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INDIGENOUS CONFLICT RESOLUTION AND AFRICA'S DEVELOPMENT: A STUDY OF OKEROME INYI PEACE AGENCY

Chukwunonso Francis Onoh (PhD)

National Open University of Nigeria, +2348137444825 ffecooh@gmail.com, conoh@noun.edu.ng

Jude Achu

Godfrey Okoye University, Enugu, chijiokejude29@gmail.com

Abstract
This study examined the Indigenous Conflict Resolution as it leads to Development in Africa: A Study of OkeromeInyi Peace Agency. The main objective was to examine the effect of Indigenous Conflict Resolution in Africa. The research design adopted for the study was descriptive survey design. Interview and observations were the instruments used for data collection. The data collected were analysed through a literature review. The researcher finds that in the olden time, people of Inyi solemnly believe in the settlement of cases by Okerome and their decisions are final in all cases and cannot be upturned. This is because it is headed by Umuajana and their decision cannot be questioned or contest on. Though the influence of modernism has affected the psyche of the people who now appeal their judgment to customary court. Though despite the influences, the body is still highly revered in terms of cultural interpretation and decision-making which people cannot do away with. The researcher therefore recommends that, there should be promotion of proactive community participation in dispute settlement procedures. Encourage projects that give local people more authority so they may take charge of peacebuilding efforts and develop long-term solutions rooted in indigenous knowledge.

Keywords: Peace, Traditional Institutions, Elders Council, Inyi

1.0 Introduction & Background of the Study

Indigenous dispute resolution systems are well-organized, efficient in terms of time, and socially integrated, with a focus on rapprochement, the preservation, and enhancement of societal peace. The methods and approaches have their roots in African people's traditions, conventions, and culture. Its foundation is "to restore balance, to settle conflict, and to eliminate disputes" (Choudree, 1999:1). Indigenous conflict resolution processes are basically traditional and at the same time less intimidating due to the fear of the forebears whom they believe that they monitor everything the living are doing hence apply caution in their judgment.

There are many indigenous peace agency and conflict resolution in Africa they include, Oromo East Africa, Beti Cameroon, Arusha Tanzania, Kpeke Liberia, Gikuyu Kenya, Toubou Chad and Mali among others. These are the council of elders who conciliate on issues and give judgment based on justice, equity and fairness. The indigenous peace institutions are not only compromised of elders but women inclusive. This is because the women are social agent of peace. African continent have a well-structured peace institutions.

In Igbo land, various communities have what it terms in English Council of Elders but its name in Igbo parlance differs but their general function remains the same. It is the council of elders that are saddled with the responsibility of seating in any matter in the land. The selection of membership of the council has some customary laws that guides it and must be in accordance to the customs and traditions of the community. It is carefully selected so that only men with integrity will be composed of it. Such members must have background knowledge of the customs and tradition of the town. The membership of this council is not for young generation but elders with wisdom, experience and intelligent with grey hair. They are considered as representatives of the ancestors and as a result, their stance in any case is seen as the position of the ancestors and gods of the land. The integrity required before being a member of the council makes it very difficult for their members to be bribed or found wanting in any corruption case. The members are afraid of the land as any judgment not judiciously passed has consequences to them and it is as a result that they carefully investigate every issue before reaching to conclusion.

Okerome(Elders Council), the main reasons why Inyi was chosen were its social development progress, political stability, and respect for indigenous institutions and expertise. The traditional, cultural, judicial, and religious leadership institutions that the Inyi forefathers built continue to influence people's behavior now. The judicial system is mostly based on the unique sociocultural settings of the municipality of Inyi (Mberedeogu, 2003).

In this light, reference is made to the *Okerome,* found mainly in *Enugwu-Inyi, Umuome, Umuagu, Alum, Obune, Amankwo, Nkwere* and *Akwu*. In the olden time, the *Okerome* is headed by *Umuajala*. This is because *Umuajala* till date are considered as *amaala* and their decisions in cultural matters cannot be disputed. They are the people who can cleanse the land in the case of abomination or when a member of the community kills a tortoise which is a sacred animal to *Ajala Inyi*, the central deity of the town. They are considered the oracle of the gods and their pronouncement in any issues is final though not without the consensus agreement of all members of the *Okerome* (Udeh, 2001).

Udeh (2001) maintained that "before colonial administration set foot on Inyi soil, the community was practicing a communal administrative system in which the elders in each village regulated the lives and conducts of the villagers. They mediated in disputes between persons, families or group. A council of elders or *Okerome* existed in each village. Then there was a central council of elders *Okerome* who sat at *Obodo Nwozor* in *UmomeInyi*. Representatives from each village *Okerome*were nominated and mandated by the village council to attend the central or town *Okerome* at *Obodo Nwozor*. The central *Okerome* met periodically to hear appeals from village councils and set up standards of adjudication for the whole town"

From the above assertions, *Okerome* is a name given to the council of elders in Inyi which resembles the modern day parliament. The republican nature of Inyi made it possible that all villages must have their own *Okerome* with the headship of the council from *Umuajana*. The decision arrived at the court venue is final and cannot be upturned since they are law and policy makers as well. The council treats cases that bother in customary sharing of properties and marriage matters.

However, the creation of autonomous community in Enugu State by the then governor Dr. ChimarokeNnamani(1999-2007) brought some changes in the constitution and operation of *Okerome.* Following the creation of five autonomous communities which are Agbada Inyi autonomous community comprises of *Umuome, Obune, Amankwo* and *Nkwere; Enugwu-Inyi* autonomous community; *Ugwu Inyi* autonomous communities comprises of *Agbaraiji* and

Akwu; Alum and *Umuagu*autonomous communities each autonomous communities now have their *Okerome*instead of villages as it was in the past. The *Okerome* now became operational under the supervision of the traditional institution in each of the autonomous communities and the formation and composition of the central *OkeromeInyi* drawn from each of the autonomous communities but separate from that of the autonomous communities. The *Okerome*each of the autonomous communities operates within their ambit and report to their traditional ruler. Its judgment can be appeal to the central *OkeromeInyi* who reports their activities to the Inyi Traditional Rulers Council headed by His Royal Majesty (HRM) Igwe Mike Offor Mberedeogu (Eze Obibi 1), (Udeh, 2001).

2.1 Theoretical Framework:

2.1.1 **The Social Capital Theory:**

Humans have developed broad preferences for friendship as well as particular preferences for signs that indicate higher amounts of social capital, claim Savage and Kanazawa (2002, 2004). They go on to claim that rethinking sociological explanations of crime in light of evolutionary theory can offer fresh perspectives on crime deterrents. In particular, choice, social control, cultural deviance, and strain theories all contend that the fear of severing social ties can be a potent deterrent to criminal or deviant behavior. The development of communal communities and the ensuing social ties that hold them together are explained by social capital theory.

According to Tristan (2018), social capital has been characterized by certain authors as lubricating the social fabric and enabling contemporary economies to run smoothly. These assertions can appear high, yet without social capital, people cannot cooperate. This is true because social interaction is made feasible by shared values, norms, trust, and a sense of belonging, or social capital. Without social capital, our society, economy, institutions, and political system would not be possible. Social capital has thus been compared to glue. Everything is an advantage of social capital because it is the productive outcome of sociality.

