



The Role of Traditional Leaders in Conflict Resolution in Nigeria: Strategies for Sustainable Peace

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Abstract

This study explores the role of traditional leaders in conflict resolution in Nigeria, with a focus on identifying strategies for sustainable peace. It examines the challenges faced by traditional leaders, including the erosion of their authority, lack of legal recognition, ethnic and religious divides, and inadequate resources and training, and how these factors hinder their ability to mediate contemporary conflicts. The study is guided by the Conflict Transformation Theory, which emphasizes the transformation of underlying social structures and relationships that perpetuate conflict. The theory, largely attributed to peacebuilding scholar John Paul Lederach, serves as a framework for understanding how conflict resolution can be achieved by addressing root causes and fostering long-term change. A qualitative methodology was employed, utilizing secondary data collection from academic articles, reports, and case studies. Thematic analysis was applied to identify recurring themes and patterns in conflict resolution practices, allowing the researcher to gain insights into the complexities of the role of traditional leaders in Nigeria. Key findings from the study reveal that political interference, lack of formal legal recognition, ethnic and religious divides, and inadequate training and resources significantly undermine the effectiveness of traditional leaders in resolving contemporary conflicts. These challenges erode their authority, neutrality, and capacity to mediate disputes. The study concludes that the weakening of traditional leadership in Nigeria has limited their ability to resolve conflicts, leading to a diminished role in peacebuilding. To address these challenges, the study recommends strengthening legal frameworks to formally recognize traditional leaders, enhancing their training and resources, promoting inclusivity to mitigate ethnic and religious divides, and reducing political interference. This study contributes to knowledge by providing a comprehensive understanding of the factors hindering the role of traditional leaders in conflict resolution in Nigeria. It offers valuable insights into how revitalizing traditional authority and integrating it into modern governance structures can improve conflict resolution processes and contribute to national stability and sustainable peacebuilding.

Keywords: Traditional Leaders, Conflict Resolution, Peacebuilding, Nigeria, Conflict Transformation

I. Introduction

Traditional leaders have long held a central role in the socio-political landscape of many African societies, including Nigeria, where they serve as custodians of culture, mediators in disputes, and symbols of communal identity. Their involvement in conflict resolution is not only a reflection of their historical significance but also a testament to the enduring relevance of indigenous governance systems.

Conflict resolution, in this context, refers to the processes and mechanisms employed to address disputes and prevent violence, fostering an environment conducive to sustainable peace. Traditional leaders, often referred to as chiefs, emirs, obas, or community heads, are individuals who inherit or are appointed to leadership positions based on customary law and practices. They play a pivotal role in maintaining social order within their communities, acting as intermediaries between the people and the state, and preserving cultural heritage (Agbaje,

2003). According to Gyekye (1997), traditional leaders are seen as the moral compass of their communities, embodying the values and norms that guide communal life. Conflict resolution, as defined by Burton (1990), is a comprehensive approach to addressing and managing disputes by identifying their underlying causes and seeking mutually acceptable solutions. It involves various strategies, including negotiation, mediation, arbitration, and dialogue, which aim to restore harmony and prevent the recurrence of conflict. Traditional conflict resolution methods, often rooted in customary law, emphasise reconciliation and restorative justice over punitive measures (Boege, 2006). The role of traditional leaders in conflict resolution in Nigeria is deeply embedded in the country's historical and cultural fabric. Traditional leaders have historically acted as the first point of contact in resolving disputes, utilising customary laws and practices that prioritise communal harmony. Their methods often involve convening elders' councils or community assemblies to deliberate on issues and reach consensus (Okeke, 2014). These leaders are seen as impartial arbiters who prioritise the collective interest over individual grievances.

Traditional conflict resolution mechanisms are particularly effective in rural and remote areas where formal legal systems may be less accessible or culturally distant from the local populace. In such contexts, traditional leaders provide an alternative avenue for justice that is perceived as more culturally relevant and expedient (Nwolise, 2005). Their deep understanding of local customs and the socio-political dynamics of their communities enables them to address conflicts in ways that are both contextually appropriate and widely accepted. The impact of traditional leaders on conflict resolution in Nigeria is multifaceted, encompassing social, economic, and political dimensions. Socially, traditional leaders contribute to the maintenance of peace and social cohesion by fostering a sense of belonging and mutual respect among community members. Their ability to mediate disputes and facilitate dialogue helps to prevent the escalation of conflicts into violence, thereby promoting communal stability (Adejumobi, 2000). Economically, the resolution of conflicts by traditional leaders can have significant benefits, as it reduces the disruptions caused by disputes and fosters an environment conducive to economic activities. Communities that experience fewer conflicts are more likely to attract investments and enjoy economic growth, as peace and stability are critical prerequisites for development (Albert, 2001). Politically, traditional leaders play a crucial role in bridging the gap between formal state institutions and the grassroots. They often act as intermediaries, conveying the concerns and aspirations of their communities to government authorities, and in turn, explaining government policies and initiatives to their people. This dual role enhances the legitimacy of both

traditional and formal governance structures, contributing to the overall governance of the country (Chabal & Daloz, 1999). However, the effectiveness of traditional leaders in conflict resolution is not without challenges. The erosion of traditional authority due to the encroachment of modern state institutions, lack of formal recognition within the legal framework, and the complexities of Nigeria's ethnic and religious diversity are significant obstacles. These challenges can undermine the credibility and capacity of traditional leaders to act as neutral and effective mediators in conflicts (Ake, 1981).

