The Role of Traditional Institutions in Mediating Ethno-Religious Conflicts in Plateau State, Nigeria

Steven Sunday Ogbobe, Adeola Adams & Bayo Asala

Abstract

This study examines the ways in which customary institutions in the Plateau State of Nigeria arbitrate conflicts between various ethnic and religious communities. Plateau State has seen protracted violent conflicts that have their roots primarily in racial and religious tensions. Conventional institutions have been essential in mediating and resolving conflicts within communities because they have historically been regarded as the guardians of moral and cultural values. This study examines the ways these institutions—traditional rulers and councils—have supported discourse, encouraged rapprochement, and collaborated with official governmental structures and civil society organizations in an effort to promote peace. The paper reviews ethno-religious conflict in Plateau state and Nigeria in particular. The paper analysed the role of mediation by traditional institution in plateau state. This study employs a qualitative research design, focusing on interviews, documents analysis and case studies to understand the role of traditional institutions in mediating ethno-religious conflicts in Plateau State. According to the study's findings, traditional institutions in Jos, Plateau State, are crucial in mediating disputes, maintenance of law and order, reconciliation and the promotion of communal solidarity and unity. It concludes that traditional institutions remain essential actors in mediating ethno-religious conflicts in Plateau State. The paper recommended that the government should reinforce the authority of traditional rulers by providing them with the necessary legal backing and resources to carry out their mediation roles. This can include training in conflict resolution, peace building, and modern governance techniques, ensuring they are well-equipped to handle ethno-religious conflicts.

Keywords: Traditional Institutions, Ethno-Religious Conflict, Mediation, Plateau State

Introduction

Ethno-religious conflicts have become one of the most significant security challenges in Nigeria, particularly in the entire northern region. According to Osaghae and Suberu (2005), cited in Shehu, 2022), Nigeria is a highly complex and pluralistic state that is divided along religious, ethnic, linguistic, cultural, and regional lines. This division has led to violent conflicts. Even though diversity by itself does not lead to conflict, discrimination and marginalization of groups have made ethno-religious conflicts more common. Nigeria is home to more than 200 million people who belong to more than 250 ethnic groups, including traditional religious groups, Christians, and Muslims, almost equally (Paden, 2008; Schwartz, 2010 cited in Shehu,2022). Since 2001, violent conflicts have occurred in Plateau State, which was formerly known as "The Home of Peace and Tourism," particularly in Jos. The Berom, Anaguta, Afizere (mainly Christian), and Hausa-Fulani (also known as "Jasawa" or settlers) are the main ethnic groups in Jos*(Albert I. , 1993)*. Violence has frequently taken on religious, ethnic, and political dimensions in the conflicts that have broken out between the Muslim Hausa-Fulani settlers and the Christian indigenous groups, the Berom, Anaguta, and Afizere. Over 4,000 people have died in Jos and the surrounding areas because of these conflicts, which are motivated by land dispute or settlement, religion, ethnicity or by rivalry for political appointments, since 2001. The government and civil society have attempted to curb violence, but their efforts have mostly failed despite the deployment of security forces, dialogue facilitators, and investigative panels *(Ajayi, 2022)*. The reason for failure or ineffectiveness of previous resolutions of western mechanism because there were no elements of traditional institution involved.

Indigenous communities around the world constantly struggle to maintain their rights, customs, and knowledge in a system that is heavily influenced by the West. These communities have persevered through centuries of oppression and the imposition of Western knowledge by learning to adapt to difficult circumstances and create sustainable means of subsistence. They have been able to manage natural resources and develop resilience because of their strong ties to the environment and cultural unity. Indigenous knowledge, which is based on first-hand knowledge of the area and an appreciation of the environment, is essential to this (Alliyu, 2020). Traditionally, disputes have been resolved through formal, adversarial legal processes rather than through social norms and group action. This is especially true when it comes to land disputes. The traditional institutions of Plateau State have historically played a significant role in mediating conflicts between various ethnic and religious groups. These groups, which are composed of chiefs, elders, and local leaders, are deeply embedded in the social and cultural fabric of the communities they serve (Nwolise, 2005). What gives them legitimacy is their established presence and ties to both the native and settler populations. In the context of the ongoing conflict in Jos, these traditional institutions have attempted to serve as unbiased mediators, utilizing their influence and power to foster communication between opposing ethnic and religious groups (Shehu, 2024). One of the primary benefits of traditional institutions is their ability to leverage cultural norms and conflict resolution practices that hold significance for the community. These groups frequently support rapprochement, aid in peace talks, and promote the peaceful coexistence of diverse communities. It is against this background that *this paper discusses the theoretical arguments surrounding religion and ethnicity before looking at the causes of ethno religious conflict in broader perspective, history, and proposed solutions of the Jos conflict which is traditional institutional mediation as whole is another point of review.* This paper explores the functions of these institutions in addressing and resolving ethno-religious conflicts in Plateau State. Objectives of the study are: to examine the functions of traditional institutions, to review Ethno-Religious Conflicts, to analyse Mediation Strategies, and to evaluate collaborative efforts.

