

**FROM CONFLICT TO CONSENSUS: ASSESSING THE NEXUS
BETWEEN MEDIATION AND COMMUNAL PEACE IN BENUE
STATE, NIGERIA**

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ABSTRACT: Mediation is a traditional mechanism considered helpful in maintaining communal peace across the globe. It was used in former times to resolve conflict among individuals and communities, but the emergence of modernization has affected its use. Yet, it is still considered helpful in achieving communal peace. Despite the emergence of modern methods of resolving conflict, it has remained endemic in society, especially in Nigeria and Benue State. Mediation is considered part of the people's culture and hence was acceptable. The study undertook to assess how mediation engendered communal peace in Benue State. It investigates the use of mediation in resolving communal conflict. The literature was reviewed in line with the study's objective and was anchored on the Social Control theory. A cross-sectional research design was adopted. A total of 1128 respondents participated in the study and were selected using multiple-stage sampling techniques. A structured questionnaire and in-depth interview guide were used to collect both quantitative and qualitative data, which was analysed using descriptive statistics and content analysis. The hypothesis for the study was tested using the Pearson r statistical tool. The findings revealed deliberation by neutral third parties as an effective way of mediating and resolving communal conflicts. Test of hypothesis showed a significant relationship among the variables. The study recommends support for policies that recognize and integrate traditional mediation practices into the broader framework of conflict resolution and encouragement of traditional leaders to uphold peace, thereby promoting harmonious coexistence among diverse communities in Benue State, Nigeria.

Keywords: Conflict, Communal Peace, Benue State, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Resolution of conflict is the process by which two or more parties involved in disagreement come to an amicable agreement on how to proceed (Rafferty, 2017). Almost all conflicts in communities are resolved through traditional methods because traditional institutions are age long structures of every society (Kachii, 2019). These structures are components that represent different spheres or aspects of the life of members of every community: political, social, economic, and cultural (Utile & Tarnongo, 2024). Polese, Troisi, Torre and Maione (2017) posit that traditional mechanisms have been used in the resolution of conflict, though with a drastic reduction as democracies and modernisation continue to expand the frontiers of societies. Mediation as a mechanism of communal peace is important and the aim of this study.

In the United States of America, mediation and arbitration often called ADR or alternative dispute resolutions are the most well-known community dispute resolution (CDR) programmes available in most major American cities. These methods facilitate the resolution of conflicts that arise in American neighbourhoods. They are known by various names such as community mediation programmes, community conflict resolution programmes and neighbourhoods' justice centres. All of them apply traditional mechanisms, usually mediation, to help the parties solve their problem out of court (UNDP, 2022).

For Europe, traditional institutions combine conflict prevention, mediation and peace building in an effective way. Europe, have historically played vital roles in maintaining social order and resolving conflicts, based on their socio-cultural and historical contexts. For example, in the South-Eastern Europe, Albania, the Kanun a set of traditional Albanian laws, had historically been used for conflict resolution in Albania. It provides guidelines for mediation and reconciliation in disputes among families or communities. The process often involves community and traditional leaders (Tsuwa & Ochoga, 2015).

In Asia, Mainland China and Hong Kong show history of traditional models and the incorporation of mediation in conflict resolution. The Chinese have very few court litigations. Instead, they mediate. In South East Asia, Myanmar also requires the intervention of locals for conflict resolution, especially those that involve land disputes (Tsuwa & Ochoga, 2015).

In traditional African settings, traditional institutions are charged with legislative, executive, and judicial functions to make laws, execute them, and interpret and apply the fundamental laws, customs, and traditions of the people for the smooth running of their communities. Conflicts are usually managed and resolved based on the customs and traditions of the people. In Nigeria and Benue State in particular, the resolution of conflicts or disputes through peaceful means in line with the values of any given community is preferred rather than violence (Aluaigba, 2011).

