
ROLES OF TRADITIONAL RULERS IN CONFLICT
RESOLUTION FOR SUSTAINABLE
DEMOCRACY IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This research examined the roles of traditional rulers in conflict resolution in Kwara State, Nigeria. The study population consisted of traditional rulers in the state. The study adopted a descriptive survey type, 180 members of traditional rulers were sampled through simple random sampling technique. The researchers' designed questionnaire titled Roles of Traditional Rulers in Conflict Resolution Questionnaire was used as an instrument to elicit data from the respondents. The findings of the study showed that traditional rulers had many roles they play in conflict resolution in all ramifications. The study also revealed that there was no significant difference in the roles of traditional rulers in conflict resolution based on age and marital status. Based on the findings of the study, it was therefore, recommended that traditional rulers in the state should be familiar with the issues that are germane among individuals, social groups as well as providing the possible resolution to any conflict among them in the state purposely to enhance and facilitate sustainable democracy in the society.

Keywords: Traditional Rulers, Conflict Resolution, Age, Marital Status, Sustainable Democracy

Introduction

Globally, there was a consensus among scholars and lay-men alike that the society exists to achieve a plethora of predetermined ends which may be personal, economic, social or political. That is, the society was generally made up of human and material resources which could be harnessed to meet certain goals for the good of all and sundry, particularly in the society and the world at large. Thus, there is no gainsaying in the fact that the essential goals of any society can only be achieved when a broad range of material and human resources were effectively and efficiently utilised. In this sense, it follows that the society was basically made up of different people with different beliefs, backgrounds, personality dispositions, interests, aspirations, needs and expectations. In other words, there are individual differences that may exist from person to person in any society (Ajayi & Buhari, 2014).

Nevertheless, every society was expected to function maximally by harnessing the differences among its human resources in line with the set objectives. To this end, therefore, conflict was bound to be a common social phenomenon in any given society. In other words, conflict was a universally evident phenomenon that was related to any form of a group activity or social interaction among people for a common purpose. Conflict thus refers to the struggles, disputes, disagreements, fights, wars, quarrels, frustrations and structural imperfections existing within, between and among individuals and groups in any given society (Ezenwoko & Osagie, 2014). Conflict can be regarded as organisational behaviour that can be related to power and politics (Ahmed, 2012). It is disagreements resulting from human interaction as a result of the individuals and groups perceive issues differently on account of individual differences and competition for allocation of resources of the society. Conflict is the heart of politics. There is bound to be a great deal of politics and political space where individuals, groups can interact in political relations in and outside government. On the other hand where there is no

freedom of interaction, the political space and politics is highly restricted and centralized. Nevertheless conflicts and politics will still exist (Okunloye & Olokooba, 2017).

Nweke (2012) sees conflict as a behaviour intended to obstruct the achievement of some other person's goals. In other words, conflict is on the incompatibility of goals and arises from opposing behaviours. It can be viewed at the individual, group or organisational level. Conflicts exist whenever an action by one party was perceived as preventing or interfering with the goals, needs or actions of another party. Conflict can arise over a multiple of organisational experiences such as incompatible goals, differences in the interpretation of facts, negative feelings, differences of values and philosophies or disputes over shared resources (Orji & Olali, 2010).

Essentially, conflicts have been experienced in the Nigerian society for decades. In this wise, Folarin (2008) notes that the causes of conflicts in the Nigerian society are diverse and are premised on a broad spectrum of factors which include competition over goals and interests that cannot be shared, usurpation or attempt to usurp the authority and position of one component by another component of a society, inconsistencies in goals, increasing desire for autonomy or authority by the different individuals or groups in the community, scarcity or inadequacy of resources to meet the needs of the various components, various kinds of communication break down among others. Albert (2012) classifies conflicts according to their causative agents viz: conflicts resulting from the struggles for the control of scarce or limited resources; conflicts resulting from perceived injury to our value system which may manifest in our preferences for certain things or ways of life or our ideologies, religious beliefs; psychological needs of the individuals and groups in terms of personal and group contradictions; and manipulation of information which may be used to incite people for conflict or peace building. Consequently, the inimical effects of conflicts in the society are devastating and incalculable and as such, it is germane for measures to be put in place to curb the prevalence of conflicts in the society (Hamisu, Makinta, Muhammed, Garba & Umar, 2017). To this end, the conflict resolution measures are necessary conditions for

the management of conflicts in the society. As noted by Rahim (2002), conflict resolution is a process that is geared towards the reduction, elimination or termination of conflict. More so, it consists of a broad range of activities which involves mediation, negotiation, bargaining, and arbitration which fall into the conflict resolution categories. In view of the direct or indirect importance of conflict resolution in the Nigerian society, the roles of traditional rulers as prime custodians of the culture cannot be overemphasised.

