

# Traditional Institutions and the Management of Communal Conflict in Kwande Local Government Area of Benue State, Nigeria

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## Abstract

*This paper examines the role of traditional institutions in managing communal conflict with a particular focus on Mbaikyaa and Dzev communities of Kwande Local Government Area of Benue State. It uses a Survey design and the data was analysed using Structural Functional theory. The paper discovered that the major cause of the conflict between the Mbaikyaa and Dzev communities is contestation over land. The paper also revealed that this conflict has become a perennial issue and has caused unplanned migration, heightened insecurity and disruption of economic activities. The paper also uncovered that Traditional Institutions in Kwande Local Government Area employed various conflict management mechanisms such as negotiation and mediation in resolving the conflict but these strategies have failed as a result of limited legal and binding authority of the traditional institution to enforce decisions, unprofessional mediatory skills of traditional institution, and lack of victim representation in the negotiation and mediation process. The study recommends that the traditional institution should be given legal backing and be trained in professional ways of Alternative Dispute Resolution to equip them with the knowledge to handle conflicts in their domain.*

**Keywords: Traditional Institutions, Conflict, Communal conflict, Conflict management,**

## Introduction

Globally, all societies have their traditional systems that are particular to them. These traditional systems include some institutionalized frameworks that regulate their cultural, socio-economic and political lifestyle and intergroup relations with other societies. As Ohiole and Ojo (2015, p.16) point out,

“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”

In many African societies, traditional institutions are at the heart of community mobilization and administration. These community efforts transcend socio-political, economic, security and cultural issue. 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 promote the principle of fairness, equity and justice.

From Enyi's explanations above, we could argue that the traditional institution has been relevant in the area of the management of conflicts which has been one of the major challenges ravaging almost all parts of the world. Nigeria for instance has fallen victim to conflicts of

various forms with consequences on the livelihood of her people and its existence. From the religious sphere for instance, Ikejani (2005) as cited in Salawu (2010) submits that there is persistent ethno-religious conflict in Nigeria, offering insights into their causes and proposing strategies for better management. He highlights that Nigeria, with over 400 ethnic groups and two major religions Christianity and Islam has experienced numerous ethno-religious conflicts since its independence. It is not, an exaggeration to report that no state in Nigeria is immune to the 'disease' of communal conflicts. Agreeing with this, Alimba (2014, p.24) submits that, "communal conflicts exist in all the geopolitical zones of the country. There is no part of the country that is spared from these conflict".

In Benue State, various communities have engaged in various forms of communal conflict over contested land, fish ponds, and chieftaincy among others. This situation has challenged the principle of peaceful intergroup coexistence between the various ethnic and community groups. Some of the protuberant conflicts in Benue State include the Tiv /Jukun conflict at Abinsi, Mbakor/Nongov in Tarkaa and Guma, Mbagwaza/Tsambe in Ushongo and Vandeikya, Mbasombo/Mbaivur in Ikpayongo, Agatu fish pond among others. These conflicts have not only contributed to the breakdown of socio-economic and political activities, but has also strained relationship among those who had once lived together peacefully.

Kwande Local Government Area has experienced conflicts on many fronts. It has been confronted by attacks from their Cameronian neighbours at many intervals including the inflow of refugees and the challenges of hosting them. It has faced the challenge of herders and bandits invasion with devastating consequences such as maiming, killings and the destruction of lives and property. Apart from externally induced conflicts, the indigenous people of Kwande have also engaged one another in communal conflicts with devastating consequences on socio-economic and political activities in the area. Managing and resolving these conflicts and building peace in the area has become problematic. The absence of government security infrastructure in the area has placed overwhelming pressure on the traditional institution in the management and resolution of these conflicts.

One of the communal conflicts that have challenged the traditional institution in Kwande Local Government is the Mbaikyaa and Dzev conflict. Traditional institutions in Kwande Local Government Area have employed various conflict resolution mechanisms that are deeply ingrained in the cultural fabric of the society. This mechanism may involve mediation, arbitration and negotiation, all of which are conducted within the framework of local customs and traditions. The involvement of respected elders and chiefs often lends credibility to these processes, as their decisions are generally accepted and respected by community members.

While traditional institutions are known for playing crucial roles in conflict management, contemporary challenges have emerged that deserve exploration. The impact of modernization, changing demographics and external influences has also altered the dynamics of conflict, potentially affecting the efficacy of traditional mechanisms in resolving conflict. Moreover, the interface between customary practices and formal legal system has posed complexities that need to be navigated thoughtfully. This is why this paper seeks to examine the efforts by traditional institutions in Kwande Local Government in managing and resolving conflict with particular interest in the Mbaikyaa and Dzev conflict.