Conceptual Review
Institutions in Perspective
Various scholars have categorically conceptualized the term Traditional institution according to their perception. Timothy (2017) perceived the concept 'Traditional' depicts the practices which are part of the traditions of a community, state or country. Traditions are historic ways of doing something over the years and accepted by the people as the norm, custom or belief system. They are the long-established practices, customs, and pattern of behaviour or belief system bequeathed to a given society for generations. The laws of most countries evolved from their traditions and customs (Timothy, 2017). He further elaborates the term 'Institution' in broader perspective that is a system or organization that has existed for a long time among a particular group of people. However, Talcott cited in Timothy (2017) collaborate with Cookey (2018) and Yandaki (2015) that traditional institution means a system or organization that has existed for long time among a particular group of people. Critically examine these defining moment of scholarly perspective in this in view, is that institutions are the backbone of any societal beliefs and norms which governed individual or group through belief system or laws.Thus, an institution is a system of patterned expectations defining the proper behaviour of persons playing certain roles enforced both by the incumbent's own positive motives for conformity and by the sanctions of others' (Osakede, 2019).

The Concept of Traditional Institutions
Academics have offered different definitions, each highlighting a distinct facet of these establishments. Some definitions from various scholar provided academic perspectives. To some scholar like 'Yandaki(2015), Cookey et al (2020), Abubakar(2014) opined that traditional institutions are established social structures, norms, and behaviours that are part of a society; they are usually derived from indigenous social structures and knowledge systems. These organizations are essential to social cohesion, governance, conflict resolution, and cultural continuity. Thus, perceptively, traditional institutions refer to indigenous systems of governance and societal management, typically presided over by local leaders such as chiefs, kings, elders, or religious leaders. These

institutions operate based on long-established customs, cultural norms, and values. They often encompass a variety of social roles, including judicial, political, and spiritual leadership, and are distinct from modern political institutions formed under colonialism or post-colonial state structures (Yandaki, 2015).African Scholars like Olowu (2018), Adegboye (2020), and Nyamnjoh (2021), traditional institutions are adaptable, community-based governance structures that have kept their indigenous essence while addressing contemporary issues. They highlight the institutions' functions in governing, resolving disputes, and fostering community harmony. Presumably the Western Scholars such as Boone (2019), Englebert (2020), and Logan (2021) emphasize the coexistence of traditional institutions with modern state structures, acknowledging the hybrid nature of these institutions.

Conceptual Aspect of Conflict
Conflict is rooted in Latin and referred to as 'Conflicts' or 'configure,' which technically means to strike together, a fight or struggle for mastery, a quarrel. Scholars from sociology, history and political science share diversion views on the perspective of conflict as a concept. Thus, Jegede (2021) described conflict as a situation or condition of disharmony in an interactional process. The conceptual framework of conflict has taken scholarly perspectives. Conflict is also seen as an intrinsic and inevitable part of human existence. It has also been defined as pursuing incompatible interests and goals by different groups. David (2018) asserted that armed conflict is associated with the use of force and armed violence and is a process of pursuing incompatible and particular interests and goals. The perception of conflict by scholars has increasingly been widening the scope of the meaning in all ramifications. Ben (2021) seems to have shared a similar opinion with that of Martin and Nayakama (2021) on the concept of conflict, which involves a perceived or genuine incompatibility of goals, values, expectations, interests, processes, strategies, or outcomes between two or more inter-dependent parties in their relationships. Martin (2021) opined that conflict is an opposing interest in relationships, interactions and an expressed struggle between at least two interdependent parties who perceive incompatible goals, scarce rewards and interference from the other party.

