



## Gendered Authority in Traditional Justice Systems: Unveiling the Role of Magajia in Customary Justice Systems in Auchi, Edo State, Nigeria.

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**Abstract.** Traditional justice systems in Africa are often perceived as exclusively patriarchal. However, the gendered authority of the Magajia in Auchi challenges this narrative. This study examines the role of the Magajia, a female traditional leader, in conflict resolution and moral guidance within Auchi's customary justice systems. Using purposive sampling, thirty-six key informant interviews, focus group discussions, and participant observation at community court sessions were conducted. Findings reveal that the Magajia is usually an elderly woman appointed by senior women or traditional rulers to mediate disputes, upholds moral standards, and represents women's interests. Though her judgments lack legal enforcement under the state law, but her influence within the community remains significant. Therefore, institutionalizing the Magajia's role and providing training in leadership, legal literacy, and digital skills could enhance her relevance in modern governance structures. Above all, the study underscores the need to recognize and empower gender-inclusive traditional justice systems in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** Unveiling, The Magajia, Traditional Justice systems, Auchi, Edo State Nigeria.

### 1. Introduction

Across many African societies, traditional justice systems continue to play an indispensable role in resolving disputes, maintaining social order, and reinforcing cultural values, particularly in communities where access to formal legal institutions is limited or viewed as expensive, delaying and culturally alien (Oomen, 2013). These systems are often shaped by patriarchal ideologies that prioritize male leadership and decision-making, thereby sidelining the contributions of women in conflict resolution and justice processes (Alubo, 2021).

However, embedded within these same systems are unique institutional spaces that empower women in specific contexts to exercise authority and influence. One of such institution is that of the Magajia, a female traditional leader found in Northern Nigerian communities, whose institution has also been adopted in other cultures with significant Northern influence, such as in Auchi, a dominant Muslims Etsako ethnic group of people in Edo State. Especially, with the growth of Islam in Auchi from the 19th century, many northern Hausa-Fulani socio-religious structures, including the institution of the Magajia, were integrated into local governance and culture (Osaghae, 1998). As a result, the institution of Magajia in Auchi developed as the indigenous Etsako gendered authority in traditional justice system.

Auchi presents a unique sociocultural environment where indigenous Edo traditions coexist with Islamic norms and customs, including the Magajia institution (Bello, 2023). This convergence underscores the importance of context in shaping how traditional institutions are adapted and interpreted across regions. In Auchi, the Magajia serves as both a custodian of culture and an adjudicator of justice in issues pertaining to women and families (Aminu and Yusuf, 2017). Her courtroom is not a formal institution backed by statutory law, but rather a communal space where disputes are resolved through dialogue, consensus, and appeals to customary values (Usman, 2021). In many communities, especially in the Northern Nigeria, the Magajia is the first point of contact for women experiencing domestic conflict, economic disputes, or social ostracization (Usman, 2021; Okonkwo, 2018). Her role is thus not only symbolic but functionally critical to the operation of justice systems that resonate with local customs and values.

This concept of gendered authority of the institution of Magajia challenges the perception that traditional African societies are exclusively patriarchal in nature (Tamale, 2020). While it is undeniable that male dominance characterizes many traditional leadership roles, anthropological and historical evidence suggests that women have also, historically held positions of influence, albeit often within gender-specific domains or under culturally defined limitations (Okonjo, 2015). The Magajia is one of such figures whose authority, although operating within a gendered hierarchy, reveals the complex interplay of power, gender, and tradition (Aminu and Yusuf, 2017). As the leader of women in her community, the Magajia is entrusted with the task of settling disputes, enforcing moral codes, mobilizing women for communal activities, and advising male traditional leaders on matters affecting the female population (Ibrahim & Salihu, 2020).

