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**Abstract**

*Conflict remains a recurring challenge in many Nigerian communities, often threatening social harmony and sustainable development. While formal legal mechanisms exist for managing disputes, traditional institutions continue to play a vital role in conflict resolution, particularly at the grassroots level. This study examined the role of traditional institutions in conflict resolution and management in Oyo State, using Ogbomosho Local Government as a case study. The study specifically assessed the level of conflict resolution and management, the extent of involvement of traditional institutions, and the influence of traditional governance structures on community peace. A descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. Data were collected from 50 respondents using a structured questionnaire based on a four-point Likert scale. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as mean scores, while hypothesis testing was conducted using inferential statistical techniques. The study established a significant influence of traditional institutions on conflict resolution and management, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis. The study concluded that traditional institutions remain effective mechanisms for promoting peace, reconciliation, and social cohesion within communities. It recommended stronger collaboration between traditional institutions and formal governance structures to enhance sustainable conflict management in Oyo State.*

**Keywords:** Traditional institutions, conflict resolution, conflict management, social cohesion, customary norms, Ogbomosho Local Government.

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The existing socio-cultural norms and values embedded in traditional institutions have remained an integral part of every organized society in Africa. According to Ondoro (2015), apart from being the powerful human tool for survival, the defined cultural norms and values also form the bases of existence of every civilized society, as described by Thomas Hobbes, they bring order which in turn makes the society devoid of any state of lawlessness. In pre-colonial Nigeria, these norms and values formed the bases upon which traditional rulers exercised governance, power and authority or influence over their subjects. According to Dokubo (2015), these institutions of traditional rulers were virtually the only institutions of governance which played critical roles such as custodians of customary law and communal assets, especially land and resources; guardians and symbols of cultural values and religious practices; dispensing justice, enforcing contracts and also resolving conflicts.

Daniel, and Osa (2013), explained that the art of resolving conflict is borne out of a belief that conflict which is inevitable could and should not be left alone, it therefore needs to

be put under control by interacting with relevant parties to develop common generalization or principles and practices that would return cordial relationship against violence. During conflicts, traditional rulers therefore undoubtedly played significant roles in managing these conflicts informally and arranging peace-making meetings when matters get out of hands. Ugwu (2016), observed that these governance institutions and structures were controlled by certain unwritten laws which formed part of the general social structure, and its machinery of enforcing governance was well-organized to manage affairs, administered justice and resolve tension in the society. However, during colonial era, there were roles change as the roles and offices of traditional rulers were either usurped by the colonialist or their subjects.

According to Aidelokhai (2008), traditional rulers before the advent of colonial rule in Nigeria were the political, cultural, economic and social administrators of their various domains. There was a new imposition of European Hegemony over the existing sovereign authority. This new governance arrangement granted the colonialist easy

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exploitation and control of their territories. According to Christian (2012), Conflict is inevitable in every human society; conflict generally exists whenever and wherever there is the pursuit of incompatible goals, as well as scarce status and resources. Nigeria is often referred to as a multi-ethnic group and a multi-religious country. According to Olaoba (2015), the plural nature of the country makes it susceptible to manipulation and therefore, ushers in a constant feeling of distrust between and among the component units, as well as ethnic and religious groups that made up the polity, sometimes leading to violent and deadly clashes between and among these groups, thereby undermining peace and security of lives and properties of its citizens, and the country in general.

Ugwu (2016), claimed that the role of traditional rulers in the process of maintaining peace and harmony is as old as the institution itself. Peace-making is part and parcel of African pre-colonial social system geared towards reconciliation, maintenance and improvement of social relationships. The methods, processes and regulations are deeply rooted in the customs and traditions of the people of pre-colonial Africa which seems to

restore a balance to settle conflict and eliminate dispute Golwa (2013), In this regard, traditional rulers play a vital role in peace-making at the grassroots level as part of the cultural heritage of the people. Traditional rulers hold the key to success or failure of security administration in Nigeria because they operate at the grassroots and interact closely with people in their daily activities consequent upon which they are highly respected.