Ethno-Religious Conflict: A Conceptual Clarification
Ethnicity
Ethnicity is a complex and relatively new concept that emerged less than half a century ago in literature (Fawole & Bello, 2011). The concept of ethnicity itself is a subject of debate among sociologists and anthropologists. Ethnicity is derived from the Greek word "ethnos," which refers to a community of common descent. It encompasses various elements such as language, religion, identity, national origin, and even skin colour. Alegbeleye (2014), defines ethnicity as a situation in which individuals in a particular ethnic group consider themselves or are considered by others to have common affinity which distinct them from other groups in the society. (Bright, 2022).

Religion in Perceptive Discourse
This study explores the complexity of religion, tracing its origins to the Latin term "Religare," meaning to bind or reconnect. Religion is an elusive and imprecise concept. It is difficult to define with precision and objectivity because it is emotion laden (Egwu, 2011, Agarwal et.al 1994); Religion has been variously defined as a body of truths, laws and rites by which a man is subordinated to transcendent being (Adeniyi, 1993). Despite its unifying role in human life, religion is challenging to define due to its multifaceted nature, shaped by political, legal, and personal factors. Scholars like Emile Durkheim (1858-1917); Edward Burnett Tylor (1832-1917); George Frazer (1854-1941) and Karl Marx, have offered varying definitions, viewing religion as a system connecting humans to transcendent realities. According to Dawson (cited in Shehu, 2022) conceptualized religion as:

> wherever and whenever man has a sense of dependence on external powers which is
> conceived as mysterious and higher than man's own, there is religion, and the feeling
> of awe and self-abasement with which man is filled in the presence of such powers is
> essentially a religious emotion, the root of worship and prayer".

Yinger J. Milton (cited in Shehu, 2023) conceived religion different from Dawson

> The attempt to bring the relative, the temporary, and the painful things in life into relations with what is conceived to be permanent, absolute and cosmically optimistic"
> *Peter (2022) conceptualized religion as system of symbols which act to establish powerful, pervasive and long-lasting mood and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic*(Pate, 2022).

Ethno-Religious Conflict in Perspectives

Scholars from the sociology, history and political such as 'Yandaki (2015), Shehu (2023), Shuaibu, 2024 science critically conceptualize the term ethno-religious conflict based on their conception. The term ethno-religious conflict, it means a situation in which the relationship between members of one ethnic or religious group and another of such group in a multi-ethnic and multi-religious society is characterized by lack of cordiality, mutual suspicion and fear, and a tendency towards violent confrontation (Shuaibu, 2024). Such conflicts are accompanied by severe human rights violations, including genocide and crimes against humanity(Salawu, 2010; Shehu, 2023).

Literature Review

Ethno-Religious Conflict in Nigeria: An Overview

Generally, the nature of conflict and its implication for social interaction has been explored by scholars of diverse backgrounds. In specific terms, the topic of ethno-religious crises, causative factors, and consequences has also featured prominently in the lenses of scholars. Literature abounds on causes of ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria. However, the major issue of concern here ison the activities of the colonial masters that laid the foundation of ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria. The British colonial masters have been blamed for the ethnic and religious conflicts in Nigeria. For instance, Uchendu (2010) observed that the growth of ethno-religious intolerance in the country has its foundation on the activities of the colonial masters that brought Christianity with them and antagonized African Traditional Religion as idolatry. Racing the history of the background of ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria, Uka (2008) avers that Nigeria, before it was colonized by the British, had a multi-cultural/multi-ethnic, multi-lingual and even multi-political culture and was extremely heterogeneous and complex. In related analysis, (Ofoeze 2009:181), remarks that:

> Nigeria… is a multi-ethnic plural society with the Igbo, Hausa and Yoruba consisting the three largest groups. Each of these ethnic groups, prior to colonial invasion had existed independently on its own and had its own socio-cultural, political and economic systems by which the entire life of its members was organized. These systems varied quite markedly among these ethnic groups so much so that in some cases, they were mutually antithetical and contradictory. It was rather these disparate ethnic groups that the colonial overlords forcefully hammered into one geopolitical amalgam as Nigeria.

