

Traditional Institutions and the Management of Communal Conflicts in Gwer-East Local Government Area of Benue State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This study examined traditional rulership institution and the management of communal conflicts in Gwer-East local Government Area, Benue State of Nigeria. The study aimed at finding out why there is a persistence of communal conflicts in the study area even with the efforts by traditional rulers to help manage them. The study pursued objectives that range from; ascertaining the relevance of the traditional rulers in communal conflict management, identifying the causes of communal conflicts, examining the effectiveness of traditional rulers in the management of communal conflicts, identifying the challenges faced by traditional rulers in the management of communal conflicts and advancing ways of ensuring the effectiveness of traditional rulers in the management of communal conflicts in the study area. The descriptive research design was adopted for the study. Questionnaires were used for data collection and the analyses done using simple percentage presented in tabular form. Structural functionalism was adopted for the study. The findings of the study revealed that land dispute is the major cause of communal conflicts in the local government area. Equally too, it was found out that traditional rulers have not been effective in the management of communal conflicts owing largely to the lack of cooperation from warring communities. This showed, as revealed from this finding, the lack of respect for the traditional rulership institution in the local government area. The study also revealed that sensitization and awareness campaigns for attitudinal change by community members are the major ways of enhancing the effectiveness of traditional rulers in the management of communal conflicts in the area. The study concludes that traditional rulers are relevant in communal conflicts management as they are considered traditional administrative structure for community mobilization. The study made recommendations in the light that; traditional rulers should be given additional powers other than mere advisory and assistance roles, the government should revisit community boundaries and make them clearer to curtail issues of encroachment into peoples' lands in the area and the beef-up of check mechanisms on traditional rulers to help unfold irregularities of biased settlements, corruption and primordialism.

Keywords: Traditional Institution, Conflict, Communal Conflict, Conflict Management, Gwer-East Local Government.

INTRODUCTION

Traditional institutions are age long structures of every society. These structures are components that represent different spheres or aspects of life of members of every community; political, social, economic and cultural. Ohioleand Ojo (2015, p.33) noted that, "it has been known that traditional African societies, indeed, had well organized and well-established systems of administration where public order was provided and maintained; where laws were made and implemented; where inter-communal and intertribal conflicts were settled". Boateng and Afranie (2020, p. 26) noted that "the evolution of this institution was necessitated by the need for those engaged in sedentary lifestyle to have individuals steer their affairs.

The traditional rulership institution stands at the heart of community mobilization and administration for survival, sustainable growth and development. This is to say that it represents and has been the functional instrument for the effective mobilization of community members for socio-political, economic and cultural cohesion. According to Enyi (2014), this structure of the society has featured in the provision of security, making of laws, and ensuring the maintenance and adherence to such community laws. It also provides a stable system of governance, contributes to the peaceful resolution of disputes, and also promotes the principle of fairness, equity and justice.

It is also worthy of note that the traditional rulership institution has been relevant in the area of the management of communal conflicts which has been one of the major challenges ravaging almost all parts of the world. Nigeria for instance is a country that has fallen victim to conflicts of various forms that are devastating in nature. From the religious sphere for instance, Ikejani (2005) as cited in Salawu (2010) submits that over the years, many events in Nigeria have led to the politicization of mistrust, intolerance, violence and acrimonious relations between the mainly Muslim North and the Christian South in Nigeria. It is not, and cannot be an exaggeration to report that no state in Nigeria is immune to the 'disease' of communal conflicts. Agreeing with this, Alimba (2014, p. 179) submits that, "communal conflicts exist in all the geopolitical zones of the country. There is no part of the country that is spared from its ugly deficiencies".

It should be noted that the wider attention the rising wave of communal conflicts in Nigeria has attracted has led to ceaseless interventions by the traditional rulership institution to help manage such communal conflicts as they erupt. Oyedokun and Lawal (2017, p. 62) note, "It is currently a national affair that has received and is still receiving attention from all ramifications". As the institution that is closest to the people and custodian of the customs and traditions of the people, the traditional rulership institution administers their subjects in communal conflict situations as well as mobilizes them in all activities within their jurisdiction. However, the experience has been worrisome considering the occurrence and reoccurrence of communal conflicts in all parts of the country. Gwer-East is a local government area in Benue State of Nigeria that has fallen victim to continuous conflict situations as it has suffered from the impact of the plethora of communal conflicts that have befallen the local government area.