The connection between traditional leaders and sustainable peace lies in their unique position within the socio-political ecosystem of Nigeria. Their role in conflict resolution contributes to the prevention of violence and the promotion of dialogue and reconciliation. By addressing the root causes of conflicts and facilitating the restoration of relationships, traditional leaders help to lay the groundwork for long-term peace and stability (Osaghae, 1995). Traditional conflict resolution practices, such as reconciliation ceremonies and peace pacts, are integral to the process of healing and rebuilding trust within communities. These practices emphasise the restoration of social harmony and the reintegration of individuals into the community, rather than retribution or exclusion (Avruch & Black, 1993). This restorative approach aligns with the principles of sustainable peace, which seek to create enduring solutions that address the underlying causes of conflict and promote social justice. The role of traditional leaders in conflict resolution is further enhanced by their ability to mobilise community resources and foster collective action. Their influence and authority can be leveraged to encourage community participation in peacebuilding initiatives, such as dialogue forums, peace education programmes, and development projects. By involving the community in these efforts, traditional leaders help to build a culture of peace that is resilient to future conflicts (Botes, 2003).

Given the significant role of traditional leaders in conflict resolution and the various challenges they face, it is essential to critically examine their contributions to sustainable peace in Nigeria. This study aims to explore the role of traditional leaders in conflict resolution, assess their effectiveness in addressing contemporary conflicts, and identify strategies to enhance their capacity for promoting sustainable peace. Through this examination, the study seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of the interplay between traditional governance systems and modern conflict resolution approaches, highlighting the potential for synergy between the two. Therefore, the essence of this study is to examine the role of traditional leaders in conflict Resolution in Nigeria: Strategies for Sustainable Peace," with a focus on

understanding the dynamics of traditional conflict resolution mechanisms, their impact on peacebuilding, and the challenges they face in the contemporary socio-political context of Nigeria. By shedding light on these aspects, the study aims to provide insights into the potential of traditional leaders to contribute to sustainable peace and stability in Nigeria.

II. Statement of Problem

Traditional leaders in Nigeria have historically played a crucial role in conflict resolution, acting as mediators in disputes and fostering social cohesion within their communities. However, their effectiveness is increasingly being challenged by several critical issues. One of the most significant problems is the erosion of traditional authority. With the advent of modern political structures and legal systems, the influence of traditional leaders has waned. In many cases, younger generations view these institutions as outdated, preferring to engage with formal legal systems or government authorities. This decline in respect and influence hinders the capacity of traditional leaders to mediate conflicts effectively. For instance, in regions like the Niger Delta, where youth militancy has surged, traditional leaders often struggle to assert their authority, as younger groups look to political figures or militant leaders for guidance. Another pressing issue is the lack of formal recognition of traditional leaders within Nigeria's constitution and legal framework. Despite their crucial role in conflict resolution, traditional leaders operate in a legal grey area without formalised authority in state-led peacebuilding initiatives. This absence of institutional support undermines their legitimacy and hampers their efforts to mediate disputes effectively. In many cases, conflicts that could have been resolved at the community level escalate because traditional leaders lack the official backing to enforce agreements. For example, in northern Nigeria, the lack of formal recognition of emirs has sometimes led to prolonged disputes, as parties involved in conflicts often bypass traditional authorities to seek resolution through formal courts, which may be less attuned to local dynamics. Nigeria's ethnic and religious diversity further complicates the role of traditional leaders in conflict resolution. Maintaining neutrality in such a complex socio-political landscape is challenging, as biases related to ethnicity, religion, or political affiliations can easily influence mediation efforts. When traditional leaders are perceived as partial, it exacerbates existing divisions rather than resolving them. The conflict in Jos, Plateau State, is a stark example of this. The city has been plagued by ethno-religious violence, and attempts by traditional leaders to mediate have often been viewed with suspicion, especially when those leaders are seen as aligned with one side of the conflict.

Additionally, traditional leaders often face challenges due to inadequate training and resources. Modern conflicts are increasingly complex, requiring skills in diplomacy, law, and negotiation that many traditional leaders may lack. Without sufficient training, their methods can appear outdated and ineffective, particularly in addressing contemporary challenges like land disputes exacerbated by climate change or conflicts fuelled by economic inequality. In some parts of southern Nigeria, for instance, disputes over land ownership have escalated because traditional leaders were unable to mediate effectively due to a lack of understanding of modern land laws and rights. Political interference and conflicts of interest further undermine the role of traditional leaders. In some cases, traditional leaders are drawn into political disputes or have vested interests in the outcomes of conflicts. When their neutrality is compromised, it diminishes their credibility as impartial mediators, making it difficult to achieve sustainable peace. For example, during elections in some regions, traditional leaders have been accused of aligning with certain political parties, which has undermined their role in mediating election-related disputes. These challenges illustrate the complex landscape within which traditional leaders operate in Nigeria. While they continue to play a vital role in conflict resolution, addressing these issues is essential to enhance their effectiveness and ensure long-term peace in the country.

III. Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of the study is to explore the role of traditional leaders in conflict resolution in Nigeria: strategies for sustainable peace. While the specific objectives are to:

1. Assess the impact of the erosion of traditional authority on the effectiveness of conflict mediation by traditional leaders in Nigeria.
2. Evaluate the effects of the lack of formal recognition of traditional leaders within Nigeria's legal framework on their conflict resolution capabilities.
3. Analyse how ethnic and religious divides influence the neutrality and credibility of traditional leaders in conflict resolution.
4. Investigate the role of inadequate training and resources in limiting the effectiveness of traditional leaders in managing contemporary conflicts.

IV. Research Questions

1. How does the erosion of traditional authority affect the effectiveness of conflict mediation by traditional leaders in Nigeria?

2. What are the effects of the lack of formal recognition of traditional leaders within Nigeria's legal framework on their conflict resolution capabilities?
3. How do ethnic and religious divides influence the neutrality and credibility of traditional leaders in conflict resolution?
4. In what ways do inadequate training and resources limit the effectiveness of traditional leaders in managing contemporary conflicts?