There have been conflicts among Benue people themselves and also other ethnic groups in north-central Nigeria, with the attendant consequence of colossal loss of lives and property (Omotola 2006: 749). The cumulative effects of these lingering conflicts have destabilised Benue state, the North-central geopolitical zone, and Nigeria as a whole. It has also instigated economic and social dislocation in the zone in particular, as well as strangled the prospects of consolidating the fledgling democracy in Nigeria generally (Aluaigba, 2009). According to Nextier (2023), Benue State has recorded the most communal conflicts. The state has seemingly unending communal conflicts over the years. Between January 2021 and 14th June 2022, communal conflicts in Benue State accounted for seven incidents that resulted in 53 deaths. In fact, there have been a series of communal conflicts in Benue State especially among the Tiv people of Konshisha and the Igede people of Oju local government areas (Punch, 2020), Mbaivur and Mbasombo Clans of Gwer-East local government area (Punch, 2023), the Agila community (Benue) and Ngbo community of Ebonyi state (Premium Times, 2020). There is high contestation over land ownership and use in Benue state where agriculture is the main sustenance of the populace. This explains why a great deal of importance is attached to land in the state. While previous studies have addressed the role of traditional mechanisms in conflict resolution, there have been little or no clear-cut studies dwelling on the role of mediation in communal peace, especially in Benue state. It is against this

standing academic reality that this study examined mediation and communal peace in Benue State to answer the research questions below.

Research Hypotheses

Ho: There is no significant relationship between mediation and communal peace in Benue state, Nigeria.

H1: There is a significant relationship between mediation and communal peace in Benue State, Nigeria

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Conflict

Conflict refers to the contradictions inherent in power relations which manifest themselves in individuals and with nature in the pursuit of limited resources or opportunities. It can be creatively transformed to ensure equity, progress, and harmony; or destructively transformed to engender acute insecurity (Tsuwa & Adorawa, 2023). However, conflict connotes a wide range of understandings of a situation or behaviour in which the interests, needs, goals, or values of involved parties interfere with one another or are perceived to interfere with one another. Conflict is a disruption caused by different of ideas or actions often related to the selfish pursuit of needs that ends in state of unrest (Tsuwa & Adorawa, 2023).

Anene and Duru (2019), describe conflict as a condition identifiable group of human beings tribal, ethnic, linguistic, religious and socio-political or cultural groups in conscious opposition to one or more other identifiable human groups because these groups are seeking for better incompatible goals. Conflict is a particular relationship between states or rival factions within a state, which implies subjective hostilities or tension manifested in subversive economic or military hostility.

Mediation and Communal Peace

Mediation, in both traditional and Western societies, is a confidential process whereby a third party assists the parties in conflict to reach a mutually agreeable solution to their dispute. In Western society mediators play a strictly neutral role, ensuring that the parties arrive at their own agreement even if the mediator disagrees with it. In traditional society the mediator plays a role more like that of a conciliator. This is because in traditional societies the mediators try to ensure that as a result of the agreement “peace and harmony reigns supreme in society”. This is encapsulated in the saying “no victor, no vanquished” which means that if “we apportion blame to the guilty person we must do the same to the other party in the conflict” (Ajayi & Buhari 2014).

In some African ethnic groups such as the Pokot and Marakwet in Kenya and the Zulu and Batswana in South Africa, the mediators, who are family or community elders freely chosen by the parties, play a strictly neutral role as in Western systems (Sone 2016). The mediators listen to each party’s version and encourage them to understand and appreciate the interests of the other

party. The mediators do not impose a solution on the parties and facilitate the process to enable them to find a solution that is satisfactory to both. In most cases, the process “is usually effective, efficient and fair, and the outcome is often acceptable to the parties and is long-lasting” (Sone 2016). While, in other African societies, the role of a mediator is much more active like that of a conciliator, in order to move the parties toward reconciliation between themselves and reconciliation between the parties and their communities, which includes: pressurising, making recommendations, giving assessments, conveying suggestions on behalf of the parties, emphasising relevant norms and rules, envisaging the situation if an agreement is not reached, or repeating of the agreement already attained. (Ajayi & Buhari, 2014).

Mediation is considered an old method of conflict management surrounded by secrecy. It involves the non-coercive intervention of the mediator(s), called a third party, to reduce, go beyond, or bring conflict to a peaceful settlement (Anene & Duru, 2019). The mediators usually ensure that, peace and harmony reigned supreme in the traditional society at whatever level of mediation. The mediators are sought from within the immediate communities or societies of the parties. Relatedly, Adom (2023) notes that in fulfilling their roles as judges, the Tiv traditional Clan heads Mbatav of a community ask questions and weigh evidence and causes of a conflict in the light of cultural values and norms and the merits of individual assessments. In collaboration, Musingafi, Mafumbate and Khumalo (2019) assert that the Michu and Luba Bada framework in western Ethiopia, the Bashingantashé tradition in Burundi, the Koko (council of elders) among the Pokot and Marakwet in Kenya, the Gaada tradition among the Oromia people of Ethiopia, *Shir* traditional assembly in Somalia, and the *Akoko* peace conference in Sudan were traditionally employed as conflict resolution strategies in the Horn of Africa (HoA) in pre-colonial and post-colonial era to mediate inter-communal and intra-communal disputes and to foster healing process. The Gacaca court which literally means “a relaxing green lawn in Rwandan homestead” where members of community meet to resolve issues in the community is a pre-colonial conflict mediation tribunal that gained popularity after it was recognized by the 1996 law and constitution of 2003 to mediate cases of war crimes in Rwanda genocide (Musingafi, Mafumbate & Khumalo, 2019).