Some of the communal conflicts experienced in the area ranges from those between Mbaivur-Mbasombo, Mbakera-Mbadev Uvir, Mbaiaise-Ugambe, Mbashough-Mbatyerev, Mba-akencha-Ornmbaatungwa, Mbagyegh-Mbagooso and Tarku-Owu community among other violent and non-violent conflicts (Field Survey, 2023)

Therefore, the preoccupation of this research is to empirically investigate the persistence of communal conflicts in the local government area despite the regular intervention by the traditional rulership institution.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

This section was devoted to the definition of key concepts in accordance with their usage within the work. The concepts of traditional institutions, conflict, communal conflict, conflict management and Gwer-East Local Government were clarified.

Traditional Institutions

These are indigenous administrative or governance structures setup or established by local community people based on customs, beliefs and value systems. These traditional institutions are customary instruments that help in the mobilization and ordering of human and material resources in pursuit of community goals. For this study, traditional institutions represent only traditional rulers who are appointed or selected based on custom and tradition, and vested with administrative powers over their subjects.

This institution in Nigeria, Benue State and Gwer-East Local Government Area to be precise also derives its legal powers from the Benue State Council of Chiefs and Traditional Councils (Amendment) Law, 2023. Various traditional rulership offices are established by the law. Sections 3. (1), 8.(2), 15.(1), 15B. (1), 22A.(2) and 22C.(1) provides for offices of the two (2) Paramount Rulers, Intermediate Area Traditional Council, Second Class Chiefs, Third Class Chiefs, District/Ward Heads, Kindred/Clan Heads and Village Heads respectively. (Benue State Council of Chiefs and Traditional Council (Amendment) Law, 2023).

Conflict

Conflict can be described as any situation of disagreement or misunderstanding that arises as a result of different interests. In their view, Wilmot and Hocker (2011) as cited in Alimba (2014), Conflict denotes a felt struggle between two or more independent individuals over perceived incompatible differences in beliefs, values, and goals, or differences in desires for esteem, control, and connectedness. Equally, Doss, Airth and Pisano (2023) note that conflict is the disruption caused by differing thoughts, wants, or ideas. They further assert that it is the result of opposing thoughts, actions or ideas disrupting the status quo. Conflict can be interpersonal, inter/intra group and inter/intra communal depending on who is involved.

Communal Conflict

According to Horowitz (2000) as cited in Nwobi (2019, p.48), “Communal conflict is that violence perpetuated across ethnic lines in which at least one party is not the state, and in which victims are chosen by their group membership”. Alimba (2014) maintain that communal conflict is a state of incompatibility that emanates from a commonly shared or used property or resources by a group or groups in a society. From these definitions, it is glaring that the concept borders on clash of interest that involves communal groups.

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

Conflict management from the point of view of Usoro, Ekpenyong and Effiong (2014) “involves acquiring skills related to conflict resolution, self-awareness about conflict modes, conflict communication skills, and establishing a structure for resolving conflict in the environment”. On his part, Dalung (2013) as cited in Usoro, Ekpenyong and Effiong (2014), asserts that conflict management entails the long-term control of intractable disagreement or disharmony involving different parties. Conflicts. Thus, to manage conflict, is to address situations of tension and upheaval.

Gwer-East Local Government Area, Benue State of Nigeria

Gwer-East Local government is one of the twenty-three (23) local governments of Benue State. It was created on the 3rd February, 1976 by the General Murtala Mohammed administration, with the headquarter situated in Aliade. The local government area is located on the South-West area of Tiv land with a landmass of 2294 Km². Gwer-east Local Government Area has a population of 163,647 (National Population Commission, 2006).

It shares boundaries with Gwer-West, Gboko, Tarka, Konshisha, Oju, Obi, Otukpo, Guma and Makurdi Local Government Area. Gwer-East Local Government Area is made up of two tribes; Tiv and Igede which form the population. The Tiv ethnic group is the dominant and has 13 council wards out of the 14, with Igede having only Akpachai (Benue Compendium, 2017).