V. Theoretical Framework

The Conflict Transformation Theory

The Conflict Transformation Theory has emerged as a vital framework in understanding and addressing the underlying causes of conflicts, particularly in contexts where traditional mechanisms may no longer be effective. This theory, attributed largely to the work of peacebuilding scholar John Paul Lederach, offers a holistic approach to conflict resolution by emphasising the importance of transforming the relationships and social structures that perpetuate conflict (Lederach, 1995). Rather than focusing solely on immediate resolution or management of conflicts, Conflict Transformation Theory advocates for a deeper, systemic change that addresses root causes and fosters long-term peace. John Paul Lederach, often considered the father of Conflict Transformation Theory, introduced a new paradigm for understanding and engaging with conflicts. His work emphasises that conflicts are not merely isolated disputes but are deeply rooted in social, cultural, and structural inequalities. Lederach (1997) argues that conflict should be seen as an opportunity for growth and transformation, where the goal is not merely to end the conflict but to change the conditions that give rise to it. His approach is particularly relevant in contexts with a history of prolonged conflict, such as Nigeria, where ethnic, religious, and political tensions are deeply entrenched. One of the core principles of Conflict Transformation Theory is the focus on relationships. Lederach posits that the quality of relationships between conflicting parties is fundamental to understanding the dynamics of conflict and its resolution. He suggests that transforming these relationships requires addressing the underlying issues of mistrust, injustice, and inequality that often fuel conflicts. This principle is particularly important in Nigeria, where ethnic and religious divisions can lead to mistrust and antagonism between different communities (Albert, 2001). By focusing on improving relationships, conflict transformation aims to build a foundation for sustainable peace. Another key principle of Conflict Transformation Theory is the emphasis on structural change. Lederach (2003) highlights that conflicts often arise from structural inequalities and systemic injustices embedded

in societal institutions. Addressing these requires not only resolving immediate disputes but also transforming the social, economic, and political structures that perpetuate inequality and marginalisation. In the Nigerian context, issues such as resource control, political exclusion, and economic disparities are significant drivers of conflict. Conflict transformation seeks to address these structural issues through inclusive dialogue, policy reforms, and community engagement, thereby creating more equitable and just societies.

The principle of inclusivity is also central to Conflict Transformation Theory. Lederach (2005) emphasises the importance of involving all stakeholders, including marginalised and underrepresented groups, in the peacebuilding process. This inclusive approach ensures that the perspectives and needs of all parties are considered, fostering a sense of ownership and commitment to the peace process. In Nigeria, where traditional leaders often play a crucial role in conflict resolution, involving these leaders in broader peacebuilding efforts can bridge the gap between formal and informal systems of governance, enhancing the effectiveness of conflict transformation initiatives. Furthermore, Conflict Transformation Theory advocates for a long-term perspective on peacebuilding. Lederach (2001) argues that sustainable peace requires ongoing efforts to build resilient communities and institutions that can manage conflicts constructively. This involves not only addressing immediate issues but also investing in education, economic development, and capacity-building to empower communities to prevent and manage future conflicts. In the Nigerian context, this long-term approach is essential for addressing the cyclical nature of conflicts, particularly in regions like the Niger Delta, where recurring tensions over resource control and environmental degradation have led to prolonged instability. The Conflict Transformation Theory, rooted in the work of John Paul Lederach, provides a comprehensive framework for addressing conflicts by transforming the underlying relationships and structures that sustain them. Its emphasis on relationships, structural change, inclusivity, and long-term peacebuilding offers a holistic approach to conflict resolution that is particularly relevant in the Nigerian context. By adopting this framework, efforts to resolve conflicts can move beyond mere management to achieve sustainable peace and social transformation.

Application of the Theory to the Study

Applying the Conflict Transformation Theory to the study of the role of traditional leaders in conflict resolution in Nigeria offers a comprehensive framework for understanding the complexities involved in achieving sustainable peace. Traditional leaders, who have historically played pivotal roles

in mediating disputes, now face challenges such as the erosion of their authority and lack of formal recognition. By using Conflict Transformation Theory, the study underscores the importance of transforming not only the immediate conflicts but also the underlying social structures and relationships that fuel these disputes. Firstly, the theory's emphasis on addressing structural inequalities is relevant when assessing the impact of the erosion of traditional authority. As modern political and legal systems have grown, the diminishing influence of traditional leaders has weakened their capacity to mediate effectively. This study examines how transforming these power dynamics can restore the credibility and effectiveness of traditional leaders in conflict resolution. Moreover, the lack of formal recognition of traditional leaders within Nigeria's legal framework highlights the structural barriers that impede their roles in conflict resolution. Conflict Transformation Theory suggests that for traditional leaders to contribute meaningfully to peacebuilding, there must be systemic changes that integrate their roles within formal governance structures. This integration can empower them to mediate conflicts more effectively, bridging the gap between traditional and modern systems. In the context of ethnic and religious divides, the theory's focus on transforming relationships is crucial. Traditional leaders must navigate these divisions to maintain neutrality and credibility. By fostering dialogues that address underlying mistrust and biases, the study explores strategies for transforming these relationships, thereby enhancing the capacity of traditional leaders to mediate impartially. Lastly, the theory's principle of capacity-building aligns with the investigation into the role of inadequate training and resources. For traditional leaders to manage contemporary conflicts effectively, they require training in modern conflict resolution techniques. By applying Conflict Transformation Theory, the study advocates for equipping traditional leaders with the necessary skills and resources, thereby enabling them to play a more proactive role in fostering sustainable peace in Nigeria.