Accordingly, Paul (2023) described mediation as a structured interactive process where an impartial third party assist disputing parties in resolving conflict through the use of specialized communication and negotiation techniques. It is interesting to note that elders are respected as trustworthy mediators all over Africa because of their accumulated experiences and wisdom. Their roles depend on traditions, circumstances, and personalities accordingly. Some studies have classified the roles of mediation as including pressuring, making recommendations, giving assessments, conveying suggestions on behalf of the parties, emphasising relevant norms and rules, envisaging the situation if an agreement is not reached, or repeating the agreement already attained (Aluaigba, 2011). Studies have assessed the function of mediation as a catalyst in resolving communal disputes in Nigeria and it has been said that conflicts are more effectively settled through mediation and other combinations of Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR). In collaboration, Adom (2023) acknowledged age-grade as another formidable organisation that mediates and resolves problems in a remarkable way among the Tiv people of Benue state. They are a unique group of people who share paternal and maternal links with the disputing parties. Tradition prohibits parties who are in conflict with one another or who disagree with one another from attacking or harming one another during mediation. In their research, Clayton and Dorussen

(2022) examined the efficacy of mediation and peacekeeping in resolving conflicts. The empirical evidence indicates that mediation, as opposed to peacekeeping, is crucial in stopping hostilities. Mediation and peacekeeping are mostly complementary, but this complementarity is dependent on certain conditions.

Chuol (2023) studied the impact of mediation on resolving all kinds of conflict in Sudan. Using a desk research method, the findings suggest that mediation is a vital tool in conflict resolution and can provide opportunities for the warring parties to have greater control over the outcome of the dispute and can often bring about a peaceful resolution in a shorter period of time. Paul (2023) posits that: participation in the mediation process is voluntary because mediation does not establish guilt or innocence of the conflicting parties, the mediator's role is not one decision, but by providing procedural information, it stimulates the dialogue, facilitates the exchange of views and information between parties, helping the parties to clarify the needs and interests, overcome communication barriers and get to solving disagreements by finding mutually beneficial solutions.

Onuh (2023) emphasises the Ubuntu principle as a traditional peace-building mechanism in Southern Africa. He revealed that the Ubuntu mediation process encompasses five key stages, of which stage one entails a fact-finding and investigation where perpetrators are encouraged by the council of elders to accept responsibility when found guilty. Secondly, perpetrators are to genuinely show remorse for their actions and put-up repentant behaviour. Thirdly, perpetrators are encouraged to plead for mercy and victims for in turn are asked to show mercy. Fourthly, where necessary, perpetrators are encouraged by the council of elders to repatriate or compensate the victims for the wrong done. Lastly, the perpetrators and victims are encouraged to consolidate the peace-building by engaging in the reconciliation process of embracing each other and committing themselves to the healing process to foster peaceful coexistence and harmony in society.

Theoretical Framework

Social Control Theory

Social control theory is one of the fundamental theories in criminology. According to social control theory, behaviour is controlled and regulated by our social bonds. Individuals are less motivated to participate in deviant or criminal behaviour when their social bonds are strong. This is demonstrated in their attachment to other members of the community, engagement in social activities, and belief in social norms and values. Social control theory does not address the causes of crime but rather focuses on why people obey the law. In other words, it explains conformity rather than deviance. Social control theory is primarily associated with the work of Travis Hirschi (1969), an American social scientist who proposed that people generally conform to social norms due to strong social bonds. Conversely, they engage in delinquent acts when these bonds are broken or weak. The key components of social bonds are:

- i. Deviant behaviour is minimized when people have strong social bonds. The bonds encourage conformity to social norms and discourage deviance.
- ii. Society maintains order by punishing deviant behaviour and reaffirming its commitment to social rules.

