THE TRADITIONAL INSTITUTIONS AND MANAGEMENT OF COMMUNAL CRISIS IN AKOKO NORTH-EAST, ONDO STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT
The study examined the efficacy of using the traditional institutions in managing communal crisis in Akoko North-East, Ondo State, Nigeria. Descriptive research design was adopted, both questionnaire and interview were used to obtain firsthand information. Communitarian theory was employed as a theoretical framework. It was discovered that land, chieftaincy disputes, religion and politicisation are factors causing communal crisis in Akoko North East, Ondo state. The negative effects of the conflict include economic disruption, human displacement and social divisions. Also, it was found that traditional institutions have authority over the affairs of the study area. It also discovered that the existence of two first-class kings, political manipulations, erosion of authority and lack of application of the ancient sacred rite in rural life have been the clog in effective managing of communal crisis in Akoko North-East, Ondo State. It recommended that existence of two first-class kings in same locality should be resolved, political interference should be curbed and traditional institutions should fall back to their ancient sacred rites to ensure their efficacy in managing communal conflicts.

Introduction

Globally, peace and development are interdependent pillars that determine a nation's trajectory of progress. However, nations around the world struggle with a variety of issues that interfere with peaceful living, which has resulted in indiscriminate killings, property destruction, and economic disorder. Azu (2018) identified that one of these issues is the communal crisis. Particularly, communal crisis is not just a phenomenon that affects developing nations; it is a global phenomenon that permeates all societies and frequently has devastating effects on communities, economies, and social cohesion. As a result, several governments have been forced to develop a variety of strategies and measures to halt its precarious effects on the economy (Blanchard, Dudouet & Vion, 2015). Communal disputes have been a persistent problem in Nigeria even before the advent of the Europeans (Umezulike & Ugochukwu, 2021), frequently leading to serious social, economic, and political upheavals. Specifically, in Nigeria, community clashes have been a worrisome and destructive scenario in this Fourth Republic and are occurring across all of the nation's geopolitical zones. Communal conflicts have led to losses of human lives and properties, constant emigrations and displacements, economic downturns, food insecurity among others (Chukwu, Utobo & Ufere, 2022; Lamidi, 2019).

Since independence, successive administrations have been concerned by the complexity of conflicts stemming from political, socio-economic, cultural, and historical reasons, such as the Biafra civil war, Niger Delta militancy, Boko Haram terrorism, farmer-herder conflicts among others (Adebajo & Adebajo, 2023, Eneji & Agri, 2020, Shuaibu, Salleh & Shehu, 2015). Although Nigerian governments have employed a variety of measures and strategies over the years, from diplomacy and negotiation to the deployment of security agents, to reduce and manage the various forms of conflicts, yet, they remain unabated (Udeoba & Eze, 2021). Most of the conflicts occur in rural locations where government visibility is weak and ineffective; where the strength of survival and defence on the part of the localities is at the lowest. Nigeria is known for having a wide variety of ethnic, linguistic, and religious groups, which adds to the complexity of intercommunal disputes. Traditional institutions have historically been crucial in preserving social cohesiveness, keeping order, and settling conflicts since they are strongly ingrained in local communities (Ojo, 2016). The institutions like elders, councils and traditional rulers, have access to a plethora of indigenous knowledge and cultural practices can be used to manage violent conflicts. Due to their proximity and familiarity, traditional institutions enjoy legitimacy and trust among community members, which increases their effectiveness as dispute resolution techniques (Osaghae, 2007). Despite the fact that the Nigerian government set up institutional structures to handle conflicts, their effectiveness can be doubted especially in undefended communities (Hassan & Yusuf, 2020). As a result, traditional institutions have developed into separate dispute resolution systems that frequently function independently of governmental institutions (Salawu, 2019).

It is no gainsaying to assert that it is only in the space of peace and harmony, development and pristine habitual relationship can thrive. Thus, it is ideal that a nation as endowed with rich and quality cultural and ancestral background having reputable local individuals symbolizing as mini-gods and emblem of peace like Nigeria to enjoy peaceful cohabitation amongst her inhabitants (Onyima, 2016). Over the years, Nigeria has been confronted with local security issues affecting every facet of social life. As a matter of fact, communities across the six geo-political zones have experienced diverse religious and ethnic conflicts resulting in fatalities, forced evictions and destruction of property (*Premium Times*, 2023). Reflecting on the consequential effects of communal conflict in Nigeria, Falola, Mukaila and Adetipe (2023) opined that there is rising food insecurity, rural-urban migration, human displacement and refugee's crisis occasioned by the communal conflicts with reverbrating effects on national peace and security. In spite of the different measures deployed by successive governments to address communal conflicts over the years, they remain endemic with negative socio-economic consequences (Udeoba & Eze, 2021). This is due to the fact that the governments seems to have little or no access to the indigenous knowledge and cultural practices in addressing the conflict.Literature exist on potential advantages of incorporating traditional institutions into conflict management mechanisms all over the world, including Nigeria(Ikelegbe, 2002; Osaghae, 2007; Obioha,

2018; Salawu, 2019). However, the studies have only been conducted qualitatively and little attention paid to efficacy of using the traditional institutions in conflict management and the challenges confronting them. Hence, the study quantitatively evaluated the traditional institutions in managing communal crises in Akoko North-East, Ondo State, Nigeria.