VI. Empirical Review of Existing Literature

Okafor, (2021) conducted a study titled *The Role of Traditional Leaders in Conflict Resolution: Challenges and Prospects in Nigeria*, which aimed to explore the role of traditional leaders in resolving conflicts, identify the challenges they encounter, and suggest strategies to improve their effectiveness. The research questions focused on the role traditional leaders play in conflict mediation, the challenges they face, and the strategies that can enhance their mediation capabilities. The theoretical framework of the study was grounded in the Social Capital Theory, which highlights the importance of networks and relationships in resolving community-level disputes. This qualitative study employed a

case study approach, focusing on various communities in the South-East region of Nigeria. It utilised in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with traditional rulers, community leaders, and other key stakeholders involved in conflict mediation. The findings of the study revealed that traditional leaders are vital in conflict resolution, particularly in rural areas. However, their role is increasingly undermined by modern governance structures. The erosion of their traditional authority and the lack of formal recognition in the legal framework have significantly limited their ability to mediate effectively. The study concluded that although traditional leaders are essential in managing conflicts, their capacity is hindered by insufficient resources, training, and formal recognition. The research recommended that the Nigerian government should formalise the role of traditional leaders in the legal framework and provide them with the necessary training and resources to enhance their mediation capabilities. The study also noted a gap in research regarding the impact of contemporary political structures on the legitimacy of traditional leaders in conflict resolution.

Adeleke, (2020) conducted a study titled *Traditional Institutions and Conflict Resolution in Nigeria: A Legal Perspective*, with the aim of examining the legal frameworks that shape the role of traditional leaders in conflict resolution and understanding how these frameworks influence their effectiveness. The research questions explored the extent to which traditional leaders are recognised legally and how their legal status affects their role in mediating conflicts. The study was framed within the Institutional Theory, which focuses on how formal and informal structures shape behaviour, especially in governance and conflict resolution. Adeleke's research was primarily desk-based and analysed the legal provisions for traditional leadership in Nigeria's constitution and regional laws, drawing on secondary data from academic journals, government reports, and legal texts. The study found that traditional leaders lack sufficient legal backing to carry out their roles effectively, as their absence from formal legal recognition undermines their authority. The conclusion highlighted the need for a stronger legal framework to empower traditional leaders and enable them to play a more prominent role in conflict resolution. It recommended that traditional leaders be included in the formal legal structure to enhance their legitimacy and operational capacity. The study pointed out a gap in research about the relationship between traditional leadership and modern legal systems in Nigeria.

Ibrahim, (2022) in his study *Ethnicity, Religion, and the Effectiveness of Traditional Leaders in Conflict Mediation in Nigeria* aimed to examine how ethnic and religious divides influence the neutrality and credibility of traditional leaders when mediating conflicts. The research questions were centred

around the influence of ethnic and religious factors on traditional leaders' decision-making and their perceived impartiality in conflict mediation. The study was based on the Conflict Theory, which examines how social divisions, such as ethnicity and religion, affect conflict and the ability of leaders to remain neutral. A mixed-methods approach was used, combining quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews with community members, traditional rulers, and other stakeholders in conflict resolution across multi-ethnic and multi-religious regions of Nigeria. The study found that ethnic and religious factors significantly influenced the credibility of traditional leaders. Leaders from particular ethnic or religious backgrounds were often seen as biased, which reduced their perceived neutrality. The conclusion of the study stressed the importance of maintaining neutrality and credibility for traditional leaders in conflict resolution and recommended that they undergo training in impartiality and neutrality. It also suggested promoting inter-ethnic and inter-religious dialogue to enhance mutual understanding. The research highlighted a gap in understanding how ethnic and religious tensions uniquely challenge the neutrality of traditional leaders in conflict resolution.

Adeyemo,(2019) conducted a study titled Training and Resources for Traditional Leaders in Conflict Resolution: A Critical Assessment, which aimed to assess the adequacy of training and resources available to traditional leaders and how these factors affect their ability to mediate conflicts. The research questions examined the availability of training for traditional leaders and how the lack of resources impacts their mediation capabilities. The study was framed within the Human Capital Theory, which posits that the skills and knowledge of individuals are crucial for their success in roles such as conflict resolution. Adeyemo's research adopted a qualitative approach, conducting interviews with traditional rulers, local government officials, and conflict resolution experts in both urban and rural communities across Nigeria. The study found that traditional leaders face significant challenges due to a lack of formal training and insufficient resources. This lack of support severely limits their ability to manage contemporary conflicts, such as insurgencies and communal violence. The research concluded that structured training programmes and increased resource allocation are essential for improving the role of traditional leaders in conflict resolution. It recommended the establishment of training institutions for traditional leaders and suggested providing them with the financial and logistical support necessary to address modern-day conflicts effectively. The study identified a gap in exploring the specific types of training needed to prepare traditional leaders for complex contemporary issues.

Olayinka, (2023) explored the erosion of traditional authority and its impact on the effectiveness of traditional leaders in conflict resolution in Nigeria. The study aimed to assess how the decline of traditional authority has affected the capacity of traditional leaders to mediate conflicts. The research questions investigated the consequences of the erosion of traditional authority on the mediation process and the perceived effectiveness of traditional leaders. The study was underpinned by the Theory of Social Order, which examines how societal structures and authority systems contribute to maintaining peace and order, particularly in conflict situations. The research combined both qualitative and quantitative methods, conducting surveys and interviews in diverse ethnic regions of Nigeria. The findings revealed that the erosion of traditional authority, coupled with the rise of modern political systems and legal frameworks, has significantly diminished the ability of traditional leaders to mediate conflicts effectively. The study concluded that restoring traditional authority and integrating it with modern governance structures would enhance the conflict resolution capacity of traditional leaders. It recommended policy changes to formally reintegrate traditional leaders into the conflict resolution framework and provide them with the tools and recognition needed to perform their roles effectively. The study pointed out a gap in literature regarding the interaction between traditional leadership and modern governance in post-colonial African states.