2.2 Empirical Studies:

Onyia (2013) examined the African conflicts: Their causes and their political and social environment. The researcher's findings showed that Africans didn't have a chief who managed the town's affairs before the arrival of white people. However, they had a number of institutions that assisted them in planning their actions. There was no single man in charge of this town's administration. In the past, each village had a leader, whom they would today refer to as the chief, to oversee its political and administrative operations. Onye ishi ani was the name of this man, who was often the village's oldest man. They have another man who manages the business of the Okenye Umunna lineage within this village. The ndiishi ani, or village heads, would get together and effectively discuss any cases that concerned the entire town.

Chris (2014), investigated on the Institutionalised conflict resolution: A theoretical paradigm. It was discovered that "in traditional African societies, the elders have proven adept and efficient at resolving disagreements. The majority of conflicts in African societies were related to family and land disputes. Land was considered to be the primary factor influencing both human and economic progress. Many men and women made their income by farming, raising animals, or doing other types of land-based work. The elders were in a better position

to resolve such issues since they were regarded as the guardians of the land. In contrast, the number of women a guy was married to and, in some cases, his legal offspring were the key factors in family problems. It will be justified to claim that the elders were the best guardians of justice in the adjudication process in the aforementioned places. The idea of impartiality in the dispute-resolution process started to drastically change in the traditional African communities as laissez-faire societies grew in size and complexity. Particularly in communities where the clan system's influence became a significant problem. Particularly when one disputant is from a different clan than the other. In these circumstances, the topic of the deciding elders' impartiality became one that was viewed as contentious".

Chidili (2012) studied on the traditional approaches to conflict transformation: Potential and limits. The researcher finds that Elders are respected not only because they are the oldest but also because they are the line of communication to the dead. The elders are treated with immense respect and are truly deserving of being considered on every communal topic because of their role as the gatekeepers of ancestral communication.

Ezeogidi (2019) investigated on the Indigenous Conflict Resolution in Africa. The researcher in his findings refers to Ama-Ali and Ndi Okenye as the council of the elders. Elders in council are highly valued in the village assembly, where general issues affecting the entire village are discussed, and are a very rentable source of conflict management mechanisms because they are elders who represent different families and wards.

The council of elders often consists of multiple elders, making it a reliable third-party collegiate dispute resolution method, according to Akuluru and Enyioko (2016). Elders may have the power to arbitrate conflicts between members of certain communities, clans, ethnic groups, or tribes. The ability of Igbo elders to promote harmony and peace, resolve conflicts, and start development is proof that they were endowed with the skill of conflict resolution.

3.1 Research Design

For this investigation, a descriptive survey design was used. A specific sort of research methodology called a descriptive survey entail providing a thorough account of events and how they affect people. The study was conducted in three stages.

The first segment came from the library which helped in reviewing related literatures through which instrument of data collection was prepared. The second segment focused on field work through which data was collected using diverse means of data collection. The last segment focused on the organization and interpretation of data already collected.

3.2 Population of the Study and Instrument for Data Collection

The study covered Inyi. Inyi is made up of nine villages and five autonomous communities who only the members of the *Okerome* in various autonomous communities and central *OkeromeInyi* were selected. And for the study, the researcher compiled and examined two (2) real-life conflict situations. To get the essential data for effective completion of this research, the following methods of data collection were adopted:

3.2.1 Interview: Most of the data was gathered using semi-structured interviews. The interviews were done while taking into account factors like age, sex, employment, and place of residence. The interview was conducted with a small number of knowledgeable individuals in order to gather information on historical events and situations as well as current realities. As a result, this strategy was used in this investigation to complement the results gained through other channels.

3.2.2 Observation (i.e Observer as Participant): Another important approach to collecting good information for data was observation. Because sometimes what people say and do contradicts one another. So, the best course of action was direct observation. Through this, the researcher may see how the target society resolves disputes and what roles and processes are involved.

3.2.3 Case Studies: A case study was used to gather trustworthy information about how traditional conflict resolution institutions help resolve disputes. We compiled and examined two instances of factual dispute. The chosen case was thoroughly discussed and analyzed to show what kinds of conflicts and dispute-resolution techniques there might be.

3.3 Validity of the Instrument: The draft of the instruments, the interview and the observation checklist were given to three experts in the Department of Peace and Studies and Conflict Resolution, National Open University of Nigeria, for validation. They assessed the contents side by side the purpose of the study. The experts examined the instruments on the bases of their relevance, format, suitability and clarity. Based on the correction and comments from the experts, amendments were made to include the correction on the final copies of the instruments that was used for the study.

3.4 Reliability of the Instrument: The instruments have consistency procedures made up of the test-retest approach, which used to assess the dependability of the measuring instrument used in this study: This test-retest methodology makes the assumption that people have had steady beliefs about particular situations throughout time.

The results of the study are presented in accordance with the research questions.

3. 5 Answers to the research questions:

3.5.1 Research Question 1: What are the peace processes of OkeromeInyi?

The peace procedures of Okerome are conducted in a peaceful and friendly manner, devoid of acrimony and rancor. Deliberations are made with an open mind, and an effort is geared towards reducing tension that may result in freedom for all. The present head of OkeromeInyi is Umuajala, from IsialaOgeniEnugwuInyi, Ichie Cosmas Ezeka. Okerome records their proceedings of the peace meeting as they read out the statement made by the party or petitioner for which the petition or complaint was brought, aimed at refreshing the minds of the people. In a situation where the petition is a fresh one, the petitioner is called to tender his petition either in writing or orally. The note is taken, and the petitioner will be dismissed for an adjoining date. Okerome, through the secretary, will write a letter of summons to any person whose name is mentioned in the petition and its content so that the respondent will prepare for defense.

On the adjoining date, the petitioner will then be allowed to state his case in detail, after which the opposing party (respondent) will be afforded the opportunity to cross-examine him. Members of the Okerome will take turns asking questions for more clarification on issues raised by the petitioner and the answers provided by the respondent. As the presentation is ongoing, the secretary will be writing down their statements and thereafter reading them before them to further confirm if they are in line with what they said. The petitioner will be allowed to seek clarification of issues that may arise from the cross-examination that, in his opinion, may cast some doubt on the case he presented, may require further explanation, or

seem to be confusing. The petitioner will, at this point, call his witnesses one by one. The chairman of Okerome will then give the witnesses Ofo Ala, which is a symbol of uprightness in the Inyi traditional setting, to testify that what the petitioner said is nothing but the truth and throw more light into the case. The testimonies of the witnesses are presented one by one, and the respondent is at liberty to ask relevant questions at each testimony for clarity. Members of Okerome are also allowed to ask relevant questions leading to unraveling the truth.

At the end of the testimonies from the witnesses, the chairman of Okerome will then call on the respondent to state his own side of the story and ask him to address critical points made during the petitioner's presentation. After his presentation, he will be cross-examined by Okerome members, and questions will be asked by the petitioners for clarity's sake. The witnesses of the respondent will be called to testify on the case and thereafter cross-examined by Okerome, and questions will be asked from the side of the petitioner. After both parties and their witnesses have finished their presentations, Okerome may appoint any person from any side whom they feel has more facts to give clarity on certain issues raised in the case so as to assist them in coming to an amicable settlement of the matter brought before them.