While the study of gendered authority of women in traditional justice systems is gaining renewed interests among sociologists, legal anthropologists and gender scholars who seek to deconstruct the monolithic portrayal of African traditional leadership as solely male-dominated, Feminist legal scholars have argued that law and legal processes are not neutral but are shaped by historical, social, and gendered power relations that often privilege masculinity while rendering women's legal authority invisible (Smart, 2012; Chinkin and Charlesworth, 2015). Within this lens, the Magajia's role can be interpreted as a form of gendered subaltern justice, where women exercise legal and social authority within gender-specific spheres, even if this authority is not recognized by formal legal systems or public institutions. Nonetheless, the resilience of the Magajia institution speaks much of the continued relevance of traditional justice systems that are embedded in local moral worlds and gendered social structures. Recognizing and documenting the Magajia's role could provide a critical corrective to dominant narratives that ignore or minimize women's agency in traditional governance. It also opens up possibilities for rethinking how legal empowerment and gender equity can be pursued within the context of indigenous judicial traditions.

However, even though studies on gendered authority in traditional justice systems in indigenous Africa societies are essentially not a new academic interest, yet only a few or limited anthropological and sociological research has been done in this field compared to other allied disciplines like feminist and gender studies, history, law and jurisprudence. It is perhaps not out of place to say that the feminist studies and these other allied academic disciplines like history, law and jurisprudence, only took academic

advantage of the field of study for their aims and presuppositions.

Over and above this, the paper is motivated by the growing recognition that indigenous justice mechanisms cannot be fully understood without analyzing the gendered dynamics embedded in them. As this will open up possibilities for rethinking of how legal empowerment and gender equity can be pursued within the context of indigenous judicial system. Following this, this paper shall attempt to explore the Magajia gendered traditional justice systems in Auchi. Since Auchi is a prominent town in Edo State with a significant Muslim population, it provides a fertile ground for examining the operation of the traditional female authority of Magajia outside the northern geopolitical zone. As a cultural hybrid of Northern and Southern Nigerian influences, it follows that the study shall specifically seeks to address the following objectives: To explore the socio- historical background of the Magajia institution in Auchi. To examine the appointment, legitimacy and authority of the Magajia. To know the roles that the Magajia plays in dispute resolution and what types of civil and customary cases she presides over. And to identify the opportunities and challenges facing the institution of the Magajia in Auchi in the contemporary modernization and legal reform.

## 2. Theoretical Orientation

### 2.1 Patriarchal Theory and Gendered Authority in Traditional Justice Systems

Patriarchal theory provides a critical lens for understanding the gendered dimensions of authority in traditional justice systems. Rooted in feminist thought, patriarchal theory posits that societies are fundamentally structured by male dominance, where men hold primary power in political leadership, moral authority, and social privilege, including the administration of justice (Walby, 1990). In many traditional justice systems, particularly in Africa and Asia, indigenous authority structures have historically been organized along patriarchal lines, marginalizing women's participation and reinforcing gendered hierarchies (Tamale, 2008).

Traditional justice systems often reflect and reinforce the socio-cultural norms of their communities. Under patriarchal frameworks, leadership positions such as chiefs, elders, or religious leaders are predominantly held by men, with women relegated to subordinate or symbolic roles (Tripp et al., 2009). This gendered allocation of power results in a justice system where male perspectives and interests dominate and shape

legal interpretations and outcomes in a way that often fail to consider women's experiences, particularly in matters related to domestic violence, inheritance, or marital disputes (Goetz, 1997).

Furthermore, patriarchal theory helps explain how customary law and cultural traditions can perpetuate systemic gender inequalities. For instance, in many African societies, the authority to adjudicate disputes or resolve conflicts is vested in male-dominated councils, while women's roles are often informal or ceremonial, such as being advisers or ritual participants with limited decision-making power (Hellum, 2001). These gendered power dynamics not only marginalize women's voices but also reinforce the legitimacy of male authority as normative and unchallengeable.

However, while patriarchal structures dominate, some traditional justice systems are not monolithic. In

certain contexts, institution like the Magajia in Auchi, Edo State or among the Hausas in Northern Nigeria or the Queen Mothers in parts of Ghana have carved out authoritative spaces, though often within the bounds of male-dominated institutions (Osei-Hwedie, 1998). Patriarchal theory, therefore, allows for an analysis of both the exclusion and strategic agency of women within these systems, offering a nuanced understanding of how gendered authority is negotiated.

