

Indigenous Conflict Resolution Mechanisms as Tools for Promoting Sustainable Livelihood in Conflict-Affected Communities in Rivers State, Nigeria

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Article History	Abstract
Original Research Article	<i>This study examined indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms as tools for promoting sustainable livelihood in conflict-affected communities in Rivers State, Nigeria, focusing specifically on mediation by traditional elders, reconciliation ceremonies, and restorative justice practices. Three research objectives, three research questions, and three null hypotheses guided the study. The study adopted a descriptive survey of research design. The population comprised 10,400 community leaders and conflict management experts across the 23 Local Government Areas of Rivers State, made up of 10,200 community leaders and 200 conflict management experts. Using the Taro Yamane formula and a multistage sampling procedure involving cluster, purposive, and proportionate stratified sampling techniques, a sample of 498 respondents, comprising 384 community leaders and 140 conflict management experts, was drawn from nine conflict-prone Local Government Areas spread across the three senatorial districts of the state. The instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire titled "Indigenous Conflict Resolution Mechanisms in Promoting Sustainable Livelihood in Conflict Affected Communities Questionnaire". The instrument was validated by three experts in Measurement and Evaluation, Rivers State University, Port Harcourt, and its reliability was established through the Cronbach Alpha method, yielding coefficients of 0.82, 0.88 and 0.76 for the three clusters of the instrument relevant to this study. Out of 498 copies of the questionnaire administered, 470 (366 community leaders and 104 conflict management experts) were retrieved and used for analysis. Mean and standard deviation statistics were used to answer the research questions, while the three null hypotheses were tested using z-test statistics at the 0.05 level of significance. Findings revealed that mediation by traditional elders, reconciliation ceremonies, and restorative justice practices all promote sustainable livelihood in conflict-affected communities in Rivers State to a high extent. The corresponding hypotheses tests showed no significant difference between the mean ratings of community leaders and conflict management experts on the extent to which each of the three mechanisms promotes sustainable livelihood. Based on the findings, the study recommended, among others, that the Rivers State Government and relevant federal agencies enact a comprehensive legal framework that formally recognises and empowers traditional elders as legitimate conflict mediators, and that reconciliation ceremonies and restorative justice practices be formally incorporated into state peacebuilding and justice institutions to strengthen sustainable livelihood recovery in conflict-affected communities.</i> Keywords: Indigenous Conflict Resolution, Sustainable Livelihood, Traditional Elders, Reconciliation Ceremonies, Restorative Justice.
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Copyright © 2026 The Author(s): This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC) which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium for non-commercial use provided the original author and source are credited. Citation: Bedi, Bornwin Kennedy, Dokubo, Chidinma, & Taylor, Ilomabo Daerego. (2026). Indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms as tools for promoting sustainable livelihood in conflict-affected communities in Rivers State, Nigeria. <i>UKR Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences (UKRJAHSS)</i>, 2(9), 62-71.	

Introduction

Conflict is an inevitable feature of human social life, arising from competition over resources, identity differences, political rivalries, and structural inequalities. In many developing regions, however, conflict has assumed more devastating forms, displacing populations, disrupting livelihoods, and unravelling the fabric of social cohesion. Nowhere is this more acutely felt than in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, particularly in Rivers State, where intersections of ethnic diversity, oil exploitation, environmental degradation, and political marginalisation have made conflict a near-permanent feature of community life. The restiveness of young people is one of the clearest expressions of this, and it has been traced to bad governance, corruption, unemployment and poverty, conditions that have fed directly into the insecurity now experienced across the country (Okachiku-Agbaraeke & Alikor, 2025). Rivers State is one of the most ethnically diverse states in Nigeria, comprising over forty distinct ethnic nationalities including the Ijaw, Ogoni, Ikwerre, Kalabari, Okrika, Andoni, Etche and Eleme, among others (Agwu, 2007). The discovery of oil in commercial quantities in the Niger Delta in 1956 introduced a new dimension to existing social fault lines, as communities began competing for resource rents, political representation, and recognition from multinational oil companies and the Nigerian state.