- iii. The criminal justice system protects the power and privileges of the capitalist class.
- iv. The primary participants in deviant and criminal behaviour are people in the lower social classes.

In relation to the study, people who are closely attached to others, like friends and family and belief in common societal values might be more concerned about their opinions, and therefore, conform to norms to gain approval. The belief in common social norms and values could translate to belief in the mechanisms that may be instituted to address social issues including mediation for communal peace in Benue state. Traditional institutions in Benue State have their peculiar mechanisms of communal conflict resolution whereby traditional leaders and rulers mediate conflicting parties. And as a result of the social bonds, beliefs and values shared by members of the community, they tend to adhere to decisions taken and mechanisms stipulated by the traditional institutions, thereby paving the way for effective communal peace in the state.

Social control theory is not without criticisms. It places too much importance on social bonds relative to an individual and society, but it does not consider other concepts such as autonomy and impulsiveness. Also, it examines criminal behaviour by emphasizing deterrents rather than motivators. Despite these criticisms, social control theory is relevant to the study because the theory reinforces order and stability in the society, which is the hallmark of mediation and communal peace in Benue State. On the whole therefore, social control theory explained the relevance of mediation for communal peace in Benue State.

METHODS

The study adopted a cross-sectional research design. The cross-sectional research design is an observational study design where the investigator simultaneously examines both the outcome and the exposures of the study participants. The study was conducted in Benue State. The state is one of the North Central States in Nigeria with a projected population of 6,671,019 people (National Bureau of Statistics, 2022). The state was created on February 3rd 1976, with its capital located in Makurdi. Benue state has 23 local government areas including Ado, Agatu, Apa, Buruku, Gboko, Guma, Gwer-East, Gwer-West, Katsina-Ala, Konshisha, Kwande, Logo, Makurdi, Obi, Ogbadibo, Ohimini, Okpokwu, Oju, Otukpo, Tarka, Ukum, Ushongo, and Vandeikya respectively. It shares boundary with Nasarawa State to the north, Taraba State to the east, Kogi and Enugu States to the west, Ebonyi and Cross River States to the south. It has shares international borders with the Republic of Cameroon to the southeast. The population of Benue State is largely composed of the Tiv, Idoma, and Igede tribes. The state has a landmass of 33,955 square kilometres and lies between Latitudes 6.5⁰ and 8.5⁰ North and Longitudes 7.47⁰ N and 10⁰ East. Over the years, Benue state has experienced persistent communal conflicts and these conflicts often result in the displacement of people, destruction of properties, and loss of lives.

The target population of the study was the entire population residing in Benue State. In order to determine the sample size for the study, Cochran's (1977) formula for sample size determination was adopted. The formula is represented as thus;

$$n_o = \frac{z^2 Pq}{e^2}$$

Where n_o = Sample size; z = the selected critical value of desired confidence level (2.58); p = the estimated proportion of an attribute that is present in the population (0.5); $q = 1-p$; e = the desired level of precision (0.03). The Cochran formula enabled the calculation of an optimal sample size based on the desired level of accuracy, the desired level of confidence, and the expected portion of the attribute in the population. Therefore, the sample size for the quantitative study comprised 1,174 and 12 respondents for qualitative data, making an overall total of 1,186 respondents for the entire study which was used for both quantitative and qualitative data. Multi-stage sampling procedure was adopted to select the required number of respondents.

Data for the study was collected using structured questionnaire and in-depth interview guide. The questionnaire was structured in a closed-ended format. It elicited quantitative data from the respondents. It was divided into two (2) sections, with section A capturing the socio-demographic attributes of respondents, while section B containing questions on the objective of the study. An in-depth interview (IDI) guide was also used to gather qualitative data from traditional leaders, youth leaders, religious leaders, and elderly people. These category of respondents were believed to have esoteric knowledge on issue under consideration. The IDI guide was divided into two (2) sections. Section A was basically the interviewee consent form, while section B contained questions based on the research objective. Mean and standard deviation were used whereby the statements with the mean scores of 2.50 and above were accepted while those otherwise were rejected. The bivariate analysis was done using inferential statistical measures whereby Pearson's r correlation was used to test the study hypothesis. This study adopted a mixed method (triangulation) in data analysis. This was because triangulation or integrative method enabled the researcher to integrate quantitative and qualitative data to produce reliable and valid results.