According to Ekong (2013), traditional leaders otherwise referred to as Chief, play a pivotal role in settling disputes among the people. The traditional rulers are regarded as custodians of the people, traditional law and custom and the responsibility to ensure peaceful co-existence in their communities' rests with them. Traditional peace-making and conflict management practices are not new in Africa. According to Olaoba (2015), indigenous approaches to peace-making and conflict management have existed long before colonialism and are deeply practice, which have constantly changed over time in the process of interacting with the outside world. the essence of the traditional institution is to preserve the tradition, the customs, cultural

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heritage of the people and to manage, settle and resolved dispute/conflict arising within or between members of the community by the instrumentality of laws and customs of the people in that particular community or society. Traditional rulers are seen and referred to as the custodians of their people's norms, cultural values and practices Olaoba (2015).

According to Christian (2012), traditional rulers have been the integral part which enhanced conflict resolution. Traditional rulers in Oyo State have been undaunted in their resolve to stem conflicts in their respective communities. Incessant cases of conflicts have manifested in many ways like intra or inter-communal, farmer-herder, religious, political conflicts etc. In the study area, its pervasive nature finds expression in the socio-cultural, economic and political life of the people. However, in spite of the efforts of relevant state institutions, the phenomenon has proved somewhat intractable; necessitating the intervention of various other stakeholders, including traditional rulers. The study seeks to examine the role of traditional rulers in all conflicts.

The broad objective of this study is to examine the role of traditional rulers in the management of religious conflict

### **CONCEPTUAL CLERIFICATION**

#### **Traditional Rulers**

According to Daniel and Osa (2013), traditional rulers may be defined as 'the traditional head of an ethnic group or clan who is the holder of the highest primary executive authority in an indigenous polity, or who has been appointed to the position in accordance with the customs and traditional of the area concerned by instrument or order of the state government, and whose title is recognized as traditional ruler title by the Government of the State. Before the advent of the Europeans, societies in Africa had evolved various systems of political administration based on the peculiarities of these ethnic nationalities.

Daniel and Osa (2013) explained further that these institutions had full executive, legislative and judicial powers in their different domains and exerted sovereign control over their people. For centuries before the advent of British rule, governance in different parts of present-day Nigeria was

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synonymous with traditional institutions and their rulers. Local administration generally centered on the traditional ruler who was considered the repository of religious, legislative, executive and judicial functions, with a few exceptions (Afigbo,1992).

According to Oloko (2016), the traditional ruler formed the nucleus of governance. One striking fact is that the geographical spheres of authority of these traditional rulers were essentially localized and no traditional ruler ever had jurisdiction over the entire geographical area of modern Nigeria. According to Oloko (2016), the traditional ruler in the then pre-colonial Nigerian communities was at the head of a well-organized system of government. As the sole authority, they were the legislature, executive and the judiciary. Traditional institution during the pre-colonial era was quite clear, since law and order were maintained through a normative system that was part of the general social structure though the system was not sophisticated, the machinery of government was organized enough to manage affairs, resolve tension and administered justice in the society. Ihejirika (2018) observed that the institution was controlled by certain unwritten laws which

ensure the security of the institution. This implies that, traditional rulers had positive impact on the evolution of political, economic and social institutions in which they had dominant control.

According to Stephen (2009), the political institutions of the pre-colonial societies included the paramount chiefs, the council of elders, age grade and religious organizations. The Ibos at the pre-colonial period did not have a single political authority; even though they were a contingent. Since the Ibos shunned the idea of having a single leader at that time, they operated a lineage system as a basis for political organization. This political system was fashioned in such a way that a man could only lead members of his lineage hence, there were many influential and powerful men, their influence was limited to hamlet, clan and village and at most the area in which they lived. According to Adedayo (2008), in every village, hamlet or clan, there was always a village head who emerged by virtue of age and who in collaboration of other elders settled disputes in that particular village. If the disputes involved another village the elders, led by the eldest from both villages came together and resolved the disputes,

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especially those bothering on elopement and land, which was common at that time. (Adedayo 2008).

### **Conflict**

According to Angelina, (2014), conflict is a situation of dissonance between two individuals or groups. It is an interactive process which manifests in disagreement and incompatibility between or within social entities. It comprises significant elements such as expressed struggle, interdependence, perceived goal incompatibility, perceived scarce rewards, and interference. And due to these significant elements, conflict is stated as a tussle among interdependent parties that have incompatible goals, share common resources, and experience interference from one another in achieving set goals (Robbins, 2005). Conflict is a natural dynamic that arises when people's interests, perceptions, goals, values or approaches to problems differ and when one party feels that another is interfering with their ability to attain a certain objective (Chimaraoke, 2002 Bukari, 2013). It may occur between individuals or groups and range from minor disagreements to major disputes or even war.