The relationship between oil extraction and conflict in Rivers State is well documented. Tajudeen and Nyiayaana (2024) found that the extractive activities of Shell Petroleum Development Company in Kegbara-Dere community in Gokana Local Government Area adversely affected the lives, livelihoods, and environment of the people, with oil spillage identified as a primary trigger of conflict. Beyond oil-related conflicts, inter-communal violence has remained a persistent challenge in Rivers State, including the Ogoni-Andoni conflict of 1993 and the Ogoni-Okrika conflict of December 1993, both of which resulted in loss of life, destruction of property and displacement (Human Rights Watch, 1995). Environmental degradation from oil pollution has, in turn, deprived farmers and fishers of access to farmlands and rivers, undermining sustainable livelihoods and reinforcing a vicious cycle of resource competition and violent conflict (ACCORD, 2022; Institute for Security Studies Africa, 2022).

Against this backdrop of protracted conflict and livelihood disruption, there has been a resurgence of scholarly and policy interest in indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms as viable tools for promoting sustainable peace and development. Indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms refer to culturally embedded, community-owned processes and institutions through which societies manage, mediate, and resolve disputes outside the framework of the formal judiciary (Bello & Olutola, 2016). Research has consistently demonstrated that traditional conflict resolution methods are often faster, non-adversarial, and more culturally appropriate than modern adjudicative methods (Ogbanga & Bukie, 2024), and that the abandonment of indigenous methods of conflict resolution in

favour of Western models is partly responsible for the proliferation of avoidable violent conflicts across the African continent (Nwolise, 2005). Denis (2019), in a study of the Annang tribe of Akwa Ibom State, adjacent to Rivers State, demonstrated that indigenous conflict resolution offers a rigorous, community-based, victim-offender-oriented approach that is deeply symbolic of the culture and customs of the people, offering lessons for Rivers State communities that share similar cultural affinities with Niger Delta ethnic groups. The livelihood dimension of indigenous knowledge is equally visible within Rivers State itself, where indigenous adaptation strategies among the fisherfolks of Kalabari Kingdom were found to carry the practical rules by which a shared natural resource is used and protected, showing that inherited community knowledge already governs the productive life of these communities and not merely their ceremonial life (Taylor et al., 2025).

Among the range of indigenous mechanisms available to Rivers State communities, mediation by traditional elders, reconciliation ceremonies, and restorative justice practices stand out as particularly central to community-level peacebuilding. Mediation by traditional elders involves respected community leaders who facilitate discussions between conflicting parties, guiding them toward a peaceful resolution based on cultural practices and wisdom. Kpae (2018), in an empirical study of traditional conflict management mechanisms in Ogoni, Rivers State, found that the council of elders constitutes the central institution of conflict resolution, functioning as active moral arbiters who deploy accumulated cultural knowledge, social networks, and spiritual authority to guide disputing parties toward consensus. Salami and Kpae (2023) similarly argue that traditional Nigerian conflict resolution derives its durability and effectiveness from the voluntary submission of disputants to constituted traditional authority, rooted in shared cultural values rather than legal compulsion, while Ajayi and Buhari (2014) confirm the centrality of elder mediation across diverse Nigerian ethnic communities as a participatory process that promotes consensus-building and social bridge reconstruction. The authority of such local institutions is what makes participation possible in the first place, as work among the Ikwerre people of Rivers State demonstrated when community-based organisations drawing on established local standing secured levels of citizen involvement in community development that externally driven arrangements could not match (Deekor et al., 2022).

Reconciliation ceremonies, the second mechanism of interest, are traditional rituals or events conducted to heal relationships between parties involved in conflict, often involving communal gatherings, apologies, and the restoration of social harmony. Huyse and Salter (2018), in a comparative study of tradition-based approaches to peacemaking across five African countries, argue that these mechanisms share common instrumental objectives of reconciliation, accountability, truth-telling, legitimacy and reparation, engaging the full

community as active participants in restoring workable social relationships rather than exacting punitive sanctions. Baines (2019) draws attention to the spiritual dimensions of reconciliation ceremonies, finding that such processes address dimensions of post-conflict harm, including spiritual pollution and community fragmentation, that formal legal institutions are structurally incapable of reaching, while Honwana (2016) demonstrates through ethnographic fieldwork in Mozambique and Angola that cleansing and purification rituals are indispensable for the individual and collective reintegration of conflict-affected persons into community economic life.

