

**CHALLENGES OF TRADITIONAL RULERS IN
MAINTAINING PEACE AND HARMONY IN IDEATO
NORTH LGA, IMO STATE, NIGERIA**

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ABSTRACT: This study focused on challenges of traditional rulers in maintaining peace and harmony in Ideato North LGA, Imo State, Nigeria. This study used the vacuum-filling theory to analyse the subject matter. The study employed a survey research design, and a questionnaire was used as the instrument for data collection. The data collected are presented in tables, and the data were analysed using simple percentages. The findings revealed that a lack of constitutional power/recognition affects traditional rulers in the maintenance of peace and harmony in the Ideato North LGA of Imo State, and a poor attitude of the people affects traditional rulers in the maintenance of peace and harmony in the Ideato North LGA of Imo State. It was recommended that traditional rulers be encouraged to mediate conflicts in society and should be educated and enlightened in modern and alternative dispute resolution to facilitate and enhance the resolution of conflicts in society. The study concluded that traditional rulers have put in place several measures in conflict resolution that have assisted in maintaining peace/harmony, law and order in their community.

Keywords: Challenges, Traditional Rulers, Peace and Harmony, Constitutional Power/Recognition and Poor Attitudes.

INTRODUCTION

Traditional rulers are seen and referred to as the custodians of their people's norms, cultural values and practices. During the pre-colonial period, the traditional rulers were the repositories of the executive, legislative, and judicial powers who implemented and maintained law and order, allocated land, resolved conflicts, especially land disputes, and ensured peace and harmony among people in their respective areas of the domain (Fatile, Majekodunmi & Adejuwon, 2013). As a result, violence, particularly ethno-religious conflicts, and intra and inter-communal conflicts was minimal. Moreover, during the colonial period, the British colonial masters recognized the position and legitimacy and respected the traditional leaders enjoyed in the country and harnessed them to maintain law and order in the country for the smooth operation of the colonial administration in Nigeria. For Julius-Adeoye (2017), even after the independence of Nigeria, traditional leaders no longer wield the executive, legislative, and judicial powers they used to wield during pre-colonial periods; the government, nongovernmental organizations and the public refer to them on social issues such as the resolution of conflicts and disputes. This is because of the role they have been playing and can play in mitigating these challenges, which pose a threat to peace and harmony in the country.

To appreciate the role of traditional rulers in ensuring peace in contemporary Nigeria, there is a need to understand the operation of traditional institutions. According to Sharma (2017), the traditional institution is a type of institution in which the power to rule lies in the traditions,

customs, and values of society. It is an indigenous political arrangement whereby leaders are appointed to lead based on the tradition and customs of the people. According to Igwubor (2020), traditional rulers, as the leaders of people and custodians of people's culture and tradition, are highly respected and revered by people within and outside their domain. Their words are laws to the people, and their advice and opinions on issues are respected and accepted. This is because they are seen as intermediaries between the people and the gods and the ancestors, and as such, cannot be disobeyed or disrespected. Considering the legitimacy and respect of traditional leaders enjoyed by their people, they contribute positively to community development, peace and unity in communities. This study therefore focused on the role of traditional rulers in maintaining peace and harmony in Ideato North LGA of Imo State.

Statement of the Problem

Government exists to maintain peace and order in the society so as to achieve development. At the community level, the traditional rulers play significant roles in maintaining peace and harmony. Notwithstanding the above fact, the role of traditional rulers in maintaining peace and harmony in different communities, especially in Ideato North LGA of Imo State is yet to be established in the literature. Okonji (2016) focused on local chiefs and peace building in Lagos; Muhammed, Garba and Umar (2017) examined the impact of traditional leaders in resolving farmers'/herders' conflict in Borno State; and Chizea and Osumah (2015) focused on traditional rulers and conflict management. The above works are related to this research but did not cover the exact subject matter as it concerns Ideato North LGA of Imo State. The above necessitated this study, which focused on the challenges of traditional rulers in maintaining peace and harmony in Ideato North LGA, Imo State, Nigeria.

Objective of the Study

The general objective of this study focused on the challenges of traditional rulers in maintaining peace and harmony in Ideato North LGA, Imo State, Nigeria. The specific objectives are as follows:

1. To identify the extent to which a lack of constitutional power/recognition affects traditional rulers in the maintenance of peace and harmony in the Ideato North LGA of Imo State.
2. To determine the extent to which poor attitudes affect traditional rulers in the maintenance of peace and harmony in the Ideato North LGA of Imo State.