The fourteen (14) Council wards include; Akpachai, Mbalom, Mbabur, Mbasombo, Mbaiase/Mbakine, Mbayom, Ikwe, Gbemacha, Shough, Aliade/Mbalav, Ikyonov, Ikyorgbajir, Mbakyaan, and Ugee wards. Agriculture, crafting, smiting and charcoal production are the mainstay of the people in the local government area. The mineral resources found in the area include; salt in Mbayom and Mbalom, Hard-

core stones and late rite in Mbasombo as well as clay which is virtually found everywhere in the local government area. These resources are tapped, while some are yet to be exploited for economic purpose (Ekhuemelo, Tsembe and Amonum, 2017).

The choice of this study area borders on the rising wave of communal conflicts even with the presence of the traditional institution that is supposed to be a mobiliser of community people towards peace and development.

METHODOLOGY

The paper adopts descriptive research design. The data generated were from both primary and secondary sources. The primary data was generated through the instrument of questionnaires that were administered on the field, while the Secondary data was gotten through textbooks, journal articles, documentaries and government publications. The respondents of the study cover the entire population of Gwer-East Local Government Area which is 163,647 (National Population Commission, 2006). Attention was focused on the three (3) Clans of the area; Ngyohov, Njiriv and Yonov. A sample size of 300 respondents was obtained with 100 purposively selected from each of the three clans. Data generated from the administered questionnaires were analyzed quantitatively using frequency tables and simple percentage.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts the structural functionalist approach which derives from the general systems theory propounded by a biologist and philosopher, Ludwig Von Bertalanfy in the 1920s. This theory started gaining grounds as a framework for political analysis when it was adopted in the field of political science by Gabriel Almond, James Coleman and Bingham Powell in the 1950s and 1960s (Potts, Vella, Dale and Sipe, 2015). Thus, for this study, structural functionalism is represented from the political view championed by Almond and his associates.

The central message and idea of the structural functional perspective is that, all systems exist to carry out functions with the aid of their structures. While structures are arrangements within the political system that perform functions on its behalf, functions relate to the capacity or activity of a structure and its external effects. Concerning the above, Almond built the structural-functionalist approach on the assumption that all political systems have political structures that help maintain order in the pattern of human interactions. He further maintain that the same general functions are performed by all political systems even though they may have different frequencies, different kinds of structures and may work in different styles. Almond equally asserts that all political structures are multifunctional and mixed in the cultural sense in so far as they contain elements of modern as well as traditional cultures in different degrees.

The traditional rulership institution is a political structure that functions within a society that as a whole comprises other political segments. The traditional institution is a structure of almost every society or system that is created based on custom and tradition of a people. Whether formally or informally established, they constitute a viable political instrument for the mobilization of community members in the process of performing their structural functions. The traditional institution contributes significantly, functioning for the maintenance of systems through the management of communal conflicts in society. The point here in essence is that, the management of communal conflict and maintenance of social, political, economic, and cultural stability in society from the structural-functionalist perspective has to do with functions performed by the traditional institution as a structure in the society to move the entire society towards peace, tranquility and development. It is in the light of this that Ogwudile (2019), p. 91 submits thus, "...it presents 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 larger society". Thus, the traditional institution as a structure, functions here as a conflict manager to bring about cohesion and harmony by managing the communal conflicts in the territories under its

control. Informed by the fundamental assumption of the structural functionalist theory, Gwer-East Local Government Area has a traditional council with structures assigned specific function to perform.

The Local Government Area has the following traditional rulership structure:

- Gwer-East Local Government Traditional Council
- Auxiliary Area Traditional Council
- District/Ward Area Traditional Council
- Kindred/Clan Area Traditional Council
- Village Head

(Benue State Council of Chiefs and Traditional Councils Amendment Law, 2023)

Each of the structures strives to perform the functions assigned to it by the law to ensure the survival of the system at large. This structural arrangement of the Gwer-East Traditional institution is an apt representation of the assumption of the structural functionalist theory which builds its arguments on structures and functions of every system.

The structural functional theory like other theories has weaknesses that range from: Being ideologically inclined towards conservatism as it emphasizes the survival of the political system.

Focusing on Western democratic model as it does not allow for development of institutions in developing societies based on their specific requirements.

Having the weakness of dysfunctions that may continue, even though they don't serve a function.