### **Conceptualising Traditional Institutions**

**Traditional Institutions:** Traditional institutions refer to the indigenous political arrangements whereby leaders with proven track records are appointed and installed in line with the provisions of their native laws and customs (Orji, & Olali, 2019). The essence of the institutions is to preserve the customs and traditions of the people and to manage conflicts arising among or between members of the community by the instrumentality of laws and customs of the people. Traditional institutions are the custodian of their people's norms, cultures and practices. In most African settings, just as it is obtainable in many parts of Nigeria, selection of persons into the offices of traditional institutions is hereditary or by selection or election by the instrument of relevant traditional methods. The mode of selection of the occupant of traditional institutions varies in Africa in general and in Nigeria in particular from various ethnic groups to other

ethnic groups or communities to communities.

Traditional institutions are symbols of indigenous peoples' rights, privileges, laws, customs and traditions which include but not limited to paramount rulers and their councils. The traditional institutions in the Nigerian context is inclusive of the chiefs-in-council, elders-in-council, and title holders who may be appointed based on their contributions to the growth and development of their communities with or little no executive, legislative or judicial powers (Aidelokhai,2018).

According to (Orji, & Olali, 2019, p.112), traditional institutions refer to the native political provisions whereby leaders with confirmed track records are chosen and appointed or elected in line with the necessary requirements of their traditional customs and laws. The aims of the traditional institutions are to preserve the customs and traditions of the people in their localities and to make decisions on issues related to the political movement of the people in all the societies across the nation. However, traditional institutions also played a significant role in managing conflicts rising between or among the public in their various communities using laws and customs of society.

Moreover, Nweke (2012), points out that traditional institutions are the custodian of their people's norms, cultures, and practices. In most African settings, appointing people into various traditional institutions is hereditary or by election or selection by the relevant traditional rulers or kingmakers.

The mode of selection of traditional rulers differs from society to society. For instance, in Africa in general and precisely Nigeria, it differs from one ethnic group to another. Traditional institutions are symbols of indigenous peoples' rights, privileges, laws, customs, and traditions which include but not limited to paramount rulers and their councils. The traditional institutions in the Nigerian context are inclusive of the chiefs-in-council, elders-in council, title holders who may be appointed based on their contributions to the growth and development of their communities with or little no executive, legislative or judicial powers (Orji & Olali, 2019).

### **Conceptualizing Conflict and Communal Conflict**

Conflict is a disruption caused by differing of ideas or actions, often related to the selfish pursuit of needs that ends in state of unrest. To Tsuwa and Ochoga (2015) conflict is natural to human life and can be sometimes destructive or productive depending on the circumstance and it is inevitable in everyday life. Conflict refers to the contradictions inherent in power relations and which manifest themselves in individual and group interactions with one another and with its nature in the pursuit of limited resources or opportunities. Conflict is the motor of transformation and is either positive or negative. It can be creatively transformed to ensure equity, progress and harmony; or destructively transformed to engender acute insecurity:

Tsuwa (2014, p.4) asserts that,

“the term conflict usually refers to a condition in which one identifiable group of human beings in a given environment (whether tribal, ethnic, linguistic, cultural, religions, socioeconomic, political, among others) is engaged in conscious opposition to or more identifiable human groups because these groups are pursuing what are or appear to be incompatible goals”.

Stranger as quoted in Angya and Doki (2016) define conflict as a situation in which two or more human beings desire goals which they perceive as being obtainable by one or the other, but not both. Each party is mobilizing energy to obtain a goal, a desired object or situation and each perceives the other as a barrier or threat to that goal. Clark (2018, p.21) also agrees with the above premise where he observes that; Conflict comes from an incompatibility of goals a struggle over values and claims to scarce status, power and resources in which the aims of the opponent are to neutralize, injure or eliminate their rivals. Arguing in the same vein Newman (2018,p.18 ) asserts that:

“conflict is a social condition which arises where two or more parties pursue goals which are compatible “this is indeed a good description of persistent farmers' /herders' conflict in Central Nigeria where the farmers struggle to have access to fertile lands

while the herders pursue good pasture and water for their herds.

Communal conflict is defined as a conflict between non-state groups that are organized along a shared communal identity. They are products of social relations and involve threat or action of one party directed at the community's rights, interest, privileges of another because of differences over economic issues, power or authority, cultural values and beliefs, (Tsuwa, 2014). Communal conflict is defined in this study as a conflict between non-state groups that are organized along a shared community identity. This is succinctly captured in Kachi (2019) who sees conflict as the struggle between parties who want to gain control over some disputed and perceived indivisible resource, such as a piece of land or local political power. The groups involved are non-state groups. This means that neither actor controls the state, although the state might be involved as an important supporting actor in a communal conflict thus, this category of collective violence is more symmetric than typical civil wars. In communal conflicts, no actor is empowered with the authority that a government has, and none of the parties is in control of the national army. Likewise, the groups are not formally organised rebel groups with standing capacities for violence but are groups that only occasionally organise to engage in conflict. The higher level of organisation and material strength of state-based conflicts means that they usually have a higher destructive potential, and a tendency to drag on for a longer time than communal conflicts.

