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TRADITIONAL INSTITUTION AND CONFLICT MANAGEMENT IN ILE-IFE, OSUN STATE, NIGERIA

Oluwafisayo Olamiposi Falowo
Department of Public Administration
Osun State University, Osogbo
falowofisayo@yahoo.com

Afolabi Fisayo Elizabeth
Obafemi Awolowo University Teaching Hospital,
Ile-Ife, Osun State

Abstract
In Nigeria, governmental authorities possess the constitutional mandate of conflict management in communities and the society at large. On the other hand, the unabated nature of communal conflicts often compel the need to approach the challenge from an indigenous perspective summoning the intervention of traditional institutions which are the custodian of custom and tradition in the community. Therefore this study examined the role of traditional institutions in conflict management in Ile-Ife, which has antecedents of communal conflicts between Ife and Modakeke. The study adopted the survey research design. Primary and secondary data were collected for the study. Primary data was collected through the administration of questionnaire. The study population comprised 1200 members of Community Development Association. The sample size of 120 respondents representing 10%, were selected through multistage sampling procedure by stratifying Ile-Ife into Ife East LGA (Modakeke) and Ife Central LGA (Ife) based on historical record of communal conflict. From the two LGAs, simple random was used to select wards in each of the LGAs, while proportionate sampling was used to select 20 members of Community Development Association in each ward making a total of 120. The data was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics, such as mean, standard deviation and regression analysis. The findings revealed that traditional rulers play significant role in conflict management with grand mean (3.5). This is further buttressed by the regression analysis which revealed significant relationship between conflict management mechanisms of traditional institutions and conflict management in Ile-Ife, with the p-value=0.0000. The findings revealed that the variation in conflict management accounted for by traditional institutions conflict management mechanisms is 75%, indicated by r2=0.7517. Furthermore, the findings showed that challenges confronting effectiveness of traditional institutions conflict management include political interference (mean=3.67), bias by traditional rulers (mean=3.56) and lack of authority (mean=3.46). The study concluded that traditional institution in Ile-Ife play significant role in conflict management in the community.

Keywords: Conflict, conflict management, traditional institutions, communal conflicts, conflict resolution

Introduction

Nigeria has witnessed various political crises that brought about insecurity, destruction of lives and properties as well as disruption of socio-economic life of the people. The phenomenon of communal conflict is not only a common feature of developing nations; it is a global phenomenon that permeates all societies and frequently has devastating effects on communities, economies, and social cohesion (Adebajo, Salako, Bello & Adekunle, 2024). Consequently, several governments have been forced to develop a variety of strategies and

measures to halt its precarious effects on the economy (Blanchard, Dudouet & Vion, 2015). These conflicts arise from the pursuit of divergent interests, goals and aspirations by individuals or groups in defined social and physical environments.

In Nigeria, communal conflicts have been a persistent problem even before the advent of the Europeans (Umezulike & Ugochukwu, 2021). The conflicts which preceded and outlived the colonialist often result to serious social, economic, and political upheavals. According to Lamidi (2019), some of these conflicts include *Ife-Modakeke* in Osun State (Toriola 2001); *Yoruba-Hausa* in Shagamu, Ogun State (Ojiji 2007); *Eleme-Okrika* in Rivers State (Agwu 2007)*; Zango-Kataf* in Kaduna State (Agrawal 2008)*; Tiv-Jukun* in Wukari Taraba State (Aja 2007) and so on. The history of communal conflict in Nigeria revealed that hardly is any region spared some of these conflicts (Akpomurie and Forae, 2024).

These conflicts exist in communities with presence of traditional institutions which have historically been vital in preserving social cohesiveness, keeping order, and settling conflicts since they are strongly ingrained in local communities (Ojo, 2016). Despite the historical role of traditional institution, the burden of conflict resolutions rest first on the government which possesses the constitutional authority (Lamidi, 2019). On the other hand, the Nigerian government institutional structures to handle conflicts have been partially effective, especially in undefended communities (Hassan & Yusuf, 2020).