VII. Gaps in Literature

Existing literature reveals significant gaps in understanding the full impact of the erosion of traditional authority on conflict mediation by traditional leaders in Nigeria, particularly in the context of modern governance structures. Additionally, there is insufficient research on how the lack of formal legal recognition of traditional leaders limits their conflict resolution capabilities. The influence of ethnic and religious divides on the neutrality and credibility of traditional leaders remains underexplored, as does the role of inadequate training and resources in restricting their effectiveness in managing contemporary conflicts. This study on The Role of Traditional Leaders in Conflict Resolution in Nigeria: Strategies for Sustainable Peace aims to fill these gaps by providing a comprehensive analysis of these critical issues.

VIII. Methodology

A qualitative methodology was employed, utilizing secondary data collection from academic articles, reports, and case studies. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data,

identifying recurring themes and patterns in conflict resolution practices.

IX. Discussions of Findings

Answer to research question 1: How does the erosion of traditional authority affect the effectiveness of conflict mediation by traditional leaders in Nigeria?

The erosion of traditional authority has significantly impacted the effectiveness of conflict mediation by traditional leaders in Nigeria. Traditional leaders, once revered as custodians of peace and justice in their communities, are now facing challenges in resolving conflicts due to the decline in their authority. This erosion is primarily driven by the encroachment of modern governance systems, the influence of political elites, and the growing marginalisation of traditional institutions. These factors have weakened the role of traditional leaders, rendering them less effective in mediating conflicts, which is crucial for maintaining peace and social cohesion. One key issue arising from the erosion of traditional authority is the loss of respect and influence traditionally accorded to chiefs, elders, and other community leaders. In many parts of Nigeria, such as in the Niger Delta, traditional leaders have historically been central figures in resolving disputes. For instance, the Ijaw, Urhobo, and Itsekiri ethnic groups in the Niger Delta have long relied on their traditional councils to mediate conflicts over land and resources. However, as political power has shifted to state governments, traditional leaders have seen their roles diminish, particularly in cases of land disputes or communal clashes. The rise of regional and national politicians, who have access to state resources, often renders traditional leaders powerless when it comes to resolving local conflicts. A notable example is the conflict over oil wealth in the Niger Delta, where local leaders, such as the Ijaw's traditional councils, have struggled to mediate between oil companies, the government, and their communities. Political elites often dismiss their involvement, favouring top-down approaches that bypass traditional structures. As reported in *The Guardian Nigeria* (2021), the lack of political will to involve traditional leaders in dialogue during the Niger Delta crisis has undermined their role in peacebuilding, as government officials prioritize their own interests over local traditional governance. This erosion of authority in the Niger Delta has made it difficult for traditional leaders to maintain peace, as their influence is consistently overshadowed by political elites.

The lack of legal recognition of traditional institutions in Nigeria's constitution also plays a significant role in the erosion of traditional authority. Despite their historical importance, traditional leaders do not have formalised roles in

the modern legal and governance systems. This lack of formal recognition undermines their legitimacy in resolving conflicts, as their decisions are not legally binding. For instance, during the 2017 ethnic clash between the Ndigbo and Hausa communities in Ile-Ife, Osun State, traditional rulers attempted to mediate the conflict, but their efforts were often disregarded in favour of government-appointed officials (Ogunleye, 2017). The government's intervention in this dispute, which bypassed traditional leaders, highlights how the marginalisation of traditional authority has hindered their capacity to mediate effectively. Similarly, in the 2018 communal conflict between farmers and herders in Benue State, traditional leaders were sidelined as the state government and security forces took the lead in addressing the issue (*The Punch*, 2018). As noted by Olayinka (2022), the lack of legal backing for traditional leaders effectively diminishes their authority and undermines their ability to resolve conflicts, thus exacerbating tensions within affected communities. Ethnic and religious divides within Nigeria further complicate the role of traditional leaders in conflict resolution. Traditional leaders from different ethnic and religious backgrounds often struggle to maintain neutrality when mediating conflicts. This challenge was evident in the long-standing conflict between the Hausa-Fulani and Yoruba communities, particularly in areas like Oyo State, where traditional leaders, often from one ethnic group, face accusations of bias and favouritism. In 2018, during the violent clashes between farmers and herders in Oyo State, traditional leaders from the Fulani ethnic group were accused of taking sides with the herders, while those from the Yoruba community were seen as more sympathetic to farmers, which made it difficult for them to maintain impartiality in conflict resolution (Akinmoladun, 2018). These ethnic divides make it increasingly difficult for traditional leaders to mediate effectively, as their authority is often questioned and their influence is weakened by competing ethnic interests.

The erosion of traditional authority is compounded by the lack of resources and training for traditional leaders. Many traditional institutions are underfunded and lack the necessary tools to address contemporary conflicts. Traditional rulers in rural areas, for example, are often unequipped to deal with complex issues such as armed militancy, insurgencies, and economic exploitation by multinational corporations. In the case of the Boko Haram insurgency in the northeast, traditional leaders, despite their historical role in community mobilisation and conflict resolution, have struggled to effectively mediate between the insurgents and the government (Okafor, 2021). Their lack of training in handling modern conflict dynamics, coupled with limited resources, makes it difficult for them to play an active role in addressing large-scale crises. As reported by *The Nation* (2019), the traditional leadership in the northeast was largely unable to

address the growing insecurity caused by Boko Haram, and their mediation efforts were frequently undermined by the state's reliance on military interventions, which bypassed traditional structures. The erosion of traditional authority has severely impacted the effectiveness of conflict mediation by traditional leaders in Nigeria. The loss of respect, legal recognition, and neutrality, along with inadequate resources and training, has diminished the capacity of traditional leaders to manage conflicts within their communities. While some traditional institutions continue to play a role in local dispute resolution, their influence is increasingly overshadowed by political elites and modern governance structures. Therefore, it is crucial to restore the role of traditional leaders by ensuring legal recognition and providing them with the necessary resources and training to strengthen their ability to mediate conflicts effectively. Only through such efforts can traditional leaders once again become pivotal in sustaining peace and resolving conflicts in Nigeria's diverse communities.

