societies. A non-member will never be nominated for any position. All positions are reserved for members of the society. Before getting into politics, either to vote or to be voted for, one has to become a member of these societies. At national level, the importance of these traditional societies is highly envisaged. Negotiations for the selection of candidates to participate in the electioneering process is done in the sacred bush of these societies. Decisions are reached as to who should Take the lead and all to follow is done without interrogation. In the cause of protecting the territorial integrity of the land, only initiates are considered in the process, the more reason they are forcefully conscripted into the society. To crown it all, the non-initiates as far as issues of the land are concerned, they are always left out. Because of this segregation sensed in the process, the formation of different traditional societies is realized in the length and breadth of the country Sierra Leone, all performing the same functions. It is just a way of limiting the movement of participants. They are all speaking with one voice. What touches a region is the concern of the other region .In the cause of agricultural activities, different groups are formed for plowing, digging, sawing of seeds, harvesting, pastoring of domestic animals etc. Whatever activity to be done, members come together to form a formidable team. When it is plowing time there is a set group locally called KABORTHOR.

Gallant men are sensed in this group. During the process they will be seen displaying their know how with their local tools women following behind singing a loud in a bid to motivate the workers. When it is time to broadcast the seeds, there are men in the society trained for that. There proficiency is demonstrated. Each activity, there are trained society members. So it is like, properly yield is always realized.

## AIMS

The main aim for the formation of these traditional societies is to:

- Train young men the art of war fare in order to defend the territorial integrity of the country against foreign invasion,
- To train men the art of medicine to cure the sick as and when necessary
- Form Different agricultural groups of workers that would come together to do their agricultural activates with their traditional tools to enhance high productivity/ harvest.
- To train young girls the art of women hood such as cooking, laundering, fishing and taking care of their children and husbands in their different homes.
- Train men and women the code of ethics (How to be respectful to authorities and elders)
- To teach them the various laws of governance and how to preside on matters.
- Train initiates the various local crimes and their corresponding penalties
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## Objectives

- At the end of the day initiates would be well grounded with the art of war fare to protect the territorial integrity of the country.
- They will be ofay with the local crimes and their corresponding penalties.
- The will be knowledgeable with the different behavioral patterns and how to behave to elders.
- They will be quite ofay with the art of woman hood: cooking, laundering, taking care of their children and husbands and the art of fishing.
- They will be able to implement the laws they are taught in the bush and their corresponding penalties.

- They will be quite aware of unity in their midst to enable them succeed in their various local activities

.I cannot actually enter into the mystic part of the society. My aim here is to indicate to researchers and readers how important these societies are in the cause of development (the actual role they play.)Initiation into the society is always carried out between the months of March and April when all the different agricultural activities have been completed and the youths are left with no option but to be engaged, and that will be the time the information is disseminated to all in and outside the region with a due date for initiation, urging members to send in their children. Initiation last for almost three months. Within these months the initiated are expected to have undergone rigorous training so that by the time they are coming out from the bush all of them are expected to have learnt all the arts involved. The implementation of the laws learnt is of great importance. The reason being the region should be well maintained in terms of governance. Cases are to be investigated to foster verdicts as prescribed. Laws are established on premature lands. These virgin lands are forbidden to be used for any agricultural purposes. For such a law be effected. it is made known to the public by placing a sign publicly for majority to know that that piece of land is been put under the control of society members to be protected. Anyone caught brushing or even entering into to it for whatever purpose is guilty of a crime, and should be brought to book. Most times such law breakers are publicly punished by giving them thorough beating. By all indication, public flogging is the last and final disgrace when inflicted on an aged person. There are other areas laws are imposed such as pre-mature fruits, rivers where drinking water is fetched by community members. Anyone caught contaminating it will either pay a fine as inscribed or face public flogging. In the case of pre-mature fruits, who so ever that is caught piking it before maturation, the penalty if expulsion from the region because of destroying the tressor of the region. Fruits if allowed to gain maturation, picked and sold brings in income to members. When that happens, responsible and sustainable consumption will be realized, the issue of hunger will be addressed. The entire members will be able to address their economic needs, health, and the education of their children will also be addressed. Fishing is another legal stand point. Nobody is allowed to fish in the rivers indicated from where water is fetched to address their economic needs. If caught is also liable to be punished, it is a crime. The bottom line for the formation of these traditional societies is basically to protect their region and to control their social and market products from where they are making an income and such

income be utilized for the development of the entire region in domains like the creation of a playing field where foot ball matches will be organized .an activity they believe will also create an income. The generated income from these places will also help to further create community center/centers where they will be organizing community meetings. They also have cattle rearers, who rear cows, pigs, goats, sheep dock Guinea pigs and fowls. From their proceeds, churches and mosques are built for the adoration of God almighty. Although there are people in their midst who are free- thinkers. They neither go to mosque nor do they to church. All of them are catered for because they are fervent members of these societies who are trained for the protection of all items mentioned.

### SUGGESTION

- For these societies to continue doing the good work of the community and the country as a whole in the area of territorial protection, I suggest that the national government pay much attention to them by providing them with the necessary gears, such rain boots during, rain coats and incentives.
- I suggest that the instituted laws and their corresponding penalties be mitigated.
- I suggest that there should be an age bracket for members to be initiated say age 18 and above are recommended instead of conscripting the under age.
- I suggest that the implement used in the ignition ceremony be monitored by a health practitioner to avoid the use of crude and unsterilized implement during initiation.
- I suggest that initiated members be given the right to maintain their biological names instead of the names given to them immediately after initiation. Names like KANRAY, the name of a snake, GBANABOM, the name of a prominent fighter (late)
- I suggest that elders of these societies be further trained them in order to broaden their horizons on the art of war fare.

### RECOMMENDATION

Because of the good intention these society members are demonstrating in their region and the country as a whole, I recommend that:

- They are solarized by government. They be given a certain amount at the end of the

- I recommend that members be provided with the necessary gears to enable them do effect job at all times.
- I recommend that age 18 and above be the age bracket for non-initiates be conscripted and be initiated into the society.
- I recommend that implements used during initiation be monitored by a health practitioner to avoid the use of crude and unsterilized implements which will infuse deadly diseases in to the bodies of the initiated.
- I recommend that elders of these societies be given modern training to enable them foster the right training.
- I recommend that the government negotiates with the traditional law makers for mitigation of the set laws, rather to minimize them in order to encourage youths in the region and the country as a whole to stay and to continue doing their good work. If laws are not mitigated there is the possibility that who so ever commits a crime will tend to flee from the region and the country as a whole, thereby reducing the labor force of the country.

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