Research Objectives

The central objective of the study was to examine the traditional institutions in managing communal crisis in Akoko North-East, Ondo State. The specific objectives of the study were to:

1. Describe the traditional institutions used in managing communal crisis in Akoko North-East, Ondo State;
2. Investigate the potentials benefits of using traditional institutions in managing communal crisis in Akoko North-East, Ondo State; and
3. Interrogate the challenges hindering the traditional institutions in managing communal crises in Akoko North-East Ondo State.

Research Questions

1. Which traditional institutions existed in Akoko North-East, Ondo State?
2. What are the potentials of using traditional institutions in managing communal crisis in Akoko North-East, Ondo State?
3. What are the challenges affecting effective use of traditional institutions in managing communal crises in Akoko North-East, Ondo State?

Theoretical Framework

Communitarian Theory

The communitarian theory is used as explanatory framework. The major proponents of the theory include Alasdair MacIntyre (1984), Charles Taylor (1985), Micheal Sandel (1982), Amitai Etzioni (1993). The theory argues that the community is an organised structure with mosaic of values, norms and customs generally accepted by the members to guide and regulate their activities. The theory advocates the principle of community decision-making processes, social solidarity, a sense of shared responsibility and a balance between individual rights and social responsibilities capable of fostering communal peace and harmony in the localities. Communitarianism is rooted in the idea that communities and shared values are foundational to societal well-being, which is pertinent to understanding how traditional institutions contribute to conflict resolution. Communitarianitarian theory has been criticised for disregarding individual rights in favour of group interest. Also, the nature of the conflict, the flexibility of traditional practices and the degree of participation in community decision-making processes can all affect how effective traditional institutions are at managing conflicts.

In Nigeria, traditional institutions are deeply entrenched in the local communities. As social structures of ethnic, religious or regional affiliations, traditional institutions serve as custodians of communal norms and shared principles (Ojo-Ebenezer, 2023). Since pre-colonial era, the Emirs, Obas, Obis, Baales, family heads, the Umuadas, chiefs, the village tribunals, council of leaders, age grades or youth leaders serve as administrative officers, mediators, facilitators, negotiators and peacemakers in the regions of Nigeria (Akpabio, 2022; Nwazie, 1991). They are respected individuals and bodies seen as a special symbol with rich knowledge of culture and values of the society. They often adopt community participation and consensus-building in conflict resolution efforts. Leaders occupying the traditioal institutions possess a wealth of local knowledge and wisdom, facilitate discussions that seek communal solution to conflicts.In managing conflicts, the traditional institutions encourage dialogue including diverse community members, ensuring that multiple perspectives are considered. They are deeply connected to the cultural nuances of their communities, draw on this knowledge to address conflicts in ways that are culturally resonant (Akpabio, 2022; Ojo-Ebenezer, 2023). They navigate disputes while respecting the historical and cultural context within which conflicts arise. By acting as mediators, they ensure that individual grievances are addressed within the framework of communal well-being, thereby contributing to sustainable conflict resolution.

The Concept of Traditional Institution

The traditional institution is not limited to the lexicon of African societies alone, it has also gained cognisance in various societies of the world, and till date, have co-existed with modern governing structures both in developing and developed nations across the globe. In Europe, particularly in England, traditional institutions could be regarded as the monarch (kings and royal chiefs, dukes etc.), also in African societies, particularly in Nigeria, they are regarded as the emirs, obas, council of elders, chiefs and Baale, etc. These institutions widely recognized for their majestic nature and cultural ambiances. Globally, the hallmark of traditional institutions is in governance, cultural preservation and conflict resolution. The review of extant literature reveals that they are repositories of cultural practices, rituals, and symbols that define a community's distinct identity, providing frameworks for leadership, authority, and decision-making within communities. Therefore, in the words of Beall and Ngonyama (2009 as cited in Oladapo, 2022), traditional institutions are the formal and informal rules, norms, and values that humans created and have the authority to impose. They also have the capacity to make choices based on these rules and values.

Traditional institutions are the heritage of customary laws, leadership roles, and communal practices that guide decision-making and conflict resolution within local communities. The fundamental purpose of institutions is to protect the customs and traditions of the populace and to use the laws and conventions of the populace as a tool to resolve disputes that may arise within or between groups of people (Akpabio, 2022). That is, traditional rulers, councils of elders, and other local authorities often wield influence over matters ranging from conflict resolution to resource allocation (Ibeanu, 2008). In agreement, traditional institutions to Obioha (2018) encompass the ancestral practices, leadership structures, and customary laws that regulate social relationships, dispute resolution, and governance within indigenous groups. These institutions contribute to the maintenance of social order, justice, and harmony by upholding established norms and resolving disputes through consensus-based mechanisms (Mboh, 2021). They often serve as bridges between conflicting parties, employing indigenous methods of restorative justice that focus on healing and reintegration (Onuoha, 2017). To Eberbach, et al. (2017) and Ikelegbe (2004), traditional institutions are the organic expressions of community values, norms, and practices that serve as platforms for authority, social integration, and cultural preservation.