Osaghe (2007) claimed that traditional institutions enjoy legitimacy and trust among community members. This is in view of their proximity and familiarity with the people. Salawu (2019) further opined that traditional institutions in view of their role as custodian of culture, sometimes time assume responsibility of alternative dispute resolution mechanisms. In view of the foregoing, this work therefore intend to examine the role of traditional institutions in resolving communal conflict in Ile-Ife, Osun State, which is historically reputed as one of the locations of communal conflicts (Ife-Modakeke crisis) in Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

(i) examine the role of traditional institutions in conflict management in Ile-Ife
(ii) determine the challenges hindering the effectiveness of traditional institutions in conflict management in Ile-Ife

Hypothesis (H_0)

There is no significant relationship between traditional institutions conflict management mechanisms and conflict management in Ile-Ile.

Literature Review

Traditional Institution

Traditional institutions refer to the indigenous political arrangements whereby leaders with proven track records are appointed and installed in line with the provisions of their native laws and customs (Orji, & Olali, 2019). The need for the institutions is to preserve the tradition and customs of the people, and to manage conflicts that may arise among members of the community through the instrumentality of laws and customs of the people. Traditional institutions are the custodian of their people's norms, cultures and practices

In line with the above, Nweke (2012), points out that traditional institutions are the custodian of their people's norms, cultures, and practices. In most African settings, appointing people into various traditional institutions is hereditary or by election or selection by the relevant traditional rulers or kingmakers. The mode of selection of traditional rulers differs from

society to society. For instance, in Africa and Nigeria in particular, the mode of appointment or selection differs from one ethnic group to another. Traditional institutions are symbols of indigenous peoples' rights, privileges, laws, customs, and traditions which include but not limited to paramount rulers and their councils.

The foregoing revealed that traditional institutions are historical institution that is entrenched in the norms, values and culture of the people. Even though they are not accorded constitutional modern day authority, they derive their legitimacy, influence and authority from the age long culture and tradition that preserves their existence and relevance.

Conflict Management

Conflict management according to Tsuwa & Ochoga (2015) connote containment of conflict through steps introduced to promote conditions in which collaborative and valued relationships control the behavior of conflicting parties, in other words, this can be interpreted to mean conflict prevention strategy. Best (2012) sees conflict management as a process of reducing the negative and destructive capacity of conflict through a number of measures and by working with and through the parties involved in that conflict.

According to Osisioma (2004) conflict management covers an array of measures of conflict resolution: problem solving, super-ordinate goals, and expansion of resources, avoidance, smoothing, compromise, authoritative command, and altering the human and structural variables. is the application of resolution and stimulation techniques to regulate the level and impact of disruptive conflict within an entity, while harnessing the more positive and constructive aspects of collaboration, cooperation and compromise.

Rahim, (2002) explain conflict management as the process of limiting the negative aspect of conflict while increasing the positive aspects. The researcher further stressed that the aim of conflict management is to enhance learning and group outcomes. The foregoing conceptualizations present conflict management to connote the ability to identify and handle conflicts sensibly, fairly and efficiently.

Functionalism Theory

Functionalism is a prominent theory in sociology. it is based on the premise that all aspects of a society-institutions, roles, norms and so on serve a purpose and that all are indispensable for the long term survival of the society. Some notable theorists include Emile Durkheim (1858 - 1917) and redefined by Talcott Parsons (1902 - 1917) during the 1940s and 1950s. According to the theorists of functionalism, the society is perceived as a system. In another sense, it is a set of interconnected parts which together form a whole. The basic unit of analysis in functionalism theory is society (the people), and its various parts are understood primarily in terms of their relationship to the whole.

The early functionalists often drew an analogy between society and an organism such as the human body. They perspective held that an understanding of its relationship to other organs and its contribution towards the maintenance of the organism will ensure normalcy on the society. In the same way, an understanding of any part of the society requires an analysis of its relationship to other parts and most importantly, its contribution to the maintenance of society. Continuing this analogy, functionalists argued that, just as organism has certain basic needs that must be satisfied if it is to survive, so society has basic needs that must be met if it is to continue to exist.