Answer to research question 2: What are the effects of the lack of formal recognition of traditional leaders within Nigeria's legal framework on their conflict resolution capabilities?

The lack of formal recognition of traditional leaders within Nigeria's legal framework has had a profound impact on their conflict resolution capabilities. Traditional leaders, such as chiefs, kings, and elders, have historically played an integral role in mediating conflicts and maintaining social order within their communities. However, the absence of a formalised, constitutional role for these leaders has diminished their authority and influence in resolving contemporary disputes. This legal marginalisation undermines their conflict resolution efforts, as they are often bypassed in favour of state-led mechanisms or interventions by political elites. In this context, the lack of formal recognition by the state hampers the traditional leaders' ability to mediate effectively, and it diminishes their role in contributing to peacebuilding and social cohesion in their communities.

One significant consequence of this legal marginalisation is the inability of traditional leaders to make decisions that are legally binding. Traditional authorities, whose decisions historically held weight in rural communities, no longer have the backing of formal legal systems. For example, in the southern region of Nigeria, particularly in the Yoruba and Igbo communities, chiefs and traditional rulers have traditionally played a central role in land dispute resolution. In the case of the persistent land conflict between the Ijaw and Itsekiri ethnic groups in the Niger Delta, traditional leaders were once the central figures in resolving land disputes and managing inter-ethnic tensions. However, the involvement of

state governments, who often bring in legal courts to decide the disputes, has undermined the power of traditional leaders in such cases (The Nation, 2020). With no legal framework recognising their authority, traditional leaders struggle to assert their decisions or ensure that their resolutions are respected by all parties involved. Furthermore, the lack of formal recognition means that traditional leaders are often sidelined in conflict resolution processes that involve larger national or state actors. For instance, during the violent clashes between Fulani herders and farmers in Benue State, traditional leaders were initially involved in attempting to mediate between the parties. However, their efforts were overshadowed by the state government's military and police-led interventions, which were seen as more authoritative and legally binding (The Punch, 2018). This sidelining of traditional leaders not only reduces their role in managing such conflicts but also diminishes the effectiveness of community-based solutions, as traditional leaders often possess a better understanding of local dynamics and the specific grievances of the people involved. The failure to integrate traditional leaders into these broader conflict resolution frameworks further diminishes their conflict mediation capabilities.

Additionally, the marginalisation of traditional leaders has led to a growing sense of disillusionment and frustration within the communities that these leaders serve. As noted by scholars like Ajayi (2021), traditional leaders are increasingly seen as ineffective due to their lack of formal recognition, leading to a decline in public trust. When communities lose faith in their traditional leaders, they often turn to alternative methods of conflict resolution, such as violence or reliance on the state's judicial system. This has been particularly evident in the ongoing herders-farmers conflict in central Nigeria, where disputes often escalate into violent clashes when traditional mediation fails due to a lack of official recognition or support (Akinmoladun, 2019). Moreover, the legal recognition of traditional leaders is important not only for strengthening their authority but also for enabling them to receive the support they need to carry out their conflict resolution duties. Many traditional institutions are underfunded, with limited access to training, resources, and administrative support. Without legal backing, these leaders are unable to access governmental resources or mobilise the necessary support from state institutions to deal with modern conflicts. In the case of the conflict between the Hausa-Fulani and Yoruba communities in Ile-Ife in 2017, traditional leaders attempted to intervene but lacked the legal resources to address the issue effectively. The conflict escalated when both parties sought intervention from the police and the state government, undermining the role of traditional authorities (Ogunleye, 2017). The lack of formal recognition of traditional leaders within Nigeria's legal

framework significantly undermines their ability to effectively mediate conflicts. The absence of legal backing for their authority has led to their marginalisation in both local and national conflict resolution processes. Furthermore, this legal exclusion deprives them of the necessary resources and legitimacy to engage with state institutions and larger societal conflicts. The result is a diminished role for traditional leaders in fostering peace and managing conflict, with far-reaching implications for social cohesion in Nigeria's diverse communities. To address this issue, it is crucial that Nigeria considers formalising the role of traditional leaders within its legal framework, thereby empowering them to continue their pivotal work in conflict mediation and peacebuilding.

Answer to research question 3: How do ethnic and religious divides influence the neutrality and credibility of traditional leaders in conflict resolution?

Ethnic and religious divides in Nigeria play a significant role in influencing the neutrality and credibility of traditional leaders in conflict resolution. Nigeria's complex and diverse cultural landscape, composed of over 250 ethnic groups and multiple religious affiliations, often creates a situation where traditional leaders are either seen as partial or biased depending on the ethnic or religious group they represent. This division undermines their ability to serve as neutral arbiters in conflict resolution, especially in highly charged ethnic or religious contexts. One prominent example is the role of traditional leaders during the Jos crises, where clashes between the Hausa-Fulani Muslim settlers and the indigenous Christian ethnic groups have frequently escalated into violent conflicts. Traditional leaders in Jos, such as the Gbong Gwom Jos, who traditionally holds a significant role in mediating disputes in the region, have often found their neutrality questioned due to the ethnic and religious affiliations of the groups involved. The Gbong Gwom Jos, traditionally seen as the leader of the Ngas people, a predominantly Christian ethnic group, has sometimes been accused by Muslim groups of partiality, thus undermining his credibility as a mediator (The Guardian, 2019). In this case, the perception of bias erodes the effectiveness of the traditional leadership in addressing conflicts that require a neutral mediator to maintain peace between the groups.