### **Conceptualizing Conflict Management**

Conflict management according to Tsuwa & Ochoga (2015) connote containment of conflict through steps introduced to promote conditions in which collaborative and valued relationships control the behavior of conflicting parties, in other words, conflict prevention. To Best (2012) conflict management is a process of reducing the negative and destructive capacity of conflict through a number of measures and by working with and through the parties involved in that conflict. It is sometimes used synonymously with conflict regulation and covers the entire area of handling conflicts positively at differently stages, including those efforts made to prevent conflict by being proactive. It also involves negotiation, mediation, arbitration and reconciliation. For instance, the boundary dispute between Nigeria and Cameroun, especially over the Bakassi Peninsula went through various stages of conflict management, including the judicial pronouncement by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in 2002 and the process is still ongoing.

Conflict management is the application of resolution and stimulation techniques to regulate the level and impact of disruptive conflict within an entity, while harnessing the more positive and constructive aspects of collaboration, cooperation and compromise. It is a process that seeks to remove cognitive barriers to agreement and group synergy. It often covers an array of measures of conflict resolution: problem solving, super-ordinate goals, expansion of resources, avoidance, smoothing, compromise, authoritative command, and altering the human and structural variables (Osisioma, 2004). Generally, conflict management involves a process of limiting the negative aspects of conflict while increasing the positive aspects of it. The aim of conflict management is to enhance learning and group outcomes, including effectiveness or performance in a given situation. The term is perhaps an admission of the reality that conflict is a *sine qua non* to human affairs, but that not all conflict can always be resolved, therefore, what practitioners can do is to manage and regulate them.

Conflict management has been defined in different ways. However, for the purpose of this paper, conflict management shall be understood as a process of limiting the negative aspect of conflict while increasing the positive aspects (Rahim, 2002). He also notes that the aim of conflict management is to enhance learning and group outcomes. Conflict management can also refer to as the ability to identify and handle conflicts sensibly, fairly and efficiently. Since conflict has become part of human existence, it is important that there should be people who understand conflict and apply relevant strategies to manage them.

### **Methodological and Theoretical Framing**

Survey design was adopted to guide the gathering of data for this paper. The study population was drawn from 6,030 respondents (Source: National Population Commission, 2022 projected population) drawn from Mbaikyaa and Dzev communities in Kwande Local Government Area of Benue State which consist of Chiefs, Village heads, elders, other community members and those affected by this conflict directly.

S.N	Local Government Communities	Population
	Mbaikyaa	4000
	Dzev	2030
	Total	6030

The paper adopts proportional sampling in selecting the appropriate respondents for the study. The choice of this sampling method is because it helps produce a representative sample that accurately reflects the population. Therefore, respondents were proportionally selected from relevant stakeholders which includes chiefs, village heads, elders, other community members and those affected by this conflict directly in the two selected council wards in Kwande Local Government Area of Benue State.

The data for this study were collected from primary and secondary sources. The study utilized the Questionnaire and Key Informant Interviews (KII) as the main instruments in the extraction of primary data. From secondary sources, the study engaged the examination of documented evidence as well as existing literature such as textbooks, magazines, newspapers, conference papers, seminar papers, and statements of commentators as concerns the issue at hand. The data collected was analysed quantitatively and qualitatively.

### **Theoretical Framework:**

The study adopts the Structural–Functionalism theory as propounded by Augustus Comte, Herbert Spencer, Emile Durkheim, William James and Talcott Parson, who later refined the theory. The theory that was dominant in Sociology views society as a set of interconnected parts that together form a whole. However, the theory, which witnessed a significant drop from the discipline of Sociology partly because of criticisms against it, was adopted in political and administrative studies.

The core assumption of the structural-functional approach is that a universal set of political functions can be defined and associated with different structures in different political systems. In other words, all political systems perform the same core set of functions, although these functions may be performed by different structures from one society to another.

Political system here refers to a set of interactions, institutions and agencies concerned with formulating and implementing collective goals of society by employment or threat of employment of more or less legitimate physical compulsion. It exists in both domestic and international environment shaping, these environments and being shaped by the environment. The literature on structural-functional analysis has identified five types of political structures located within the modern political system: political parties, interest groups, legislature, executives/bureaucracies, and the courts.

In existing Western systems, political parties are largely but by no means exclusively associated with interest aggregation; interest groups with interest articulation, legislature with rulemaking or policy formulation, executives and bureaucracies with rule application or policy implementation and judiciary with rule adjudication. Besides, two other structural components of the political system are the mass media and the range of other social institutions (e.g. the families, schools and churches) that play a key role along with more obviously political institutions such as parties in maintaining or adapting the political system especially by performing the functions of political socialisation, communication, and recruitment. The inclusion of these social institutions within the political system suggests that the boundaries between the political system and other social systems are not physical but behavioural. While the seven structures mentioned above are found in almost all modern political systems, these structures may perform different functions or may be organized differently across political systems.