RESULTS

A total of 1,174 structured questionnaires were administered, with 1,116 deemed usable. This figure represented a return rate of 95.0%, which was considered adequate for analysis. The results presented in this report were based on this number, along with the 12 in-depth interviews conducted.

Socio-Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents.

Table 1 displays data on the socio-demographic characteristics of respondents. From the table, the majority of the respondents (62.3%) were males. This implied that men, who are usually the head and decision-makers in the community, participated majorly in the study. The age pattern of the study revealed that the majority of respondents (29.4%) were between the ages of 42-53 years. This implied that the majority of the respondents were aged people and had more experience with issues of communal conflicts and traditional ways of resolving them. Data on the educational qualification of respondents indicated that (36.6%) have a Senior School Certificate Examination (SSCE), followed by those with a First School Leaving Certificate (FSLC). It implied many of the sampled respondents have lower academic certificates and this further justifies why they reside in

the rural areas to engage in farming activities. The involvement of this category of people in farming leads to high contestation over land ownership and triggering communal conflicts in the area. The marital status of respondents revealed the majority of the respondents were married. Meaning they were mature and had much experience of mediation as a tool for communal peace. Religious affiliation revealed majority of respondents are Christians and further confirming the assertion that, Benue State is generally dominated by Christians of different denominations with numerous Churches. The result also confirmed the true religious life of the Benue people. The occupational distribution of the respondents revealed many of the respondents (36.8%) were farmers. Farmers attach much value to land, and this often results in high contestation over land ownership and use. This could be the reason why there have been incessant communal conflicts in the study area. In view of the monthly income of the respondents, the study discovered that many of the respondents (35.7%) earned from 46002-55001 naira. This means that the majority of the sampled respondents earned a very meagre amount of income, considering the present economic situation. This may also be a reason for instigating communal conflict for selfish interests. Place of residence of the respondents, the study found majority of the respondents (64.4%) lived in the rural area. This implies that majority of the respondents were drawn from the rural setting where land is the source of livelihood and could lead to high tussle over its ownership and use, leading to communal conflicts in the area. The findings are summarized in table 1 below:

Table 1: Percentage distribution of respondents by socio-demographic characteristics

Variable	Categories	Frequency (N=1116)	Percentage %
Sex	Male	695	62.3
	Female	421	37.7
Age	18-29	201	18.0
	30-41	308	27.0
	42-53	328	29.4
	54 +	279	25.0
Educational attainment	No formal	91	8.1
	Primary	363	32.5
	Secondary	408	36.6
	Tertiary	254	22.8
Marital status	Single	215	19.3
	Married	598	53.6
	Divorced	67	6.0
	Widowed/widower	101	9.0
	Separated	135	12.1

Religious affiliation	Christianity	905	81.1
	Islam	53	4.7
	Traditional religion	158	14.2
Occupation	Farming	411	36.8
	Public/civil servant	179	16.0
	Trader	301	27.0
	Students	37	3.3
	Applicant	145	13.0
	Artisans	39	3.5
	Others	4	0.4
Monthly income	500-10001	45	4.0
	10002-19001	52	4.6
	19002-28001	61	5.5
	28002-37001	86	7.7
	37002-46001	97	8.7
	46002-55001	398	35.7
	55002 +	377	33.8
Place of residence	Urban	397	35.6
	Rural	719	64.4

Source: Field Survey, 2024.

Data in Table 1 showed the relevant demographic characteristics of respondents covered in the study. This was necessary to understand the nature of respondents and their relevance in providing useful information necessary to address the study's objectives. It also had implications for the findings and generalisations. Analysis of these characteristics showed the suitability of respondents and validity of findings.

Mediation

Data collected on mediation indicated that, a majority of the respondents with the mean scores of 2.9 were of the opinion that deliberation by neutral third parties was an effective method for resolving communal conflicts in Benue State. Most of the respondents (M-2.7) were of the view that trained mediators help find mutually acceptable solutions to communal conflicts and this was accepted by the mean scores of 2.8. The findings also showed that, majority of the respondent's resolved conflict using voluntary resolution process to ensure cultural sensitivity. While other respondents agreed that the mediation process was transparent and inclusive in conflict resolution, and some of the respondents agreed that mediation should be the first step in addressing communal

conflicts before resorting to other methods, such as litigation or law enforcement. Similarly, other respondents admitted that deliberations focus on restoring relationships and rebuilding trust among communities and mediators prioritise the needs and interests of all parties involved in the conflict resolution process. These responses were agreed with the mean scores of above 2.50. The findings are summarized in table