In conclusion, patriarchal theory provides a foundational framework for analyzing traditional justice systems as gendered institutions. It reveals how entrenched male authority limits equitable justice for women and underscores the need for reform strategies that promote gender inclusivity and equal representation.

### 3. Materials and Methods

#### 3.1 Ethno-Historical Profile of Auchi



Fig 1: Map showing Auchi. Source: <https://tinyurl.com/mu8krh3v> Retrieved May, 2025

The study was carried out in the five major indigenous village communities of Auchi. Auchi consists of five major indigenous village communities (Usogun, Aibotse, Akpekpe, Igbhe and Iyekhe). Each of these five indigenous village communities are headed by Red-Cap chief (Daudu) and Magajia, all traditionally organized under the Paramount Chief called the Otaru of Auchi. Historically, Auchi people migrated from Benin Kingdom in the 16th century during the reign of Oba Ewuare of Benin (Yakubu, 2021). Auchi people were said to have been led by a man called Uchi. Uchi had the present Auchi indigenous Village communities (Usogun, Aibotse, Akpekpe, Igbhe and Iyekhe) named after his children. These village communities, which

are separated are basically located at the foot of Uchi hill while at the top of the hill is Uchi market. The indigenous administration of Auchi town was initially gerontocracy, where the most senior man (Odion) presides over the affairs of Auchi. But this gave way to monarchical traditional administration when the Nupes invaded and brought Islam to Auchi (Yakubu, 2021). Presently, Auchi is traditionally organized under the Paramount Chief called the Otaru of Auchi. These indigenous Auchi village communities (Usogun, Aibotse, Akpekpe, Igbhe and Iyekhe) have common peculiarities in history, language, social experiences culture, traditional belief system, norms, values and taboos with strong Islamic influence and

Hausa culture, which includes the traditional institution of Magajia.

### **Research Instrument and Sampling Method**

The study focuses on Magajia institution in traditional justice systems in Auchi. A qualitative ethnographic approach was adopted for the study because the study was basically a fact-finding study. A purposive sampling method was employed to conduct an in-depth unstructured interview (IDI) with a cross section of thirty-six (36) key informants (KIIs) in each of the five indigenous Auchi village communities (Usogun, Aibotse, Akpekpe, Igbhe and Iyekhe). These key informants were: past and present Magajias, community elders (male and female), traditional rulers' aides, some adult residents (men and women), local clerics, the Otaru of Auchi and the five indigenous village communities Red-Cap chiefs (Daudu). The in-depth unstructured interview (IDI) questions were not arranged as a fixed questionnaire. Answers to the questions were also gently probed, only where necessary, to give respondents a moment to reflect and gather their thoughts for clearer responses and information. Focus group discussions (FGDs) with women and participant observation at the community court sessions presided over by the Magajia was also conducted. In all, the data gathered were qualitatively analyzed.

## **4. Results and Discussion**

### **4.1 The Socio-Historical Background of the Magajia Traditional Justice Systems in Auchi**

Islam is the dominant religion of the Auchi people of Etsako ethnic group of Edo State. They have a long history associated with the Uthman Dan-Fodio's Jihad followers of Nupe across the Niger, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Enaikelé, 2014). Islam entered the present Edo State from across the Niger through the Edo North corridor where the Auchi people are geographically located. Jihad was used as a means of Islamizing the people to eradicate the people's traditional belief system (idol worshipping) and introduce Islamic culture and values, which the Auchi people share in common with the Nupes, Hausas, Fulanis and others in Northern Nigeria. The Auchi people of Etsako ethnic group still maintain a blend of ancestral worship, Islam, and Christianity in their spiritual and social lives (Omoriegic, 2002). With the growth of Islam in Auchi from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, many northern Hausa-Fulani socio-religious structures, including the institution of the Magajia, were integrated into local governance and culture (Osaghae, 1998). As a result, the institution of

Magajia in Auchi developed as the indigenous Etsako gendered authority in traditional justice system.