Divergent viewpoints exist regarding the origins of ethno-religious disputes in Nigeria. The disruption and division brought about by European colonialism in Africa, according to scholars like Machava (2008), Duala-M'Bedy (1984), Fonkem (2013), Okoyo (1977), Cohen (1995), and Ake (1985), is the primary cause of these conflicts. They argue that the "divide and rule" policy of the British colonial government encouraged rivalry and mistrust among the various ethnic groups in Nigeria, which grew into widespread ethnic conflicts. While Cohen (1995) notes that modern African states were colonial creations that ignored regional diversities, leading to marginalization by dominant groups. Conversely, some individuals maintain that global political and religious advancements have an impact on ethno-religious disputes in Nigeria (Albert, 2005)

Ethno-Religious Conflicts in Plateau State

Since Nigeria's independence, conflicts have significantly disrupted the state's functionality, with the Nigerian

Civil War (1967–1971) being a notable example (Osaghae, 1998). While the conflict in Plateau State shares similarities with other regional conflicts, it stands out due to its use of indigene status as a criterion for political, economic, and resource allocation. Religious differences have often acted as catalysts, intensifying the violence between indigenes and settlers competing for access to resources. In Jos, the state capital, the insecurity has reached alarming levels, marked by frequent ethnic and communal clashes and other social vices, leading to annual episodes of violent conflict and bloodshed (Daniel, 2023).

Causes of Ethno Religious Conflict in Plateau
There are multiple interconnected factors that contribute to the ethno-religious conflict in Jos, Plateau State. Since both the Muslim Hausa-Fulani community, which is made up of farmers and cattle herders, and the indigenous Christian population depend on the land for their livelihoods, competition over land ownership is one of the main causes. Land scarcity has increased tensions, which have been made worse by the Structural Adjustment Program, which has forced many people to go back to farming. Another significant factor is political authority, especially in Jos North LGA, where the Hausa-Fulani have attempted to exert political influence *(Ogbuleke, 2019)*. However, indigenous groups oppose this because they believe they are left out of political appointments and elections. The conflict is also fuelled by issues of indigenous rights, since non-natives, especially the Hausa-Fulani, are excluded from public services and work even though they have lived in the area for generations (Ostein, 2021: Gwamna, 2020). Last but not least, there are now more religious differences between the Hausa-Fulani, a Muslim group, and the predominantly Christian indigenous groups.

Government Policies to Toward Resolving the Crises
Over the years, the government and civil societies have attempted, albeit ineffectively, to address and prevent crises in Plateau State through a variety of measures. A commission of inquiry headed by Justice Fiberesima was established following the 1994 crisis to look into the causes and offer recommendations, but no significant action was done. Similar to this, following the crises of 2008 and 2001, a special task force and judicial commission were established; however, their conclusions were either withheld or not released until later, which resulted in additional acts of violence. The 2010 recommendation from a high-level committee made by the federal government also did not produce any noticeable outcomes (Ogbuleke, 2019).Curfews, weapon searches, and military deployments were among the additional measures taken to re-establish order. In an attempt to foster harmony, the state government established interfaith committees, peace conferences, and media campaigns; however, these initiatives were hampered by unresolved issues, particularly from the Hausa-Fulani community, whose demands for equal rights were disregarded. While workshops and social events were arranged by civil society organizations like CEPID and the Young Ambassadors for Community Peace with the goal of promoting interfaith cooperation, these efforts frequently fell short of addressing the underlying causes of the conflicts. The ongoing violence in Plateau State, in spite of these efforts, is a reflection of the inadequate responses to the underlying tensions by the government and civil society (Daniel, 2023). Due to these unprecedented circumstances that led to the search for alternative dispute resolution through traditional institution of mediation.

Mediation: An Overview
Mediation has been critically examined as a process which involves a third-party intervention process that aims at helping the parties to a dispute reconcile their difference, reach a compromise and attain settlement of their conflict. In mediation, a neutral third party tries to help disputants resolve disagreements and negotiate settlement. Mediation focuses on the interests, needs and rights of the parties to the conflict. The mediator manages the interaction between the parties and facilitates open communication and dialogue (Sam, 2018). Usually, parties to a conflict accept that they have a conflict situation and are willing and committed to resolving it. The mediator then enters to provide assistance and create an enabling environment for parties to the dispute to iron out their differences. Mediators in conflict reconciliation have certain characteristic and roles. According to Moore, mediation is

> The intervention in a negotiation of conflict of an acceptable third party who has limited or no authoritative decision-making power but who assist the involved parties in voluntarily reaching a mutually acceptable settlement of issues in dispute… (More, 1996).