Thereafter, the Okerome will ask the parties to go for an appointed date of judgment. This is to enable them to consult widely and thoroughly investigate the matter and issues raised in the petition. Their findings determine parts of the ruling found in the customs and norms of Inyi traditional society. In the case of land disputes, apart from the oral presentation, an oversight function is conducted in the said land with both parties because, according to the Inyi proverb, it says, '*'ana egosinwataawonankume, shirubaya aka makanaawonankpumebuofu''* which literally means that when you are showing a child a frog in a stone, clearly point at it because both stone and frog resemble each other. This diluted the reason behind the oversight function usually undertaken by Okerome in the bid to arrive at a final conclusion in every matter. This is based on the nature of the conflict, which determines the methods and techniques to be adopted.

However, after the indebtedness analysis, they will communicate to the parties the date of the judgment and, at the same time, state the items the parties will present that day before the commencement of business that day. The judgment will be contained in detailed documents, and a mild presentation with the use of proverbs and maxims will be utilized to calm nerves before making their findings known to the parties and the position of the customs and norms in such a matter. Before the pronouncement of the findings, the parties will commit to peace by filling out a form that shows acceptance of whatever decision the elder's council reached. The documents will be signed by the chairman and secretary of Okerome, including the members who participated in the process. The decisions in every case are based on cooperation, compromise, and collaboration. This is to maintain the harmonious relationship that exists between the petitioner and the respondent.

Citing the case brought by Mr. Dennis Onyekwere, representing the Onyekwere family, and Nze Sunday Ezulu, representing the Ezulu family, both from the UmuomamEnugwu-Inyi autonomous community, On the 10th day of April 2023, the petitioner, Mr. Dennis Onyekwere, lodged a petition orally before Okerome. In his submission, he prayed that Okerome should arbitrate in a land boundary dispute between their family and the Ezulu family. In line with the practice of Okerome, a copy and letter of invitation were served to the respondent to appear before Okerome.

The case was called on August 19, 2023. The petitioner lined up five witnesses, while the respondent had four witnesses. Both parties presented their cases and positions and were cross-examined differently. Witnesses from both parties were called to testify over the matter, and they did and were cross-examined. The petitioner defined the land boundary with a tree called the ujo tree and stated that the land is not straight but branches at a point. The witnesses affirmed the evidence. The respondent, in his submission of evidence, stated that their father planted palm trees on the land and defined the boundary with a cashew tree. The land in contention is situated at Owerre and Umuomam. Okerome, in their unanimous decision, resolved to go for an oversight function in the land. After seeing the evidence thereto when they visited the land, they discovered the following:

1. The land is not straight but curved along the line.
2. There is no cashew tree in what the respondent defined as the boundary.
3. There is no palm tree planted in the areas in dispute.
4. They find grown palm trees scattered in the land belonging to the Ezulu family.
5. They find the ujo tree used for defining the boundary.

From the oversight, Okerome discovered that the Onyekwere family is the owner of the land given to the above presentation. Referencing the bloodlines between the families, Okerome redefined the land boundary for the continual cooperation of both families. Before the Okerome reached the decision, they sought the opinion of the two parties, who affirmed that they were ready to abide by the resolution of the council without appealing. The judgment was delivered on September 7, 2023, in the presence of the researcher. They allocated some portions to the respondent and left the bigger portion to the petitioner, and both parties were happy with the outcome of the conflict. They were asked to bring a carton of beer and a kola nut each in appreciation for the peaceful settlement of the boundary dispute. With this, the Okerome, seeing the nature of the case, applied negotiation to the matter since both families are closely related.

In another case, research was witnessed between the Umegbolu family, represented by Mr. Felix Onyebuchi Umegbolu, and the Kenechukwu family, represented by Mr. Emmanuel Kenechukwu, over a boundary dispute situated at Uzo Agu Abor EnugwuInyi. The Okerome shows that both parties have a piece of land in that location, as testified by the parties and supported by their witnesses. The council of elders divided the land into two and asked both parties to maintain their various positions on their land and redefine the land boundary. The decision was applauded and accepted by both parties on September 23, 2021. They gave the elders council two cartons each and a kola nut for Thanksgiving.

Extra judicial means of resolving conflict in Inyi by *Okerome*

A. **Oath Taking *(Inu Iyi):*** The oath-taking in Inyi has two sharp edges, in the sense that the accused can take an oath to exonerate himself from the issue or the accuser can affirm his stand that the accusation is true and without blemish. The essence of oath-taking in Inyi, as it is in all societies in Igbo land, is to establish the truth, and the Igbo proverb explains it as *'EziokwubuNdu'* which suggests that truth is life. What this means is that false accusations can lead to untimely death, or swearing falsely can render one useless. Before the *Okerome* administers an oath to one, they must give the person time to search his or her conscience to avoid the fact that it always comes at last. They will inform their family of the consequences of their son or daughter taking such an oath of innocence or affirmation and admonish them to inquire from him or her about the truth regarding the matter. After some time and if the accuser is

adamant, they will go on and administer the oath. *OkeromeInyi* administers the oath through verbal proclamations by holding the sacred *ofo* stick, which is a symbol of justice and honesty, referred to in Igbo parlance as *Ofo na Ogu,* or by taking the person involved to a deity by drinking some concoction taken from the clay pot found in the shrine or hugging the deity tree upon which the deity was instituted.

The major cases in which *OkeromeInyi* will administer the oath are land issues, accusations of adultery, and murder issues. Before this is done, the *OkeromeInyi* will invite the parties in conflict for a dialogue. The dialogue will last for many days; within that period, they will be consulting people whose names were mentioned as witnesses, as the case may be. At the end of the wider consultation and proclamation of their findings, if any of the parties insisted that he or she is not satisfied with the outcome, the *Okerome*will inquire from the person if he or she is ready to swear an oath with what is called *'Ofo Ndiiche', and* if the person agrees, they will invite the family regarding the development before administering the oath. The person will hold the *Ofo* stick and say after the chairman of *Okerome* whose prerogative power it is to administer the oath and who is the holder of the *Ofo Ndiicche*. They will invoke the spirit of their ancestors, *Ajala Inyi,* and all the spirit beings in Inyi, and use Oji to inform them of what they are about to do. The person who wants to swear an oath will buy the items for the swearing. After the administration, the person is given a specified period for him or her to be declared innocent or establish the truth of his or her claim. The oath taken falsely has accompanied sickness, economic woes, madness, diseases, and death associated with it, depending on the proclamation of the *Okerome.* It must be noted that when *Okerome* wants to administer the oath, all the villages in Inyi will present their village *ofo* as a symbol of authority, with the person taking the oath holding the *Ofo Ndiiche,* which is the central *Ofo* of the Inyi people. After praying with Igbo Kola nuts, they pour raffia wine as a libation. Once the person is exonerated, it is expected that the person will go to *NkwoInyi* and dance around the market, informing them that he took an oath last time and had been exonerated from the offense accused him of. The people will rejoice with him. In the event that the person dies or is struck with a sickness, the spirit of the ancestors and that of the land must be placated and cleansed before the funeral of such a victim can take place. There are instances where the *Okerome* can take people to the deity of the land for oath-taking. This all depends on the resolution and agreement of the parties. One who accused the other person falsely has the punishment of going around the market to inform the people that the allegation against the other person was wrong and asking for their forgiveness. Thereafter, the accused will list some items that the person who accused him or her of wrongs will buy to placate him. After this has been done, *OkeromeInyi* will invite the two persons, and they will bring along one goat each, eight tubers of yam, kola nuts, and assorted drinks for what is known as *'Igburu Obo'* in Inyi parlance. The two goats will be killed, and yam will be used to cook it. The commensality, or what is known as *Nrigba* in Inyi parlance, signifies the end of the hostility and the beginning of a new relationship. *OkeromeInyi* will sincerely reconcile the parties as they eat together on one clay plate.