Restorative justice practices, the third mechanism, focus on repairing the harm caused by conflict by bringing together the victim, the offender, and the community to discuss the impact and agree on actions for healing and reconciliation. Zehr (1990, 2015), widely regarded as the founder of the contemporary restorative justice movement, argues that restorative justice reframes justice from questions of what law was broken and who should be punished to questions of who has been harmed, what their needs are, and whose obligations these are, thereby centring harm, needs, and obligations in ways that formal adversarial systems cannot. Braithwaite (2019) extends this framework, identifying healing rather than hurting, community participation, respectful dialogue, and the making of amends as core restorative values applicable across governance institutions. Gabagambi (2018), in a comparative analysis of restorative justice practices across six African countries including Nigeria, argues that restorative justice was practised in Africa long before colonisation, and that African traditional approaches to justice are inherently restorative in their emphasis on healing relationships, reintegrating offenders, and restoring community harmony.

Despite this growing scholarly recognition, the integration of indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms with sustainable livelihood outcomes in conflict-affected communities remains an understudied area. Nwoye and Nwekeaku (2023), studying traditional institutions in Anambra State, found that indigenous conflict resolution strategies were effective in managing communal conflicts but called for more research on how such strategies translate into tangible development outcomes for affected populations. It is within this context that the present study is situated, examining specifically how mediation by traditional elders, reconciliation ceremonies, and restorative justice practices contribute to sustainable livelihood recovery in conflict-affected communities in Rivers State.

Statement of the Problem

Rivers State has experienced frequent and intense conflicts, particularly in its rural and oil-producing communities, exacerbated by resource competition, ethnic rivalries, political struggles, and the activities of oil companies. These conflicts have led to widespread displacement, loss of livelihoods, and environmental degradation, significantly undermining community stability and hindering development efforts.

Indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms have long been used to address disputes at the local level and are often regarded as culturally appropriate and community-driven alternatives to formal judicial systems that may be perceived as distant or inaccessible. However, despite the growing recognition of indigenous conflict resolution methods, there is limited empirical research on their role and effectiveness in promoting sustainable livelihoods, particularly in conflict-affected areas such as Rivers State.

Specifically, it remains unclear to what extent mediation by traditional elders, reconciliation ceremonies, and restorative justice practices contribute not just to resolving disputes but to enabling affected communities to rebuild their lives and restore socio-economic stability. Providing empirical answers to this question, therefore, warranted a study of this nature.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms as tools for promoting sustainable livelihood in conflict-affected communities in Rivers State. In specific terms, the study sought to:

1. examine the extent to which mediation by traditional elders promotes sustainable livelihood in conflict affected communities in Rivers State.
2. ascertain the extent to which reconciliation ceremonies promote sustainable livelihood in conflict affected communities in Rivers State.
3. investigate the extent to which restorative justice practices promote sustainable livelihood in conflict-affected communities in Rivers State.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. To what extent does mediation by traditional elders promote sustainable livelihood in conflict affected communities in Rivers State?
2. To what extent do reconciliation ceremonies promote sustainable livelihood in conflict affected communities in Rivers State?
3. To what extent do restorative justice practices promote sustainable livelihood in conflict affected communities in Rivers State?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested at the 0.05 level of significance:

1. There is no significant difference in the mean rating of community leaders and conflict management experts on the extent to which mediation by traditional elders promotes sustainable livelihood in conflict affected communities in Rivers State.

2. There is no significant difference in the mean rating of community leaders and conflict management experts on the extent to which reconciliation ceremonies promote sustainable livelihood in conflict affected communities in Rivers State.

3. There is no significant difference in the mean rating of community leaders and conflict management experts on the extent to which restorative justice practices promote sustainable livelihood in conflict affected communities in Rivers State.

Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey of research design. The population of the study comprised 10,400 community leaders and conflict management experts across the 23 Local Government Areas of Rivers State, made up of 10,200 community leaders and 200 conflict management experts (Source: Rivers State Ministry of Rural Development and Community Affairs). The sample size of the study was 498 respondents, comprising 384 community leaders and 140 conflict management experts, determined using the Taro Yamane formula. A multistage sampling technique was adopted: cluster sampling was first used to divide the state into its three senatorial districts (Rivers East, Rivers South East and Rivers West); purposive sampling was then used to select three conflict-prone Local Government Areas from each senatorial district, giving nine Local Government Areas in all (Emohua, Ikwerre and Etche in Rivers East; Gokana, Khana and Tai in Rivers South East; and Ogba-Egbema-Ndoni, Ahoada East and Ahoada West in Rivers West); and proportionate stratified sampling was finally used to select 10% of community leaders in each selected Local Government Area, while all 140 conflict