The institution of Magajia is deeply rooted in Hausa cultural traditions but has found local expression among the Auchi people of Edo State, due to centuries of inter-ethnic interactions and Islamic influences. In Auchi, the Magajia is selected from among respected elderly women known for their wisdom, leadership, and commitment to communal values (Audu, 2020). Her appointment is often endorsed by male traditional rulers but is functionally independent in many of her responsibilities, especially in women's affairs. The presence of the Magajia institution in Auchi traditional justice systems reflects a confluence of cultural integration, gendered social roles, and indigenous governance systems. The Magajia serves as a custodian of women's cultural interests, she plays the role of settling disputes and enforcing moral codes. As a liaison between women and traditional male authorities, she also plays the role of advising the male traditional leaders on matters affecting the female population.

### **4.2 Appointment, Legitimacy and Authority of the Magajia Institution in Auchi**

The key informant interview with the past and present Magajia in all the five indigenous Auchi village communities (Usogun, Aibotse, Akpekpe, Igbhe and Iyekhe) revealed that the Magajia in Auchi is typically an elderly woman appointed by consensus among senior women or she is typically appointed by the traditional rulers (Otaru of Auchi or the village heads) to represent women's interests in traditional councils. She occupies a parallel role to the male Red-Cap Chiefs but operates specifically within the realm of women's affairs, family dispute resolution, community mobilization, and the transmission of cultural knowledge to younger generations. Okojie, (2011) confirms this that the Magajia in Auchi, commands considerable respect, especially within the gendered spaces and she is often chosen based on her wisdom, age, integrity, and commitment to community service. Her position is not only ceremonial but functional, acting as a conflict mediator, moral guide, and cultural custodian in Auchi. In fact, the resilience of the Magajia institution underscores the community's adherence to indigenous models of dual-gender leadership (Salihu, 2010). This institution of Magajia in Auchi therefore, reflects a deeper African tradition of complementary gender leadership authority, where women hold recognized, although often less formalized role.

The influence of Islam on the Magajia institution in Auchi cannot be overemphasised. With the rise of Islamic practices in Auchi, the institution of the Magajia adapted and incorporated Islamic virtues such as modesty, prayer observance, and piety, especially in the public presentation of women (Last, 1987). The institution of Magajia in Auchi is influenced by Islamic practice but shaped in organization and practice by Etsako customs and tradition. Okpewho (1999) confirms and corroborated this that the institution of Magajia in Auchi remains distinctively Etsako in its organization and practice with the preservation of culture, norms values and taboos (Okpewho, (1999).

The legitimacy of the Magajia in Auchi, is deep rooted in communal consensus and spiritual recognition rather than state-backed authority. She derives her mandate from the community and must maintain her credibility through acts of fairness, charity, and spiritual insight (Yakubu, 2021). Her authority is moral and symbolic, yet she can influence public opinion, mobilize women for developmental projects, and act as a liaison with government agencies or NGOs focusing on women’s empowerment. In recent years, the Magajia in Auchi has played a role in promoting primary health awareness in family planning and child spacing, girl-child education, and vocational training for women, especially in collaboration with NGOs, local government and religious bodies (Ebohon, 2017). These activities reaffirm her role not just as a conflict mediator, but also as a key stakeholder in local development.

#### **4.3 Types of Civil and Customary Cases that Magajia has Authority to Presides Over in Auchi**

The FGDs and KIIs conducted among the women, community elders, local islamic clerics and the traditional rulers aids in all the five indigenous Auchi village communities (Usogun, Aibotse, Akpekpe, Igbhe and Iyekhe) reveals a complex number of cases that the Magajia traditional female justice systems in Auchi, for example, has the cultural authority to mediate or presides over, especially within the context of the Auchi people’s culture, norms, value system, taboos and community justice systems:

- Marriage disputes – issues between spouses, especially concerning neglect, roles, or misunderstandings.
- Bride price disagreements – disputes about payment or refund of bride price.
- Divorce settlements – negotiation and guidance on separation, including child custody.