B. Covenant (Igba ndu): This is an essential part of the judicial mechanism adopted by *OkeromeInyi,* which aims for genuine reconciliation, confidence building, and re-building trust between disputants whose bonds have been soured. This kind of exercise could be between individuals, families, groups, villages, or communities.

The process of covenant as conducted by *OkeromeInyi* starts with the invocation of gods, spirits, and ancestors, followed by a proclamation of the intention upon which the covenant is made. The covenant takes the form of killing a fowl or goat and licking the blood before the proclamation, so that anyone who violates any section of

the covenant will have himself blamed. In Inyi, *Okerome* can conduct *Igba Ndu* in the case of husband and wife, where love and trust have been lost and feelings that have to do with threats to life have occupied spaces in their minds; hence, the agency for peace will administer the covenant to rebuild trust and confidence in the marriage. This will allay fear of death or any forms of harm from each other. The spirit of *'izendu'* in Inyi parlance will be eroded as both of them start leaving in peace. After the exercise, the fowl or goat will be cooked, and the husband and wife will eat it.

In another development, where a man married more than one wife, suspicion of death and unnecessary rivalry came in, and to maintain peace and harmony in such a family, a covenant will made between the wives with a declaration that any of the wives who thought or aided evil against their co-wives or husbands must die or be struck with sickness. Anyone who plans evil against the other wife's must die. The covenant of such can be done with the *Ofo* stick and other concoctions, which the *OkeromeInyi* did not reveal to the researcher in the course of this study. At the same time, a covenant could be made between brothers of the same parents or in extended families where trust and confidence have been lost. This mechanism has rebuilt hope in many families in Inyi, as testified by Pa Ndueke Kenechukwu, who married three wives. Due to constant quarrels in his house, he invited the *OkeromeInyi,* who made a covenant in between the wives, and since then, a one-time crisis zone has turned to a climate of peace and understanding. He confirmed the efficacy of the covenant as very effective, as he never had issues, especially as it posed a threat to life for over 40 decades since the covenant was made.

C. **Rites of Purification/Appeasement *(Ikpu Aru):***In Inyi, there are certain offenses one may commit that require appeasement from the gods and ancestors, upon which *Okerome*will express their customary rite to avert calamities in the land. Such offenses include the killing of a tortoise, which is regarded as a sacred animal to *Ajala Inyi,* and the use of vultures to prepare charms or amulets; killing is customarily forbidden, for it is considered the messenger of the spirit. Others include murder of kinsmen, incest, and stealing of sacred objects. Pa Raymond Ike of UmualatuUmuchimeEnugwu-Inyi told the researcher how late Gilbert Mberedeogu took *Ofo Ajala Ogeni* and used it to prepare a dangerous charm against their community. With this act, *Ajala Ogeni,* who forbids evil, can no longer hold anyone who has committed evil because the *Ofo* has been taken away. It was when *Ajala Ogeni* brought calamity upon the village that the elders of the village consulted a *dibia,* who told them the cause of their problem and the solution therein. After carrying out the process of replacing the *Ofo Ajala*, *OKeromeInyi* was called to perform some cleansing in the village by killing a goat, spreading its blood around the village, and burying it together with a sheep and some herbs. This is the reason the leader and holder of *Ofo Ndiiche* is *Umuajala,* because it is their customary right to perform such sacrifice and no other person can do it. The process of purification or appeasement may involve killing an animal and sprinkling its blood on the offender. With the appeasement, the living and the dead will be at peace in the village.

In another development, if someone kills a tortoise, knowingly or unknowingly, the *Okerome,* headed by *Nwajala,* will be consulted, and they will take the person to *Ajala* Deity, where some sacrifices and appeasement will be made to ward off any calamity that may befall the person. When the person knowingly commits the act, they will conduct a funeral ceremony and burry the remains of the tortoise like a human being before undergoing the appeasement rituals. In the case of a vulture, when someone kills it, *Okerome*will be informed, and they will gather together and perform some sacrifices, and at the end of it, they will cross what is known as *ogboro* in all the entrances in Inyi to ward the evil off, but in the case of the person who killed

confessed, they will kill a sheep, use the blood to bathe the person, and ask for clemency from the gods. Thereafter, the person is made clean and integrated into society. In the case of preparing a dangerous charm, the charm will kill the person in a mysterious way that will force the family to make inquiries through divination. When the truth is ascertained, the *Okerome* is invited to cleanse the family with some concoction made from herbs and roots before the person is buried. The family will be ordered to return the charm to the dibia that prepared it.

D. **Divination (Igba Afa):** *OkeromeInyi* relied on divination to ascertain the truth about the conflicting parties and crimes. In the process of this divine discovery, the gods, ancestors, and all the spirits are invoked for their intervention and divine revelation. Divinations are applied in certain cases, which makes it difficult to discover who is telling the truth or not.

Seniority issues in families are usually followed by the mechanism of using divination to ascertain the truth. The process is usually done by *Okerome,* who consults *Dibia Afa* to discover the truth. The *Dibia Afa* will come to the family house accompanied by *OkeromeInyi,* but all expenses for the consultations will be funded by the families. In this kind of situation, seven *Dibias* are usually brought together, but their divination is made differently and hidden behind other *Dibias*. This is aimed at ascertaining the right divination and the consistency of their revelations before drawing conclusions. The scientific generalization in this method is that if, at the end, five or more *Dibias* are consistent in their revelations, and then the *OkeromeInyi* will take the consistent truth and uphold it as the true representation of fact. They could achieve this because they usually keep the *Dibias* apart without any contact with each other or with other people.

Types of Customary Matters Treat by *OkeromeInyi*

(a) Land: There are two types of land disputes in *Inyi*: intra- and inter-family land disputes and inter-community land disputes. The intra- and inter-family land dispute occurs between blood brothers within a family setting or an inter-family setting. The later has to do with a dispute that emanates from brothers of the same parents laying claims over their father's property, as the eldest son always tries to manipulate others. The land issue mostly results in a free-for-all fight within the brothers; competition and survival of the fittest become the order of the day. In the case of an inter-family dispute, it has to do with extended families from one ancestral background. There are always cases of superiority and suppression in this kind of situation, especially when the other family is economically buoyant. They will try to hand it over to the other family with the agenda of claiming all the properties. In the case of an inter-community land dispute, it is usually bloody with the use of a Dane gun, and machetes employed for the boundary struggle.