Thus, social institutions such as the family and religion are analyzed as a part of the social system rather than as isolated units. They are understood with reference to the contribution

they make to the system (McLauchlin & Pearlman, 2012). It is in the light of the above, that this paper has adopted functional theory. There is no gainsaying that the traditional institutions cannot function in isolation of governmental institutions to maintain peace and unity in their domain.

Functionalism emphasizes institutional roles, social cohesion, and the consequences of institutional dysfunction for the broader social system. Furthermore, functionalism is particularly suitable for this study because it aligns with the study's emphasis on revitalizing and repositioning traditional institutions as effective institution of conflict management in contemporary society. The theory challenges the marginalization of traditional conflict resolution mechanisms and advocates for their reintegration into governance and peace-building processes based on African communal ethics (Azu, 2018).

Given that communal conflicts are not merely institutional failures but also crises of identity, values, and social relationships, functionalism offers a holistic explanatory framework that captures the moral, cultural, and communal dimensions of conflict in Osun State. Its adoption therefore strengthens the study's analytical depth and provides a more contextually relevant explanation of how traditional institutions can contribute meaningfully to sustainable peace and social harmony.

Empirical Review

Ogbanga and Bukie (2024) examined the role of traditional institutions in conflict resolution in Nigeria from a social work perspective. Data was generated from secondary sources only. The study was anchored on system theory of Ludwig Bertalanffy (1956). The study revealed that the traditional conflict resolution method as practiced in Nigeria is better than the modern adjudicative method of conflict resolution, because it is faster and non-adversarial. The study recommends among other things a reversal to traditional methods of conflict management and resolution, because it is friendlier, faster, cheaper and devoid of post conflict resolution animosity.

Akpeekon, Ogala and Agi (2023) investigated the role of traditional institutions in conflict management in Khana Local Government Area (LGA), Rivers State, Nigeria. The study interviewed 5 respondents in each community totaling 15 respondents using snowball and purposive sampling techniques. The study contended that the advent of colonialism and post-colonial state in Nigeria politicized traditional institutions, hence weakened them in living up to their traditional responsibilities of conflict management and peace building. Also, the study affirms that this has resulted in the loss of respects for African values and traditional authority; accounting mainly for the decades of social conflicts in communities in Khana LGA.

Igbokwe-Ibeto (2021) examined the role of traditional institution in curbing insecurity in Nigeria. She adopted the framework of historical orientation approach and secondary sources of data using content analysis to examine the roles of traditional rulers in tackling insecurity in Nigeria. It was discovered that though, the powers of the traditional rulers have changed constitutionally, in practice they still have a high level of influence on the people. However, the powers to enforce sanctions have been eroded. This study concludes that, despite the fact that the traditional rulers do not have formal political power, they are still highly respected in their communities across the states with considerable economic and political influence in the country.

Umezulike and Ugochukwu (2021) investigated the roles of traditional rulers in community conflict management in Imo State. The study primarily assessed the levels of use of some

strategies by traditional rulers in managing conflicts in their communities. The study adopted a descriptive survey method carried out in selected autonomous communities in Imo State. The findings of the study showed that traditional rulers use of compromise and collaborating strategies in community conflict management strategies, also they agreed on the challenges encountered in the course of managing conflict in their communities.

Abdulsalam, Olokooba and Okafor (2020) examined the roles of traditional rulers in conflict resolution in Kwara State, Nigeria. The study population consisted of traditional rulers in the state. The study adopted a descriptive survey type, 180 members of traditional rulers were sampled through simple random sampling technique. The findings of the study showed that traditional rulers had many roles they play in conflict resolution in all ramifications. The study also revealed that there was no significant difference in the roles of traditional rulers in conflict resolution based on age and marital status.