In most instances, people are selected for positions in traditional institutions either by election or selection using appropriate traditional means, or through heredity. The institutions are responsible for carrying out legislative, executive, and judicial duties in their local capacities. That is, they create laws, implement, interpret and apply the basic laws, societal norms, and customs to ensure the smooth operation of their communities (Obioha, 2018; Nweke, 2012). By doing this, disputes are often handled and settled in accordance with the local traditions and customs. Thus, to this paper, traditional institutions are cultural organisations that hold significant control over the customs and traditions preserved by the people of Nigeria in managing their daily lives and they operate in various areas across the nation.

The concept of Communal Crisis

Community crisis is a complex situation marked by tensions, disputes, and fights inside or across communities. It frequently results in violence,instability, and disruption of social order. Communal crises are seen to be the outcome of complex social interactions, including issues of control, participation, production and consumption within a society (Alozie, 2019). From the perspective of Omitola, et al. (2023), communal crisis is described as disputes and tensions that develop within or across communities, frequently accompanied by animosity and violence, and which endanger social cohesion and disturb routine. Okoli and Nnabuihe (2019) conceived communal crisis as clashes with low vehemence and local arms between or among several groups of people connected via links to their original land. It is most prevalent in rural communities where caste, religion, ethnicity, and clan are used as narrow distinctions between groups.

Nnoli (2008) conceptualises community crisis as disagreement that arises between different ethnic, religious, or social groups located in the same area and frequently result in violence and instability. This type of crisis can take many different forms, from small-scale conflicts over territory or resources to larger ones that endanger the stability of a whole country or region. Violent outbursts centered on racial,

religious, socioeconomic, or political fault lines are hallmarks of communal crises. Conflicts between groups with similar identities or who live in the same region are also frequent features of communal crisis (Varshney, 2002). Communal crisis can result from socio-economic inequities, competition over resources, political manipulation, identity problem or historical grievances (Okpa, Ajah, Eze & Enweonwu, 2023; Osadola, Olofinsao & Ajisafe, 2021). In addition, interpersonal impulses and underlying social issues can function as catalysts for animosity and violence between different groups. The triggers might be violent acts, uncomfortable circumstances, or perceived injustices (Oravee, 2015).

It is imperative to mention that community identity and social cohesion are significantly impacted by communal disasters. They damage relationships between groups and destroy trust, fostering animosity and dread (Falola, Mukaila & Adetipe, 2023). By implication, conflicts that divide communities frequently strengthen group identities and develop "us vs. them" mentalities that can last long after the crisis has passed. In Nigeria, disputes and confrontations between various communal groupings are marked by underlying tensions and animosity leading to casualties, destruction and heightened tension. Communal crisis challenges governance structures and development efforts within societies because they strain state institutions, hinder service delivery, and undermine efforts to promote stability and progress (Popoola, Olawale & Mufutau, 2020: Kughur, Daudu & Iornenege, 2017). These disruptions caused by communal crisis can have lasting socio-economic consequences, perpetuating cycles of poverty and underdevelopment.

Multifarious causes of Communal Crisis in Nigeria

Communal crisis have been a recurring social phenomenon in Nigeria. Okoli and Ukwandu (2022) asserted that communal conflicts have been recurring despite the level of social, political and economic development in Nigeria. Communal conflicts became worrisome after the end of the Nigerian Civil War as several communities have persistently been at loggerheads either over lands, market sites, local government administrative offices, police stations, or inclusion in a state or local government area. Also, communal clashes have been recorded in many rural areas inspired by sheer hatred for others cultural practices.