However, reviewing the case presented by Mrs.Amasiatuonwu and the Ikeka family, as observed by the researcher, the Ikeka family of Abor forcefully took over the land, which was the only inheritance she got from her late husband, Mr. Obualo Igwe, and sold it without giving her any money from the sale of the land. It is paramount to know that Mrs. Amasiatuonwu was married to the Ikeka family, and she had seven children who died mysteriously, leaving the poor widow with her son’s wife, who bored her children. During the inter-family sharing, each of the brothers of Igwe, Ikeka, and Obualo received an equal share. The late Obualor sold most of his land when he was alive, leaving one behind for his wife. It was after numerous years that one of the descendants of Ikeka, Mr. Festus Ikeka, was seriously ill as a result of sores in his right leg. There was no money to treat him, and it has gotten to the point that chemotherapy cannot handle the situation. The only available

condition for survival was amputation of the leg, but there is no money to carry out surgery. Mrs. Amasiatuonwu, in her magnanimity, brought half of the land he inherited from her husband and asked them to sell it for the treatment of Mr. Festus Ikeka. The land was sold, and the money was used to pay for the surgery. Surprised, Mr. Festus Ikeka and his extended brothers connived and sold the remaining plots without the consent of the woman. After hearing the atrocities they committed, the woman approached her immediate family for an explanation, but she was rebuked. She took the matter to Abor Progressive Union, but her case was seated upon because of the influence the family is wielding. The woman approached Atuele, and they frustrated the case with the allegation that she sold five plots of land after the demise of her husband. The woman reported the matter to *Okerome,* who mediated the matter with a wider consultation to ascertain the truth. They called up witnesses who testified that the woman has never sold any land, as in Inyi custom, a woman has no customary right to sell land or discuss issues that have to do with land. The people in the Ikeka family alleged to have bought the land from the woman also testified, and the land documents bear the signature of the late husband. These testimonies invalidate the claim that the Ikeka family is lying against the woman. Delivery judgment: *OkeromeInyi* visited the family in oversight function and carved out a portion of land from the family big compound and allocated it to the woman. They further fined the respondent 8 tubers of yam, a hot drink, a kola nut, and three cartons of beer. They further surcharged ₦90,000 to cover their expenses for fuel, food, and other things during the course of the investigation. These invalidate the point that *OkeromeInyi* is duty-bound to deliver judicious judgment because of his fear of *Odinala.*

(b)Marriage: Marriage is between a man and a woman. The marriage rite starts when the man has an agreement with his would-be wife. After the agreement, the woman is introduced to the family of her would-be husband for recognition and acceptance, and vice versa. After this stage, wine carrying takes place, which involves three stages of first, second, and third wine carrying. The completion of the rite takes place once the bride prize is paid and the prayer, known as *Igo ofo,* is offered to the young family by the eldest man of the clan.

However, there are lots of marriage problems, and the predominant of them all is infidelity. This has led to so many divorce cases, as treated by *Okerome.* The man or woman could be the victim of the infidelity. When it has to do with a man's infidelity to his wife, society does not frown over it, as it is being pronounced when it has to do with a woman. The above statement is generally the same throughout Igbo land. A woman who cannot endure this may report the matter to the husband's family, and if it has no positive outcome, some women may decide to divorce the husband by packing her belongings and leaving the husband's house on Nkwo day. *Nkwo* is a market day in the town, and it is taboo for a woman to return to her father’s house on that day in the name of divorce. When such happens, the woman has no option but to pay the bride prize back to her husband. But in a situation whereby both later reconcile, the husband will start afresh in carrying wine upon the woman's head, and the elders will intervene to remove cultural inhibition brought by the woman for divorcing her husband on *Nkwo* Day.

In the case of the woman being infidel toward the husband, society usually frowns over the case, and most husbands send their wives packing. But if such a woman is allowed to stay in her husband's house after mediation by *Okerome,* the woman must appease the husband by cooking with native fowl and four tubers of yam. Only the elders will partake in the meal, while the husband will not eat it. After the meal of sanctification, the elders will pray for her and remove all customary curses she brought upon her head as a result of her infidelity.

(c) Murder: reviewing the murder case in the town. May I cite the oral case presented by Mr. Dennis Onyekwere in 1997 involving a lady from *UmuomeInyi* who got pregnant at a tender age? Because she would not like people to notice that or ridicule her, she kept the pregnancy away from the parents and people around her. But her peer knew about it and helped her keep the secret. On the day she delivered, she went and hid inside the cocoyam farm and delivered a bouncing baby girl. She buried the innocent child alive and returned home. When people who visited their house saw her, they suspected a foul game and interrogated her on the way about her pregnancy. During the course of the interrogation, she revealed that she delivered that morning and buried the child alive. Before the women could get to the spot, the child was already dead. The *Umuada* summoned the *Okerome* at *ObuNwozor* in *Umuome* that morning. After listening to the points and evidence before them, they asked the *Umuada* to take the girl around the town with the dead child to customarily inform the land that an abomination had been committed and that the town could not be held responsible. Any punishment should go to the culprit. This exercise is called, in Inyi parlance, *Igba nkpu*. After the exercise, the *Okerome* passed judgment that the lady be banished from the land for seven years, and it was carried out. They perform the rite of atonement for the community to be free. The lady later returned after spending 7 years in exile, and she was purified and integrated back into the community by the elders.

(d)Robbery: Theft of any kind is being frowned at in Inyi. It is on this basis that the people regard those who steal as the worst set of people because they do not have human sympathy. In Inyi in the olden times, anyone stealing must be led around the town with the stolen property upon his or her head. This will happen after the members of the *Okerome*have met and decided, with the evidence before them, whether the accused committed the offense or not. If the person is found guilty of the offense, he will be led around the village with the stolen items and naked. The youths will be beating him around the village, and at the end of the public disgrace, the person will be pardoned. This was in the case of the late Mr. Amos Maduatona Chukwu, who was known to be a notorious criminal in Enugwu. Chief Augustine Amauche narrated that the man had on several occasions been beaten and paraded around the village for stealing cassava, yam, cocoyam, fowl, goats, sheep, etc. The *Okerome* has continued sanctioning him for his nefarious activities until, on one occasion, the elders concluded that he would be ostracized anytime he stole again. This threat led him to stop all forms of criminal engagement. He further stated that similar threats were used to condition Mr. AgozieAkarukwe and the late Mr. AgozieIloanusi, respectively.

OkeromeInyi Reform System in our Contemporary:

Okerome has undergone some changes in recent times, and its operation and decision-making have never remained the same following the Balkanization of Inyi into five autonomous communities in 2005 by the Dr. Chimaroke Nnamani administration (Governor of Enugu State, 1999-2007). Following the partitioning, village *Okerome* was restructured to reflect autonomous communities, and the composition is the statutory right of the *Igwe* of such an autonomous community. Each autonomous case is handled according to its peculiarity. At this point, the *Okerome* is no longer the apex court but the court of Igwe-in-council when it has to do with the autonomous community.

However, the coming together of the five traditional rulers of the Inyi clan birthed a new *OkeromeInyi,* whose composition relied on the five *Igwes,* who appointed the elders to the council of elders called *Okerome*. The decision of the council is no longer final because parties have the chance of appealing to the Inyi Traditional Rulers Council, which is the highest traditional court in Inyi. Referencing the case between Umuawuchi and Umuochie of

the Alum autonomous communities, the *Okerome*Alum autonomous community handled the matter and affirmed that the land in dispute was owned by Umuochie. Umuawuchi, dissatisfied with the judgment, approached *OkeromeInyi* in an appeal, who investigated the matter and, with evidence available, condemned the decision of the *Okerome* Alum autonomous community on their decision to will the land to Umuochie and affirmed Umuawuchi's rightful ownership of the land. Umuochie rejected the outcome and judgment of *OkeromeInyi* and approached the Inyi Traditional Rulers Council, which, after thorough studies and consultations both spiritually and otherwise, affirmed Umuawuchi as the rightful owner of the land and ordered them to remove the *Iyi* instituted in the land to prevent Umuochie from encroachment. The order was carried out, and Umuochie accepted the judgment, seeing the evidence and understanding in it.