In view of that, the mediator creates the enabling environment for the parties to carry out dialogue sessions leading to the resolution of conflicts, pollinates by working on common themes and drawing attention to neglects points, helps parties to identify and arrive at common grounds with a view to overcoming their fears and satisfying their real need (Best, 2006). Mediation is a process involves voluntary commitment. The mediator does not impose any resolution on the disputants but he makes what is called a *mediator's proposal*which may be accepted, modified or rejected. Mediation facilitates resolution of conflicts through opening avenues for reconciliation by neutral third party (Nnaemeka, 2019).

A Critical View on Traditional Institution Mediation Mechanisms
The mediation processes in traditional institutions are built on principles of dialogue, community participation, and reconciliation, rather than the punitive approaches found in formal legal systems. Mediation in traditional institutions in Nigeria remains a powerful tool for resolving conflicts, promoting reconciliation, and maintaining social harmony. While it faces challenges due to modern legal systems and societal changes, it remains an indispensable mechanism for peace building, particularly in rural and culturally diverse areas (Ajayi, 2014). The mechanisms often involve. Elders and community leaders play an essential role in mediating conflicts. They are considered wise and experienced individuals who can offer impartial judgment based on their deep understanding of local customs and values. Disputes are brought before these elders, who listen to both sides, assess the situation, and provide advice or solutions that prioritize reconciliation and harmony (Ajayi, 2014).Customary law is the body of unwritten laws and practices that govern local communities in Nigeria. This approach involves the offending party compensating the aggrieved party through apologies, fines, or other forms of restitution.

The Roles of Traditional institutions on Ethno-Religious Conflict in Plateau State
Given that the essence of the traditional institution is to preserve the tradition, the customs, cultural heritage of the people and to manage, settle and resolved dispute/conflict arising within or between members of the community by the instrumentality of laws and customs of the people in that particular community or society. Traditional rulers are seen and referred to as the custodians of their people's norms, cultural values and practices (Olaoba, 2005; Oyedele, 2007; Otite & Albert, 2009: Zartman, 2000).

Mediation through Dialogue and Negotiation
Traditional rulers in Plateau State, such as the Gbong Gwom Jos, play a crucial role in maintaining peace and order. Traditional rulers, such as district heads, village chiefs, and clan leaders, often serve as neutral figures during conflicts. They initiate dialogue among warring groups by using their influence and personal relationships. In Plateau State, where conflicts often arise between ethnic groups like the Berom, Hausa, Fulani, and others, these institutions foster communication between communities to mitigate tensions (Ajayi, 2022). In the aftermath of the 2001 Jos riots, which led to widespread violence between Christians and Muslims, traditional leaders such as the Gbong Gwom of Jos and other tribal leaders were instrumental in convening peace talks. These discussions brought together representatives from the Berom, Hausa, and other ethnic communities to discuss issues around land rights, religious grievances, and access to political power (Alliyu, 2020). Conflict resolution has been greatly aided by traditional leaders, such as chiefs and elders from the indigenous Berom, Anaguta, and Afizere communities. These individuals are trusted by their communities and are regarded as cultural stewards. They call peace conferences, referred to as 'kottong; or 'palaver', in which opposing sides are gathered to air grievances. (Nwolise, 2005).

Community-Based Reconciliation Efforts

After the immediate violence subsides, traditional leaders often take the lead in reconciliation efforts. They focus on rebuilding trust among communities through traditional peace mechanisms, such as public apologies, compensation, and inter-group collaborations. These processes are deeply rooted in the cultural and religious values of the communities, giving them a higher chance of success. In the years following the 2015 conflict between Berom farmers and Fulani herders in Barkin Ladi, traditional rulers in the area played a pivotal role in negotiating grazing routes and farming lands. Following the 2010 Dogo Nahawa massacre, where hundreds of Berom villagers were killed in an attack by Fulani herdsmen, local traditional rulers helped mediate peace talks (Ajayi, 2022).