The concept of traditional rulers referred to leaders or persons by virtue of heredity or people with proven tracked records who are nominated, appointed and installed in line with the provisions of their native laws and customs (Wadama, 2013). Thus, traditional rulers hold the key to the success or failure in any political administration in Nigeria because they operate at the grassroot of the society and interact closely with people in their daily activities, consequent upon which they were highly respected (Abdullahi, 2008). Traditional rulers are popular symbol of tradition, culture, customs and their preservation, and as such, they are instrumental in ensuring growth and development in their communities through a well-structured system of communication. A traditional ruler has also been defined as a traditional head of an ethnic unit or clan who for the time being is the holder of the highest traditional authority whose title is recognised as a traditional ruler titled by the government of the state (Cookey, Alemika, Amucheazi, Oyebode, & Yahaya, 2010).

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).

Malami (2008) identifies three categories of traditional title holders in Nigeria that derived their titles from and through the traditions of the people. However, the traditions vary from time, place and depth of cultural roots. Firstly, those holding literally

honorific titles conferred on them by superior traditional rulers in recognition and appreciation of the service rendered to the society. This category has no schedules or specific functions seen as a good chain of information and agents of mobilising people when the need arises. The second category was the holders of titles or positions due to recent recognition or creation of such titles. In contrast to the above, they may have executive functions but restricted by the same laws that created them or gave them recognition. The last category was full time executive traditional title holders who perform executive functions from traditions largely rooted, revered and recognised and exercise their executive functions (Malami, 2008).

The rationale for the relative importance of traditional rulers in the process of conflict resolution in the Nigerian society is premised on the fact that they have a vast knowledge of the acceptable traditional methods and procedures have been passed from one generation to another. Furthermore, traditional rulers have a deep understanding of the morals, values and ethics of the society. Indeed, there is no question that every society recognised and mandated the traditional rulers the with some measures of power to maintain law and order, ensure security, manage, control and resolve conflicts among individuals and groups (Oyedele, 2007; Otite & Albert, 2009). For instance, Kwara State is made up of many communities with several traditional rulers that have played an indispensable role in the resolution of a broad spectrum of conflicts among members of the society for decades. Nevertheless, relevant studies in extant literature have not focused specifically on the roles played by traditional rulers in conflict resolution in the state. In the light of the foregoing, therefore, this study investigated the roles of traditional rulers in conflict resolution for sustainable democracy in Nigeria.

Research Question

This research question was raised to guide the conduct of the study.

1. What are the roles of traditional rulers in conflict resolution for sustainable democracy?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were tested in the study.

- Ho1: There was no significant difference in the roles of traditional rulers in conflict resolution based on age.
- Ho2: There was no significant difference in the roles of traditional rulers in conflict resolution based on marital status.

Methodology

The research design that was adopted for this study was the descriptive survey method. This method was adopted because it enables information to be obtained from a representative sample of the population and describes situations as they exist. It also focused attention on the people, their beliefs, opinions, perceptions, motivations, attitudes and behaviours. In agreement with the foregoing, a descriptive survey was chosen for this study because it enabled the researcher to collect large amount of information to investigate the roles of traditional rulers in conflict resolution. The population for this study was all traditional rulers in the state. Multi-stage sampling procedure was used. Stratified random sampling technique was used to select ten local government areas in Kwara State. Eighteen traditional chiefs were selected in each local government selected using simple random sampling technique. Total of 180 traditional rulers were sampled as respondents.

A questionnaire was used to gather the relevant data from the respondents. The instrument titled "Role of Traditional Rulers in Conflict Resolution Questionnaire (RTRCRQ)" was a researcher-designed questionnaire. The instrument consisted of two sections. Section A elicits information on respondents' biographic data such as gender, religion, marital status and age. Section B consisted of fourteen items on the role of traditional rulers in conflict resolution. This section of the questionnaire was designed using four point Likert-type rating scale of Strongly Disagree (SD) - 4, Disagree (D) -3, Agree (A) - 2 and Strongly Agree (SA) - 1. The instrument was subjected to face and content validity

by showing it to two experts in Social Sciences Education Department, University of Ilorin, Ilorin. The reliability of the instrument was determined through the test-retest method and a reliability index of 0.74 was obtained. Therefore, it was considered as moderate for the study. A research question was answered using mean and rank order while t-test and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) were used to test the hypotheses.

Results

Research Question: What are the roles of traditional rulers in conflict resolution for sustainable democracy?

Table 1: Mean and Rank Order of the Roles of Traditional Rulers in Conflict Resolution for Sustainable Democracy

| S/N | Items | Mean | SD | Rank |
|-----|---|------|------|------------------|
| 1. | reconciling and integrating both parties in conflicts | 3.74 | 1.07 | 1 st |
| 2. | maintaining law and order in the communities | 3.62 | 0.48 | 2 nd |
| 3. | promoting the use of informal settlements checks and balances in the society | 3.62 | 0.48 | 2 nd |
| 4. | managing improper communication and interaction breakdowns among their subjects | 3.61 | 0.51 | 4 th |
| 5. | fostering communal solidarity and unity | 3.60 | 0.49 | 5 th |
| 6. | engendering peaceful co-existence of people of different religious, ethnic and social background | 3.60 | 0.49 | 5 th |
| 7. | dealing with pressures from external forces outside the community that results in breeding internal pressures | 3.59 | 0.51 | 7 th |
| 8. | facilitating socio-cultural bridge reconstructions in post-conflict situation | 3.56 | 0.49 | 8 th |
| 9. | facilitating the determination of customary law and practice on all matters including that relating to land | 3.52 | 0.50 | 9 th |
| 10. | mediating in inter-tribal issues | 3.51 | 0.54 | 10 th |
| 11. | promoting consensus building among members of the community | 3.50 | 0.50 | 11 th |
| 12. | helping to raise and address pressing societal problem | 3.50 | 0.53 | 11 th |
| 13. | settling biases that people have against different groups of people | 3.49 | 0.53 | 13 th |
| 14. | helping people to learn how to recognise and benefit from their differences | 3.48 | 0.53 | 14 th |