The above is to give credence that *OkeromeInyi* has structurally changed from what it was known to another modernized format. Secondly, in the olden time, there was no record keeping of the proceedings of the council, but the enlightenment era and the composition of their members with people who were lettered introduced record keeping of all cases and photocopying of written evidence, pictures, and videos, as the case may be. It was through record-keeping that the researcher discovered some of the cases cited above. Prior to the Enlightenment era, all forms of record were basically kept off-head, and frankly speaking, it worked for them because the members were people with high intellectual capability. It must be noted that the *Inyi* traditional ruler's council does not entertain individual cases but rather village, kindred, or community cases.

Figure (1) Traditional Administrative of Conflict Resolution in Inyi in our Contemporary

Inyi Traditional Rulers Council (Apex Court)
OkeromeInyi (Court of Appeal)
Okerome Autonomous Communities (High Court)
Okerome Village
OkeromeUmunna
Family

From the above presentation, it means that any conflict that arises must be settled at the family level. In a situation where such a matter cannot be resolved at that level, *umunna* should be wielding into it to ensure that it is resolved. If the matter persists, the *Okerome* village will take the matter up and handle it. If any of the parties is not satisfied, the party can now appeal to the *Okerome* autonomous community. If any of the parties reject the decision of the *Okerome*, the party can appeal to the *OkeromeInyi* and Inyi Traditional Rulers Council, as the case may be. This is the process of traditional conflict resolution in Inyi as of today.

3.5.2. Research Question 2: Do parties in conflict accept the judgment of OkeromeInyi?

The Okerome in the olden time was the apex court in Inyi traditional conflict resolution mechanism. During the period under review, the decision of Okerome is final and parties abide by their decision without constellation. This is because the umuajala who headed the peace agency are customarily sacred beings and serves as the oracle of Ajala Inyi deity. In the above basis, whatever they say or proclaim remains constant and cannot be appealed since they are the oracle and their words are considered divine. The advent of colonialism and the introduction of a modern court system, a new religion, and western education effected changes in the operations of Okerome. From the research gathered, the people do not abide

by their judgment any longer but prefer taking their case to court. In most cases, they may bring their case before the Okerome, and once the decision and findings are not in their favor, they approach the modern court, where they can bribe their way and justice is sold in the form of bazaar sales. In an Inyi traditional setting, one cannot bribe the members because of the oath taken to always uphold the truth and maintain the probity of the culture and tradition of the Inyi people. As a result of these actions, there is a local law that states that no person or village can take civil matters to the police or court without first complaining to Okerome, and defaulters attract a penalty of ₦100,000.

However, the case of Agbaraiji and AkwuInyi over land at Aguike was cited as learned by the researcher. The case was brought by AkwuInyi, who was the petitioner, and Agbaraiji, who was the respondent. Agbaraiji claimed ownership of the land with a claim that AkwuInyi was their slave, an allegation AkwuInyi refuted. In the course of the investigation, it was discovered that AkwuInyi is the owner of the land and had settled within the areas long before Agbaraiji expanded and annexed some of the areas. Agbaraiji refused to accept the findings and decision of Okerome, who ordered them to leave the land. They pursued the case up to the Supreme Court, and AkwuInyi won the case. A judgment according to Elder Gabriel Onwuania, was delivered in November 2021. They have since reclaimed the land. This case evidences that sometimes parties do not agree on the decision of the elder's council in our contemporary.

In the same vein, due to modernism, Okerome has lost the right to sit on any criminal matters such as armed robbery, murder, and the use of dangerous charms that are capable of killing. This is because such cases are categorized as criminal matters that can only be handled by the government, and no individual has the right to entertain such a case. Mr. Augustine Madu confirmed that people who committed murder and other capital offenses were handed over to the police. This is because even when Okerome deliberates in such a case, their decision is no longer binding because the government has taken over. He noted that most times, the armed robbers will bribe their way and secure freedom, and when Okerome tries to sanction the person according to tradition, there will be resistance, and such a person will rush back to the police and report. The police, in their usual way, intimidate those elders and issue them threats that will make them withdraw from pursuing the case. This has had a negative effect on the dignity and prestige of this noble agency.

In the case of the rape issue committed by Ugochukwu Anya from Ozegu, Okerome, according to John Onye, sat on the matter and found the offender guilty of the allegation against him and customarily ostracized him. But instead of embarking on the journey, he went and reported himself to the police, who now provided shelter for him. In conclusion, they later dropped the charges preferred against him when the family of the victims was lobbying to agree to dropping the charges. Their acceptance nailed down the case, as the offender has continued to walk freely in the street today.

To give more credence to this, Okezie Onwu, who beheaded Donald Omenka over a piece of land, was summoned by Okerome, who, after cross-examination, found him guilty of the allegation and ostracized him from the land, as it is customary that anyone who commits murder must leave the land so that the spirit of his victim will be placated. The man approached the police and used money to bribe his way into acting in self-defense. He was later released after two years of court proceedings. In a nutshell, parties in conflict in Inyi no longer abide by the decision of the Okerome once the case does not favor them but prefer to take it to the institution that accepts bribes and where bidding for justice delivery is possible.

3.5.3: Research Question 3: What are the conflict resolution mechanism adopted by Okerome?

The mechanisms adopted by OkeromeInyi in the course of resolving conflicts in traditional settings are:

1. **Mediation**: This is one of the methods adopted by OkeromeInyi for settling disputes among the people. Before the mediation takes place, they may conduct a thorough investigation of the matter at stake and study the contexts, dynamics, parties, and their interests and grievances before intervention. This is because they would not like to mess up the dignity and prestige of OkeromeInyi. According to Ozo C.Y. Esiobu, in the interview granted to him, he noted that the Okerome study cases before mediation could be explained in the Inyi maxim 'oburunaicho ka okenye di nzuzu; kporoyajeenaokwuomaghi' which literally translated to mean if you want an elder to look stupid, take him to any matter he has no idea off. This explained why, in the mediation method, the elder's council will first be briefed, and the parties will seem to be tired of the matter. This is because early intervention may be premature and would be counterproductive, and late mediation may be destructive, so they evaluate options before delving into them. A ripe moment in mediation describes a phase in the conflict cycle where the parties feel exhausted and hurt and are ready for settlement.