Existing literature have identified the drivers of communal conflicts in Nigeria in varying degrees of significance (Okoli & Ukwandu, 2022; Okoli & Ogayi, 2018; Okoli & Lenshie, 2018; Oravee 2015; Alimba, 2014). The studies of Okoli and Ukwandu, (2022) and Alimba (2014) identified with issues relating to cultural, economic, political, and socio-ecological factors as causes of conflicts. Ethno-identity disputes has been linked to communal conflict to aggressive resource competition. This suggests that fights between communities over power, ownership, or access to political or economic resources serve as the basis for community conflict. Oravee (2015) expounded further that land related issues especially farmland disputes as substantial and crucial driver of communal conflicts in Nigeria. Clashes over lands are seen not only in light of veritable economic resources but also could be driven by genuine or misguided political or cultural issues (Ayokhai, 2013; Okoli & Atelhe, 2014). For intance, the Aguleri-Umuleri-Umuoba Anam crisis in Anambra State was driven by issues of land ownership. Scholars such as Adeyote and Omilusi (2015) Uzuegbunam and Nwobia (2014), Okoli and Uhembe (2014) also identified identity-based, livelihood-related, and partisan political factors as drivers of communal conflicts in Nigeria. They believed that communal conflicts may result from a combination of cultural differences, access to resources or possibilities for employment, and problems with political representation. These elements have frequently reinforced one another in the majority of community conflict cases in Nigeria, leading to disastrous consequences. Citing the Sagamu conflict in the late 1990s between the Yoruba and the settler-Hausa groups and Ife-Modakeke crisis as instances, they held that prejudices and ethno-cultural disparities have contributed terribly to communal conflict in Nigeria, exacerbating ethno-cultural stereotypes (Asiyanbola 2007). Contemporary trails of communal conflicts in Nigeria are influenced by elite manipulation and politicisation; the political class alongside their religious counterparts have taken advantage of religion and ethnicity as tools for bargaining and mobilisation for patronages in the sharing of national resources (Adeyote & Omilusi, 2015; Okoli & Uhembe (2014).

Hassan and Yusuf (2020) contended that the political elites' desperation and opportunistic

desire for political dominance has frequently fueled communal conflicts. In order to garner support during elections, Nigerian political actors have a history of exacerbating ethnic and religious tensions, which has resulted in violent outbursts. This was true in the instance of Nasarawa State's Ombatse conflict, Wukari crises in Taraba State which explains why communal conflict in modern-day Nigeria seems unsolvable as government appears to be unable to handle the issues of communal and ethnic conflicts because they are only being managed rather than resolved (Alozieuwa, 2016; Nwagwu 2016; Nwanebo, Odigbo, & Ochanna, 2014). The study of Okoli and Nnabuihe (2019) explored the sources, fault-lines, and associated catalysts of occurrence of communal conflict in Nigeria as its drivers. Sources are the underlying causes of communal conflict which could be chieftaincy related issues, boundary, and land conflicts. Fault-lines appear to be the opportunistic socio-cultural and political factors such as cultural prejudices, identity politics, religion and ethnicity and associated catalysts include various socio-ecological, demographic, socio-economic and governance challenges. For instance, the effects of urbanisation and population growth, climate change and governance-related problems such as socioeconomic crises exacerbate communal conflicts (Schuab, 2014; Asiyanbola, 2007; Blench & Dendo, 2005). Ogundiya (2017) claimed that communal conflicts in Nigeria have frequently been constructed along the dividing lines of native (indigene)-settler, Christian-Muslim, farmer-herder, and inter-clannish closures, in keeping with the current socio-cultural and political fault-lines. Given all of these, it is clear that communal crises are complicated phenomena that are influenced by a range of historical, political, economic and social aspects. The root causes of these crises are interconnected on a global scale, reflecting the complex character of human society.

Negative effects of Communal Conflicts in Nigeria

Communal conflicts have left indelible marks on societies worldwide, causing profound social, economic, and psychological consequences. Communal conflicts have long been a significant challenge in Nigeria, exacerbating social tensions, undermining peace and stability, and hindering socio-economic development. The far-reaching consequences and implications of communal conflict for the country's structure include the following. One of the effects of communal conflict is economic disruption and development setbacks**.** Due to infrastructure damage, business closures, and disruptions to agricultural activity, communal crises frequently cause considerable economic disruptions (Okoli & Nsemba, 2018). Recurrent conflicts between farmers and herders in Nigeria's Plateau State have resulted in the abandoning of productive fields, which has a detrimental effect on agricultural production and food security (Nwagwu, 2016). Also, in the works of Akindele and Olanrewaju (2019), it was discovered that communal conflicts disrupt agricultural production, trade, and commerce, leading to loss of livelihoods, food insecurity, and economic stagnation. Insecurity resulting from communal conflicts deters domestic and foreign investment, constraining economic growth and development (Olaniyan, 2014). Vital infrastructure such as roads, schools, health facilities, and markets are often destroyed during conflicts, impeding access to essential services and hindering development (Ibrahim & Adebisi, 2018).

Communal crisis also causes displacement and forced migration**.** Mass displacement is frequently brought on by racial or ethnic conflicts since populations are compelled to evacuate their homes to avoid the violence (United Nations High Commission on Refugees,UNHCR, 2020). For example, the current conflict between farmers and herders in Nigeria's Benue State has resulted in thousands of people being displaced, escalating humanitarian issues (Brimah, 2018). Individuals and communities affected by communal conflicts suffer from psychological trauma, including anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Adeyemi & Ogunyemi, 2016). Also, communal crises also lead to social divisions and trust erosion. Conflicts within communities exacerbate already-existing social divisions and undermine trust between various racial or religious groups (Varshney, 2002). Deep-seated divides between Bosniaks, Croats, and Serbs still exist in Bosnia and Herzegovina as a result of the 1992–1995 conflict (Dzankic & Hulusic, 2015). Inter-group connections and societal cohesiveness in Nigeria have been hampered by community disputes (Onuoha, 2017). Prolonged conflicts erode social cohesion and trust within communities, undermining traditional mechanisms of conflict resolution and fostering a culture of violence (Onuoha, 2012).