Research Questions

The following research questions will be answered to obtain the findings or results of the study:

1. To what extent does a lack of constitutional power/recognition affect traditional rulers in the maintenance of peace and harmony in the Ideato North LGA of Imo State?
2. To what extent does the poor attitude of people affect traditional rulers in the maintenance of peace and harmony in the Ideato North LGA of Imo State?

Conceptual Issues

Traditional Rulers

Traditional rulers are popular symbols of tradition, culture, customs and their preservation, and as such, they are instrumental in ensuring growth and development in their communities through a well-structured system of communication. A traditional ruler has also been defined as a traditional head of an ethnic unit or clan who for the time being is the holder of the highest traditional authority whose title is recognized as a traditional ruler titled by the government of the state (Cookey, Alemika, Amucheazi, Oyebode & Yahaya, 2010). The concept of traditional rulers refers to leaders or persons by virtue of heredity or people with proven tracked records who are nominated, appointed and installed in line with the provisions of their native laws and customs (Wadama, 2013).

Peace and Harmony

According to Igbafen (2012), peace and harmony are enjoyed and possessed jointly by mankind, which is a base for the full realization of the creative potential of individuals, the sustainable development of the economy and culture of nations, and true security for the long-lasting prosperity of mankind's society. Peace and harmony can bring peaceful and stable order to society, and they are necessary conditions for the survival and development of mankind. A world deprived of peace and harmony will certainly fall apart and return to the jungle era in which the strong prey on the weak. Peace and harmony are highly wise. It is the height of wisdom that determines the breadth of vision, the depth of exploration, the extent of progress and the limit of transcendence (Efeizomor, 2014).

None of the current major religions or major cultural traditions of the world love peace or pursue harmony. History shows that all the thoughts that are against peace and harmony are against the will of the people and shall perish by themselves. Peace and harmony are the basic needs of any nation. Only if a nation enjoys peace and harmony would it be able to prosper. According to Abdullahi (2008), peace and harmony mean dealing with disputes and resolving conflicts fairly and properly with neutralization and middle way principles to further the welfare of each individual as well as the wellbeing of mankind as a whole. Peace and harmony are significant factors for any nation to develop in an appropriate way. If there is peace and harmony among the people of the country, then only it can develop as a nation. The people and the government itself have to make enough endeavours to create a harmonious and peaceful climate among various societies.

EMPIRICAL REVIEW

Okonji (2016) focused on local chiefs and peace-building. It postulates that local chiefs contributed to resolving and restoring peace in the case of ethno-religious conflict in Kosofe in Lagos. In addition, he found that 88.8% of the respondents of the study acceded to the decisions of traditional chiefs over other actors in the arbitration of the conflict in the Kosofe LGA in Lagos State. This shows that traditional leaders play a vital role in the resolution of ethnic and religious conflicts; therefore, such conflicts are best handled by them because people honour, respect, and accept their decisions.

Muhammed, Garba and Umar (2017) examine the impact of traditional leaders in resolving farmers'/herders' conflict in Borno State. Surveys and percentages were used for the interviews. They found that the majority of the people involved in the conflict believed that traditional leaders played a vital role in resolving the conflict between them. As a result, peace has been restored in the area. This study concluded that the strategy employed by traditional leaders in resolving such conflict contributed to bringing peace and normalcy in the area. This is an empirical case study whose findings can be applied to other parts of the country where such a conflict is taking place.

Chizea and Osumah (2015) focused on traditional rulers and conflict management. They argued that most crises, such as ethno-religious crises, militancy in the Niger Delta, Boko Haram insurgency, and farmer/herder clashes, occur and aggravate in Nigeria as a result of not involving traditional rulers at the initial stage of the crisis. They further believed that traditional rulers have knowledge of the values, norms, culture, and traditions of their people with which they can resolve and manage conflicts and crises and ensure that peace and harmony prevail in their areas of study. This assertion is true because evidence in the past (during the pre-colonial and colonial periods) has clearly shown that traditional leaders resolved and managed conflicts effectively and ensured that peace reigned in their respective areas of jurisdiction.

Osei-Hwedie and Rankopo (2012), in their case study of indigenous conflict resolution in Ghana and Botswana, observe that the values embedded in traditional institutions and cultural processes have a positive impact on the arbitration of conflicts to the extent that people favour the traditional pattern of conflict resolution more than the courts do. This is because traditional conflict resolution is based on the customs, traditions, and values that are more comprehended, accustomed to, and accepted by people. They concluded that indigenous patterns of conflict resolution pave the way for peace and harmony to prevail in society.