Thus, applying the theory to the study shows that the traditional 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 the custom and traditions of a people. Whether formally or informally established, they constitute a viable political instrument for the mobilization

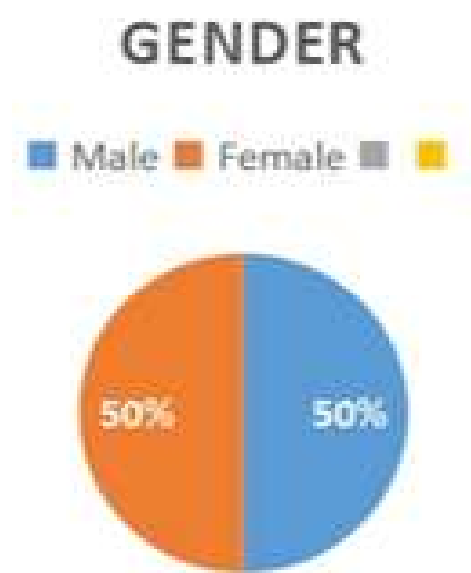
of community members in the process of performing their structural functions. The traditional institution contributes significantly, functioning for the maintenance of systems through the management of communal conflicts in society. This emphasizes that the management of communal conflict and maintenance of social, political, economic, and cultural stability in society from the structural-functionalist perspective entails functions performed by the traditional institution as a structure in the society to move the entire society towards peace, tranquility, and development. Informed by the fundamental assumption of the structural functionalist theory, Kwande Local Government Area a traditional council has structures assigned with specific functions to perform. The Local Government Area has the following traditional rulership structure:

- (i) Tor Kwande
- (ii) Ter Kwande
- (iii) Mue Ter
- (iv) Tyoor
- (v) Or-tar
- (vi) Ator-A-Kpande

Each of the structures strives to perform the functions assigned to it by the Benue State Local Government laws to ensure the survival of the system at large. This structural arrangement of Kwande LGA Traditional institution is an apt representation of the assumption of the structural functionalist theory which builds its arguments on structures and functions they perform.