Table 2: Respondents' rating of mediation

S/N	Items	Yes	Not sure	No	Mean Scores	Standard Deviation
1	Deliberation by neutral third parties is an effective method for resolving communal conflicts.	1099	13	4	2.9	.16017
2	Trained mediators help find mutually acceptable solutions to communal conflicts.	879	162	75	2.7	.57976
3	Traditional mechanisms in the voluntary resolution process ensure cultural sensitivity.	988	105	23	2.8	.39794
4	Mediation processes are transparent and inclusive in conflict resolution.	898	129	89	2.7	.59568
5	Mediation should be the first step in addressing communal conflicts before resorting to other methods, such as litigation or law enforcement.	1099	15	2	2.9	.14261
6	Deliberations focus on restoring relationships and rebuilding trust among communities.	1110	4	2	2.9	.10349
7	Mediators prioritise the needs and interests of all parties involved in the conflict resolution process.	716	313	87	2.5	.63421
Cluster mean					2.77	

Source: Field survey, 2024 (N=1116).

The data in table 4.4 indicated the rating of mediation in conflict resolution in Benue State, Nigeria. All the means were above the accepted point of 2.50, showing acceptability of the mediation in resolving communal conflict. The values of standard deviation were between 0.1 and 0.6 which shows how close the values are to the mean.

Test of Hypothesis

Ho: There is no significant relationship between mediation and communal peace in Benue state, Nigeria.

H1: There is a significant relationship between mediation and communal peace in Benue State, Nigeria

One of the hypotheses tested in the study was “there is no significant relationship between mediation and communal conflict resolution in Benue state, Nigeria”. Findings on the correlation of mediation and communal conflict resolution indicated a significant relationship at 0.01 and 0.05 level. This implied that there is significant relationship between mediation and communal conflict resolution in Benue state, Nigeria.

Table 3: Pearson correlations between mediation and communal conflict resolution

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1 Deliberation by neutral third parties is an effective method for resolving communal conflicts.	1							
2 Trained mediators help find mutually acceptable solutions to communal conflicts.	.349**	1						
3 Traditional mechanisms in the voluntary resolution process ensure cultural sensitivity.	.551**	.804**	1					
4 Mediation processes are transparent and inclusive in conflict resolution.	.341**	.960**	.831**	1				
5 Mediation should be the first step in addressing communal conflicts before resorting to other methods, such as litigation or law enforcement.	.968**	.355**	.560**	.346**	1			
6 Deliberations focus on restoring relationships and rebuilding trust among communities.	.749**	.206**	.325**	.201**	.721**	1		
7 Mediators prioritise the needs and interests of all parties involved in the conflict resolution process.	.290**	.824**	.693**	.821**	.295**	.171**	1	

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed).

The result in Table 4.9 showed that mediation correlated with communal conflict resolution at 0.05 and 0.01 levels of significance. Therefore, the null hypothesis, “there is no significant relationship between mediation and communal peace in Benue state, Nigeria,” was rejected, and the alternate accepted to read “there is significant relationship between mediation and communal peace in Benue state, Nigeria. The results from the IDI corroborated the findings from the quantitative data. An informant had this to say

At any time there are communal conflicts in our community, as traditional rulers, we enter into the matter by inviting others who are neutral to the conflicts. That is, those who are not part of the communal conflicts collaborate with them and invite the conflicting parties or communities to come. When they come, we take time to talk to them, we enquire to know what really makes them engage in the conflict, and after hearing from both

parties, we decide on what to do to end the communal conflicts. If it were land matter, we do go there and see everything by ourselves, and we ask the other people whom we have invited to be part of us and who know much about the land issues in the area to tell us the truth regarding the land under contentions. Having listened to them, we unanimously take a decision that always leads to the ending of the conflicts based on the principle of impartiality. Although, in most cases, the conflicting parties or communities found it difficult to give up, we also continued to talk to them and in the end, they agreed to embrace peace. **(IDI, 7th September, Male, Kindred Head, Aged 51, Ogwule-Ogbaulu Council Ward, Agatu Local Government Area, 2024).**

Similarly, another informant said:

After the persuasion, we do call on the trustworthy persons in the communities who are not part of the conflict and we join forces with them to mediate between the conflicting parties or communities. We do so by inviting them for a meeting in the village hall. When they both come, we seek to know the facts regarding the communal conflict as to what exactly is the bone of contention. Thereafter, we decide on the appropriate conflicts, and we solely rely on nothing but the truth and in the end, the conflict would be resolved. However, sometimes, one of the conflicting parties will prove stubborn, and, in that case, we insist on the right thing to be done since no one is above the collective decision of the kinsmen. **(IDI, 15th August, Male, Kindred Head, Aged 58, Mbazungwe in Nyiev Council Ward, Guma Local Government Area, 2024).**

Furthermore, an informant averred that:

In mediation, the elderly people who are not part of the conflicts do call on youths and others and tell them why they have to unit and fight for a common purpose instead of attacking themselves; they should rather bury their individual differences and think about how to achieve a common goal after all communal conflict does more harm than good. By doing so, the conflicting parties feel relief and quickly calm down and discontinue the conflicts. **(IDI, 8th September, Female, woman leader, Aged 40, Obagaji Council Ward, Agatu Local Government Area, 2024).**

Again, one of the informants submitted that:

At this point of mediation, we seek to know the truth as related to the communal conflicts by calling on others who are neutral to the conflicts; by the time they come, we also call on the conflicting parties to come, and they too do honour our invitation. After they all gather, we counsel with them regarding the dangers of the conflict and ask them to forgive one another

and forge ahead with their communal way of life as this would bring more development in the communities than carrying arms against each other. **(IDI, 15th August, Male, Community Elder, Aged 62, Mbawa Council Ward, Guma Local Government Area, 2024).**

Based on the above expressions from the Key Informants, it was inferred that mediation is very important in achieving communal peace because through mediation, all the community members including the conflicting parties are assembled together and the truth is gotten from them for the purposes of finding possible solution to the conflicting issue.

Similarly, another informant said:

After persuading them and they agree to come together, we mediate by inviting other community members who are not part of the conflicts. We stand in between them by constantly talking to them to give peace a chance and think of oneness as it has ever been part of our lives. With these words, we are able to resolve the communal conflicts. **(IDI, 10th August, Male, Youth leader, Aged 38, Kendev Council Ward, Ukum Local Government Area, 2024).**

Again, one of the informants had this to say:

I will make reference to my council ward, which I am most conversant with. Normally, our traditional rulers, particularly our district head, meet with other members of our community and parties that are involved in the dispute to convince them, try to make them understand that there is a reason they should be in peace and by this, he is able to resolve the land dispute amicably. **(IDI, 10th August, Male, Youth Leader, Aged 37, Tsaav Council Ward, Ukum Local Government Area, 2024).**

Similarly, an informant averred that:

Yes, mediation has been carried out by our traditional institution and has been effective too. Our traditional institution has mediated many internal communal conflicts among our brothers here, and it has yielded a fruitful result. Again, the communal conflict between the Bonta community of Konshisha and the Okpute community of Oju Local Government Areas, it was our traditional institution that persuaded mediation and reconciliation, in conjunction with the State government and centre for humanitarian dialogue where a peace agreement was signed by the warring parties without necessarily going to court. So, it is effective **(IDI, 30th August, Male, Elder, Aged 62, Oju Council Ward, Oju Local Government Area, 2024).**

Mediation as a way of resolving communal conflict enabled one of the conflicting parties to withdraw themselves from such acts as it is harmful in all aspect of life. As community members who are willing to welcome developmental projects, they are made to forgive one another and embrace peace as this is the only way development can thrive

In the same vein, another informant had this to say:

During mediation, we the youth leaders, elders, traditional rulers among others do enter into the matter and ask the warring parties to tell us exactly the matter that is`bothering them that calls for conflicts. After hearing from both parties, we counselled them to bury their differences and think of oneness as people who have been living together for years. Through this mediation, the conflicting parties do see the need to forgive one another and live together as one family. So, mediation has been fruitful in resolving communal conflict in our communities **(IDI, 30th August, Male, Youth Leader, Aged 35, Oju Council Ward, Oju Local Government Area, 2024.**