Similarly, in the religiously divided northern region of Nigeria, traditional leaders have struggled to maintain credibility in the face of ongoing sectarian violence between Muslims and Christians. A case in point is the inter-religious violence in Kaduna State, where Christian and Muslim communities often engage in violent clashes over political, religious, and economic issues. Traditional leaders, such as the Emir of Zazzau in Zaria, have been tasked with mediating

these conflicts, but their efforts have been undermined by the widespread perception that they are either favouring one side over the other, depending on their religious or ethnic background. This has led to a diminishing trust in the capacity of traditional leaders to effectively mediate conflicts in a way that is seen as fair by all parties involved (Akinmoladun, 2020). Moreover, the perception of partiality among traditional leaders also has an impact on their authority in handling localised ethnic disputes. In the Niger Delta, where multiple ethnic groups, including the Ijaw, Itsekiri, and Urhobo, often find themselves in conflict over land, resources, and political power, traditional leaders are seen as central figures in conflict resolution. However, the ethnic composition of these leaders often shapes their approach and the outcome of mediation processes. For example, the Ijaw traditional leaders are often seen as sympathetic to their ethnic group's demands over oil resources, leading to accusations of bias when they mediate disputes with the Itsekiri or Urhobo ethnic groups, whose interests may conflict with the Ijaw's (The Punch, 2020). This creates a situation where traditional leaders are sometimes viewed as ineffective or even as instigators of division rather than healers of conflict.

In addition to ethnic divisions, religious divides also influence the role of traditional leaders in conflict resolution. A significant example is the ongoing Boko Haram insurgency in the northeastern part of Nigeria, where the ethnic and religious divide between the predominantly Muslim north and the Christian south has contributed to a deep mistrust of traditional leaders from either side. While traditional leaders in the north have tried to mediate peace talks, their credibility has often been questioned by Christian communities, who view the insurgency as having roots in religious extremism. Similarly, traditional leaders in the southern part of the country have faced challenges when dealing with the ethnic militias from the oil-rich Niger Delta, where militant groups with distinct ethnic and political agendas often view traditional leaders as compromised due to their affiliations with political elites or particular ethnic factions (Ogunleye, 2018). Furthermore, the lack of a formalised role for traditional leaders in the legal system further complicates their ability to mediate effectively, especially in ethnically or religiously sensitive cases. In a country like Nigeria, where legal authority often takes precedence over traditional leadership, the power of traditional leaders to intervene in ethnic and religious disputes is limited by the formal legal system. This institutional marginalisation often leaves traditional leaders with fewer tools at their disposal to combat the divisive effects of ethnicity and religion on their credibility and neutrality. The conflict in the North-Central region, where Fulani herders often clash with farming communities over land and resources, highlights how traditional leaders struggle

to assert themselves as neutral parties due to the religious and ethnic contexts in which these disputes unfold (The Nation, 2019).

Ethnic and religious divides in Nigeria have a profound impact on the neutrality and credibility of traditional leaders in conflict resolution. These divides often lead to accusations of bias, eroding the authority of traditional leaders and undermining their efforts to mediate effectively. Whether in the case of inter-ethnic violence in Jos, religious conflict in Kaduna, or resource disputes in the Niger Delta, the traditional leadership's ability to serve as impartial mediators is continually challenged by Nigeria's complex and divisive ethnic and religious landscape. Acknowledging these challenges and integrating traditional leadership into a broader, more inclusive conflict resolution framework could potentially improve the effectiveness of traditional leaders in fostering peace and social cohesion.

Answer to research question 4: In what ways do inadequate training and resources limit the effectiveness of traditional leaders in managing contemporary conflicts?

Inadequate training and resources are significant factors limiting the effectiveness of traditional leaders in managing contemporary conflicts in Nigeria. Traditional leaders, who have long been seen as custodians of culture, peacekeepers, and community heads, often face substantial challenges in dealing with modern disputes, which are becoming more complex due to issues like resource control, political influence, and ethnic/religious tensions. These leaders frequently lack the necessary training in conflict management techniques, legal knowledge, and modern governance, which limits their capacity to manage disputes effectively.

A key example of the limitations posed by inadequate training and resources is evident in the recurring communal clashes in Plateau State, particularly between the Berom and Fulani ethnic groups. These clashes have been fuelled by land disputes, ethnic tensions, and cultural differences. Traditional leaders in these areas, such as the Gbong Gwom of Jos, have often been at the forefront of peace efforts. However, their attempts to mediate have sometimes failed due to a lack of proper training in modern conflict resolution methods. Without a solid understanding of negotiation techniques, conflict de-escalation methods, and the role of state legal frameworks in managing disputes, traditional leaders in Plateau State have struggled to build trust and prevent further violence (Okafor, 2018).