According to Ihejirika and Ogbugo (2018), conflict signifies the presence of disagreement, rancor, tension and anger in the relationship between or among individuals, groups, and institutions arising from incompatible goals, values, interest, and needs. Conflict revolves around opposing interests, needs, or goal and often occurs when individuals or groups realize that their interests, needs or goal are opposed to those of others, and as such, expect these other persons to thwart their concern.

According to Ifeoma, (2015), it has become very common cutting across every field of human endeavor. This means that in every social relationship, conflict is most likely to occur. As long as people engage in social interaction or relationship, differences in opinion are unavoidable. Such differences arise whenever people disagree over issues, interests, values, motives, perceptions, feelings, or desires (Odigbo, Okonkwo & Eleje, 2014). For example, issues surrounding the planning and implementation of community development projects such as project selection, location, funding and management raise arguments, disagreements and differences in opinion. This situation is

typical of every human relationship, be it organizational, communal or international.

### **TYPES OF CONFLICT**

#### ***1. Inter-personal Conflict***

Intra-personal conflict which exists at the individual level, inter-personal conflict occurs between persons or among persons arising from poor interaction. This could be as a result of the persons' dissatisfaction with the planning and implementation of community projects such as disagreement over project prioritization and location of projects. As minor as this type of conflict could be, ignoring it can escalate to intra-group or inter-group conflict which can affect the community and the projects negatively (Akinwale, 2010).

#### ***2. Intra-group Conflict***

This refers to a conflict between two or more members of same group or team. This is distinct as it develops from implicit or real mismatches among group members and it mostly arises from either task or relationship issues (Hanif, Khan, Adeel and Shah, 2016). Intra-group conflict describes a situation in which group members hold discrepant views or have inter-personal incompatibilities with one other. Intra-group conflict is very

common in communities, especially as it affects development projects. For instance, when a project team fails in its responsibilities to manage inter-personal fracas regarding its members interest in development projects, it can ignite confrontation and translate to intra-group squabble. Such internal rift can be a consequence of role ambiguity, decisions on prioritization of projects, location of projects, or even financial misappropriation. Intra-group conflict in the context of community development is dangerous as it deters project teams from working together effectively to deliver project goals and objectives.

#### ***3. Inter-group Conflict***

Inter-group conflict is not new in human societies; it is a pervasive and ubiquitous phenomenon. It is a type of conflict that exists between two or more groups and could be as a result of humans 'tendency to distinguish between in-group 'and out-group members. In most cases, it underscores the forces leading to discrimination, exclusion, and aggression between groups. In the context of community development, inter-group conflict can be seen as disagreement, struggle, clash between two or more groups within the community over selection of projects, location of projects,

management of projects and their funds and other project-related matters. Such groups could be chieftaincy institutions, town unions, women associations, religious groups, youth associations, among others with each group wanting its interest to impact on community projects (Anugwom, 2016).

Disputes between various stakeholders frequently arise during the process of community or rural development in Southeast Nigeria, particularly in self-help projects. They admitted that chieftaincy organizations frequently compete with other local people and organizations. The analysis revealed that there has always been a struggle for dominance between the town unions and the chieftaincy institutions, albeit in a very subtle fashion (Ukaegbu and Anugwom (2015)). In Southeast Nigeria, the process of community or rural development, especially in self-help initiatives, often leads to the emergence of conflicts between different parties. They disclosed that chieftaincy institutions often pitch against other groups and individuals in the community. As unraveled in the study, there is always in existence, even though most subtly, tussle of supremacy between the chieftaincy

institutions and the town unions (Ukaegbu and Anugwom, 2015).

#### ***4. Communal Conflict***

This is the height of conflict manifestation in community development projects. It is dangerous and should demand greater attention from community workers. It occurs when the inter-personal, intra-group, and inter-group conflicts and/or interactions are not well managed. As observed by typical community conflicts over development frequently entail polarized parties that have protracted debates. Protests, blockades, murders, kidnappings, complete cessation of communal activity, and property destruction are characteristics of this stage (Ilesanmi, 2016)). This was one of the problems highlighted as impeding community development both within and between communities (in the case of inter-communal conflict). Community conflict can be a spin-off from disagreement over land for development projects, misappropriation of projects funds, marginalization of certain groups of people (e.g., women, youths, elderly, the disabled, particular religious' groups, or ethnic groups, etc.) from participation in the planning and

implementation of community projects. These lead to protests and breakdown of law and order (Chukwuwezi, 2015).