Loveness and Mathew (2017) focused on the role of the indigenous knowledge system in peace-building in the Umguza District in Zimbabwe. Traditional leaders play a significant role in the arbitration of conflict and disputes; however, the process of indigenous conflict resolution has been fraudulent, subjective and politicized. This problem was attributed to the absence of any written law that can guide the process and prevent traditional rulers from adjudicating according to their personal whim. Therefore, they suggested the need to assign a formal role to traditional institutions in the resolution of conflicts so that the process will be protected against corruption and any other personal interests.

Theoretical Framework

Vacuum-Filling Theory

This theory was proposed by Ugwulebo in 2003. He believed that a vacuum exists between the planned traditional rulers' supposed roles and what they do in practice. According to Ugwulebo (2003), vacuum-filling theory aims at explicating and bringing to bear why people (especially those in high places) behave the way they behave. In other words, the theory aims to unearth what these people do not want to say but have as the foundation bedrock of their policies. It aims at looking at the reasons behind the offered reason or reason guiding certain actions. According to Ibe (2019), the major tenets of the theory are as follows:

1. There is usually a gap or difference between what people (especially traditional rulers and government) promise and what they actually do.
2. There is a gap between what traditional rulers promise people and what they actually do in practice.
3. There is also a gap in what people of different communities need and what is provided (in terms of peace making, unity, and the promotion of development projects by traditional rulers).
4. The promises made to the masses heighten expectations, which are usually dashed with reckless impunity on the assumption of office.

The vacuum filling theory was employed as the framework of analysis in this study. This is true because the theory focused on the need to understand the behaviour and inconsistent way of life of our traditional rulers. Here, some of them do not actually promote peace and unity as it should be. This may be because of a lack of funds, lack of constitutional recognition, and poor attitudes of the people.

METHODOLOGY

In this study, a survey research design was adopted. The population of this study is composed of 300 members of the traditional council of Imo State in different autonomous communities in the Ideato LGA. (Source: Ideato North LGA, 2024). To determine the sample size, the formula of Taro Yamane was used. The formula is given as follows:

$$n = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2}$$

where

n = the sample size

N = population of staff. An estimated population of 300 is used.

e² = square of maximum allowance for sampling error at the 5% level of significance.

$$n = \frac{300}{1+(300) (0.05)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{300}{1+(300) (0.0025)}$$

$$n = \frac{300}{1+(0.75)}$$

$$n = \frac{300}{1.75}$$

$$n = 171.428$$

Approximately = 171

The sample size (n) = 171. Moreover, a questionnaire was used to collect the data. The researcher employed simple percentages to analyse the data collected through the questionnaire.

RESULTS

Item 1: A lack of constitutional power affects traditional rulers in the maintenance of peace and harmony in the Ideato North LGA of Imo State.

Table 1: Responses to lack of constitutional power affecting traditional rulers in the maintenance of peace and harmony in the Ideato North LGA of Imo State.

| Options | F | Percentage (%) | X | Percentage (%) |
|--------------------|------------|----------------|------------|----------------|
| Strongly Agreed | 52 | 31.1 | 260 | 40.9 |
| Agreed | 77 | 45.2 | 308 | 48.4 |
| Undecided | 6 | 3.5 | 18 | 2.8 |
| Disagreed | 15 | 9.0 | 30 | 4.7 |
| Strongly Disagreed | 20 | 11.8 | 20 | 3.1 |
| Total | 170 | 100 | 636 | 100 |

Source: Survey data, 2024

$$\sum X = \frac{636}{170} = 3.7$$

$$\sum F = 170$$

Since our results in the above table are above 2.5, we therefore accept that a lack of constitutional power affects traditional rulers in the maintenance of peace and harmony in the Ideato North LGA of Imo State. Table 4.9 indicates that 31.1% of the respondents strongly agreed, 45.2% agreed, 3.5% were undecided and 9.0% disagreed, while 11.8% strongly disagreed.

Item 2: Limited authority of traditional rulers hinders them from developing.