The strength of structural functionalism as a theoretical framework cannot be overemphasized. It is a theory that offers the opportunity for an understanding of the political system and the workings of its structures. Structural functionalism is a representation of an improvement and brilliant innovation for a scientific understanding of the political system, taking into account, not only its structural components or institutions, but also their functions. This theory bears relevance as it is a basis for comparison between two political systems on the consideration of how their structures functions within the political system. Structures such as interest groups, traditional institutions, political parties, the executive, legislative, judiciary and the bureaucratic machinery are institutions that all political systems have, and they perform similar functions for the survival of the system at large. The theory also provide opportunity to understand that what distinguishes two or more political systems lies with the way their structures or institutions live up to expectations by playing complimentary roles for system maintenance and survival. The structural functional theory is relevant for playing a pivotal role in advancing the behavioural approach to the study of politics. Conclusively therefore, structural functionalism, bears uncontestable relevance in creating room for an understanding that; all political systems have political structures which help in maintaining order in the pattern of human interactions, the same general functions are performed by all political systems even though they may have different frequencies, different kinds of structures and may work in different styles, all political structures are multifunctional and all political systems are mixed in the cultural sense in so far as they contain elements of modern as well as traditional cultures in different degrees.

CAUSES OF COMMUNAL CONFLICTS

Alao, Mavalla, and Akinnusi (2019) see the contest for control of resources like land, mineral resources and water becoming some of the major factors responsible for confrontations that leads to deaths, displacement, and refugee issues. In the same vein, Adewuyi, Salami, and Dogara (2021) note that conflict arises when two or more individuals, groups, communities, or nations pursue unharmonious goals. They equally hold that in most cases, the underlying factors that ignite communal conflicts include; scarcity of resources, a clash of interests, incongruence of values, standards, and principles as

well as a perception of being displaced by other groups in pursuit of desired goals. Of course, these authors' submissions on the causes of communal conflicts are substantial because they truly represent the reasons for most communal conflicts. They constitute potential areas that individuals, groups or communities can clash on.

Onyebueke, Okwaraji, and Obiechina (2018, p. 174) noted that “conflict is a reality of social relations and arises from different interests, desires, goals and value aspirants in the competition for resources to meeting some demands on social life within a defined socio-political environment”.

Thus, various factors have been identified as causes of communal conflicts in communities. These causes however, vary from one community to another. Krause (2020) on causes of communal conflicts identifies local-level competition among the political elite, access to resources and land rights, and discrimination and marginalization of social groups as causes of communal conflicts.

Yecho (2006) as cited in Alimba (2014, p. 186) avers that, “the causes of communal conflicts are not static but rather dynamic and varied in nature depending on the socio-economic and geographical circumstances at the time”. In like manner too, Idebe (2019) affirms that community conflicts in Nigeria usually present themselves in different circumstances, their causes are multi-facial and turn out to have dynamic consequences. It is a fact to accept because the causes of communal conflicts may only be known when it erupts. Thus, one can rightly say it is multi-facial and has its causes not static. Onwudiwe (2004) as cited in Alimba (2014) lists social conditions as population explosion, economic migration, and the anti-poor policies of the government as triggers of communal conflicts in the society. This is a fact established because the struggle over land is increasing today because of the increase in population (Saidu, 2015). Relatedly, Oravee (2015) attributes communal crises in Tiv land to the struggle for farmlands and the exploitation of land related resources, and therefore sees communal conflicts linking to the mode of economic production and distribution practiced in the society.

According to Wolff, Deeka and Otiteas cited in Nwobi (2019), most of the conflicts in Nigeria are caused by the struggle for land space, resources competition, disputed jurisdiction of traditional rulers, creation and location of local government council headquarters, scarce political and economic resources, micro and macro social structures of Nigeria, population growth and disregard for cultural symbols. Nweze and Etamesor (2021, p. 40) remarked that “conflicts at any level arise from divergence of interests, desires, goals and values aspirations in the competition for resources to meet imposing demands on social life in a defined social-physical environment”. They further affirm that it is safe to infer that the fundamental foundation of conflicts is the primal instinct to survive in a reality where the resources for survival are scarce.

Management Of Communal Conflicts

According to Adewuyi, Salami, and Dogara (2021), management of communal conflict is sometimes synonymously used with conflict regulation and it covers the entire area of handling conflicts positively at different stages, including those efforts made to prevent conflict by being proactive. Umezulike and Ugochukwu (2021, p. 153) opine that, “The art of resolving conflict is borne out of the 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...” They see conflict management as the ability to identify and handle conflicts sensibly, fairly and efficiently. To Best (2015) as cited in Omeje and Nwaoba (2021, p. 100), “conflict management is the process of reducing the destructive capacity of conflict through several measures and by working with and through the parties involved in that conflict.