- Polygamy-related conflicts – disputes among co-wives or between a wife and husband about equitable treatment.
- Child custody and care – deciding who should raise children after separation or parental death.
- Inheritance disputes – especially in female-headed households or where women's shares are contested.
- Domestic violence mediation – informal resolution or intervention in cases of abuse.
- Family neglect or abandonment – cases where a man neglects his family duties.
- Disputes over dowry items – clarifying ownership or return of marriage gifts.
- Adultery accusations – mediating community concerns and restoring social order.
- Farmland or housing disputes among women – usually involving shared family land or inherited property.
- Debts and money lending among women – resolving informal borrowing disputes.
- Quarrels among co-wives – peacekeeping and counseling among women in polygamous homes.
- Market or petty trade disputes – settling disagreements among women traders.
- Disputes over communal labor contributions – like helping with funerals or weddings.
- Problems involving in-laws – especially conflicts between wives and their husband’s relatives.
- Moral conduct and discipline – advising or sanctioning behavior that brings shame to the community.
- Support for widows and orphans – ensuring customary entitlements and care.
- Mentorship and mediation for wayward girls – intervening in cases of delinquency or early pregnancies.
- Traditional rites and festival conflicts – settling issues related to participation, roles, or taboos.

Audu, and Adegoke (2015). confirms and corroborated this that these cases demonstrate the types of civil and customary matters that Magajia has the authority to mediate or presides over, particularly those involving issues between spouses, quarrels among co-wives, wayward girls and early pregnancies, wife battery and issues relating to taboos and abomination. Her role is crucial in maintaining social harmony and ensuring that custom and tradition are respected and upheld within the community.

#### **4.4 Roles of the Magajia in Gendered Traditional Justice System in Auchi**

The institution of the Magajia in Auchi, located in Edo State, Nigeria, embodies a distinct gendered authority within the traditional governance structure. Though often marginalized in patriarchal historiography, yet, the Magajia performs multiple critical functions that support communal stability and promote justice, particularly for women and vulnerable groups. The following outlines ten core roles of the Magajia in Auchi's gendered traditional justice system:

##### **4.4.1 Dispute Mediation Among Women**

The Magajia acts as a mediator in interpersonal disputes involving women, particularly in cases of domestic conflicts, market-related disagreements, and inter-family disputes. She leverages cultural wisdom and customary precedents to resolve matters amicably, preventing escalation to male-dominated councils or formal courts (Ibrahim, 2020).

##### **4.4.2 Enforcement of Female Moral Conduct**

She enforces traditional codes of morality among women, especially regarding sexual propriety, marriage responsibilities, and respect for elders. This role helps maintain social harmony and cultural continuity within gendered expectations (Yahaya, 2014).

##### **4.4.3 Representation of Women in Council Deliberations**

The Magajia often participates in traditional council meetings where she speaks on behalf of women's concerns. Her presence ensures gender inclusivity in local governance. (Oyesomi, 2020)

##### **4.4.4 Arbitration in Marital Conflicts**

In marital issues—ranging from divorce to child custody—the Magajia serves as a preliminary arbitrator, offering culturally acceptable solutions before such issues escalate to male elders or modern courts (Okonkwo, 2018).

##### **Custodian of Women's Cultural Practices**

She preserves and teaches traditional rites, rituals, and taboos relating to womanhood, such as puberty rituals, marriage customs, and post-natal care (Yusuf, 2010).

##### **4.4.5 Protection from Gender-Based Violence**

The Magajia intervenes in cases of domestic violence or abuse, providing a culturally grounded mechanism

for addressing gender-based violence and advocating for victims (Adamu, 2019).

##### **4.4.6 Regulation of Female Economic Activity**

She monitors women's market activities and ensures fair trading practices among female vendors. Her regulation helps prevent exploitative behaviors and supports local economic equity (Bello, 2023).

##### **4.4.7 Mentorship and Leadership Training**

The Magajia mentors younger women, preparing potential successors and teaching them the responsibilities of communal leadership and dispute resolution (Usman, 2021).