### **5. Ethnic Conflict**

Ethnicity is a state of belonging to the same social group that has a common national or cultural tradition. It shows a category of people who identify with each other based on similarities such as common ancestry, language, history, society, culture or nation. It is an inherited status based on the society in which one finds himself. Ethnic group as affiliation resulting from racial or cultural ties with distinctive ways of living. This group has the same cultural background, the same belief system; worship the same god, the same traditional pattern; clothing, food, festival and as well has the same ancestral origins or brotherhood. In Nigeria, every ethnic group strive to protect its identity by preserving their identity and as well strive to have their rights protected in a heterogeneous society like Nigeria. Such rights could stem from the distribution of common resources such as economic resources, social and political within the society (Odoh, 2016).

### **6. Religious Conflict**

Religion is a cultural system of designated behaviors and practices, morals, worldviews, texts, sanctified places, prophecies, ethics or organizations that relates humanity to supernatural, transcendental or spiritual elements. While different religions may or may not contain various elements ranging from the divine, sacred things, faith, supernatural being or some sort of intimacy and transcendence that will provide norms and power for the rest of life, (Akinwale, 2010). Religion practices may include rituals, sermons, commemoration or veneration, sacrifices, festivals, feasts, trances, initiations, funerary services, matrimonial services, meditation, prayer, music, art, dance, public service or other aspect of human culture. Abah (2019), notes that there are an estimated ten thousand distinct religions worldwide. In Nigeria, there are three major known religions, namely, Christianity, Islam and African Traditional religion. These three are the most practiced in Nigeria with Christianity and Islam being the most common ones practiced by defined groups of people.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

*Structural-functionalism theory*

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Using the structural-functionalism perspective as explained by the system theory, traditional rulers are part of the society who have some functions to perform and contribute to the maintenance of the society (i.e. their communities) such function include the contribution of their quota in the maintenance of the internal peace and security in their domain which is the only way development can take place in the community. They help in revenue generation and community tax assessment, determination of religious matters and settlement of conflict arising thereof; they also contribute in community development efforts of their respective communities like building of health Centre, town halls, market shop, post office, electricity, construction of road networks, bridges and culverts etc.

The functionalist perspective has to be subjected to considerable criticism. Critics argued that the type of explanation states that the parts of the system exist because of their beneficial consequences for the system as a whole. The main objection to this type of reasoning is that it treats an effect as a cause. Therefore, the assertion that traditional rulers embark on development projects in their domain is an attestation of consensus value

and institution is a misplace one. Finally, despite the widespread criticism, it should not be rejected out of hand, the assumption that society should be seen as an integral whole, that its part is interdependent, that social institution exists and the social structure directs human behavior. However, this approach to grassroots development is considered relevant in evaluating the role of traditional rulers in Nigeria. In other word, it present traditional rulers as a structure within a given system which has functions to perform in the transformation and development process within local government environment as well as in a large society. In conclusion, for the purpose of this research work, one has taken side with the functionalist perspective. This is because it throws more light in understanding the function perform by traditional rulers, not only in performing their core functions of maintaining peace and order, settling of land dispute etc. but also initiating and executing projects that will develop or transform their communities to be like the develop western societies.

### **CAUSES OF CONFLICT AT THE LOCAL LEVEL IN NIGERIA**

### *1. Indigene and Settler Conundrum*

The contestation arising from the indigene-settler dichotomy arises from the conception, definition and perception of who is an indigene and who is not or who is a settler and what rights does one have which the others should not have, as noted by Oji (2015). This gets to identity structure of indigene-settler relation as the indigenes see the settlers as tenants and as such should be controlled to certain level in their rights of possession and participation in the community activities. This identity provides recognition, definition, reference affinity and coherence and meaning for individual members of the group acting individually or collectively. The history of migration before slavery, during slavery and after slavery makes yesterday's immigrants today's indigenes, and yesterday's settlers today's natives. On this context, the question of who qualifies as an indigene becomes a serious problem, since by history, everyone is a settler in one way or the other, irrespective of the time of settlement. The differences between the indigenes and the settlers have continued to create serious hostile relationship between various communities, resulting in communal conflicts in Nigeria as

has been witnessed in the Tiv-Jukun conflict in Taraba State, Ijaw and Itskeri crisis in Delta State, Ezillo- EzzaEzillo conflict in Ebonyi State among others (Yeche, 2016).