   From the study, it was discovered that there are certain issues in which the elders do not intervene immediately, especially when it has to do with marriage. According to their spokesperson, Mr. Cyril Agwuna, the elders council advises couples to settle their case as it is a family issue and should not involve a third party. In cases of marriage issues and breakdown of vows, the elder's council is reluctant to intervene unless it gets to the point of a threat to life; they will summon the couples for questioning, accompanied by their parents if they are still alive, relatives, and neighbors. He maintained that their position in such a matter was a win-lose but geared towards the restoration of the failed relationship, peace, love, and foster cooperation. They will work to establish fertile ground to restore communication between the couples. In this kind of case, proverbs and maxims play a major role, and at the end, the couples are advised to go outside to have a discussion and come back with their joint resolution. The elder's council does not cast blame or condemn either of the parties but persuades them to accept themselves in love and deeper mutual understanding in their marriage vow as they renew it once again. At the end of the settlement or dialogue, a carton of beer and kola nuts are presented to the elder's council as an expression of appreciation for a peaceful dialogue. It must be noted that in the fallout of the matter without any agreement, the above items must be presented, which diluted the Inyi maxim '*okwu di mma, nze ga ataoji; okwuadighimma, nze ga ataoji'*.

   Given the complexity of conflicts, for mediation to be successful, it requires coordination to ascertain the feelings of each party and mental rebirth so as to know the best approach to utilize in the dialogue series. Okerome adopts problem-solving techniques in mediation, which, according to Sir Dennis Echem, has helped them find lasting solutions to matters of customary concern.

2. **Adjudication**: The act of adjudication in Okerome is not for judgment delivery and condemnation but for a kind of corrective measure that is acceptable to both parties. The Okerome does not issue a death sentence to citizens or any person, no matter the

offense, even before colonial rule. This is because the Ajala deity forbids the spilling of blood. The Okerome judgment is mild and full of hope for the restoration of peace and harmony among the disputant parties. Okerome decides the right or wrong in a case during proceedings in which such pronouncements are centered on the use of proverbs. This is adopted so that the parties will not be angered in their judgment as the proverb will be used to interpret the case and the punishment thereto. It must be noted that the nature of evidence in the process is elastic, especially when issues are complicated, though not in all cases. The center piece of the Okerome adjudicatory process is telling the truth, which will facilitate the process.

This method needs evidence to prove some claims by both parties, and enough time is spent studying the evidence before the pronouncement of the judgment. Most cases, especially land-related issues, take time before they are finally settled, according to an interview granted to Mr. Linus Onwu, who submitted that a land case is a difficult issue, especially when it involves many parties and interests. To avoid rushing to conclusions, OkeromeInyi involves lots of techniques to thoroughly adduce the evidence before them and, in most cases, applies the spiritual dimension of inquiry to ascertain the truth. He further noted that at times, a man may marry more than one wife; in such a family, troubles always abound, and upon this, he cited the Ejeagu family, who are contesting the position of di-okpara. There was confusion between the two wives on the determinant of di-okpara as both wives delivered on the same day but in different locations. To determine who is di-okpara between Mr. Emmanuel Ejeagu and Mr. Chukwuebuka Ejeagu became problematic as their father affirmed the latter as di-okpara throughout his life, which was heavily contested and resisted by the first wife. The matter was presented to OkeromeInyi, who applied all traditional techniques to determine the truth. They consulted seven dibia's differently, and they affirmed Mr. Emmanuel as the first son in the family. Upon their return, they subjected the two persons struggling for the first son position to face the ikoro and lift its ofo up after prayers and incantations, and whoever lifted it is the first son, which upholds the discovery of the seven native doctors. When the two sons of Ejeagu tried, Mr. Emmanuel Ejeagu lifted the ikoro, and with this, the elder's council affirmed him as the eldest son in the family.

In the traditional Inyi setting, *Okerome,* as a peace agency, applied the adjudication method of conflict resolution, which has to do with the punishment ascribed to the offender. The punishment is based on judicious judgment delivery, as all parties present must see that the evidence before them all suggests the true position of the peace agency. The target of the punishment is not to ridicule an offender but as a corrective measure to placate the victim. It is also an honor for parties in conflict to accept the decision of the *Okerome*without reservation, as this encourages them to do more.

According to the interview granted to Ichie Cosmas Ezeka, the chairman, *OkeromeInyi,* stated that "a case that required punishment has to do with murder. Ala Inyi abhorred spitting of blood, and offenders must be submitted to the elders for judgment in the olden times. After finding the person guilty of the offense, the *Okerome* will asked the offender to leave the town in what is known in Inyi parlance as *Igba Oso Ochu* (ostracize) for at least 7 years. The essence of it is to placate the spirit of the person murdered and that of their family, which has a healing process. The essence of the family is that before the expiration of the seven years, the family may have forgiven and forgotten the incident. But throughout this period, the two

families will not interact or correlate in any way because they have what is referred to in Inyi parlance as *Oboo.* When the period elapsed, the *Okerome*presented the two families before the *Ajala* deity for purification, cleansing, and the breaking of all communication barriers. This is called, in Inyi parlance, *IgburuOboo*. In such rituals, a female native goat is used to do it with native kola, raffia palm, *nzu,* and *odo".*

In furtherance of this, he was asked how such a case is being treated today. In his reaction, "he noted that modernization has caused such practices to stop. In the event that one commits murder in the Inyi, the police take its cause. He noted that in cases of accidental death, such as motorbikes, etc., the police usually arrest the culprit, and if eventually the police or a court of competent jurisdiction discharges the person based on the fact that it was an accident, the person must leave the town for seven years just to respect and placate the spirit of his victim. Whenever he returns, he will undergo the process as stated above.

Ichie John Onyegbaraeke, a member of *OkeromeInyi,* succinctly said that criminal cases have some punishment attached to them when handled by the agency. Robbery suspects, if found guilty by the *Okerome*, may be ostracized from the town. The *Okerome* will call the young people in the village to lead the person out of the outskirts of the town between the boundaries of other towns. When they get to the boundary, the leader of the youth will warn the person seriously not to step foot in the town again for the next seven years, according to the ruling of the *Okerome*. Thereafter, they will use what is called in Inyi parlance '*Ogboro'* to cross the road. The significance of the '*Ogboro'* indicates that coming to the town is dangerous and must be avoided. After the elapse of the sanction, the person will return, but not without some purification. But today, such information is no longer obtained as the police have taken charge. A good example was from Alum Inyi. When such a criminal case was recorded, the people ostracized the person, and he went and called the police. The police came and arrested the elders".

From the above speculations, it must be of interest to know that Inyi, just like any other African society, has no written law, but its laws are spiritually endowed and called *odinala,* from which the elders make their oral reference of what the judgment stands as it was handed over to them by the forebear. From the investigation gathered, adultery was a serious offense being treated by *Okerome.* A married woman caught in sexual relations with the opposite sex has committed abomination in the land. As a result, the husband can no longer eat her food, and if he attempts to do so either by commission or omission, *Iyi,* in Inyi parlance, will either kill the man or render him useless. If such sexual relations result in pregnancy, the woman will have a prolonged labor unless she mentions the person(s) she slept with before she can deliver. Once she mentions them, the *Okerome* will converge by summoning both the husband and the people whose names the woman mentioned. They will interrogate those involved, and if found guilty, the *Okerome* will fine them one native fowl each. The native fowl will be cooked at the village square, and both the *Okerome* and other elders will partake in the food of sanctification and forgiveness. The woman will use her own money to buy yam that will be used in cooking the native fowl. At the end, the *Okerome* will remove the curse the woman sexual activities brought upon the family and bless them. Notwithstanding during child's labor in such situation, the woman must take a native chick to the *Ajala* shrine, *NgeneEbelebeEnugwu shrine,* or any other shrine for sincere confession, remorse, purification, and forgiveness before she can deliver the baby. If she fails to do the needful, she may give up the ghost.