Human rights violations and trauma are also one of the effects of communal crisis**.** Communal clashes frequently result in serious human rights violations, such as torture, deaths, sexual assault, and displacement and strain the capacity of security forces, exacerbating inter-communal tensions and contributing to human rights abuses and extrajudicial killings (Amnesty International, 2020). Numerous crimes against civilians were committed during the Sudanese conflict in Darfur, leaving long-lasting trauma and emotional scars (Mayer et al., 2017). Similar to cases of violence during communal conflicts, survivors in Nigeria have experienced trauma and emotional distress (Adebayo & Olaleye, 2014). Furthermore, institutional weakness and governance challenges are aftermath of communal crisis**.** Ineffective service delivery and development can be hampered by communal crisis, which can weaken state institutions and erode governance systems (Stewart & Fitzgerald, 2018). The government of Iraq has struggled to maintain law and order and deliver basic services as a result of years of fighting (Hinnebusch & Ehteshami, 2019). Long-running conflicts in Nigeria have made it difficult for the government to handle and respond to new problems (Hassan & Yusuf, 2020). By and large, communal conflicts have broad-reaching, multifaceted repercussions on civilizations that affect them on the psychological, social, and economic levels. Due to these conflicts, communities around the world have had to deal with weakened governance institutions, human rights breaches, trust erosion, and economic setbacks. Communal disputes have real-world effects in Nigeria, scarring people and communities, impeding efforts to grow, and jeopardizing the country's unity.

The Imperative of Traditional Institutions in Solving Communal Crises in Nigeria

Nigeria has experienced numerous communal crises due to its complex socio-political landscape. These crises often arise from ethnic, religious, and economic differences. The Nigerian government and various stakeholders employ a range of mechanisms to address and resolve the conflicts. This involves mediation and dialogue, security interventions, legal framework or adjudication, arbitration, peacebuilding committee and grassroots initiatives. The mechanisms are explained as follows in line with the locations where they have been utilized in Nigeria's geopolitical zones justifying the imperative of traditional institutions (religious leaders, traditional rulers and youth organisations).

Mediation and dialogue are critical traditional conflict management mechanisms used in bringing conflicting parties together to discuss their differences and find common ground (Uhunmwuangho & Epelle, 2011). The government, religious leaders, and traditional rulers often play key roles in facilitating discussions. For instance, in resolving the Jos crisis in Plateau state, the ethno-religious conflicts between the predominantly Christian Berom and the Muslim Hausa-Fulani communities. Over the years, the Nigerian government-initiated dialogue sessions involving community leaders, religious heads and youth representatives, aimed at fostering understanding and promoting peaceful coexistence between the groups (Garkuwa, 2023).

The deployment of security forces, the military and police, is a common mechanism to quell violent outbreaks and restore order. This approach is often criticised for being reactive rather than preventive. Specifically in the Niger Delta plagued by incessant violence due to the exploitation of oil resources and environmental degradation. Over the years, the Nigerian government has deployed military forces to the area to combat militant groups and protect oil installations. The kinetic approach imposed negative peace characterised by human rights violations (Nwogwugwu, Alao & Egwuonwu, 2012).

Nigeria has established legal and institutional frameworks to address communal conflicts. The constitution guarantees the rights of all citizens, and various laws have been enacted to protect minority rights and promote justice. Institutions such as the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) and the judiciary play critical roles in investigating abuses and ensuring accountability in Nigeria. For instance, Benue and Taraba states have witnessed violent clashes between farmers and herders over land use. The government's response includes enforcing existing land use laws, deploying security forces, and supporting peace-building initiatives through legal channels (Lucas. et al., 2024). However, the Nigerian Human Rights Commission has been involved in investigating human rights violations and recommending measures to prevent future conflicts. Although, the recommended measures are partly implemented or not all.

Peacebuilding committees are established at various levels (local, state, and federal) to prevent and manage conflicts. The committees comprise representatives from different ethnic and religious groups, government officials, and security agencies. Their mandate includes conflict prevention, mediation, and monitoring of peace agreements. For instance, Kaduna state has experienced significant ethno-religious violence, particularly between the Christian-dominated Southern Kaduna and the Muslim-dominated Northern Kaduna. The Kaduna Peace Committee, consisting of religious leaders, traditional rulers and civil society organizations, played significant roles in mediating disputes and fostering dialogue between the communities (Best, 2007). As can be gleaned from the aforegoing, the strategies in one way or the other made use of the native authorities, village heads or elders and youths in resolving conflicts. This underscores the efficacy of adopting traditional institutions, that is, grassroots initiatives in solving issues peculiar to the society. Traditional institutions possess adequate knowledge of indigenous dynamics to mobilise communities for peace-building activities (Ojo-Ebenezer, 2023).