Collaboration with Government and Security Agencies

Traditional institutions often collaborate with government bodies, security agencies, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to address the root causes of ethno-religious violence. They serve as intermediaries between the community and formal state mechanisms, providing valuable insights into local dynamics and advocating for more culturally sensitive responses to conflict. During the 2018 clashes in Riyom and Bassa local governments, traditional rulers worked with the Plateau Peace Building Agency (PPBA) and local government officials to establish peace committees (Osakede, 2019). These committees included representatives from various ethnic and religious groups and facilitated ongoing dialogue to prevent future violence.

Promotion of Interfaith and Inter-Ethnic Understanding

In a state where both ethnic and religious identities are often intertwined, traditional leaders also promote interfaith understanding by encouraging tolerance and respect for different religions. They play a vital role in demystifying the "other" through cultural events, inter-group marriages, and joint celebrations. In the years following repeated clashes in Jos North, traditional institutions supported interfaith dialogues and joint cultural events to promote peaceful cohabitation (Osakede, 2019). These efforts included the establishment of neighbourhood watch groups, where community leaders from Christian and Muslim communities worked together to prevent violence.

Restoring Social Cohesion through Traditional Justice

Traditional justice mechanisms, such as customary courts and conflict resolution councils, help provide a more accessible and culturally familiar means of resolving disputes. By emphasizing restoration over retribution, traditional rulers help heal societal rifts that can otherwise fuel further violence (Sampson, 2014). In Shendam Local Government Area, traditional councils intervened in disputes between Tarok and Hausa communities, using customary justice mechanisms to resolve issues of cattle theft and crop destruction, thus preventing further escalation of conflicts in the region (Albert O. , 2001). (Timothy, 2017)

Theoretical Framework

The study of ethno-religious conflicts is often grounded in the theory of social identity, which posits that individuals' group identities, based on ethnicity, religion, or other social categories, can lead to conflict when these identities become the basis for competition or exclusion. According to Tajfel and Turner (1979), individuals derive part of their self-esteem from their group identity, leading to in-group favouritisms and out-group discrimination. In the context of Plateau State, ethno-religious divisions have been exacerbated by political and economic competition, further fuelling conflicts.

Research Methodology

This study aims to explore the role of traditional institutions in mediating ethno-religious conflicts in Plateau State. The researcher has adopted a qualitative design approach, emphasizing the analysis of secondary data gathered from a variety of sources, including articles, journals, newspapers, government documents, internet resources, and other relevant texts related to the topic.

Data Collection

For this study, data collection will primarily focus on gathering secondary sources that provide insights into the role of traditional institutions in mediating ethno-religious conflicts in Plateau State. The researcher will utilize a systematic approach to identify and compile relevant materials, including:

a) Academic Articles and Journals: Peer-reviewed publications will be sought to ensure the information is credible and grounded in established research. These sources will provide theoretical frameworks and empirical evidence regarding the influence of traditional institutions on conflict resolution.

b) Government Documents: Official reports, policy papers, and records from governmental agencies will be analysed to understand the formal recognition and support for traditional institutions in conflict mediation.

c) Newspapers and Media Reports: Local and national news articles will be reviewed to capture contemporary perspectives and case studies related to ethno-religious conflicts and the involvement of traditional leaders.

d) Internet Resources: Online databases, think tank publications, and relevant websites will be explored for additional data and analysis. This will include accessing digital archives and repositories that house pertinent research.

e) Relevant Texts: Books and monographs focused on the history and dynamics of ethno-religious relations in Plateau State will be examined to provide a broader context for the study.

By utilizing these diverse sources, the research aims to construct a comprehensive understanding of how traditional institutions function in conflict mediation, highlighting both their successes and challenges in the context of ethno-religious tensions in Plateau State.

Findings

The study found that traditional institutions in Jos, Plateau State, are crucial in mediating disputes between different ethnic and religious groups. The maintenance of law and order, the promotion of informal conflict resolution techniques, the preservation of societal checks and balances, the handling of communication breakdowns, the reconciliation and integration of disputing parties, and the promotion of communal solidarity and unity are among the key roles that have been identified. These roles highlight traditional rulers' proactive and sincere efforts to mediate conflicts within their communities. These results are consistent with Otite and Albert's (2009) assertion that traditional rulers are crucial to the upholding of security, law and order, and the settlement of disputes between individuals and groups in Nigerian society. Comparably, Hamisu, Makinta, Muhammed, Garba, and Umar (2017) attested that customary laws and traditions are an effective means for traditional rulers to settle disputes and conflicts that arise within or between members of the community. Traditional institutions in Plateau State still enjoy a high degree of legitimacy among local communities. Many respondents indicated that they prefer traditional mediation because it is faster, more accessible, and more in tune with local customs than formal legal processes. Traditional rulers face significant challenges in their role as mediators. These include political interference, accusations of bias, and limited resources. Many traditional rulers expressed frustration at their diminishing power and the lack of support from the state government. There is a growing recognition of the need for collaboration between traditional and formal state institutions. In areas where such collaboration exists, conflict resolution efforts have been more successful.