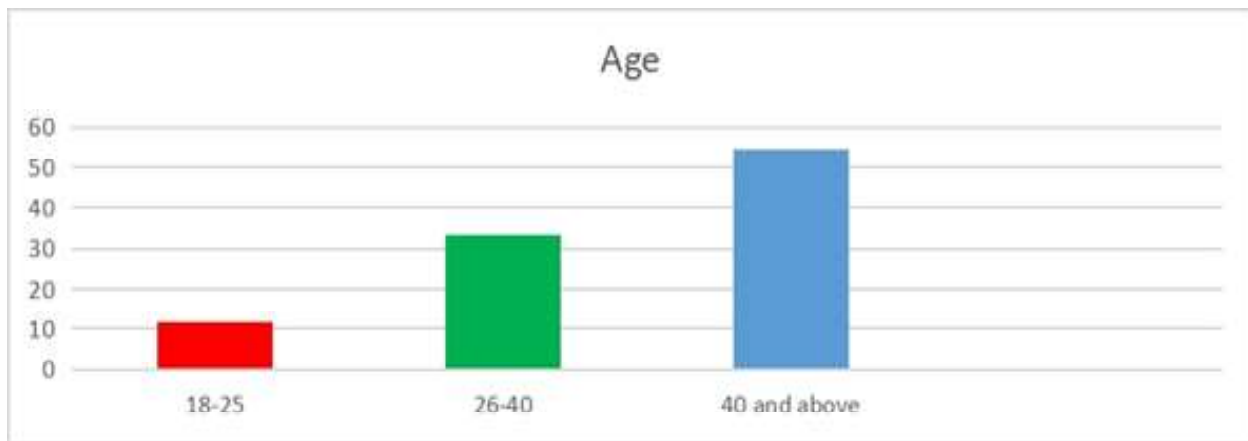
### Data Presentation and Analysis

**Table 1: Socio-Demographic Analysis of Respondents**



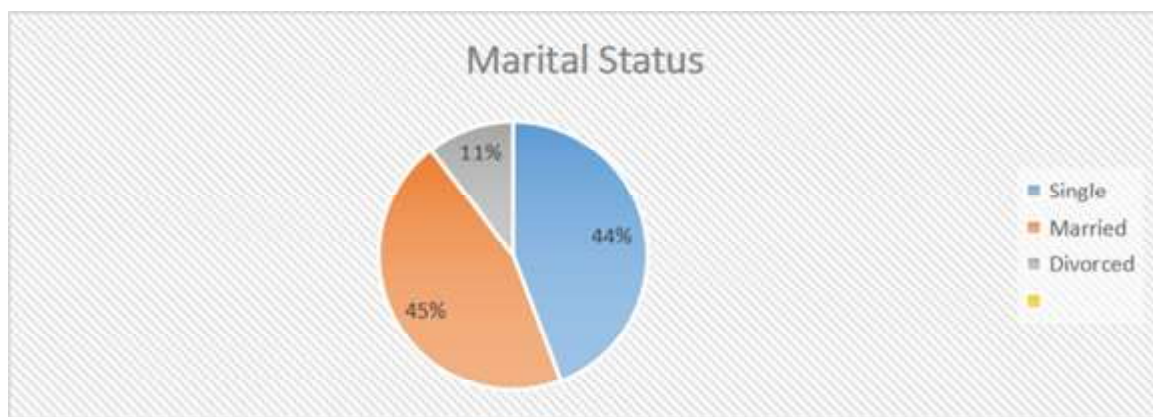
**Source: Field Survey, (2024)**

Presented in figure above shows the gender distribution of Results obtained revealed that majority of the respondents (50.50%) were males compared to females (49.50%). This indicates that both male and female dominates the study area



Source: Field Survey, (2024)

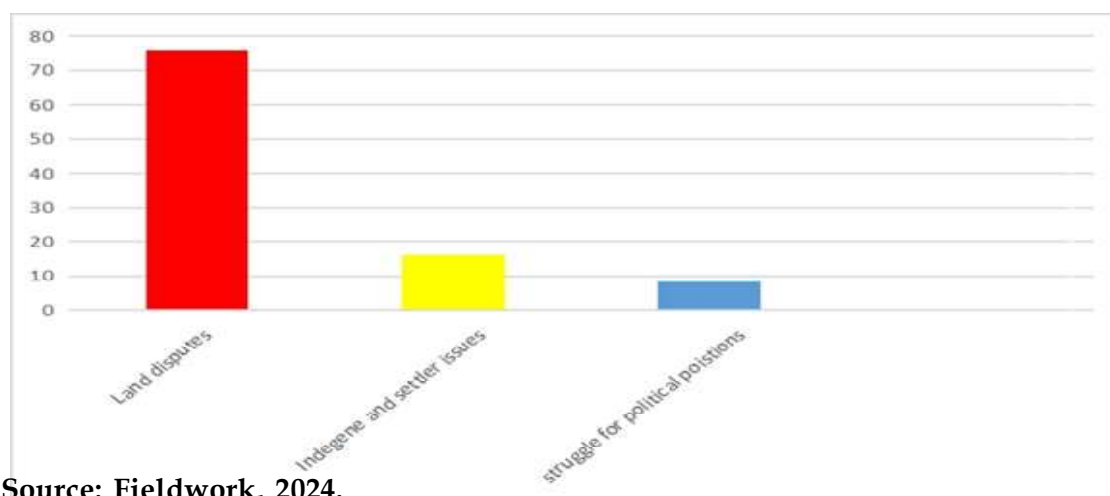
The figure above shows the age distribution of respondents. Thus, majority of the respondents were within ranges of 40 years and above (54.70%), this was followed by those within age ranges of 26-40years (33.40%) and 18-25 years (11.80%) respectively



Source: Field Survey, (2024)

Most of the respondents (45.30%) were married compared to those who were single (44.20%) and divorced (10.50%). This shows that married dominate the study and are more aware of the role of traditional rulers in conflict management

**Table 2: What are the causes of communal conflict between the Mbaikyaa and Dzev communities in Kwande Local Government Area of Benue State?**



Source: Fieldwork, 2024.

Table 4.2.2 above shows that 286 (75.3%) respondents agreed that the major cause of