Research Methods

The study adopted descriptive survey research design in order to get firsthand information from the target area. The Local Government comprised of 16 towns namely Ikare Akoko (headquarters), Okela, Okegbe Okorun, Eshe, Odo, Ilepa, Okoja, Iku, Odeyare, Odoruwa, Okeruwa, Iyame, Igbede, Oyinmo, Ishakunmi and Ekan. Ikare Akoko was chosen as the target area for the study due to prevailing communal crisis in the area. The study covered the Akoko North-East Local Government Area of Ondo State. According to United Nations World Population Prospects (2023), the estimated population of Ikare Akoko is 199,019. The population is made up of people of various ages (youth, and adult), sex (male and female), occupation, ethnic, and educational backgrounds. The primary data were collected using questionnaire and interview methods. 384 copies of questionnaire were administered randomly and five participants who gave consent were purposively selected and interviewed. Purposive sampling technique was used to select individuals who had in-depth knowledge of the traditional institutions in the area of the study. The secondary sources used included academic journals, reports, books, magazines and online articles. The sample size for the quantitative data was determined using Miller and Dillman (2011) formula. The formula was adopted because it shows sample size is inversely proportional to the square of margin error and accurate for calculating sample size based on specific population as it is in this location. Sample size obtained was 383.88. Approximately, the sample size was 384. The quantitative data was analysed using simple percentage while the qualitative data was coded, transcribed and thematically analysed.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Table 1. The traditional institutions used in managing communal crisis in Akoko North East Local Government Area, Ondo state

S/N	Research Items	SA	A	D	SD
1.	Traditional rulers such as kings exist in Akoko North-East L.G.A, Ondo State just as in other areas of Nigeria.	299 85.6%	50 14.4%	0 0%	0 %
2.	Council of chiefs and elders are well-recognised in localities in Akoko North-East L.G.A in Ondo State.	310 88.8%	39 11.2%	0 0%	0 0%

3.	Family heads are traditional institutions in Akoko North-East L.G.A., Ondo State.	320 91.7%	29 8.3%	0 0%	0 0%
4.	Age-grade system exists in Akoko North-East L.G.A in Ondo State.	115 32.9%	161 46.1%	25 7.2%	48 13.8%
5.	Traditional religious heads are prominent institutions in Akoko North-East L.G.A, Ondo State.	280 80.2%	40 11.5%	18 5.2%	11 3.1%

Source: Field survey, 2023

In table 1, all(100%) the respondents believed that traditional rulers such as king(s) who govern in the society exist in the location of the study. 100% thought that there are well-recognised council of chiefs and elders in area. All the respondents thought that family heads are parts of traditional institutions in Akoko North East. Meanwhile, All 79% thought that age grade exists in Akoko North East and 21% had a contrary idea. 91.7% agreed, while 8.3% disagreed that traditional religious heads are a prominent institution in Akoko North-East L.G.A, Ondo State. In communities in Nigeria, through traditional institutions having different individuals like kings, chiefs, elders, family heads, age grade and traditional heads are found in Akoko North East.

From the interviews, it was revealed that in Ikare-Akoko that there exists two First-class or Grade A monarch, namely the Olukare of Ikare kingdom, HIM. Oba Akadri Saliu Momoh IV and Owa Ale of Ikare, Oba Adeleke Adegbite-Adedoyin II. Also, they attested to the fact that there is long list of council of chiefs at both sides of the two monarchs who advise and assist the kings. At the town level, there exists council of elders(*Erigbo)* who settles minor disputes in the locality, while at every quarter of the town, there are age grades called *regberegbe* . in addition, there youths who are organised and coordinated by youth leaders(*Olori Odo),* who sees to the affairs of the youths. The traditional religious heads (Onimale) also exist and perform traditional religious rites in the communities.

Table 2. Potentials of adopting traditional institutions in managing communal crisis in Akoko North-East Local Government Area

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD
1	Through mediation, peacemaking and customary rules, traditional institutions have the necessary tools to resolve disputes and maintain harmony in Akoko North-East L.G.A in Ondo State.	214 61.3%	72 20.6%	40 11.5%	23 6.6%
2	The council of chiefs and elders can foster social cohesion by creating forum to address recurring conflicts due to	222 63.6%	80 22.9%	29 8.3%	18 5.2%

	their proximity with the locales in Akoko North-East L.G.A., Ondo State.				
3	The kings, council of chiefs and elders, through the knowledge of the customs and familiarity with the community can bridge divides and facilitate dialogue to identify andaddress the remote causes of conflicts in Akoko North-East L.G.A in Ondo State.	276 79.1%	62 17.7%	10 2.9%	1 0.3
4.	The king and his councils through their position of cultural authority and divine figure resolve issues that can erupt into state-crisis in Akoko North-East L.G.A in Ondo State.	198 56.7%	56 16.1%	50 14.3	45 12.9
5	Through the belief and sacredness of the traditional religion, the religious heads can also contribute to dispute resolution in Akoko North-East L.G.A in Ondo State.	202 57.9%	88 25.2%	32 9.2%	27 7.7%