Given the above speculation, truth plays a major role in determining the case, as each oral submission and cross-examination are linked to the evidence tendered. The trial period is done in public with transparency, and this is the reason the parties abide by the decision and judgment of the elder's council. The judgment is not hasty but anchored on a persuasive statement that melts the hearts of the parties. All punishment given by Okerome is not aimed at tarnishing the image of the person but is a corrective measure against re-occurrence. It behooves the offenders to show a robust sense of responsibility and maturity towards accepting the verdict given by the elder's council in line with the customs and norms of society.

3. **Reconciliation**: This is a process of restoring order and affecting normalcy in a wartime zone. The idea of reconciliation in Inyi traditional conflict resolution is to reach an agreement or compromise towards healing the wound caused by the conflict and share agonies, frustrations, and threats together to avoid future occurrences. OkeromeInyi's major role in the Inyi traditional setting is to facilitate peace and harmony in Inyi through pacification and persuasion applied to ensure a smooth resolution of the matter. The language Okerome applied in reconciliation is a soothing balm that percolates into the psyche and conscience of the parties to the conflict. In this kind of scenario, as observed by the researcher, they always made this statement, 'iwenwanneanaghierunaokpukpu; izu ka mma nan ne ji' which literally translated to mean that anger over blood relations does not result in violent clashes as only people from common ties can have fruitful discussions. All these maxims are to prepare the ground for a melting point of parties for ease of settlement. Proverbs and maxims were instrumental in nailing the truth and ascertaining the facts expressible in the issues of conflicts in traditional Inyi society.

   For instance, the researcher observed the reconciliation between Nze Christian Onyebueke and his brother Fabian Onyebueke over the property issue they jointly bought in Abuja, which was cunningly coveted by the former without giving the latter his due share of the money realized from the sale of the property as initially agreed. After the presentation before the Okerome on September 20, 2023, and the cross-examination that followed thereafter, they discovered that Nze Christian Onyebueke was guilty, as evidence tendered before them shows that the property belonged to both brothers. Okerome counsels them to sheath their weapons and embrace unity, and in the face of all challenges, they should remember that they are still brothers. They established a common understanding, reposed confidence, and built trust once again. The height of the dialogue and reconciliation meeting was a handshake of re-union and an act of friendship, as NzeOnyebueke promised before the Ofo Ala to pay his brother his due share of the business once they got to Abuja. They also hug each other, accompanied by laughter. The acceptance and show of unity demonstrated at the end are like a magic wand.

   Okerome could achieve the feet in reconciliation in an Inyi traditional setting because of their expertise in the use of proper language of persuasion in resolving matters.

4. **Arbitration**: This method produced confidence building, trust, and a common understanding in the Inyi traditional setting, as reposed by Okerome. OkeromeInyi had lived up to their expectation of being transparent, accountable, impartial, and fair in their judgment and in the application of cultural norms and customs suitable to each customary matter handled in the arbitral proceedings. They interpret customs accordingly and without any bias. The Okerome decisions, as noted by Ichie Foster

Ofozie, are based on the dynamics of cultural norms, and when such cases have never had roots in Inyi cultural heritage, they seek divine opinion from the Igwe family of UmuomeInyi, who were divinely ordained to give directives in such matters, and whatever they pronounced becomes part of the norms in Inyi. The directive forms the basis upon which the Okerome decision will be articulated. The Igwe family of Umuome is a think tank as regards Inyi customs and norms, and they are culturally placed to provide solutions in controversial and mysterious circumstances in Inyi traditional settings.

In his submission during the interview, Ichie Raymond Ike succinctly stated that arbitration in traditional Inyi settings relies more on the use of supernatural powers to dictate the outcome of the case after presentation by the parties, especially in controversial circumstances. They consult native doctors beyond the shores of Inyi just to get a reliable result. For them to accept the divination, they must consult at least five to seven native doctors, and if their findings are consistent, they will draw conclusions and determine the truth.

In his words, Nze Simon Okafor said that in most cases, Okerome consults NdiicheInyi Nile at Umuome and seeks their positions in some customary matters with the use of two sliced raw yam. After prayers before the shrine of the ancestors, they will present their needs and inquiries before them before soliciting answers using the two sliced raw yam. There will be a consensus before they start using the yam, as it is believed that the earth cannot lie to the yam.

In all, in arbitration, people tend to believe in the process because of fear of the unknown. At the same time, some people are afraid to accept the process because of the consequences. The traditional arbitration method in Inyi is really working.

5. **Negotiation**: This has to do with agreements reached between parties in conflict through cooperation, collaboration, and compromise. This is possible when there is good communication and understanding that flow in the same direction. Negotiation played a major role in the Inyi traditional setting applied by the OkeromeInyi peace agency. Before negotiation takes place, they create a level ground that will give the parties issues while helping each party understand the positions, needs, and interests of the other party. OkeromeInyi, from what the researcher observed, abhors the use of foul language during presentations and will sanction those who use it. They will apply their wisdom to ensuring that each party shifts the ground for the case to be amicably resolved.

   OkeromeInyi has used the method to settle marriage issues, land disputes, chieftaincy tussles, masquerade matters, and boundary disputes, among others. The outcome of the case is always win-some or loss-some. The parties are always very happy with the outcome.

   Pa Nnadueke Kenechukwu stated that negotiation was applied during the boundary dispute between Umuchime and Abor villages at Alaike. At the end of their presentations, the elders' council observed that where Umuchime defined the boundary, it was misleading and false. They thoroughly carried out an indebted investigation on the matter, and in their ruling, they appealed to the consciousness of the Abor people to shift from the true boundary demarcation to accommodate Umuchime and avoid future occurrences, while Umuchime has to forfeit their ten

plots of land that are situated beyond the boundary to the Abor side. This is to straighten the boundary demarcation that tends to curve against Umuchime uphill and have a sharp bend against Abor downward. At the end of the negotiation, both parties accepted the outcome and presented one goat each, which was slaughtered after Thanksgiving prayers for peace, marking the end of hostilities, and they ate together to renew their union, known as Nrigba in Inyi parlance, which means commensality or communion.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the research findings, regarding Africa indigenous institutions, here are the conclusion and recommendations;

1. Community Empowerment and Involvement: Promote proactive community participation in dispute settlement procedures. Encourage projects that give local people more authority so they may take charge of peacebuilding efforts and develop long-term solutions rooted in indigenous knowledge.
2. Preserving Indigenous Traditions: Promote the upkeep and revival of native conflict-resolution customs in OkeromeInyi and other African communities. Encourage projects that preserve the legacy of culturally appropriate conflict resolution techniques by documenting and passing them on to future generations.
3. Education and awareness campaigns: To foster knowledge and respect for indigenous dispute resolution techniques, organize educational events and awareness campaigns in OkeromeInyi and the surrounding areas. Stress the usefulness and effectiveness of conventional methods in addition to contemporary ones.
4. Government and NGO Cooperation: Promote cooperation among local governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and OkeromeInyi Peace Agency. Encourage cooperative efforts to fund, train, and carry out programs for resolving conflicts in order to create a synergistic approach for long-term peace and community development.

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