According to Dalung (2012), conflict management entails the long-term management of intractable conflicts. To him, it is the variety of ways by which people handle grievances, standing up for what they consider to be right and against what they consider to be wrong. Conflict management in this way may mean acquiring all the necessary skills of conflict resolution, being self-aware of conflict modes, and

establishing a structure for resolving it in the environment. It is all about articulating all the necessary institutional mechanism in controlling the conflict escalation.

Traditional Institutions and Conflict Management

The Traditional Ruler ship Institution as a traditional administrative structure right from the pre-colonial days to the present has remained instrumental in the management of inter-personal, inter-group and inter-communal conflicts. As custodians of the customs and traditions of their people, and an institution established by law, this structure of society has always explored customary and traditional means alongside defined legal frameworks to handle and manage conflicts of varying degrees. In the pre-colonial days for instance, Olaniran and Arigu (2013) maintain that during the pre-colonial period, traditional rulers managed affairs, administered justice and resolve tension in their different localities with unwritten laws that have their roots in firsthand experience passed on through stories, myths and legend, folklore, rituals, or songs from generation to generation and form part of the general social structure which in turn bred order, development, peace and stability in the localities. In fact, the role of traditional rulers in conflicts management is widely acknowledged by authors who have ventured into studies on this institution.

According to Simeon, Ngambi and Mulubale (2023, p. 344), “In countries such as Malawi, Rwanda, Kenya and Zambia, traditional authorities play a paramount role as mediators of conflicts”. In affirmation of this submission, Zango (2020) also assert that traditional political institutions play a tremendous role in society particularly in the areas of conflicts management and brokering peace between and amongst people in their respective emirates and chiefdoms. On his part, and concerning Nigeria, Saidu (2015) notes that, with the intervention of traditional rulers, several boundary disputes were resolved. He identified some of them to include; disputes between Jambil in Tafawa Balewa Local Government and Zungur in Bauchi Local Government, Gwaran Local Government of Jigawa State and Giade Local Government in Bauchi State, Marbiri in Ganjuwa Local Government Area of Bauchi State and Zumburum in Gwaran Local Government area of Jigawa State. Saidu further referenced the Darazo LGA in Bauchi State and Gwaram in Gwara LGA Jigawa State, Shira LGA in Bauchi State and Gwaram LGA in Jigawa State among many others.

Relatedly, Akpabio (2022, p. 216) notes thus, “traditional rulers get to settle disputes at various levels such as inter village, marital conflicts, inter family and inter clan land conflicts”. Akpabio emphasizes that traditional rulers in the managing of conflicts arrange peace-treaty plenaries especially when issues escalate and become uncontrollable.

The above submissions by the various authors points to the fact that the traditional rulership institution from the pre-colonial period to the contemporary play’s pivotal roles in the management of communal conflicts in their areas of jurisdiction. Even though most of the authors are not precise on the methods employed by traditional rulers in communal conflicts management, there is a fact established that the institution has always featured in this regard.

Challenges of Communal Conflicts Management

There are challenges with communal conflict management in Nigeria and other countries of the world. With the attention largely drawn, scholars have differently identified the challenges faced in the process of communal conflict management.

On his part, Chinwokwu (2013) attributes the challenges of communal conflict management to such factors as; bad leadership and governance, the proliferation of small arms and light weapons, the failure to address early warning signals and early response system, porousness of borders, failure to tackle or address the immediate and root causes of conflicts and globalization. All of these are indeed factors that constitute obstacles to the management of communal conflicts. Relatedly, Azu (2018) points out

Westernization, traditional authority not backed up by the legal system, capitalist system, integration of traditional rulers into governance and political influence as the challenges faced by traditional institutions in the management of communal conflicts. Equally, Zango (2020) attribute the challenges of communal conflict management to such issues as moral decay in the society, abuse of privilege by traditional rulers as well as conflict of interest. He further blames the challenges on politics and dwindling economic fortunes which affects the integrity of traditional office holders. These factors identified by the authors are quite apt considering the fact that the environment of operation can negatively or positively affect the functioning of an institution. According to Orhero (2020), attempts to manage most conflicts fail because of the methods adopted to handle them. He maintain that the approach to resolving the conflicts to a large extent favour one party, leaving the other groupdissatisfied.

