SOCI 222
Comparative Social Institutions

Session 1 – Nature and Functions of Social Institutions

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In every society, there are certain basic needs such as the need for food, clothing, law and order, as well as procreation that must be satisfied if society must survive and maintain itself. This session introduces students to the nature and functions of social institutions as society’s mechanism of satisfying its fundamental needs.
The key topics to be covered in the session are as follows:

- Topic One - Definition of Social Institutions
- Topic Two - Major Institutions in Society and their Characteristics
- Topic Three - Structural Elements of Social Institutions
Reading List


• http://www.jstor.org/stable/4311198?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents
Topic One

DEFINING SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS
The Concept of Social Institutions

- There are certain basic needs every society must satisfy if it is to survive and endure

- These include the need for food, clothing and shelter, the need for law and order, the need for reproducing new members of society etc

- The mechanisms and procedures by which society meets its basic and fundamental needs is known as Social Institutions
The Concept of Social Institutions

• According to Robertson (1987: 93) “Institutions are stable clusters of values, statuses, roles and groups that develop around basic needs of society”.

• According to Smith and Preston (1977:169) “Institutions develop as a way of dealing with a society’s concerns... An institution is an established, relatively enduring, and organized set of procedures that enables a society to meet one or more of its major problems”.
Sample Question

• Attempt a definition of social institutions in your own words.
Topic Two

MAJOR INSTITUTIONS IN SOCIETY
The Major Institutions

- Politics
- Religion
- Economy
- Marriage and Family
- Education
- Health
Other Minor Institutions

- Law
- Sports
- Military
- Science and Technology
- Media
General Characteristics of the Institutions

- They are relatively stable
- They have universal social usages structured around societal basic needs
- They are mutually and functionally interrelated
- They are independent and coercive of the individual
- They have social determinants
Sample Question

• What specific needs do you think the minor institutions are there to satisfy?
Topic Three

STRUCTURAL ELEMENTS OF SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS
• **Social Needs**: Every institution is structured around a particular basic need of society

• **Social Values**: Each institution is constituted by a set of values; which are the goals or aspirations and shared ideas of society

• **Social Norms**: Every institution has a set of norms i.e. the common procedures by which the values are achieved

• **Social Status and Role**: Each institution is made up of a network of statuses and roles such as husband, wife etc.

• **Social Groups**: Each institution is represented by a particular social group.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Social Need</th>
<th>Social Value</th>
<th>Social Norm</th>
<th>Status and Role</th>
<th>Social Group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Politics</td>
<td>Maintain law, order</td>
<td>Freedom, Justice</td>
<td>Vote by secret ballot</td>
<td>President, MPs,</td>
<td>Parliament, Pol. Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>Social solidarity</td>
<td>Belief in God or gods</td>
<td>Attend worship</td>
<td>Pastor, Elders Priests</td>
<td>Church, mosque</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic</td>
<td>Produce and distribute goods</td>
<td>Free enterprise, State owned</td>
<td>Maximize profit</td>
<td>Accountant, Salesman</td>
<td>Banks, labour unions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marriage</td>
<td>Regulate sexual behavior.</td>
<td>Marital fidelity</td>
<td>Have only one spouse</td>
<td>Husband, wife, sister</td>
<td>Kinship Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Transmit skills</td>
<td>Intellectual curiosity</td>
<td>Attend school</td>
<td>Teacher, student</td>
<td>College, school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>Take care of the sick</td>
<td>Good health</td>
<td>Save life if possible</td>
<td>Doctor, nurse</td>
<td>Hospital</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
References