Azu (2018) examined the challenges of traditional institutions in the management of communal conflicts. Data for this study was generated from secondary sources which include related published works on library shelves, internet materials and primarily from researcher's personal observations. Specific reference was made to the leadership roles played by these institutions in the traditional communities prior to the advent of colonialism. The study was anchored on the African Renaissance Theory which is rooted in African traditional values.
Findings revealed that westernization and its politics, coupled with primitive politics occurring in the Nigeria political arena have altogether distracted and deviated the consciousness of these institutions from their primary role as custodians of traditional and customary values, especially in the area of ensuring peaceful co-existence among communities. The study therefore argues that not until the traditional institutions are once more repositioned to assume their traditional roles and responsibilities, in partnership with the legal institutions of the state, management of communal conflicts will continue to be problematic, while peace building and consensus will remain a mirage.
Otite and Albert (2009) argued that traditional rulers function as custodians of peace and social order within Nigerian society. Ojo-Ebenezer (2023) asserted that traditional institutions, especially the council of elders is held in high regard by the general public due to their duties as elders representing a range of families and wards, and they are highly appreciated in town meetings, when issues affecting the entire town are debated.

Methodology

Research Design
The study adopted the survey research design. A survey is a way of data collection in which people are asked to answer questions (usually in the form of a questionnaire or interview). This enabled the researcher to elicit information from selected community leaders in Ile-Ife community.

Population of the Study
The population for this study consists of selected members of Community Development Association in Ile-Ife, Osun State, Nigeria. Therefore, the population of the study is 1200 which include members of community association in Ife central and Ife east local government. The members of Community Development Associations selected are people who have been residents in Ile-Ife for a period long enough to provide information on communal conflicts and conflict management by the traditional institutions in Ile-Ife.

Sample and Sampling Procedure

The sample size for this study consists of 120 respondents which is 10% of the population. To select the sample size for this study, multistage sampling technique was used, which include, simple random sampling technique, stratified sampling technique, and proportionate sampling technique. The description of multistage sampling techniques was done based on stages presented as follows;

Stage I: Stratified sampling technique was used to stratify two LGAs into wards; 11 wards for Ife Central and 10 wards for Ife East.

Stage II: Simple random sampling procedure was used to select three (3) wards in each local government areas making a total of 6 wards. This was done by taking 3 wards out of 11 wards in Ife central and 3 wards from 10 wards in Ife east.

Stage III: Proportionate sampling technique was used to select one hundred and twenty (120) respondents from the 6 wards in each of the LGAs. This was done by selecting 20 members of Community Development Association from each ward in the LGAs.

Validation of the Instrument

In order to establish the validity of the instrument adopted by the researcher, the questionnaire was vetted by expert. The Suggestions and corrections made by the validators were incorporated.

Data Analysis

The data was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The descriptive statistics include mean and standard deviation while the inferential statistics utilized regression.

Analysis of Results

Table 1: Role of Traditional Institution in Managing and Resolving Conflict in Ile-Ife region, Osun State

S/N	Item	Mean	STD	Decision
1	Traditional rulers act as mediators in resolving disputes within their communities	3.341	0.27	Agreed
2	Chiefs and elders play advisory roles during conflict resolution processes	3.491	0.34	Agreed
3	Traditional institutions organize peace meetings to resolve communal conflicts	3.528	0.63	Agreed
4	Traditional rulers use customary laws to settle disputes effectively	3.472	0.82	Agreed
5	Palace courts serve as platforms for resolving community conflicts	3.653	0.58	Agreed
6	Traditional institutions collaborate with community leaders to maintain peace	3.415	0.63	Agreed
7	Traditional rulers intervene promptly when conflicts arise in their domains	3.431	0.81	Agreed
	Grand mean	**3.503**		

Role of Traditional Institution in Managing and Resolving Conflict in Ile-Ife region, Osun State

The table 1 above presents respondents' views on the role of traditional institutions in managing and resolving conflicts in Ile-Ife region, Osun State, using mean and standard deviation values. The grand mean of 3.503 indicates an overall agreement that traditional institutions play significant roles in conflict management and resolution. All the items

recorded mean scores above 3.00, showing consistent agreement among respondents. The highest mean score (3.721; SD = 0.58) was recorded for the item stating that traditional institutions promote peaceful coexistence through dialogue and negotiation, suggesting this is perceived as their most prominent role. This was followed by palace courts serving as platforms for resolving community conflicts (Mean = 3.653; SD = 0.58) and respect for traditional authority enhancing compliance with conflict resolution decisions (Mean = 3.604; SD = 0.49). These relatively high means and moderate standard deviations indicate strong and fairly consistent agreement among respondents.