management experts were studied as a census. The instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire titled "Indigenous Conflict Resolution Mechanisms in Promoting Sustainable Livelihood in Conflict Affected Communities Questionnaire", divided into Section A (demographic data) and Section B (items on the research questions), with responses rated on a four-point scale of Very High Extent (4), High Extent (3), Low Extent (2) and Very Low Extent (1). The instrument was subjected to face and content validation by the researcher's supervisor and two other experts in Measurement and Evaluation, Rivers State University. Its reliability was established through a test of internal consistency using the Cronbach Alpha method, administered on 20 respondents outside the study sample, yielding reliability coefficients of 0.82, 0.88 and 0.76 for the three clusters of the instrument relevant to this study, indicating that the instrument was reliable. Out of 498 copies of the questionnaire administered by the researcher and three trained research assistants, 470 copies (366 for community leaders and 104 for conflict management experts) were successfully retrieved and used for analysis. The research questions were answered using mean and standard deviation, with a criterion mean of 2.50 used to classify an item as promoting sustainable livelihood to a high extent, while the null hypotheses were tested using z-test statistics at the 0.05 level of significance; the null hypothesis was rejected where the calculated z-value exceeded the critical value of ± 1.96 and retained where it did not.

Results

Research Question 1: To what extent does mediation by traditional elders promote sustainable livelihood in conflict affected communities in Rivers State?

Table 1: Mean Ratings of Community Leaders and Conflict Management Experts on the Extent Mediation by Traditional Elders Promotes Sustainable Livelihood in Conflict Affected Communities in Rivers State

S/N	Items	Community Leaders (N=366)			Conflict Mgt Experts (N=104)		
		Mean	SD	Rmk	Mean	SD	Rmk
1	The involvement of traditional elders in conflict resolution significantly contributes to the restoration of peace in the community.	3.51	0.68	HE	3.58	0.62	HE
2	Mediation by traditional elders enhances the economic stability of households affected by conflict in the community.	3.28	0.79	HE	3.35	0.74	HE
3	The mediation process by traditional elders helps to reduce the displacement of people within conflict-affected communities.	3.35	0.74	HE	3.42	0.71	HE
4	Traditional elders' mediation fosters trust and cooperation between conflicting groups, leading to improved community cohesion.	3.42	0.72	HE	3.55	0.69	HE
5	Mediation by traditional elders has led to an increase in sustainable livelihood opportunities for community members affected by conflict.	3.19	0.81	HE	3.27	0.77	HE

6	The conflict resolution practices of traditional elders result in improved access to social services (e.g., healthcare, education) for community members.	3.12	0.84	HE	3.20	0.80	HE
7	Traditional elders play a crucial role in ensuring the long-term sustainability of livelihood projects initiated in conflict-affected communities.	3.38	0.76	HE	3.46	0.73	HE
Grand Mean		3.32		HE	3.40		HE

Table 1 above shows the mean ratings of community leaders and conflict management experts on the extent to which mediation by traditional elders promotes sustainable livelihood in conflict affected communities in Rivers State. All seven items were rated High Extent by both groups of respondents, with mean scores ranging from 3.12 to 3.51 for community leaders and 3.20 to 3.58 for conflict management experts. The item with the highest rating from both groups was that the involvement of traditional elders in conflict resolution significantly contributes to the restoration of peace in the community (means of 3.51 and

3.58), while the lowest-rated item concerned improved access to social services (means of 3.12 and 3.20). With grand mean scores of 3.32 and 3.40 for community leaders and conflict management experts respectively, the answer to research question one is that mediation by traditional elders promotes sustainable livelihood in conflict affected communities in Rivers State to a high extent.

Research Question 2: To what extent do reconciliation ceremonies promote sustainable livelihood in conflict affected communities in Rivers State?