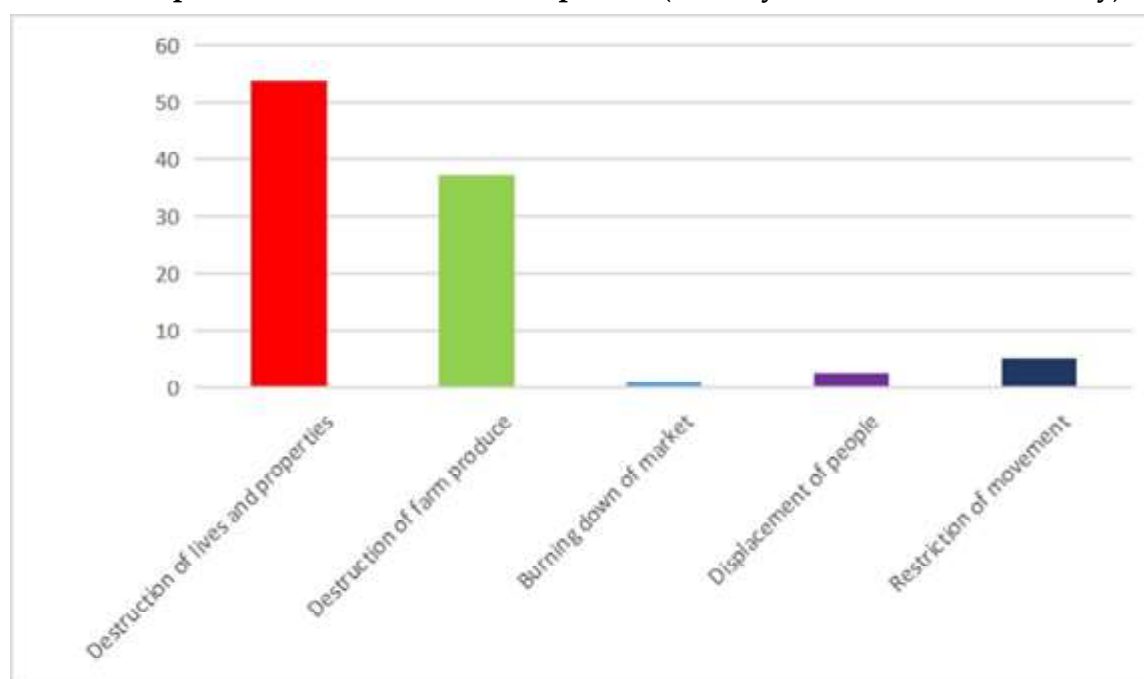
communal conflict between the Mbaikyaa and Dzev community in Kwande Local Government Area of Benue State is a result of land dispute. 62 respondents representing 16.3% said it is caused by indigene and settler issue, 32 respondents representing 8.4% said it is caused as a result of the struggle for political positions. Therefore, majority of the respondents were of the opinion that the major cause of communal conflict between the Mbaikyaa and Dzev community in Kwande Local Government Area of Benue State is a result of Land dispute.

The above collaborates the views of a respondent interviewed on the 17<sup>th</sup> of June, 2024 at 11.30. He noted that;

the major causes of the conflict between the two communities of Mbaikya and Dzev is over a piece of land. The respondent stated further that There was relative peace in these communities until the reign of late Zaki Anzuu Butu, the third kindred head of Mbaikyaa community. Those involved in the conflict are the family of Mr. Nor Kyeke from Mbaikyaa and the families of Late Zaki Chior Angyi and Shayongo Agoninjo from Dzev. The respondent narrated that, the both families started the conflict as both sought the ownership of a piece of land. The family Mr. Nor Kyeke from Mbaikyaa claimed that the land belongs to them which according to them was bequeathed by their forefathers. While the family of Late Zaki Chior Angyi and Shayongo Agoninjo also claimed ownership of the same piece of land. The situation spiraled out of control and eventually led to a full-blown conflict involving the two communities.

Based on the data from the Questionnaire and Key Informant Interview, we can firmly conclude that the main causality factor of the Mbaikyaa and Dzev communal conflict is land. Other causes such as politics and indigene-settler are minor and the resolution of the land issue would make them fade.

**Table 3: Impact of the conflict on both parties (Mbaikyaa and Dzev community)**



Source: Fieldwork, 2024.

Table 4.3.1 above, shows that 204 respondents representing (53.7%) said that one of the impact of the conflict is the destruction of lives and properties, 142 respondents representing (37.37%) noted that one of the effect of the conflict is the destruction of farm produce, 4 respondents representing (1.1%) said another effect of the conflict is the burning down of market



while 10 respondents representing 2.6% went for the displacement of people and 20 (5.3%) said another effect of the conflict is the restriction of movement. From the table above, majority of the respondents were of the opinion that, the destruction of farm produce, destruction of lives and properties, restriction of movement, displacement of people and the burning down of market are some of the destructive impacts of the communal conflict between the Mbaikyaa and Dzev community of Kwande LGA of Benue State.

Respondent 4 interviewed on 18<sup>th</sup> of June, 2024, revealed that the conflict over land ownership have exacted a heavy humanitarian toll on both communities with people killed and many displaced. Some estimates suggest about 50 people were killed in the conflict and many of them also have been displaced. The economic toll has also been huge.

Respondent 6, interviewed on the 18<sup>th</sup> of June, said during the conflict, he lost 20 bags of rice, 40 bags of soya beans, yams and many other food items. According to him, "I managed to escape with my wife and three children when they ambushed us in our house and started shooting. He stated that it was a terrible situation at that time the conflict erupted because all our barns were set ablaze by the people from the other communities.