Other notable roles include organizing peace meetings (Mean = 3.528; SD = 0.63), chiefs and elders playing advisory roles (Mean = 3.491; SD = 0.34), and the use of customary laws to settle disputes (Mean = 3.472; SD = 0.82). Traditional rulers' prompt intervention (Mean = 3.431; SD = 0.81), collaboration with community leaders (Mean = 3.415; SD = 0.63).

Table 2: Regression Analysis on the Role of Traditional Institutions in Conflict Management

Conflict management	N	X	SD	Test value	t-value	Coeff	Sig.
Role	121	3.503	0.584	2.50	26.9	0.239	0.000
				r2=0.7517			

Hypothesis (H_0): Traditional conflict management mechanism does not significantly affect conflict management in Ile-Ife region, Osun State.

Table 2 shows the regression analysis conducted to determine whether traditional conflict management mechanisms significantly affect peace and stability in Ile-Ife region, Osun State. The findings revealed that the traditional institution conflict management mechanism significantly affect conflict management which engenders peace and stability. This interpretation is derived from the result of the $p < 0.05$. The result further showed that conflict management which produces peace and stability is enhanced by 0.239 units as the traditional institution deploys its conflict management mechanism. The result also revealed that the variation in conflict management is accounted for by conflict management mechanism of traditional institutions is 75% which is indicated by 0.7517.

Table 3: Challenges hindering the effectiveness of traditional institutions in conflict management

S/N	Item	Mean	STD	Decision
1	Lack of legal authority limits the effectiveness of traditional institutions.	3.412	0.26	Agreed
2	Government interference weakens the role of traditional rulers in conflict management.	3.253	1.27	Agreed
3	Political influence undermines neutrality in traditional conflict resolution.	3.672	0.65	Agreed
4	Declining respect for traditional authority affects conflict management outcomes.	3.050	0.84	Agreed

Challenges Hindering The Effectiveness Of Traditional Institutions In Conflict Management

Table 3 presents respondents' perceptions of the major challenges affecting the effectiveness of traditional institutions in conflict management. The overall grand mean of 3.094 indicates that respondents generally agreed that the listed factors significantly hinder the performance

of traditional institutions in resolving conflicts. The results reveal that political influence undermining neutrality in traditional conflict resolution (Mean = 3.67, SD = 0.65) was identified as the most prominent challenge. This suggests that respondents strongly perceive political interference as a major factor compromising the impartiality of traditional rulers. Similarly, bias or favoritism by traditional leaders (Mean = 3.56, SD = 0.20) was highly rated, indicating concerns about fairness and objectivity in dispute resolution processes. The relatively low standard deviation in this item shows a strong consensus among respondents. Additionally, modern legal systems reducing reliance on traditional conflict resolution mechanisms (Mean = 3.46, SD = 1.04) and lack of legal authority (Mean = 3.41, SD = 0.26) were strongly agreed upon, suggesting that structural and institutional limitations significantly weaken traditional institutions.

Furthermore, respondents agreed that government interference (Mean = 3.25, SD = 1.27) and declining respect for traditional authority (Mean = 3.05, SD = 0.84) also negatively affect the effectiveness of traditional rulers in managing conflicts. These findings imply that both external interference and changing societal attitudes contribute to diminishing the authority and influence of traditional institutions.

Discussion of Findings

This study examined the roles of traditional institutions in managing conflicts in Ile-Ife region, Osun State. The findings revealed that traditional institutions play significant role in conflict management with grand mean (3.5) indicating the result. This is further buttressed by the regression analysis which revealed significant relationship between conflict management mechanisms of traditional institutions and conflict management in Ile-Ife, with the p-value=0.0000. The findings revealed that the variation in conflict management accounted for by traditional institutions conflict management mechanisms is 75%, indicated by r2=0.7517.

The findings provide empirical support for the continued relevance of traditional institutions as grassroots conflict management mechanisms. The finding is in consonance with the view of Ogbanga and Bukie (2024). The researchers anchored their work on system theory of Ludwig Bertalanffy (1956). Their study revealed that the traditional conflict resolution method as practiced in Nigeria is better than the modern adjudicative method of conflict resolution, because it is faster and non-adversarial. The study recommends among other things a reversal to traditional methods of conflict management and resolution, because it is friendlier, faster, cheaper and devoid of post conflict resolution animosity.