An overview of communal conflicts experience in Gwer-East Local Government Area of Benue State, Nigeria

In Nigeria, several communal conflicts that have been experienced by various communities. For instance, Nwobi (2019) identified some communal clashes experienced in Anambra state including; Nkwerke Ezumaka and Onitsha, Ajalli and Akpu, Ajalli and Ndiokpa Laeke, Ogbumka and Querre Ezuakala, Obosi and Onitsha and Nkpor, Akpu as well as Umuchukwu (Nkerechi). Otite et al, 1999; Omobighe et al, 2002, Ubi, 2001; Omatayo, 2005; Best, 2007as citedin Orji, Eme and Nwoba (2014), pre-colonial and colonial Nigeria experienced several cases of communal conflicts which include, Zango-Kataf conflicts in Kaduna, Tiv-Jukum Wukari in Taraba state, Itsekiri-Urshobo Warri crisis, Yilwa-Sheudam conflicts, Mangu-Bokoss crisis and the Ife-Modakeke crisis. Equally, Alimba (2014) also identified some communal conflicts in Nigeria including the Aguleri-Umuleri in Anambra State, the Ife-Modakeke in Osun State, the Ijaw-Ilaji in Ondo State, the Biakpa and Itoro in Cross River State, Eyo Abasi and Idua in Akwa Ibom State, Yoruba-Hausa community in Shagamu, the Ogoni-Adoni Hausa-Yoruba clashes in Idi-Araba in Lagos State, the Eleme-Okrika-Itsekiri-Ijaw/Urhobo among many others. In Benue State according to Dura (2022) as cited in Gbatse, Korinjoh, Shaakaa and Nungwa (2022), there are the Tiv-Jukun crisis at Abinsi, the Mbagen-Etulo conflict in Buruku, the Masev-Idoma, Tiv-Ibo in Gboko, Tiv farmers and herders’ attacks, Ikyov and Mbayegh crisis, Utange and Mbagwaza in Ushongo, Ishangev-ya and Ugee, Uyough and Nyiev in Kwande, Ukam and Ipav in Ushongo and Mbasombo-Mbaivur among many others in Tiv land

In Gwer-East Local Government Area of Benue State, conflicts of varying degrees have since the creation of the local government continuously endangered and affected the development of the community people. Some of the conflicts include: Mbaiase/Ugambe1993, Mbaiase/Idiiv 2003, Mbachough/Mbachin 1999, Mbaba/Otukpojo 2000, Mbaivur/Mbatyerev 2001, Mbakyan/Mbachough 2011, Ikyogbajir/Belambe 2010, Tse-Igbur/Tse-Kuwe 2016, Mbasombo/Mbaivur 2023 among many others. The situation have always led to cases of inter-communal attacks of people on farm lands, destruction of crops, killing of domestic animals, blocking of access roads, burning of markets, kidnapping and disruption of social activities. (Field Survey, 2023).

DATA ANALYSIS

The presentation and analysis of data was structured in two sections; socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents, and the impact of traditional rulershipinstitution in the management of communal conflicts in Gwer-East Local Government Area. Out of the three hundred (300) questionnaires administered, 287 were retrieved with three (3) invalid. The presentation and analysis wastherefore based on the 284 valid questionnaires.

Table 1: Description of Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents.

Attributes	Frequency	Percentage
	(N = 284)	(% = 100)

Gender		
Male	162	57.00
Female	122	43.00
Age		
18-30	127	44.72
31-50	131	46.13
50 and above	26	9.15
Marital status		
Single	106	37.32
Married	159	55.99
Separated	19	6.69
Occupational status		
Farming	113	39.79
Civil/public servant	75	26.41
Businessman	77	27.11
Politician	19	6.69
Educational status		
Primary level	14	4.93
Secondary	81	28.52
Tertiary level	189	66.54
Total	284	100.00