In an interview with respondent 6, a traditional ruler in Mbaikyaa community on the 18<sup>th</sup> of June, 2024, he stated in Tiv that: *Num ne pande u eren tom sule, shi uvihi akaa yan kpishi, shi uvihi mlu u dedoo u yange sedoo ayoo a ase la*. This can be translated as; *this crisis has slowed down agricultural productivity, destroyed farm crops and has severed the cordial relationship we previously enjoyed. There is no cordial relationship among the two groups again.*

The leader of Dzev women Association interviewed on the 18<sup>th</sup> of June, 2024, voiced out that: "This crisis has drastically affected agricultural productivity in the area. The farming activities were thwarted thereby causing severe hunger. Women and the children fled to other parts leaving their daily farming activity. Aside from the effect on farming activities, some individuals lost their lives as well as property worth millions of Naira".

Respondent 7 from Mbaikyaa interviewed on 18<sup>th</sup> of June, 2024, stated that displacements owing to the conflict between the two warring parties have both affected social relations and group formation in the community. The intra-communal conflict between the people of Mbaikyaa and the community of Dzev brought disunity and mutual hatred that tore the community into two. In extreme cases, marriages were dissolved and friendship ties broken. The conflict uprooted a large number of members of the community from their ancestral homes, leaving them with deep feelings of hate toward their opponents. The situation has been exacerbated by the massive displacement caused by the increasing frequency of violent conflict between the two communities, which has put Kwande LGA under pressure since the conflict erupted. Most families have been separated as vulnerable members migrate to safety in other towns and villages.

Supporting the views above, respondent 12 stated that during the conflict, a curfew was declared and people's right of movement was restricted. This was due to the enormous destruction of lives and properties during the conflict.

**Table 5: What is the level of Traditional Institution involvement in the conflict?**

Options	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Dialogue was initiated by involving the parties in a meeting	142	37.3
Village committee system was adopted by traditional institutions	204	53.7
Negotiations was used by traditional institutions	14	3.7
Traditional court system was adopted	20	5.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>380</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source: Fieldwork, 2024.**

Table 4.3.3 above shows that a total of 142 (37.3%) felt that dialogue was initiated by involving the parties in a meeting, 204 (53.7%) were of the opinion that village committee system was adopted by traditional institutions while 14 respondents representing (3.7%) were also of the opinion that negotiations was used by traditional institutions, 20 (5.3%) were of the opinion that traditional court system was adopted by traditional institutions as a mechanism for managing communal conflict in Kwande LGA. The presentation showed that dialogue was initiated by involving the parties in a meeting, Village committee system was adopted by traditional institutions, Negotiations was used by traditional institutions and traditional court system was adopted

Thus, majority of the respondents were of the opinion that, the traditional rulers in Kwande and most especially from the two communities used mediation as aspect of conflict resolution between the two parties. The traditional rulers persuaded the parties to end conflict. Infact the respondent stated that the traditional rulers even organized a feast to see how ready the conflicting parties were towards reaching a compromise. Infact he stated that they were joint consultation between Zaki Suur Saai Jinge of Mbaikyaa and Zaki Andrew Kparevfa Atoba of Dzev. The respondent stated that they called on intervention from two district heads, Tyoor Gbagema Simon Orbunde of Mbaketsa district and Tyoor Atumbu Ityondo district head of Tondov 1 to help address the issue that led to the conflict

Respondent 12 stated that traditional rulers dialogue with members of the warring communities. People of good personality and integrity who enjoy social respect and recognition are selected. This helps to resolve the problems of representation. There was a rapid intervention at the initial stage as chiefs and elders of the two communities called for a meeting and dialogued on the land issue and the dispute was settled. The traditional ruler in Mbaikyaa community said that: "The traditional rulers organized series of the meeting where the elders and representative from the two groups attended that meeting. But one of the challenges is that whenever we discuss in the meeting, youth reacted differently. One other day, after the meeting that lasted for 5 hours, the youth of both sides resumed that fight. The government on their part deployed police to prevent the violence". The committee of inquiry was also set up.

The traditional leaders interviewed maintained that they used dialogue as initiated by them in managing the land conflict between Mbaikyaa and Dzev communities of Kwande. A community leader in Mbaikyaa stated that dialogue between the two parties helped a lot in stemming the tide of the conflict. Noting further, he mentioned that there were instances in which dialogue did not work out as an interventionist approach because the parties would not uphold the agreement reached. The respondent went further to state that traditional rulers engaged in managing the conflict because they were recognized as the custodians of the cultural norms and values guiding the communities. So, they become the first point of call when issues arise in their domains. It was revealed by the community elders in both communities (Mbaikyaa and Dzev) that the village committee system was used. According to him, the village committee system helps them in arresting any brewing conflict before it erupts into a large scale. The village heads are in charge of the village council with elders drawn from different households based on age, knowledge of culture, experience in resolving conflict and integrity. The community leader further revealed that any village head that shirks his responsibility by allowing conflict to erupt will be sanctioned accordingly by the traditional rulers in the district.