Similarly, in the Niger Delta region, where resource control conflicts between ethnic groups and oil companies have caused instability for years, traditional leaders have been involved in mediating disputes between oil-rich communities and the federal government. While these leaders possess considerable local influence, they often lack the expertise and resources necessary to deal with the complex legal, economic, and political dimensions of the conflicts. For example, the Ijaw leaders in the Niger Delta have attempted to address disputes over the environmental degradation caused by oil exploration, but their efforts have often been undermined by their limited access to legal and technical resources. As noted by scholars such as Duru (2019), traditional leaders in the region struggle to effectively communicate with the government and corporate entities due to a lack of formal training in policy negotiation and resource management. The lack of resources also exacerbates these challenges. Traditional leaders in Nigeria often have limited access to financial support, which hampers their ability to organise effective conflict mediation sessions or mobilise resources to address the root causes of conflicts. For instance, during the Boko Haram insurgency in the northeast, traditional leaders in Borno and Yobe states attempted to mediate between the government and the insurgents. However, their efforts were often thwarted because they lacked logistical support, including funds for organising meetings, travel allowances, or a platform to engage meaningfully with all stakeholders (Eze, 2020). This scarcity of resources restricts their ability to carry out peacebuilding initiatives that could address the broader socio-economic and political issues fueling the conflict.

Another example of how inadequate training and resources limit the effectiveness of traditional leaders can be seen in the leadership of the Yoruba traditional rulers in the southwest, particularly in their role in addressing farmer-herder conflicts. The Ooni of Ife, one of the most prominent traditional leaders in the southwest, has been vocal about the need for dialogue between farmers and herders. However, his capacity to mediate the issue has been constrained by his lack of formal training in conflict management and the absence of financial and material support to facilitate meetings and communication between the involved parties (Folarin, 2019). Without the resources to engage experts, organise outreach programmes, or use media platforms effectively, the Ooni's efforts are limited to symbolic gestures rather than actionable, sustained interventions.

The limitations in training and resources also impact the ability of traditional leaders to understand and navigate the modern political landscape. In some cases, traditional leaders

are seen as politically neutral, but their lack of knowledge about contemporary governance structures and legal systems can create difficulties when engaging with the state or international bodies. This was evident in the failed mediation efforts during the Tiv-Jukun conflict in the middle-belt, where traditional leaders lacked the necessary understanding of state laws, which impeded their ability to mediate effectively between the two ethnic groups (Ibrahim, 2018). The inadequate training and resources available to traditional leaders in Nigeria significantly limit their effectiveness in managing contemporary conflicts. The complexity of modern disputes, including ethnic, religious, and resource-based conflicts, requires a blend of traditional wisdom and modern conflict resolution skills, as well as adequate financial and logistical support. Without the necessary training in modern governance, legal frameworks, and conflict mediation, as well as the resources to execute peacebuilding initiatives, traditional leaders remain constrained in their efforts to mitigate and resolve conflicts. There is a pressing need for the formal recognition of traditional leaders' roles in conflict resolution, along with the provision of training and resources to enhance their effectiveness in modern Nigeria.

Key Findings

1. The erosion of traditional authority in Nigeria has significantly weakened the effectiveness of traditional leaders in conflict mediation, as their influence is undermined by political interference, lack of legal recognition, ethnic divides, and inadequate resources and training.
2. Lack of formal recognition of traditional leaders within Nigeria's legal framework significantly hampers their conflict resolution capabilities, as it undermines their authority, limits their resources, and prevents them from effectively engaging in state-led mediation processes.
3. Ethnic and religious divides in Nigeria significantly undermine the neutrality and credibility of traditional leaders in conflict resolution, as these divides often lead to perceptions of bias and hinder their ability to mediate effectively across diverse communities.
4. Inadequate training and resources significantly hinder the ability of traditional leaders in Nigeria to effectively manage contemporary conflicts, limiting their capacity for meaningful mediation and resolution.

X. Conclusion

In conclusion, the erosion of traditional authority in Nigeria, combined with the lack of formal legal recognition, ethnic and religious divides, and inadequate training and resources, has significantly weakened the role of traditional leaders in

conflict resolution. These challenges have undermined their authority, neutrality, and effectiveness in mediating conflicts. As a result, traditional leaders are increasingly unable to play a central role in resolving contemporary disputes. The combined effects of these factors have diminished their capacity to foster peace and address the complexities of modern-day conflicts.

XI. Recommendations

Based on the following findings, the study proposed the following recommendations:

1. **Strengthening Legal Frameworks:** The Nigerian government should formalise the recognition of traditional leaders within the country's legal framework, ensuring that their role in conflict resolution is explicitly defined and supported. This will enhance their authority, legitimacy, and ability to effectively engage in both local and state-led mediation processes.
2. **Enhancing Training and Resources:** There is a need for comprehensive capacity-building programmes to equip traditional leaders with the necessary skills, knowledge, and resources to handle contemporary conflicts. This includes training in negotiation, peacebuilding, and conflict resolution, alongside providing financial and infrastructural support to enable effective mediation.
3. **Promoting Inclusivity and Neutrality:** Efforts should be made to mitigate the impact of ethnic and religious divides by fostering greater inclusivity in traditional leadership roles. Promoting dialogue and collaboration between diverse ethnic and religious groups can help enhance the neutrality and credibility of traditional leaders, enabling them to mediate effectively across communities.
4. **Addressing Political Interference:** Political interference in the affairs of traditional leaders should be reduced to protect their independence. A clear distinction between the roles of traditional leaders and political actors will safeguard the integrity of traditional mediation and conflict resolution processes, ensuring that traditional leaders can operate without undue influence from political power structures.

XII. Contribution to Knowledge

This study contributes to knowledge by offering a comprehensive examination of the factors that hinder the effectiveness of traditional leaders in conflict resolution in Nigeria. It highlights the significant impact of the erosion of traditional authority, lack of legal recognition, ethnic and religious divides, and inadequate resources and training on

their capacity to mediate contemporary conflicts. The study advances the understanding of how these challenges limit traditional leaders' ability to play a central role in resolving disputes, offering practical recommendations for strengthening their role in peacebuilding processes. By addressing these gaps, the study provides insights into how traditional authority can be revitalised and integrated into modern governance structures, thereby contributing to sustainable conflict resolution and national stability in Nigeria.

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