Table 2: Mean Ratings of Community Leaders and Conflict Management Experts on the Extent Reconciliation Ceremonies Promote Sustainable Livelihood in Conflict Affected Communities in Rivers State

S/N	Items	Community Leaders (N=366)			Conflict Mgt Experts (N=104)		
		Mean	SD	Rmk	Mean	SD	Rmk
1	Reconciliation ceremonies contribute significantly to the healing of relationships within conflict-affected communities.	3.41	0.71	HE	3.49	0.66	HE
2	The reconciliation ceremonies lead to a reduction in the recurrence of conflicts, allowing for a more stable community environment.	3.29	0.77	HE	3.36	0.72	HE
3	Participation in reconciliation ceremonies improves community members' access to resources, such as land, education, and employment.	3.10	0.86	HE	3.18	0.81	HE
4	Reconciliation ceremonies help to strengthen social bonds, which in turn promotes community cooperation and shared livelihood opportunities.	3.33	0.74	HE	3.40	0.70	HE
5	The outcome of reconciliation ceremonies encourages individuals to invest in long-term livelihood activities, reducing dependency on external aid.	3.05	0.89	HE	3.13	0.84	HE
6	Reconciliation ceremonies facilitate the return of displaced persons to their homes, which aids in the restoration of their livelihoods.	3.22	0.82	HE	3.30	0.78	HE
7	Reconciliation ceremonies have a positive impact on improving mental and emotional well-being, enabling community members to engage more effectively in livelihood activities.	3.38	0.73	HE	3.45	0.68	HE
Grand Mean		3.25		HE	3.33		HE

Table 2 above shows the mean ratings of community leaders and conflict management experts on the extent to which reconciliation ceremonies promote sustainable livelihood in conflict affected communities in Rivers State. All seven items

were rated High Extent by both groups, with mean scores ranging from 3.05 to 3.41 for community leaders and 3.13 to 3.49 for conflict management experts. Respondents rated the contribution of reconciliation ceremonies to the healing of

relationships within conflict-affected communities as the highest item, while the encouragement of long-term investment in livelihood activities was the lowest-rated, though still within the high-extent range. With grand mean scores of 3.25 and 3.33 for community leaders and conflict management experts respectively, the answer to research question two is that reconciliation ceremonies promote

sustainable livelihood in conflict affected communities in Rivers State to a high extent.

Research Question 3: To what extent do restorative justice practices promote sustainable livelihood in conflict affected communities in Rivers State?

Table 3: Mean Ratings of Community Leaders and Conflict Management Experts on the Extent Restorative Justice Practices Promote Sustainable Livelihood in Conflict Affected Communities in Rivers State

S/N	Items	Community Leaders (N=366)			Conflict Mgt Experts (N=104)		
		Mean	SD	Rmk	Mean	SD	Rmk
1	Restorative justice practices promote accountability and responsibility, leading to the rebuilding of trust in conflict-affected communities.	3.22	0.78	HE	3.30	0.73	HE
2	The implementation of restorative justice practices results in the restoration of social order, which enhances livelihood opportunities for community members.	3.08	0.83	HE	3.16	0.78	HE
3	Restorative justice practices contribute to the reduction of violence, creating a safer environment for sustainable livelihood activities.	3.31	0.76	HE	3.38	0.72	HE
4	The involvement of all stakeholders in restorative justice practices fosters community cooperation, which supports collective economic development.	3.15	0.80	HE	3.23	0.76	HE
5	Restorative justice practices have a positive impact on improving access to community-based resources, such as land and credit, for affected families.	2.98	0.91	HE	3.06	0.86	HE
6	Restorative justice practices lead to reconciliation between conflicting groups, enabling joint efforts towards rebuilding and sustaining livelihoods.	3.18	0.79	HE	3.26	0.75	HE
7	The application of restorative justice practices helps to restore the sense of community ownership and responsibility, contributing to long-term livelihood sustainability.	3.10	0.85	HE	3.18	0.80	HE
Grand Mean		3.15		HE	3.22		HE

Table 3 above shows the mean ratings of community leaders and conflict management experts on the extent to which restorative justice practices promote sustainable livelihood in conflict affected communities in Rivers State. All seven items were rated High Extent, with mean scores ranging from 2.98 to 3.31 for community leaders and 3.06 to 3.38 for conflict management experts. The item on the reduction of violence and creation of a safer environment for sustainable livelihood activities recorded the highest ratings, while the item on improved access to community-based resources such as land and credit recorded the lowest, though still within the high-extent range. With grand mean

scores of 3.15 and 3.22 for community leaders and conflict management experts respectively, the answer to research question three is that restorative justice practices promote sustainable livelihood in conflict affected communities in Rivers State to a high extent.