**Table 6 Were there any factors that affected the success of the conflict management mechanism adopted by traditional institutions in Kwande LGA**

Options	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Lack of capacity to enforce binding decision	100	26.3
Erosion of powers of community leaders	260	68.4
Avoidance of dialogue by the warring parties	12	3.2
Partiality on the part of traditional institutions	8	2.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>380</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source: Fieldwork, 2024.**

Table 4.3.4 above shows that 100 (26.3%) strongly agreed that the lack of capacity to enforce binding decision is a challenge that affected the success of the conflict management mechanism adopted by traditional institutions in Kwande LGA, 260 respondents representing (68.4%) agreed that erosion of powers of community leaders, 12 respondents (3.2%) opined that avoidance of dialogue by the warring parties is a challenge that affected the success of the conflict management mechanism adopted by traditional institutions in Kwande LGA while 8 (2.1%) were of the opinion that partiality on the part of traditional institutions is a challenge that affected the success of the conflict management mechanism adopted by traditional institutions in Kwande LGA. From the presentation above, the lack of capacity to enforce binding decision, erosion of powers of community leaders, avoidance of dialogue by the conflicting parties and partiality on the part of traditional institutions is a challenge that affected the success of the conflict management mechanism adopted by traditional institutions in Kwande LGA.

Respondent 13 from Dzev community stated that lack of capacity to enforce binding decisions which is characteristic of mediation is a constraint to traditional rulers in effectively managing the conflict. For instance, the respondent pointed out that that lack of mediatory skills by the traditional rulers, non-inclusion of poor representation of the victims of the conflict makes the process deficient in procedure.

It was revealed by respondent 5 that negotiation did not work in resolving the conflict because they would not want to enter into any agreement on how the other party would take over their land. Another respondent stated that negotiation as a tool for managing conflict is not effective because of the erosion of the authority of the traditional rulers which affects the process.

### **Discussion of Findings**

The findings of the study show that the major cause of the conflict between the two communities of Mbaikyaa and Dzev is over a piece of land. Those involved in the conflict are the family of Mr. Nor Kyeke from Mbaikyaa and the families of Late Zaki Chior Angyi and Shayongo Agoninjo from Dzev. Both families started the conflict as both sought the ownership of a piece of land. The family Mr. Nor Kyeke from Mbaikyaa claimed that the land belongs to them which according to them was bequeathed by their forefathers. While the family of Late Zaki Chior Angyi and Shayongo Agoninjo also claimed ownership of the same piece of land. The situation spiraled out of control and eventually led to a full-blown conflict involving the two communities.

The findings also showed that the conflict between the two communities has affected all of the community life. Thus, since the conflict started, the population of the communities had been drastically reduced. The community population has been badly depleted as people are forced almost on daily basis to migrate. This migration, which includes workers on essential services like health and education, has badly affected livelihood in the community. The situation manifests insecurity that retards every form of productive venture.

Furthermore, the findings show that traditional rulers intervened in the conflict such that they adopted various conflict resolution mechanisms in resolving the conflict between the two warring parties. Thus, several conflict management mechanisms such as negotiations, mediations, village committee system, traditional conflict management system among others were used by the traditional rulers. However, the study revealed that mediation was the most effective mechanism.

Lastly, findings revealed that lack of capacity to enforce binding decisions which is characteristic of mediation is a constraint to traditional rulers in effectively managing the conflict between the two communities. The study also showed that sometimes the avoidance of dialogue by both parties constitute an obstacle for traditional rulers to resolve the conflict.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The paper investigated the role of traditional institutions in communal conflict management in Mbaikyaa and Dzev communities of Kwande Local Government Area of Benue State. The paper concluded that traditional rulerships are relevant in communal conflict management as it is considered an administrative structure in the study area, and also identified the main cause of the communal conflicts in the study area as largely premised on land dispute. The paper also explained that the traditional rulers play crucial roles in managing the conflict. Several conflict management mechanisms such as negotiation, mediation, village committee system, traditional conflict management system, among others, were used by the traditional leaders. However, some of the mechanism adopted in managing the conflict were effective while others were not effective. The negotiation strategy in managing the conflict did not work in resolving the conflict because the parties did not want to enter into any agreement on how the other party would take over their land. Also, the lack of adequate skills in conflict management and capacity to enforce decisions, partially, erosion of authority, constrain the traditional institutions in managing the conflict effectively. The study further recommended that:

For the communities that are already in disputes, government agencies that are responsible for land allocations should re-delineate such land to create room for peace and harmony amongst the two communities

Benue State government should allocate more funds to Kwande Local Government Council so as to revive the communities ravaged by the conflict. All stakeholders in the communities at large should embark upon peace and development promotion campaigns.

Government should create a clear and constitutionally specified role for traditional rulers with transparent mechanisms for either making or approving choices and for demoting or dismissing those who fail in their tasks. In addition to this, these roles must specify more clearly what is expected of them in terms of conflict resolution.

The Benue State 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.

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