##### **4.4.8 Liaison with Religious Institutions**

In communities like Auchi where Islam coexists with traditional practices, the Magajia may serve as a liaison between women and religious leaders, especially in enforcing family and inheritance laws (Mama, 2011)

##### **Preservation and Interpretation of Customary Law**

As a living archive of customary law, the Magajia interprets indigenous legal principles from a female perspective, thereby contributing to gendered justice and oral legal tradition" (Yusuf, 2010)

#### **5. Contemporary Challenges Facing the Institution of Magajia in Auchi**

The KIIs conducted with the past and present Magajia and the traditional ruler aids in in all the five indigenous Auchi village communities (Usogun, Aibotse, Akpekpe, Igbhe and Iyekhe) revealed a number of contemporary challenges facing the institution of Magajia in Auchi as:

##### **5.1 Erosion of Traditional Values**

The globalization of culture, particularly through Western education and digital media, has led to a devaluation of traditional institutions. Youths in Auchi increasingly associate roles like the Magajia with backwardness and irrelevance. As modern lifestyles replace communal values with individualism, the respect and obedience once accorded to traditional authorities, including the Magajia, continue to decline (Oyesomi, 2020).

##### **5.2 Religious Tensions and Misinterpretation**

The Magajia historically participated in public ceremonies and had a visible community presence. However, the growing influence of conservative Islamic ideologies in Auchi, often conflicts with such traditional practices. Reformist groups advocate for gender segregation and discourage female public leadership, which limits the Magajia's participation in social and cultural events (Salihu, 2010). These shifts challenge the compatibility of the Magajia's duties with contemporary religious expectations.

### 5.3 Political Marginalization

Modern political structures in Nigeria are not designed to accommodate traditional female authorities. While male traditional rulers are sometimes given formal advisory roles in local governance, female leaders like the Magajia are often excluded. This results in limited influence on policy decisions affecting women and the community at large (Ibrahim and Salihu, 2020). The marginalization reflects broader gender disparities in Nigeria's political system.

### 5.4 Political Interference

There is also the problem of political interference, where the traditional institution like that of the Magajia is influenced or manipulated by local power brokers for political gains (Adebanwi & Obadare, 2010).

### 5.5 Decline in Communal Support

Historically, the strength of the Magajia is derived from the collective support of women in her jurisdiction. With increasing urbanization, migration, and the breakdown of extended family networks, this support base is shrinking. The weakening of communal bonds means that the *Magajia* has fewer women willing to participate in traditional activities or accept her authority (Mama, 2011). Community fragmentation reduces the cohesion necessary for the institution to function effectively.

### 5.6 Male-Dominated Traditional Hierarchies

Despite the *Magajia*'s historical authority, she often operates within patriarchal traditional councils where her voice is either limited or symbolic. Male chiefs and elders typically hold decision-making power, while female leaders are expected to support, not challenge, male authority (Aminu and Yusuf, 2017). This structural subordination hampers the autonomy and leadership scope of the *Magajia*.

### 5.7 Absence of Legal Recognition

The legal framework governing chieftaincy and traditional institutions in Nigeria seldom includes female leaders. While some male traditional rulers receive state stipends and are listed in government gazettes, the *Magajia* remains largely unrecognized by formal institutions (Garba, 2021). Her power is largely symbolic and moral rather than coercive. She lacks formal enforcement mechanisms and her judgments are not legally binding under the state law. Moreover, her authority is constantly challenged by shifting gender norms, generational differences, and the encroachment of formal legal institutions. The lack of legal status limits access to resources, official platforms, and institutional protection.

### 5.8 Generational Communication Gap

There is a noticeable disconnect between the *Magajia* and the younger generation, who often do not relate to the cultural symbols and oral traditions. In Auchi, younger women increasingly bypass the *Magajia* in favour of formal courts or religious leaders who are perceived as more authoritative or responsive (Oyesomi et al., 2022). Younger people who are influenced by global youth culture and technology, find traditional institution of the *Magajia* outdated (Aminu and Yusuf, 2017). Without a rebranding or modernization of the institution of the *Magajia*, the *Magajia* stands the risk of becoming irrelevant to future generations.