Test of Hypotheses

Ho1: There is no significant difference in the mean rating of community leaders and conflict management experts on the extent to which mediation by traditional elders promotes sustainable livelihood in conflict affected communities in Rivers State.

Table 4: Z-Test Analysis of Community Leaders and Conflict Management Experts on the Extent to which Mediation by Traditional Elders Promotes Sustainable Livelihood in Conflict Affected Communities

Respondents	N	Mean	SD	Df	LS	z-cal	z-crit	Decision
Community Leaders	366	3.32	0.76	494	0.05	0.87	±1.96	Accepted
Conflict Mgt Experts	104	3.40	0.71					

Table 4 above shows that the calculated z-value of 0.87 is less than the critical z-value of 1.96 at the 0.05 level of significance and 494 degrees of freedom. The null hypothesis was therefore accepted, indicating that there is no significant difference in the mean rating of community leaders and conflict management experts on the extent to which mediation by traditional elders promotes sustainable livelihood in conflict affected communities in Rivers State.

Ho2: There is no significant difference in the mean rating of community leaders and conflict management experts on the extent to which reconciliation ceremonies promote sustainable livelihood in conflict affected communities in Rivers State.

Table 5: Z-Test Analysis of Community Leaders and Conflict Management Experts on the Extent to which Reconciliation Ceremonies Promote Sustainable Livelihood in Conflict Affected Communities

Respondents	N	Mean	SD	Df	LS	z-cal	z-crit	Decision
Community Leaders	366	3.25	0.80	494	0.05	-0.65	±1.96	Accepted
Conflict Mgt Experts	104	3.33	0.75					

Table 5 above shows that the calculated z-value of -0.65 is less than the critical z-value of 1.96 at the 0.05 level of significance and 494 degrees of freedom. The null hypothesis was therefore accepted, indicating that there is no significant difference in the mean rating of community leaders and conflict management experts on the extent to which reconciliation ceremonies promote sustainable livelihood in conflict affected communities in Rivers State.

Ho3: There is no significant difference in the mean rating of community leaders and conflict management experts on the extent to which restorative justice practices promote sustainable livelihood in conflict affected communities in Rivers State.

Table 6: Z-Test Analysis of Community Leaders and Conflict Management Experts on the Extent to which Restorative Justice Practices Promote Sustainable Livelihood in Conflict Affected Communities

Respondents	N	Mean	SD	Df	LS	z-cal	z-crit	Decision
Community Leaders	366	3.15	0.82	494	0.05	0.42	±1.96	Accepted
Conflict Mgt Experts	104	3.22	0.77					

Table 6 above shows that the calculated z-value of 0.42 is less than the critical z-value of 1.96 at the 0.05 level of significance and 494 degrees of freedom. The null hypothesis was therefore accepted, indicating that there is no significant difference in the mean rating of community leaders and conflict management experts on the extent to which restorative justice practices promote sustainable livelihood in conflict affected communities in Rivers State.

Discussion of Findings

The finding on research question one revealed that mediation by traditional elders promotes sustainable livelihood in conflict affected communities in Rivers State to a high extent, with respondents affirming that elder mediation contributes to the restoration of peace, enhances household economic stability, reduces displacement, fosters trust and cooperation between conflicting groups, and sustains livelihood projects. The corresponding hypothesis test showed no significant difference between the perceptions of community leaders and conflict

management experts. This finding is consistent with Kpae (2018), who found that traditional conflict management mechanisms in Ogoni, Rivers State, anchored in elder authority and communal mediation, provided the social stability and relational foundations without which productive community activities, including farming, fishing, and inter-community market exchange, could not be safely conducted. It also affirms Salami and Kpae (2023), who argue that the relational orientation of elder-mediated processes makes them uniquely suited to post-conflict community recovery because they directly address the damaged social relationships and broken trust that are among the most debilitating consequences of conflict for community livelihoods.