Table 2: Responses to whether the limited authority of traditional rulers hinders them from developing roles.

| Options | F | Percentage (%) | X | Percentage (%) |
|--------------------|------------|----------------|------------|----------------|
| Strongly Agreed | 49 | 29.0 | 245 | 43.0 |
| Agreed | 51 | 30 | 204 | 36.6 |
| Undecided | 9 | 5.3 | 27 | 4.8 |
| Disagreed | 20 | 11.8 | 40 | 7.2 |
| Strongly Disagreed | 41 | 24.1 | 41 | 7.4 |
| Total | 170 | 100 | 557 | 100 |

Source: Survey data, 2024

$$\sum X = \frac{557}{170} = 3.2$$

$$\sum F = 170$$

Since our results in the above table are above 2.5, we therefore accept that the limited authority of traditional rulers hinders them from developing roles. Table 4.10 indicates that 29.0% of the 170 respondents strongly agreed, 30% agreed, 5.3% were undecided and 11.8% disagreed, while 24.1% of the respondents strongly disagreed.

Item 3: The poor attitudes of people affect traditional rulers in the maintenance of peace and harmony in the Ideato North LGA of Imo State.

Table 3: Responses of people with poor attitudes to traditional rulers in the maintenance of peace and harmony in the Ideato North LGA of Imo State.

| Options | F | Percentage (%) | X | Percentage (%) |
|--------------------|------------|----------------|------------|----------------|
| Strongly Agreed | 71 | 42.1 | 355 | 54.1 |
| Agreed | 58 | 34.1 | 232 | 35.4 |
| Undecided | 8 | 4.7 | 24 | 3.7 |
| Disagreed | 12 | 7.1 | 24 | 3.7 |
| Strongly Disagreed | 21 | 12.3 | 21 | 3.2 |
| Total | 170 | 100 | 656 | 100 |

Source: Survey data, 2024

$$\sum X = \frac{656}{170} = 3.8$$

$$\sum F = 170$$

Since our results in the above table are above 2.5, we therefore accept that the poor attitude of the people affects traditional rulers in the maintenance of peace and harmony in the Ideato North LGA of Imo State. Table 4.13 indicates that 42.1% of the respondents strongly agreed, 34.1% agreed, 4.7% were undecided and 7.1% disagreed, while 12.3% strongly disagreed.

Item 4: Lack of support from communities hinders the effectiveness of traditional rulers in performing their functions.

Table 4: Responses to a lack of support from communities hindering the effectiveness of traditional rulers in performing their functions.

| Options | F | Percentage (%) | X | Percentage (%) |
|--------------------|------------|----------------|------------|----------------|
| Strongly Agreed | 50 | 29.4 | 250 | 44.6 |
| Agreed | 50 | 29.4 | 200 | 35.7 |
| Undecided | 10 | 5.9 | 30 | 5.4 |
| Disagreed | 20 | 11.8 | 40 | 7.1 |
| Strongly Disagreed | 40 | 24.0 | 40 | 7.1 |
| Total | 170 | 100 | 560 | 100 |

Source: Survey data, 2024

$$\sum X = \frac{560}{170} = 3.2$$

$$\sum F = 170$$

Since our results in the above table are above 2.5, we therefore accept that a lack of support from communities hinders the effectiveness of traditional rulers in performing their functions. Table 4.14 indicates that 29.4% of the 170 respondents strongly agreed, 29.4% agreed, 5.9% were undecided and 11.8% disagreed, while 24.0% of the respondents strongly disagreed.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Our first research question was that a lack of constitutional power/recognition affects traditional rulers in the maintenance of peace and harmony in the Ideato North LGA of Imo State. According to Igwubor (2020), traditional rulers are not constitutionally empowered to enhance the security of lives, peace and unity in communities.

Furthermore, our second research question addresses the poor attitude of people toward traditional rulers in the maintenance of peace and harmony in the Ideato North LGA of Imo State. According to Fatile et al. (2013), the effectiveness of our traditional system depends on our support. According to Peter (2014), most traditional rulers do not enjoy the support of people.

Conclusion

Basically, traditional rulers have a grip of all issues – conflict matters, peace/harmony issues, development issues, and security matters. They are therefore in a better position to play a role in the maintenance of peace in Nigeria. Based on the findings of this study, it was concluded that traditional rulers have put in place several measures in conflict resolution that have assisted in maintaining peace/harmony, law and order in their community.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, it was recommended that:

1. The Nigerian government (through the lawmakers) should empower the traditional rulers by amending the constitution to give them constitutional power/recognition to maintain peace, harmony and help in resolving conflicts.
2. There is a need for the people at the community level to give good support to the traditional rulers to encourage them for effective peace-building and conflict resolution.

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