### 5.9 Gender-Based Discrimination

The *Magajia* faces systemic gender discrimination rooted in patriarchal norms. Even within her community, she is often seen as subordinate to male leaders, and her contributions are undervalued. Structural gender inequalities in Nigeria's cultural, economic, and political institutions reinforce this marginalization (Usman 2021).

### 5.10 Economic Constraints

Unlike male traditional rulers who sometimes have access to land rents, tributes, or government stipends, the *Magajia* typically lacks financial autonomy. Her inability to support community initiatives or respond to women's needs reduces her influence and visibility (UN Women, 2020). The lack of economic power also limits her capacity to mediate disputes effectively or offer assistance during crises.

### 5.11 Exclusion from Development Programs

Despite increasing focus on gender-sensitive roles in development, traditional female leaders like the Magajia are often excluded from planning and implementation processes of development programmes. Government agencies and NGOs frequently collaborate with elected officials or male traditional leaders while neglecting female structures of authority (Ibrahim, 2020).

## **6. The Advantages in Repositioning the Magajia for Legal Empowerment and Gender Equity in Contemporary Modernization and Legal Reforms.**

### **6.1 Cultural Renaissance and Identity Preservation**

The Magajia can be repositioned as a custodian of indigenous knowledge, language, and cultural heritage, playing a role in cultural tourism and education. Her leadership can bridge generational gaps and instill cultural pride among youth.

### **6.2 Community Mediation and Peacebuilding**

The Magajia's traditional role in conflict resolution and mediation, especially among women can be institutionalized as part of community justice systems. She can complement formal justice systems by handling sensitive gender-related cases, reducing court burdens.

### **6.3 Empowerment through Legal and Institutional Recognition**

With proper legal backing, the Magajia can be incorporated into local governance structures (e.g., as part of local government advisory councils). NGOs and development agencies can partner with Magajias to implement community-based gender programs.

### **6.4 Promotion of Women's Rights and Gender Advocacy**

Given her influence among women, the Magajia can serve as a critical ally in promoting maternal health, girls' education, and anti-GBV campaigns. She can mobilize traditional support for modern gender rights initiatives, using culturally accepted frameworks.

### **6.5 Capacity Building and Digital Engagement**

Training in leadership, legal literacy, and digital skills can enhance the Magajia's ability to remain relevant and effective. She can use social media and mobile communication platforms to engage wider audiences and advocate for women's issues.

## **7. Conclusion and Recommendation**

The Magajia is a pivotal figure in traditional dispute resolution, community governance, and women's affairs in Auchi, where the institution reflects both Etsako cultural traditions and Islamic influences. As a mediator, cultural custodian, and representative of women, the Magajia plays an indispensable role in maintaining social cohesion and promoting community development. Far from being a mere relic of the past, the Magajia embodies a dynamic form of female leadership that responds to communal needs through culturally rooted and gender-sensitive justice practices.

In Auchi, the Magajia continues to be central to women's cultural life and local governance, demonstrating the flexibility of indigenous institutions to adapt to evolving socio-political realities. Her authority is grounded in moral leadership, religious adaptability, and grassroots mobilization. As Nigeria confronts the dual pressures of modernization and globalization, institutions like the Magajia offer valuable frameworks for inclusive governance and restorative justice that resonate with local values.

However, the survival of the Magajia institution faces significant challenges. Modern legal systems, gender bias, and lack of formal recognition have increasingly marginalized traditional institution of Magajia. To safeguard and strengthen the institution of the Magajia, deliberate efforts are required. These include legal acknowledgment, capacity-building initiatives, and strategies to integrate her role within contemporary governance structures. Such efforts must balance respect for cultural institution of Magajia with the need for institutional reform.

Ultimately, revitalizing the Magajia institution presents an opportunity to promote gender equity, preserve indigenous governance, and foster culturally relevant justice mechanisms. Recognizing and repositioning the Magajia would not only empowers women but also reinforces the social fabric of navigating change. The Magajia's traditional role in conflict resolution and mediation, especially among women should be institutionalized as part of customary justice system. Training in leadership, legal literacy, and digital skills can also enhance the Magajia's ability to remain relevant and effective.

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