### *2. Land Dispute*

Land dispute is a major cause of communal conflicts in Nigeria. When there is a disagreement between the ownership of land and the accepted boundary of land, it degenerates to conflicts among such communities. This in some occasions arise from claim of ownership of land which the other community might have been in possession of, or the fact that the other community claims that they were the original inhabitants of the area, and as such determines where they should allow the settlers have. This generally leads to conflicts when the communities involved were unable to settle their differences to the acceptable level (Ikeke, 2008).

### *3. Socio-Economic and Political Power Struggles*

Several communal conflicts arise due to socio-economic and political power struggle. This is visible in rural communities where these communities divide along party politics, each supporting a particular party or candidate with the intention of gaining

political power over the other community if their preferred candidate wins in an election. With this winning, they gain control of the economic and socio resources of the other community whose own candidates or party failed to clinch to political power. Believing that this community would continue to support the ruling party, the politicians give backing to their supporting community to control the other community and their resources. Efforts to resist this type of control always result to communal conflict (Nkewede, Udeuhele and Elem, 2018).

#### ***4. High Level of Illiteracy***

Most of these communities are characterized by people who do not understand the need for peaceful resolution of disagreement as they always feel cheated. A community with high level of uneducated youths are prone to incessant communal conflict, as they see this conflict as avenue to show their strength and bravery (Odoh, 2006).

#### ***5. Frustration and Aggressive Displacement***

A community is displaced by either war or natural disaster, such community may settle in other communities for survival and as such, if it becomes difficult to reclaim their original area, they may tend to settle and start their

lives as a community in such new place that originally belonged to other communities. This other community may not find it comfortable to allow the other group to occupy their land, and in the process of driving them away, there may arise a conflict. The new settlers as a result of frustration and aggression as a result of their displacement from their own community, would have no any other option than to resist such move since they had no any other place to go (Alao and Ojo, 2022).

#### ***6. Environmental Degradation***

One of the major causes of resource control conflict in Nigeria is environmental degradation. Environmental degradation is the deterioration of the environment through depletion of resources such as air, water, and soil. It is the general destruction of the ecosystem; habitat destruction, extinction of wildlife and pollution. In Nigeria, environmental degradation induces conflict, especially in communities where the explorative and exploitative of natural resources such as crude oil are carried out. In these communities, farmlands, water resources and forest are polluted, depleted and degraded, thereby destroying their means of livelihood (Alabi, 2010). The people in

such environment suffer from lack of good water, food, health and general means of economic activities, thereby subjecting the people to abject poverty.

### THE ROLE OF TRADITIONAL RULERS IN CONFLICT

According to Cookey (2010), that traditional rulers are perceived as assisting the government in maintaining law and order in the communities as well as promoting peaceful co-existence of people of different religious, ethnic and social backgrounds. The way of life of ordinary people in Nigeria is deeply rooted in their culture and traditional are central to maintaining their cultural values and traditions. They found that, the traditional rulers are more accessible to the ordinary people in times of need and problem than government officials and elected politicians. In addition, traditional rulers treat their people without discrimination. People generally trust their traditional rulers and respect (Cookey, 2010). According to Adanla (2015), reconciling and integrating both parties in conflicts, maintaining law and order in the communities, promoting the use of informal settlements, provision of checks and balances in the society, managing improper

communication and interaction breakdowns among their subjects and fostering communal solidarity and unity among others were the prevalent roles performed by the rulers in the communities. This implies that the rules are proactive and sincerely performed their roles in the communities.

The finding was in line with the finding of Otite and Albert (2009) who found that traditional rulers maintain law and order, ensure security, manage, control and resolve conflicts among individuals and groups in the Nigerian society. Similarly, it also corroborates the finding of Hamisu, Makinta, Muhammed, Garba and Umar (2017) who found that traditional rulers settled and resolved disputes/conflict arising within or between members of the community by the instrumentality of laws and customs of the people in that particular community.

According to Okonkwo et al (2019), Traditional rulers are bridge builders that could be used by the government to cement the existing relationship among the various ethnic groups in Nigeria. Akinole (2013) observed that “the amalgamation of 1914 could not undo the North-South dichotomy. The coming together of our traditional rulers, especially the first class traditional rulers in

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the geo-political zones, such as the Sultan of Sokoto, the Emir of Kano, the Oba of Lagos, Oni of Ifa, Alafin of Oyo, Oba of Benin, Obi of Onitsha etc. can do the magic and undo the North-South dichotomy. Their personal relationships and coming together with a common voice on national issues will help to reduce tension, hatred and suspicion among the peoples of Nigeria. The voice and opinion of the traditional rulers is highly respected by the people because of their position in the society.