Source: Field Survey, 2023

From table 1, the presentation on gender distribution of the respondents showed that, 162 representing 57.04% were males while 122 respondents representing 42.96% were of the female gender. Equally, 127 representing 44.72%, fall within the age range of 18-30 years, 131 respondents representing 46.13% fall within the 31-50 age range, while 26 respondents representing 9.15% were people from 50 years and above. On status of marriage, 106 representing 37.32% were single, 159 weighing 55.99% were married and 19 respondents representing 6.69% were separated. This shows that respondents that most respondents were married. On occupation, the largest population of 113 representing 39.79% are farmers, and 75 respondents representing 26.41% are civil/public servants. 77 respondents representing 27.11% belong to the business category while 19 respondents representing 6.69% are politicians. On the educational qualification of respondents as presented in table 4.1.5, out of the 284 respondents, 14 representing 4.93% fall under the category of First School Leaving Certificate (FSLC), 81 representing 28.52% are senior School Certificate (SSCE) holders, 95 respondents representing 33.45% are National Certificate of Education (NCE) or National Diploma (ND) holders. 72 respondents representing 25.35% fall under the category of Higher National Diploma (HND) or First Degree, 15 of the respondents representing 5.28% are holders of master’s degrees, while 7, representing 2.47% of the total respondents are Doctorate degree holders.

Table 2: Identifying the cause(s) of communal conflicts in Gwer-East Local Government Area.

Major Causes of Communal Conflicts in Gwer-East LGA of Benue State.	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Land dispute	223	78.5

Indigene/Settler issue	19	6.6
Struggle over land related resources	22	7.7
Domination tendencies	1	0.3
Discrimination	1	0.3
All of the aforementioned	19	6.69
Total	284	100.00

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Responses in Table 2 revealed that 223 representing 78.5% hold land dispute as the major cause of communal conflicts in the Gwer-East Local Government Area, 19 of the total respondents representing 6.6% identify indigene/settler issue as the cause of communal conflicts in the Local Government Area, 22 respondents representing 7.7% attribute the cause of communal conflicts in Gwer-East Local Government Area to struggle over land related resources. 1 respondent representing 0.3% sees domination tendencies as the cause of communal conflicts in the local government area. Equally, 1 respondent representing 0.3% attributes the cause of communal conflicts to issues of discrimination, while 18 respondents representing 6.3% see all land disputes, indigeneship issues, struggles over land-related resources, domination tendencies and discrimination as causes of communal conflicts in the local government area. 1 of the total respondents representing 0.3% did not decide on the cause of communal conflicts in the local government area. Deriving from the above, it is clear that land dispute is the major cause of communal conflicts in the Gwer-East Local Government Area.

Table 3: Identifying the challenge to communal conflict management in Gwer-East Local Government Area.

Challenges of communal conflicts management in Gwer-East LGA of Benue State	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Proliferation of arms and light weapons	21	7.39
Porous borders	17	5.99
Integration of traditional rulership institutions into partisan politics	36	12.68
None recognition of traditional rulership institution by the constitution	31	10.92
Lack of respect for traditional rulers	89	31.34
Corruption	60	21.13
Poverty	15	5.28
All of the above	11	3.87
None of the above	3	1.05
Undecided	1	0.35
Total	284	100.00

Source: Field Survey, 2023

In Table 3, results showed that 21 respondents representing 7.39% of the total respondents identify the proliferation of arms and light weapons as the challenge to communal conflict management in the local government area, 17 representing 5.99% identify with porous borders as the challenge, 36 respondents representing 12.68% sees the integration of traditional rulership institution into partisan politics as the cause of the challenge, 31 respondents representing 10.92% identifying with non-recognition of traditional rulership institution by the constitution, 89 respondents representing 31.34% attribute the situation to the lack of respect for traditional rulers. 60 representing 21.13% of the respondents see corruption as the challenge, 15 representing 5.28% hold unto poverty, while 11 representing 3.87% sees all of the mentioned as the challenges. 3 respondents representing 1.05% see none of the above as a challenge while 1 representing 0.035% remained undecided. The above result showed that lack of respect for traditional rulers by community members in the local government area is the major challenge to communal conflict management in Gwer-East Local Government Area.

