

THE ROLE OF TRADITIONAL AUTHORITY IN CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN AFRICA, A LOOK AT OHAOZARA LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF EBONYI SAE

Asu Ugama Anoke
Post Graduate Student
Department of Political Science
Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki,
Nigeria.

&

Igwe Eugene Nwigwe
Department of History
Ebonyi State College of Education, Ikwo
Ebonyi State, Nigeria.

Abstract

This paper looks at the challenges militating against effective role of traditional authorities in conflict resolution in Ohaozara Local Government Area of Ebonyi State. The paper sees political interference, corruption, Christianity and modernization to have posed a great threat to the role of traditional authorities in conflict resolution in Ohaozara Local Government Area of Ebonyi State. The study adopts experimental survey design with structural functionalism as the theoretical framework of analysis. Content and descriptive technologies are the method of data analysis. Data collection was made up of both primary and secondary sources which after careful study, it was discovered that corruption, political interference, Christianity, civilization, poverty and illiteracy are factors responsible for the failure of traditional authorities in effective conflict resolution in Ohaozara Local Government Area of Ebonyi State. The paper recommend among others. Independence of traditional authorities, sack and jail term for traditional rulers found corrupt or living below expectations.

Keywords: Traditional Authority, Conflict Resolution.

Introduction

During the pre-colonial period, communities in Africa and Nigeria in particular had evolved various system of administrations based on peculiarities of ethnic nationalities. These institutions had executive, legislation as well as judicial power in their various areas. The organization according to Njoku (2011) had and maintained check and balances with advisory bodies.

Nwankwo (1992) argued that traditional authorities contributes in judicial, legislative as well as executive processes of their communities.

In Ohaozara Local Government Area of Ebonyi State, the area had been faced with numerous civil conflicts

since the creation of Ebonyi State in 1996. some of the conflicts had been resolved by the traditional rulers, Eze in councils and Ezumezu Ohaozara in council Assembly. Some of the conflicts resolved include: Land dispute between individuals and villages, for instance, boundary demarcation between Umunaga and Umuchima village, Ihenu and Umuchima village, Umuchima and Urobo village and many, more in Uburu. At the inter community level, the boundary demarcation between Uburu and Okposi her neighbouring community was carefully resolved and peace reign supreme between them.

As time went on, these primary responsibilities of maintaining peace and security which traditional rulers are known for became eroded by increase in

communal conflict and other forms of crisis in Ohaozara Local Government Area of Ebonyi State. The situation results to insecurity, loss of lives and properties. Here the study will look at corruption, political interference, modernization, poverty, Christianity illiteracy as factors militating against traditional authorities in conflict resolution in Uburu community in Ohaozara Local Government Area of Ebonyi State.

Statement of the problem

The level of increase in communal conflicts in some communities in Ebonyi State particularly in Ohaozara Local Government Area of Ebonyi State constitute a major sources of worry. Since the creation of Ebonyi State in 1996, Ohaozara Local Government Area had witnessed geometric rise in communal conflict. This situation results to insecurity and loss of lives and properties in the area.

Objectives of the study

The broad objective of this paper is to investigate the factors responsible for the inability of traditional rulers to resolve civil conflicts in their various communities in Ohaozara Local Government Area.

Specifically, the objectives are;

1. To examine corruption as one of the factors responsible for the inability of traditional rulers in resolving conflict in Ohaozara Local Government Area.
2. To examine how political interference is a factors responsible for the inability of traditional rulers to resolve conflict in Ohaozara Local Government Area.

Research questions

1. How has corruption contributed to the inability of traditional rulers to resolve conflict in Ohaozara Local Government Area?
2. Does political interference contribute to the inability of traditional rulers to resolve conflict in Ohaozara Local Government Area?

Significance of the study

The study is significance as it has revealed the negative effect of corruption, political interference and Christianity in conflict resolution among traditional ruler in Ohaozara Local Government Area and Nigeria at large.

Scope and limitation of the study

The study covers a period of twenty six (6) years 1996-2022. The period under review witnessed the highest conflict which many lives and properties were lost in Ohaozara Local Government Area. It is worthy of mention that the study centres on Ohaozara Local Government Area of Ebonyi State. The Local Government is made up three major communities. Namely Uburu, Okposi and Ugwulangwu community.

The study has its own limitations and challenges. This ranges from generalization or application to other different cultural setting in communal conflict differences.

Corruption and conflict resolution in Nigeria

Many scholars believed that traditional rulers are corrupt in the process of discharging their duties. This is evident on a case of a traditional ruler OjongAgboof Ikom Local Government Area in Cross River State of Nigeria who was said to have conspired with one OduNsor, Oduma Ese and others to kidnap Oduma Atta, a 23 years old law student of University of Calabar. Oduma is a son of a business man,. They demanded and collected a ransom of Fifty (50) Million naira before releasing him from captivity. This act (kidnaping) led to the suspension and removal of the traditional ruler for aiding corruption Asu (2010).

Political interference in conflict resolution in Nigeria

During the pre-colonial era, traditional rulers had executive role they performed before the advent of colonialism. They were in charge of day to day running of their communities. Custom and tradition define the roles of traditional rulers in their communities. In line with this, Nwankwo (1992) argues that Chiefs are custodians of their land and they held the land in trust for the people. They serve as the mediator between the living and the death, government and the ruler people. In 1960, Nigeria gained independence from their Colonial masters; the freedom enjoyed by traditional rulers started reducing till date. The efforts to regain the lost glory which was largely eroded by Western culture and political governance could not attract the expected result.