According to Erezene (2002), “they are the traditional leaders of thought, custodians of wisdom, customs and traditions of the people. Therefore, their coming together and collaboration will help in stabilizing the unity, peace and security of the nation as their words can either make or mar the nation. The collaboration and partnership of the traditional rulers will guarantee the safety of other ethnic group in their domain. It makes the foreigners feel at home as the king is seen as the father of all. According to Efeizomor (2015) noted the importance of collaboration of the traditional rulers when he commented on the existing relationship between his kingdom, Owa and the Benin Kingdom. Thus, he stated “this catalogue of

intimacy has continued to the present day particularly when about twenty percent of the present Owa population now reside in various Benin territory. These Owa People have comfortably settled in the above habitations without molestation, making their economic venture under the giant umbrella of OmoN’ObaN’EdoUkoAkpokolopoloand the good custody of their resident (Enogieand 2016).

According to Erezene (2002), the collaboration of the traditional rulers can ginger and speed up development of an area. The traditional rulers as the motivator of supply, demand and distribution and the generator of traditional wisdom, collectively can call on the government to establish infrastructures and ventures that can generate employment. They can also call on their subjects to invest at home to create employment for the people. Those who contributed to the development of their community are honored with chieftaincy titles. The efforts of the entrepreneurs and industrialists galvanized into action by the traditional rulers will bring about economic blessing in the area. The benefit of this is enormous as Igbafen (2012) noted that “under economic blessing, crime and criminality

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including kidnappings, hostage taking, assassinations, armed robberies, endless strikes and political violence either do not exist or reduced to the barest minimum”. This is what every community and nation aspires to achieve, for it generates employment for the people, especially the youths.

According to Olusola and Aisha (2013), the roles of traditional rulers as plausible to conflict resolutions from the pre-colonial to post-colonial era. At the pre-colonial era, these rulers managed local affairs, administered justice and resolved tension in different areas of their domains with no written laws. People respect them as the living representative of their ancestors; believed to possess their authority from the spirit of the Supreme Being or God. The roles of traditional rulers have continued to change as provided by different constitutions—the 1960 Independence, the 1963 Republic, the 1979 and, the 1999 constitutions respectively. In these constitutions, some accorded traditional rulers powers and roles to play whereas, some did not. While the 1979 provided those functions, the 1999 eliminated them. This to a large extent downplayed the role of traditional rulers in governance. For these scholars (Olusola& Aisha, 2013), the

resultant effects are: poverty, frequent electoral and post-electoral strife and, persistence of widespread ethnic and civil conflicts in Nigeria.

### **CHALLENGES FACING TRADITIONAL RULERS IN CONFLICT MANAGEMENT**

According to Oloko (2016), the traditional rulers have great roles to play in the maintenance of national security. This has become necessary as the government alone cannot provide the necessary security that will secure lives and property in Nigeria as well as guarantee peace and unity of the nation. However, the role of the traditional rulers in this regard is being hindered by a number of factors which includes but not limited to lack of adequate funding of the traditional institution. The traditional rulers have no security vote or any allocation for security. This hinders their efforts to effectively mobilize the people for action on security matters. The local vigilante they established for the maintenance of security in their domain are not remunerated and all the traditional rulers can do is a tip occasionally.

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According to Ekong (2016), In the 1999 constitution, there is no definite constitutional role for the traditional rulers. This is one of the defaults of the 1999 constitution. How do they operate without a constitutional backup for their actions? A thorough scrutiny of the Nigerian constitution since 1979 clearly shows that traditional authority has not been recognized therein. It is a known fact that, even if the state council of chiefs/traditional rulers is in the constitution, it's membership is prescribed by the state House of Assembly without a constitutional role and according to Ekong (2016) such council is supposed to act in advisory capacity to the state government, whenever requested to do so. It should be noted that the government may accept or reject their advice. The power of the traditional rulers in conflict resolution has seriously been undermined both in terms of authority and power.