Findings from the in-depth interviews corroborated the various ways of mediation in communal peace. According to the findings from IDI, mediation is very much important because most at times traditional rulers who involved in conflicts resolution after persuading the conflicting parties and they agree to come together, they mediate by inviting other community members who are not part of the conflicts and stand in between them by constantly talking to them to give peace a chance and think of oneness as it has ever been part of their lives.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The study examined the nexus between mediation and communal peace in Benue state, Nigeria. Both qualitative and quantitative data showed that mediation is a very effective mechanism of achieving communal peace in the area. It was effectively employed to manage and resolve communal conflict in Benue state by traditional institutions. This corroborated Ajai (2014), who agreed that, one of the methods of performing conflict resolution in African traditional societies is mediation. The study revealed a huge connectivity between mediation and communal peace in Benue State, Nigeria. This also corroborated Nwolise (2004), who earlier argued that more than 70% of traditional African societies still maintain and practice their traditional means of social control. In Benue State, mediation is constantly used in communal conflict resolution as many conflict cases are not taken before the criminal justice system but are dealt with at the traditional level either by the traditional council or leaders. In corroboration, Braimah (1998) assert that, in the last centuries, modern social conflict resolution has yet to gain acceptance in traditional African societies. Again, the study revealed traditional mechanisms as culturally relative. This also corroborated Wassara (2007), who stated that the application of these mechanisms differs from one ethnic group to another.

The study revealed that trained mediators helped find mutually acceptable solutions to communal conflicts and the deliberation by these neutral third parties was an effective method for resolving

communal conflicts (M-2.9) as facts or truths surrounding the conflicts were revealed and decisions were taken to resolve the conflicts based on the available facts discovered. In corroboration, Chuol (2023) studied the impact of mediation on resolving all kinds of conflicts in Sudan using a desk research method; the findings show that mediation enables the parties involved in the conflict to engage in dialogue and reach mutually acceptable solutions while also promoting peaceful cooperation. He further stated that mediation is a vital tool in conflict resolution and can provide opportunities for the warring parties to have greater control over the outcome of the dispute and can often bring about a peaceful resolution in a shorter period of time. Similarly, Anene & Duru (2019), in their findings, also corroborate this study that mediation involves the non-coercive intervention of the mediator (s), called a third party, either to reduce, go beyond, or bring the conflict to a peaceful settlement.

The study also found that the voluntary resolution process ensures cultural sensitivity (M-2.8) and the mediation processes are transparent and all-inclusive in conflict resolution (M-2.7). This corroborates the findings of Adom (2023); thus, in fulfilling their roles as judges, the Tiv traditional Clan heads Mbaterev of a community ask questions and weigh the evidence and causes of a conflict in the light of cultural values and norms and the merits of individual assets. The study reviewed that deliberations involved in mediation are focused on restoring relationships and rebuilding trust among communities, and mediators prioritise the needs and interests of all parties involved in the conflict resolution process (M-2.9). In corroboration, Paul (2023) found that participation in the mediation process is voluntary because mediation does not establish the guilt or innocence of the conflicting parties, the mediator's role is not one decision but by providing procedural information to stimulate the dialogue and facilitates the exchange of views and information between parties, helping the parties to clarify the needs and interests, overcome communication barriers and get to solving disagreements by finding mutually beneficial solutions

Conclusions and Recommendations

The study has demonstrated the significant role of mediation as an effective mechanism for achieving communal peace in Benue State, Nigeria. Both qualitative and quantitative data confirmed that mediation, especially as employed by traditional institutions, is a culturally relevant and practical method of managing and resolving conflicts. It is not only a means of resolving disputes but also a tool for rebuilding relationships and restoring trust within communities. Trained mediators, acting as neutral third parties, facilitate dialogues that lead to mutually acceptable solutions. Furthermore, the transparency, inclusiveness, and cultural sensitivity of the mediation process have been identified as critical factors contributing to its success in Benue State. These insights provide valuable guidance for policymakers, community leaders, and researchers seeking to promote sustainable peace.

The study, therefore, recommends that there should be institutional support for policies that formally recognise and integrate traditional mediation practices into the broader framework of conflict resolution. This could involve establishing partnerships between traditional councils and formal judicial systems. Also, community leaders should be encouraged to continue their roles as custodians of peace, ensuring that mediation processes remain transparent, inclusive, and culturally sensitive. On their part, researchers should conduct comparative studies across different

Nigerian states to explore variations in the effectiveness of mediation practices and identify best practices that could be replicated. These efforts will help strengthen the capacity of communities to resolve conflicts and foster lasting social harmony in Benue State, the North central region and Nigeria at large.

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