Conclusion

Traditional institutions remain essential actors in mediating ethno-religious conflicts in Plateau State. However, for these institutions to remain effective, they must be empowered and supported by formal state structures. Strengthening the legitimacy of traditional rulers, addressing issues of bias, and promoting collaboration between traditional and formal conflict resolution mechanisms will be critical in sustaining peace in Plateau State.

Recommendations

1. **Strengthen the Role of Traditional Institutions:** The government should reinforce the authority of traditional rulers by providing them with the necessary legal backing and resources to carry out their

mediation roles. This can include training in conflict resolution, peace building, and modern governance techniques, ensuring they are well-equipped to handle contemporary ethno-religious conflicts.

2. **Institutional Collaboration:** There should be structured collaboration between traditional institutions and formal state agencies, such as local governments, security agencies, and the judiciary.

3. **Inclusive Peace building Initiatives:** Traditional institutions should incorporate all stakeholders in the peace building process, particularly women, youth, and religious leaders. These groups often play a crucial role in either escalating or de-escalating conflicts. Including them in mediation efforts would enhance the legitimacy and acceptance of peace agreements.

4. **Capacity Building for Conflict Mediation:** Regular capacity-building programs should be organized for traditional rulers and their councils. This will include workshops on conflict analysis, negotiation skills, and trauma healing.

5. **Promotion of Interfaith Dialogue:** Traditional rulers, being community leaders, are in a unique position to foster interfaith dialogue between Christian and Muslim communities in Plateau State. They should be supported in organizing regular interfaith meetings, community forums, and educational programs that promote mutual understanding and respect between different religious and ethnic groups.

6. **Public Awareness Campaigns:** Public education campaigns should be launched to promote the importance of traditional mediation in conflict resolution. This would help reinforce the role of traditional institutions in maintaining social cohesion and encourage communities to seek peaceful and culturally sensitive solutions to their disputes.

References

Abubakar, A. (2019) Middle Belt and Religion in Nigerian Politics. Gbemi Printing Press and Computer

Adamu, O. A. (2024). Examination of Factors Influencing Ethno-Religious Conflict in Jos Metropolis in Plateau State, Nigeria. *FULafia International Journal of Business and Allied Studies*, 2(2), 120–134. Retrieved from [FULafia Journal] (https://fijbas.org/index.php/FIJBAS/article/view/79).

Adegboye, F. (2020). "The Role of Traditional Authorities in Conflict Resolution: An Examination of Chieftaincy in Ghana." African Studies Quarterly, 19(3), 123-136.

Ake, C. (1993). "The unique role of traditional institutions in African governance." African Affairs, 92(367), 35-40.

Ajayi, O. (2022). Traditional Methods of Conflict Management and Resolutions: The Case of the Old Oyo Empire.*European Journal of Management and Marketing Studies* -, 126-138.

Albert, I. (1993). *Inter-ethnic Relations in a Nigerian City: The Historical Perspective of the Hausa-Igbo Conflicts in Kano, 1953-1991,*. Ibadan: Institute Francais de recherché en Afrique.

Albert, O. (2001). *New Directions in the Management of Community Conflicts in Nigeria: Insights from the Activities of AAPW. Community Conflicts in Nigeria, Management, Resolution.*

Alliyu, A. A. (2020). Roles of Traditional Rulers in Conflict Resolution for Sustainable Democracy in nigeria. *Nigerian journal of social studies,*, 52-62.

Andresen, J. (2004). *Religion in Mind: Congnitive Perspectives on Religious Beliefs, Ritual, and experience,*. Cambridge University Press.

Bright, J. N. (2022). The Rise of Ethno-Religious Conflicts in Northern Nigeria: Critical Analysis and Proposal for New Resolution Strategies. *Covenant University Journal of Politics & International Affairs*, 3767-3789.