Source: Field survey: 2023

In table 2, 82% believed that traditional institutions through mediation, peacemaking and customary rules resolve disputes and maintain harmony in Akoko North East L.G.A in Ondo while 18% objected. 87% thought that council of elders and chiefs can foster social cohesion by creating forum to address recurring conflicts due to their proximity with the locales while 13% thought otherwise. 97% felt k council of chiefs and elders can bridge divides and facilitate dialogue to resolve conflicts in Akoko North-East L.G.A in Ondo State. 79% felt that traditional institutions can through their position of cultural authority and divine figure facilitate dialogue to resolve that can erupt into state-crisis. 83% perceived that the religious heads based on sacredness of religious rites contribute to dispute resolution in Akoko North-East L.G.A in Ondo State while 17% did not perceive so.

The interviewees revealed that communal disputes of great dimension are mostly resolved by the king and council of chiefs of Akoko prior to the kingship rivalry in the area. However, it was found out that minor disputes on land ownership, rents, marriages, etc. among inhabitants are solved by Council of Elders (Erigbo). While the religious heads solve issues relating to spirituality. In short, the interviewees ascertained that organised traditional institutions have and will always be a strong tool to manage communal crisis in the area of study. Gleaning from the data presented, the traditionnal institutions play critical roles in managing crisis that can result to violence engulfing the state. They have been engaging in managing issues on land ownership, rents, religion, marriage, etc,.

Table 3. Challenges hindering effective management of communal crises by the traditional institutions in Akoko North-East Local Government Area

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD
1.	Political manipulation by elites seeking to exploit communal divisions for their own gain is a challenge facing traditional institutions in Akoko North-East L.G.A., Ondo State is	283 81.1%	30 8.6%	21 6.0%	15 4.3%
2.	Historical crisis of succession among the traditional institution poses a challenge to curbing communal crisis in the area in Akoko North-East L.G.A., Ondo State	303 86.8%	30 8.6%	12 3.4%	4 1.2%
3.	Erosion of authority of traditional institutions due to changing societal values affects them in managing communal crisis in Akoko North-East L.G.A., Ondo State.	227 65.0%	71 20.3%	32 9.3%	19 5.4%
4.	Absence of a comprehensive legal backing for traditional governance and conflict resolution limits the capacity of traditional institutions to address complex communal crises effectively in Akoko North-East L.G.A., Ondo State.	68 19.5	52 14.8%	25 7.2%	204 58.5%
5.	Lack of application of the ancient sacred rites by traditional institutions due to negative effects of money and modernity affects management of conflict in Akoko North-East L.G.A., Ondo State face challenges in reducing conflict due to	262 75.1%	68 19.5%	12 3.4%	7 2.0%

Source: Researcher's Field Work, 2023

In table 3, it was revealed that 90% believed that political manipulation by elites seeking to exploit communal divisions for their own gains is a problem facing traditional institutions in the location of the study while 10% believed otherwise. it can be deduced that traditional institutions face challenges in carrying out their role of managing communal conflicts in Akoko North-East L.G.A., Ondo State. 95% perceived that historical successional crisis among the traditional institutions in Akoko North-East L.G.A., Ondo State poses a problem to curbing communal crisis in the area while 5% thought contrarily. 85 % agreed and 15% disagreed that erosion of traditional institutions' authority and legitimacy due to changing social values constitutes a barrier to traditional institutions in managing communal crisis in the study area. Meanwhile, 34% agreed and 66% disagreed that the absence of a comprehensive legal backing for traditional governance limits the capacity of traditional institutions to address complex communal crises effectively in the area. Lastly, 95% believed lack of application of the ancient sacred rites in their activities owing to the negative impact of money and modernity affects traditional institutions in reducing conflict.

In affirmation with the above, the participants advanced that the current communal crisis in Akoko North-East L.G.A., Ondo State is as a result of interference and manipulation by political elites in the traditional organisation of the town. It was identified that the deceased former governor of Ondo State, Oluwarotimi Akeredolu, in kickback against the Olukare of Ikare's lack of support to his political campaign, rewarded the Owa Ale of Ikare by upgrading him to a first-class king, leading a faction degenerating into different crisis the town faces. Also, Akoko has had a long history of crisis within its communities, due to successional or right to kingship crisis since the colonial period which has not been resolved till date. It was remarked that long ago in history, at the demise of Olukare, Owa Ale being the right-hand man to the king was given the charge to make decisions in assistance to the regent (a female heir). Subsequently, the then Owa Ale declared himself king, and thus, the position of kingship title amongst his descendants continues till date. However, the crisis was aggravated due to the upgrade of the seat of Owa Ale as first-class king.