According to Abdulqadir (2017), the instruments of coercion the police, courts, prisons, were removed from its control. There is no constitutional provision for the enforcement of the resolution reached in arbitration. Alaga (2015) shared a similar view when he stated that, “the traditional

institutions no longer have full rein of operation, since they have to operate in a context where their authority is limited by Federal, State and even Local Government authority” (31). Without the means of enforcing the decisions reached in the arbitration, the parties in conflicts may refuse to abide by the terms reached. Also, as Nwani (2012) noted, “the emergence of public court destroyed the use of our traditional conflict resolution mechanism because it encourages people to bypass traditional courts to go regular courts. In some cases, the traditional rulers neglect their primary role as conflict managers especially at the grass root. Their inability to intervene at the earlier stage of crisis has led to the escalation of such crisis leading to a serious instability and chaos.

According to the Fajonyomi (2015), the traditional rulers played an indispensable role in Nigeria before, during and after colonialism. They portrayed themselves as agent of change, peace and meaningful development. Today, it is quite unfortunate that the traditional rulers have been totally excluded from the face of administration and governance in Nigeria. Apart from the fact that the 1976 Local government reforms and subsequent constitutions including the 1999

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constitution that removed the traditional rulers from the face of administration and governance in Nigeria despite their wealth of knowledge and experience, studies have shown that uncultured disposition and behaviour from some traditional rulers in recent time worsened the situation. Nowadays, the traditional rulers are found in the midst of money politics, corruption, embezzlement, political issues, mismanagement to mention but few, these have made them lost their dignity and integrity that put them in moral and spiritual leadership in the past and thereby put their in rural development in question.

### **THE WAY FORWARD FOR A RESTRUCTURED TRADITIONAL INSTITUTION**

According to Joseph (2015), the traditional rulers have a great role to play in the maintenance of security for a sustainable development in Nigeria. However, for the traditional rulers to play the role effectively, they should be security allocation for the traditional institution which will enable the institution to mobilize the people for the maintenance of security. The government should give the traditional institution constitutional recognition and backing for

their actions. This will enable the decisions reached in arbitrations by traditional rulers implemented by parties in conflicts. In a restructure Nigeria, the traditional rulers should be partnered by the government and security agencies to obtain information on security matters in an area. Such information should be treated with up uttermost secrecy and with dispatch. According to Alaga (2015), the traditional rulers should be allowed and encouraged to establish Security Council or committee in their domain with the collaboration with security agencies. Their area of focus can be set out by the government. When this is done, security will be better handled both by the government and the traditional rulers who are at the grassroots as the government cannot handle security alone as events of the recent time has shown.

According to Joseph (2015), the traditional rulers have a role to play in the maintenance of security in Nigeria. This is due to the fact that the government cannot do it alone. Also, the fact remains that the traditional rulers are grassroots leaders who live among the people. They are highly respected and revered as the custodian of the people's culture, tradition and wisdom. As grass root leaders, they have a grip of the

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security of the area and the people can confide in them on security matters. They are therefore in a better position to play a role in the maintenance of security in Nigeria.

### **CONCLUSION**

**AND**

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Traditional rulers should be seen as an agent of development and have been playing significant role in resolution and management of religious conflict. While religious intolerance, Disagreement over land ownership, , Socio-Economic and Political Power Struggles, the struggle over ownership and control of communal resources, Inter-religious disagreement are the major causes of religious conflicts, traditional rulers peace building initiative and inter-faith peace meetings are essential part of traditional rulers efforts in resolution of religious conflict. However, traditional rulers in Nigeria have gradually witnessed the erosion of their powers and this situation also creates a huge gap between the people at the grassroots and government at the states and Centre. Though, there have been a few attempts to make traditional rulers relevant at the state and federal levels. The states have their council of traditional rulers, in addition

to the existence of the ministries of local government and chieftaincy affairs. Traditional rulers have also been given ceremonial functions as heads of governmental and non-governmental institutions, such as Chancellors of universities and other institutions of learning.

The government should give the traditional institution constitutional recognition and backing for their actions. Traditional rulers should involve less in politics and channel their effort toward self-help community development programs. All levels of government should make laws that will improve participation of traditional institutions especially traditional rulers in activities relating to community development. Traditional rulers need to be considered for constitutional roles in governance to improve their performance. Government at all level should frequently consult traditional rulers in each community to identify felt-need of the community for effective policy formulation toward national development. Traditional rulers should involve less in politics and channel their effort toward self-help community development programs. Traditional rulers should articulate and

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aggregate citizens' interest through their local government or representatives in the State Houses of Assembly and National Assembly

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