Table 1 shows the roles of traditional rulers in conflict resolution in the state. Items 1st to 11th are the prevalent roles as their means are 3.50 and above while other are below 3.50. Therefore, the prevalent roles are the main roles performed by the traditional rulers.

Hypothesis One: There is no significant difference in the roles of traditional rulers in conflict resolution based on age.

Table 2: Mean, Standard Deviation and t-value on the Roles of Traditional Rulers in Conflict Resolution based on Age

| Age | No | Mean | SD | Df | Cal. t-value | Crit. t-value | P-value |
|--------------------|-----|-------|------|-----|--------------|---------------|---------|
| 18-35years | 1 | 71.00 | 1.41 | 176 | 0.08 | 1.96 | 0.94 |
| 36 years and above | 117 | 70.61 | 5.13 | | | | |

As shown in Table 2, the calculated t-value was 0.08 while the critical t-value is 1.96 ($0.94 > 0.05$ level of significance). Since the calculated t-value is less than the critical value, the null hypothesis was not rejected. This means that there is no significant difference in the roles of traditional rulers based on age.

Hypothesis Two: There is no significant difference in the roles of traditional rulers in conflict resolution based on marital status.

Table 3: Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) showing the Difference in the Roles of Traditional Rulers in Conflict Resolution based on Marital Status

| Source | Sum of Squares | Df Squares | Mean Ratio | Cal.F- Ratio | Crit.F- Ratio | p-value |
|----------------|----------------|------------|------------|--------------|---------------|---------|
| Between Groups | 2.614 | 1 | 2.614 | 0.99 | 3.00 | 0.75 |
| Within Groups | 4645.638 | 176 | 26.396 | | | |
| Total | 4648.253 | 177 | | | | |

As shown in Table 3, the calculated F-ratio was 0.99 while the critical F-ratio is 3.00. Since the calculated F-ratio is less than the critical F-ratio, the null hypothesis was not rejected. This means that there is no significant difference in the roles of traditional rulers in conflict resolution based on marital status.

Discussion

The findings of the study revealed that reconciling and integrating both parties in conflicts, maintaining law and order in the communities, promoting the use of informal settlements, provision of checks and balances in the society, managing improper communication and interaction breakdowns among their subjects and fostering communal solidarity and unity among others were the prevalent roles performed by the rulers in the communities. This implies that the rules are proactive and sincerely performed their roles in the communities. The finding was in line with the finding of Otite and Albert (2009) who found that traditional rulers maintain law and order, ensure security, manage, control and resolve conflicts among individuals and groups in the Nigerian society. Similarly, it also corroborates the finding of Hamisu, Makinta, Muhammed, Garba and Umar (2017) who found that traditional rulers settled and resolved disputes/conflict arising within or between members of the community by the instrumentality of laws and customs of the people in that particular community.

Also, finding revealed that there was no significant difference in the roles of traditional rulers in conflict resolution based on age. The reason for this finding could be attributed to the fact that traditional rulers play indispensable roles based on age. This finding is in line with that of Ezenwoko and Osagie (2014) who found no age differences in the perception of respondents on the role of traditional Igbo rulers in the resolution of inter-personal, intra-communal and inter-communal conflicts in the Igbo society.

Furthermore, the finding of the study showed that there was no significant difference in the roles of traditional rulers in conflict resolution based on marital status. Thus, this implies that traditional rulers play important roles in the society irrespective of differences in marital status. This finding contradicts the finding of Orji and

Olali (2010) who found that married adults and their single counterparts differed in their views on the role of traditional rulers in conflict resolution.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it was concluded that traditional rulers have put in place several measures in conflict resolution which have assisted in maintaining law and order in their community. The roles of traditional rulers in conflict resolution includes reconciling and integrating both parties in conflicts, maintaining law and order in the communities, promoting the use of informal settlements, checks and balances in the society, managing improper communication and interaction breakdowns among their subjects, fostering communal solidarity and unity, engendering peaceful co-existence of people of different religious, ethnic and social background, dealing with pressures from external forces outside the community that results in breeding internal pressures as well as facilitating socio-cultural bridge reconstructions in post-conflict situation. Age and marital status are not statistically significant in the roles of traditional rulers in conflict resolution.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, it was recommended that traditional rulers should be encouraged to mediate in conflicts in society and should be educated and on enlightened in modern and alternative dispute resolution that will enable them to facilitate and enhance resolution of conflict in the society. All traditional rulers should be mandated to resolve conflicts regardless of differences in age and marital status.

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