Table 4: Ascertaining the possible remedy to the challenges faced by traditional rulers in communal conflicts management in Gwer-East Local Government Area

Possible remedies to resurgence of communal conflicts in Gwer-East LGA of Benue State.	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Constitutional backup on the powers of traditional rulers	40	14.08
Promoting literacy of traditional rulers	53	18.66
Improving on the welfare of traditional rulers	38	13.38
Repositioning the traditional institution to command respect	41	14.44
Launching of sensitization and awareness campaigns for attitudinal change by community members	107	37.68
Undecided	5	1.76
Total	284	100.00

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Table 4 revealed that 40 representing 14.08% suggests a constitutional backup on the powers of traditional rulers. 53 respondents representing 18.66% hold onto the promotion of literacy of traditional rulers. 38 respondents representing 13.38% sees the improvement in the welfare of traditional rulers as a possible way of solving the challenges faced by traditional rulers. On repositioning the traditional institution to command respect, 41 respondents representing 14.44% all confirm this as the remedy to the challenges faced by traditional rulers. Out of the total respondents, 107 respondents representing 37.68% suggests launching of sensitization and awareness campaign for attitudinal change by community members as the possible remedy to the challenges faced by traditional rulers in Gwer-East Local Government Area. 5 respondents representing 1.76% belong to the undecided category. The above table shows that the launching of sensitization and awareness campaign for attitudinal change by community members is the possible remedy to the challenges faced by traditional rulers in communal conflicts management in Gwer-East Local Government Area of Benue state.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The findings of the study revealed that traditional rulership institutions is relevant in communal conflict

management. This is affirmed by the provision of the Benue State Council of Chiefs and Traditional Councils (Amendment) Law 2023 under section 1. (2), which established various Traditional Rulership stools with designations and a common seal and power to hold land, to sue and be sued in their corporate names. The relevance of this institution is also sustained by the Benue State Council of Chiefs and Traditional Councils (Amendment) Law 2023 via sections 7.(c), 15A.(c), 15C.(c), and 22B.(c) all empowering the various categories of traditional rulers to assist in the maintenance of law and order.

Secondly, the findings of the study revealed that land dispute is the major cause of the occurrence and reoccurrence of communal conflicts in the local government area.

Furthermore, the study on identifying the challenges faced by traditional rulers in the management of communal conflicts in the Gwer-East Local Government Area, it was found that the lack of respect for traditional rulers is the major challenge frustrating the effectiveness of the institution in communal conflict management. It should be noted that the Benue State Council of Chiefs and Traditional Councils (Amendment) Law 2023 vests only advisory roles on Traditional Rulers. The advisory roles are provided for in sections 4.(a) (b), 7.(a)(b)(f), 9.(b)(c)(e). Equally, Sections 7.(c), 15A.(c), 15C.(c) and 22B.(c) of the same law establishing traditional rulers only make them assistants in the maintenance of peace and order in their various jurisdictions.

Finally, the research found that sensitization and awareness campaigns for attitudinal change by community members stand out in this regard.

CONCLUSION

From the findings, the study ascertained that traditional rulership institutions are relevant in communal conflict management as it is considered an administrative structure in the study area, and also identified the causes of communal conflicts in the Gwer-East Local Government Area, which is largely premised on issues of land dispute.

Equally, the study discovered that the intervention by traditional rulers in communal conflict situations has not been effective because of the lack of respect for traditional rulers. This is one of the major challenges hindering the effectiveness of traditional rulers.

Premised on the above outcome of this research, the following recommendations are made: The traditional rulership institution in Benue State and Gwer-East Local Government Area in particular should be given additional powers other than mere advisory and assistance roles as provided by the Benue State Council of Chiefs and Traditional Councils (Amendment) Law, 2023.

The government should also as a matter of importance create opportunities for literacy training for traditional rulers for enhanced capacity building in communal conflicts management.

The study also recommends sensitization and awareness campaigns for enhanced attitudinal change on the part of community members as this will help promote cooperation, mutual understanding and peace between communities.

Equally, the study recommends that the government should revisit community boundaries and make them clearer to curtail issues of encroachment into peoples' lands in the area. There is also the need to uphold the principles of distributive justice in the allocation of community resources. This will help reduce the constant struggle over such resources by communities, families, family members or other inter or intra-community social groups.

Lastly, check mechanisms on traditional rulers should be beefed up to unfold irregularities of biased settlements, corruption and primordial sentiments on their parts and appropriate sanctions meted out as provided under Section 26.(1)(a). This calls for strict adherence to the Benue State Council of Chiefs

And Traditional Councils (Amendment) Law 2023.

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