The finding on research question two revealed that reconciliation ceremonies promote sustainable livelihood in conflict affected communities in Rivers State to a high extent, with respondents affirming that such ceremonies heal relationships, reduce conflict recurrence, improve

access to resources such as land and employment, facilitate the return of displaced persons, and improve mental and emotional well-being. The corresponding hypothesis test likewise showed no significant difference between community leaders and conflict management experts. This finding aligns with Huyse and Salter (2018), who identify the restoration of broken communal relations as a fundamental objective of tradition-based reconciliation processes, and with Honwana (2016), who documented how purification and reintegration ceremonies in Mozambique and Angola enabled conflict-affected persons to resume their roles within community economic life, arguing that without culturally appropriate cleansing ceremonies, returning conflict-affected persons are often unable to be fully reintegrated into the cooperative economic relationships upon which sustainable livelihoods depend. The practical value of that restored cooperation is evident in the study of community based resources for promoting sustainable tourism in Andoni and Opobo/Nkoro Local Government Areas of Rivers State, which showed that resources held in common can only be turned to livelihood use where the social relations governing access to them remain intact (Dokubo et al., 2024).

The finding on research question three revealed that restorative justice practices promote sustainable livelihood in conflict affected communities in Rivers State to a high extent, with respondents affirming that such practices promote accountability, restore social order, reduce violence, and foster the community cooperation needed for collective economic development. The corresponding hypothesis test showed no significant difference between the two groups of respondents. This finding corroborates Gabagambi (2018), who demonstrated across six African country contexts, including Nigeria, that African traditional approaches to justice are inherently restorative in their emphasis on the healing of relationships, the reintegration of offenders, and the restoration of community harmony, and Zehr (2015), who affirmed that restorative justice processes, by creating structured spaces in which victims can articulate the full range of harm they have experienced, make it possible for the material and economic dimensions of conflict-related harm to be recognised and remedied in ways that formal legal processes rarely achieve. The orientation of these practices towards repair rather than punishment also connects to the argument that education and social arrangements which advance social justice are what prepare people to take a productive place in the life of their society, since a settlement experienced as fair is the one most likely to hold (Alikor & Okachiku-Agbaraeke, 2025). Taken together, the three findings suggest that sustainable livelihood recovery in conflict-affected communities in Rivers State is not achieved through the cessation of hostilities alone, but through indigenous

processes that deliberately rebuild the trust, relationships, and social order on which productive economic life depends. This lends weight to the case for devolving real authority to local bodies, an approach already applied elsewhere in the state through school-based management committees, where decision-making responsibility was deliberately placed with parents, community members and local administrators on the reasoning that those closest to a problem are best positioned to act on it (Nwanguma & Nwuke, 2024).

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms play a significant role in promoting sustainable livelihood in conflict affected communities in Rivers State. Specifically, mediation by traditional elders, reconciliation ceremonies, and restorative justice practices each demonstrated a high extent of contribution to the promotion of sustainable livelihoods, and the consistent agreement between community leaders and conflict management experts on the effectiveness of the three mechanisms affirms their broad legitimacy and acceptability within the communities they serve. The study concludes that these culturally embedded, community-owned approaches to peacebuilding transcend the limitations of formal justice systems in addressing the relational and livelihood dimensions of community conflict, and that their formal recognition, institutional strengthening, and policy integration represent important priorities for sustainable development and livelihood recovery in conflict-affected communities in Rivers State.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. The Rivers State Government and relevant federal agencies should enact a comprehensive legal framework that formally recognises and empowers traditional elders as legitimate conflict mediators in community dispute resolution processes. This framework should provide institutional support, capacity-building training, and logistical resources for elder mediators, enabling them to manage the increasingly complex nature of modern community conflicts while maintaining the cultural integrity and moral authority that give their mediation its effectiveness in promoting sustainable livelihoods.
2. State and local government authorities in Rivers State should formally incorporate reconciliation ceremonies into their post-conflict peacebuilding and community recovery programmes, providing financial and administrative support for their organisation and performance. Community leaders, non-governmental organisations, and development practitioners should be sensitised to the role of

reconciliation ceremonies in rebuilding social capital, restoring community cohesion, and facilitating the reintegration of displaced persons into productive livelihood activities.

3. The Rivers State Ministry of Justice should develop policy guidelines and institutional protocols that formally integrate restorative justice practices into the state's conflict management architecture. These guidelines should define the roles of community councils, traditional authorities, and restorative justice practitioners, establish standards of procedural fairness, and ensure that restorative justice processes are inclusive of women, youth, and other marginalised community members whose livelihood interests are most acutely affected by community conflict.

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