Their reliance on customary laws and community norms underscores the embedded legitimacy they derive from shared cultural values and historical continuity. This finding aligns with Otite and Albert (2009), who argue that traditional rulers function as custodians of peace and social order within Nigerian society. Similarly, the study corroborates the position of Hamisu *et al*. (2017), who observed that traditional institutions effectively resolve intra- and inter-communal disputes through culturally grounded mechanisms.

The result further revealed that traditional rulers in Ile-Ife cannot be viewed as ceremonial figures; rather, they are functional actors within local governance and peace building frameworks. This is in tandem with the opinion of Ojo-Ebenezer (2023), who asserted that traditional institutions, especially the council of elders is held in high regard by the general public due to their duties as elders representing a range of families and wards, and they are highly appreciated in town meetings, when issues affecting the entire town are debated.

The findings also showed that traditional institutions do not merely perform symbolic roles; they produce tangible outcomes in terms of stability, unity, and de-escalation of disputes.

From a theoretical standpoint, these findings align with structural functionalism, which emphasize the role of indigenous institutions in maintaining equilibrium within social systems. This aligns with Umezulike and Ugochukwu (2021) who investigated the roles of traditional rulers in community conflict management in Imo State. The findings of the study showed that traditional rulers use of compromise and collaborating strategies in community conflict management strategies, also they agreed on the challenges encountered in the course of managing conflict in their communities. Similaly, Abdulsalam, Olokooba and Okafor (2020) submitted traditional rulers play crucial role in conflict resolution in Kwara State, Nigeria. The findings of the study showed that traditional rulers had many roles they play in conflict resolution in all ramifications.

The finding is also in line with Igbokwe-Ibeto (2021) who examined the role of traditional institution in curbing insecurity in Nigeria. The researcher discovered that though, the powers of the traditional rulers have changed constitutionally; in practice they still have a high level of influence on the people. However, the powers to enforce sanctions have been eroded. This study concludes that, despite the fact that the traditional rulers do not have formal political power, they are still highly respected in their communities across the states with considerable economic and political influence in the country.

While traditional institutions are perceived as both active and effective, there are substantial challenges facing the traditional institution. The finding indicates strong agreement that significant constraints hinder their effectiveness. These include political interference (mean=3.67), bias by traditional rulers (mean=3.56) and lack of authority (mean=3.46).

The foregoing is in line with Azu (2018) who examined the challenges of traditional institutions in the management of communal conflicts. The researcher highlighted specific leadership roles played by these institutions in the traditional communities prior to the advent of colonialism. The researchers' findings revealed that westernization and its politics, coupled with primitive politics occurring in the Nigeria political arena have altogether distracted and deviated the consciousness of these institutions from their primary role as custodians of traditional and customary values, especially in the area of ensuring peaceful co-existence among communities.

It is therefore argues that there is a need to reposition to traditional institution to partner with the legal institutions of the state, management of communal conflicts will continue to be problematic, while peace building and consensus will remain a mirage.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it is concluded that traditional institutions in Ile-Ife region play significant and indispensable roles in conflict management and resolution. Their functions extend beyond mediation to include reconciliation, restoration of social harmony, promotion of communal solidarity, and prevention of conflict escalation. Traditional rulers operate within culturally embedded frameworks that emphasize dialogue, consensus-building, and restorative justice. The study further concludes that traditional conflict management mechanisms are effective in ensuring peace and stability.

Recommendations

In light of the findings and conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. It is important that traditional institutions should be formally integrated into local conflict management frameworks through structured collaboration with formal judicial institutions, law enforcement agencies, and local government authorities.
2. There is a need for clearer constitutional or statutory recognition of the roles and jurisdictional boundaries of traditional institutions to reduce ambiguity and enhance enforcement capacity.
3. Continuous training in modern and alternative dispute resolution techniques should be organized for the traditional rulers to complement customary approaches and strengthen their capacity.

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