Cookey, S.J.S et al (2020) Traditional Rulers in Nigeria. Safari Books Ltd Ibadan

Daniel, R. O. (2023). Ethno-Religious Conflict: a Threat to Benevolent Intergroup Relations in Wukari Metropolis, Taraba State, Nigeria. *Wukari International Studies Journal, Vol 7 (3),* , 178-199.

Kaderi, N. (2013). Exploring Indigenous Approaches to Conflict Resolution: The Case of the Bawku Conflict in Ghana. *Journal of Sociological Research*, 1948-5468.

Nathaniel, A. (2014). Current Trends in Theories of Religious Studies: A Clue to Proliferation of Religions

Worldwide. *Global Journal of Arts and Humanities and Social Science*, 27-46.

Nnaemeka, O. F. (2019). Mediation and Methods of Conflict Resolution. In O. Okonkwo, & edis (Ed.), *ntro. To Peace & Conflict and General Studies* (p. 18). Enugu: Gostak Printing and Publish C. Ltd.

Nwolise, O. B. (2005). Traditional modes of bargaining and conflict resolution in Africa. . In I. A. Olawale, *In: Perspectives on peace and conflict studies in Africa,* (pp. 152–168.). Ibadan. : Perspectives John Archers Publishers Ltd.

Ogbuleke, L. E. (2019). Democracy and Ethno-Religious Conflicts in Jos, Plateau State, Nigeria (2007-2012). *Irish Interdisciplinary Journal of Science & Research (IIJSR) (Quarterly International Journal) Volume 3, Issue 2,* , 29-44.

Osakede, K. e. (2019). Traditional Institution and the Modern Day Administration of Nigeria: Issues and Prospects. *Journal of Research and Development*, pp-76.

Pate, A. e. (2022). Press freedom and ethical orientation in democratic Nigeria. In. In E. E. Asemah, & (eds) (Ed.), *(eds), Discourse on communication and Media studies in contemporary society. .* Jos: Jos University press.

Sam, G. (2018). Mediation and the Mediation Process. In G. B. Shedrack, & edits (Ed.), *Introduction to Peace and Conflict Studies in West Africa* (p. 130). Ibadan: Spectrum Books Limited.

Shehu, H. et al, (2023) Peace in the Light of 'Bible' and 'Quran': Challenges of Peaceful Coexistence Between in the Christian and Muslim in Northern Nigeria. Chapter Three, in Samuel, O.I. &Basil, I. (edits) Readings in Peace, Conflict and Strategic Studies. Department of Conflict Resolution National Open University of Nigeria, Abuja.

Shehu, H. (2022) Historical Antecedent of Nationalism in Nigeria: Challenges and Options for Nationhood and Peace. chapter Five in Samuel, O.I. &Basil, I. (edits) Peace Building and Nationalism. Department of Conflict Resolution National Open University of Nigeria, Abuja.

Shehu, H. et al, (2024) A Comparative Analysis on Some African Traditional Mechanism for Conflict Resolutions in Ghana, Rwanda, Nigeria and Uganda. *the Journal of Society for Peace Studies and Practice. PP 11;20*

Shuaibu, H. A. (2024). Reporting Ethno Religious Conflict: The Jos Crises in the Nigerian Press. *International Journal of International Relations, Media and Mass Communication Studies*, 50-69.

Timothy, U. N. (2017). *African Traditional Institution An Illustrative Perspective.* Port Harcourt: S.P. Shapea Publishers.

Yandaki, A. (2015). *The State in Africa A Critical Study i Hstoriography and Political Philosophy.* Zaria: Gaskiya Cooperation Limited.

Steven Sunday Ogbobe, Department of Peace Studies and Conflict Resolution, National Open University of Nigeria, Jabi-Abuja;
    Email: degoldenwine@yahoo.co.uk, Phone No: +234 803 678 5777
Adeola Adams (PhD), Department of Peace Studies and Conflict Resolution, National Open University of Nigeria, Jabi-Abuja;
    Email: tjadams20@yahoo.co.uk, Phone No: +234 708 147 8381
Bayo Asala (PhD), Department of Peace Studies and Conflict Resolution, National Open University of Nigeria, Jabi-Abuja;
    Email: bayoasala@gmail.com, Phone No: +234 813 556 4321