Gleaning from the interviews, the traditional institutions did not fully lose their authority as perceived. However, due to modernity and change in social values, traditional institutions' authority is eroded. They also remarked that, due to the unabated and irreconcilable factions in the town, the civilized inhabitants give little or no reverence to the activities of the monarch, however, the sacred rites known as "*Oro*" and sacrifices are followed and the timings and prohibitions given by the monarchs. Also, the Erigbo's and council of chiefs' decisions to resolve disputes are followed by the parties to the conflict as they still reverence them. More so, the participants ascertained that traditional institutions in Akoko have no challenge of legal backing, that it is the institutions' inclusion in politics that led to their vulnerability and reasons for more conflicts in the region. They also validated that the non-application of the ancient sacred rite in carrying out various activities due to the influence of money from political elites and modernity pose a challenge to traditional institutions in curbing conflict, as people see those who should be sacred as corrupt \.

Discussion of Findings

On the first objective, the findings of the paper disclosed that there are traditional institutions in Ikare-Akoko as there are in other geo-political zones of Nigeria. As found out, there are two First Class monarchs, the Olukare of Ikare and Owa Ale of Ikare, having each a long list of chiefs regarded as council of chiefs. There also exists council of elders known as "*Erigbo*" who settles minor disputes, with age-grades and traditional religious heads inclusive in the institution. This confirms Okeowo (2023) assertion that just like every other local government area in Ondo State, Ikare-Akoko has two contending and rivalry kings that have continued to clash over supremacy in the community, and the kings have a long historical antecedents that predates colonial periods and have a strong influence on the lives of the people of the community. Also, the finding is in consonance with the view of Mustapha and Hadiza (2019), who observed that traditional institutions exist in all ethnic groups in Nigeria, despite variations in their capabilities and modes of operation. These institutions have contributed to Nigeria's history and were crucial to the administrative process prior to, during, and after colonial governments.

On the second objective, the findings also showed that traditional institutions have great potentials in managing communal conflicts in Ikare Akoko. The traditional institutions,

especially the council of chiefs and elders play great role in settling disputes that may degenerate into violent conflict. Adebile (2023) contended that the elders (Agba) are the key actors in managing and resolving conflict in Ikare-Akoko and other communities in Ondo state. He furthered that the communities in Ondo State have a renowned quasi three tier government like configuration with the king as the supreme authority in the community supported by his chiefs who deliberate on issues surrounding the posterity of the community. The Agbas are summoned by the king and his chiefs to help out with certain matters since they are believed to be wiser, possess immense knowledge about the community and more experienced by virtue of age (Adebile, 2023). This is in tandem with the opinion of Ojo-Ebenezer (2023), who asserted that traditional institutions, especially the council of elders are held in high regard by the general public due to their duties as elders representing a range of families and wards, and they are highly appreciated in town meetings, when issues affecting the entire town are debated. They served as a court of appeals for anyone who had received an unfavorable judgment from the head of their household.

On the third objective, it was revealed that traditional institutions face some challenges in carrying out their role of managing communal conflicts in Ikare-Akoko such as political manipulation, historical successional crisis, erosion of traditional institutions' authority and lack of application of the ancient sacred rite of selection in many activities. The finding confirms Okeowo (2023) position that traditional institutions in Ikare-Akoko have the potential to settle the current conflicts in the community, however, the battle between the two monarchs fueled by political manipulations have allowed the crisis to linger for long. In many local governments in Ondo State such as Ifedore, Akure South and Okitipupa, there are several monarchs that rule together peacefully without violent clashes over supremacy. Also, the battle for supremacy by the monarchs in Ikare-Akoko is simply due to the thriving economic posterity of the area which is known for export of cocoa and palm oil from colonial period till date. This crisis between the kings have led to serious conflicts between the king's factions, eroded and ridiculed the traditional authority. In addition, the finding confirms the assertin of Hassan and Yusuf (2020), Onuoha (2017) that political manipulation and elite interests, erosion of authority and legitimacy, lack of institutional framework and support, resource constraints and modernization, are challenges facing traditional institutions in carrying out their role of conflict resolution in Nigeria.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Communal conflicts are inexorable in many societies and it is a recurring issue in Nigeria of which traditional institutions still remain viable means of management. The traditional institutions in Ikare-Akoko have existed for decades and possess the potentials to manage communal conflicts. However, the traditional institutions have continued to be ineffective due to the challenge of supremacy battle between the two monarchs, politicization and manipulation resulting into violent clashes. The study concluded that if supremacy battle is not timely addressed, communities in Ikare Akoko North East, will become hubs for unabated violence. Therefore, the paper recommends that:

i. The existence of two first-class kings in same localities should be resolved using the true ancestral kingship procedure in the area. The existence of two equal monarchs with historical rivalry will not in one way or the other promote social cohesion among their followers.

ii. Political interference in the affairs of the traditional rulers should be curbed to avoid manipulation and erosion of authority. The elevation of one king as a first-class king which created rivalry between the two monarchs was due to political involvement.

iii. Traditional institutions should fall back to their ancient sacred rites in every activity of the area.

iv. Unnecessary crave for money and materialism should discouraged by the traditional rulers. This is because they are the custodian of cultures and traditions and cannot afford to lose their legitimacy and authority due to crave for money, materialism and political positions.

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