Aidelokhai (2008) maintained that the role of

traditional rulers during the pre-colonial period were political cultural, economic and social and were the lords of their various kingdom. As time went on, the status of traditional rulers changed as colonial masters got involved with colonial rule thereby imposing their powers on traditional rulers and traditional authorities. Njoku (2011) also maintains that there are changes in the role of traditional rulers since the introduction of local government reforms of 1976.

In our societies today, the customs, tradition, norms and values are gradually dwindling due to corruption and political interferences. Christianity and modernization has interfered with their duties which have hindered their effective and proper discharge of their duties.

Christianity and conflict resolution in Nigeria

Traditional rulers perform religious functions in their various communities as they remain the custodians of traditional religion in their various communities. Enyiagu (2012) to receive their first true king from God, David a man after God's heart, they were under a traditional ruler. Saul brought about woes in Isreal because of his failures. This is applicable to our traditional rulers of today.

They believed they cared more than the creator of life who had said "Love your neighbor as yourself" therefore, offo-na-ogu, Nigerian government is blamed for carrying out genocidal crime against our traditional home land and desecrated our norms values and self-recognition by frustrating our peoples root and self-image and removed the divine power of traditional rulers and made the crowd sycophants, even though their position cannot remove the divine power since it is the spirit from the land of the people.

During the colonial administration the traditional rulers served as the priest of indirect rule. Abdullahi (2007)

The British administrators made use of the local chiefs and other intermediaries in the administration of their colonies. Their motives was for exploit the natural resources for their industrial uses in Europe. This period, traditional rulers were used by the colonial masters to achieve their selfish motives to the detriment of the natives who were exploited with the help of traditional rulers.

Theoretical framework

The theory adopted is structural functionalism. This theory explains the relationship that exists among institutions. This school of thought is associated with the work of August Comte (1798 – 1857), Emile Durkheim (1868 – 1917) etc. Their central argument is that the society is connected together with each other. It further argues that the various part of society is understood in terms of their relationship.

Methodology

The methodology includes: Research design area of the study, population of the study sample and sampling techniques, sample size, methods of data collection validity and reliability of the instrument, methods of data analysis.

Research design

The study adopted descriptive survey design. The choice of this is because it describes the event under study.

Area of the study

Area of the study is Ohaozara Local Government Area. The area is made up of three autonomous communities namely; Uburu, Okposi and Ugwulangwu. It is one of the thirteen local governments in Ebonyi State. Its surrounded by Local Governments like Ivo, Onicha and Afikpo.

Populations of the study

Population of the study comprises the total population of Ohaozara Local Government Area which is 198.793 people. It comprises both male and female.

Sample and sampling techniques

The sample size was 265 respondents. The study, adopts stratified random sampling techniques. Ohaozara is grouped into three principal communities. Three hundred (300) questionnaires were distributed to the respondents in all the local Government. At the end two hundred and sixty five (265) were returned and made use of.

Methods of data collection

Questionnaire was designed to explore information from the respondents with respect to factors responsible in the inability of traditional rulers to resolve conflict in their various communities and how to encourage traditional rulers to resolve conflict.

Validity of the instrument

Critiques were used to make necessary modifications which eventually led to the production of the final instruments used.

Reliability of the instrument

The instrument was subjected to test retest method and analyzed using Cronbach Alpha, which gave a reliability coefficient of 0.72.

Method of data analysis

Data was collected and presented in a table for easy understanding. Mean were used for the analysis. The mean was calculated based on the five likert type of strongly agreed (SA), Agreed (A) undecided (U), strongly disagree (SD), Disagree (D) with scale rating of 5,4,3,2 and 1 respectively.

Research question 1: Is corruption one of the factors responsible for the inability of traditional rulers to resolve conflict in their communities in Ohaozara Local Government Area?

Table 1: Mean ratings of the respondents on corruption etc.

S/N	ITEMS	SA	A	U	D	SD	MEAN X
1	Corruption is one of the factors responsible for inability of traditional rulers to resolve conflict in Ohaozara Local Government Area	95	88	12	46	24	3.69
2.	Poverty contributes to low performance of traditional rulers in conflict resolution	99	92	14	41	19	3.78
3.	Modernization is a factor militating against traditional rulers in conflict resolution	80	91	30	42	22	3.62
4.	Lack of objectivity hamper traditional rulers in conflict resolution in Ohaozara Local Government Area	92	96	19	31	27	3.73
5.	Lack of legitimacy militates against traditional rulers in Ohaozara Local Government Area	120	111	8	16	10	265

In the above table, the findings clearly show that corruption, poverty modernization are factors responsible for poor performance of traditional rulers in conflict resolution in Ohaozara Local Government Area because of high mean ratings of 3.62 to 4.18..

Research question 2: Does political interference contribute to inability of traditional rulers to resolve conflict in their various communities in Ohaozara Local Government Area

Table 2: Political interference and others.

S/N	ITEMS	SA	A	U	D	SD	MEAN X
1	Political interference contribute to inability of traditional rulers to resolve conflict in Ohaozara Local Government Area	104	82	5	41	13	3.61
2.	Religion is a factor hindering effective conflict resolution by traditional rulers in Ohaozara Local Government Area	100	76	7	42	40	3.58
3.	Education is an important factor in conflict resolution by traditional rulers in Ohaozara Local Government Area	95	64	12	50	44	3.43
4.	Implementation of traditional rulers decision is necessary in conflict resolution in Ohaozara Local Government Area	99	97	10	30	29	3.78
5.	Imposition of traditional ruler has affected the effective conflict resolution in Uburu	97	93	9	40	26	3.73

Finding on the above table shows that political interference, religion, education failure to implement traditional rulers' decision, and imposition of traditional rulers are some of the factors militating against effective conflict resolution in Ohaozara Local Government Area with a high mean rating of 3.43 to 3.78

Findings

After careful analysis of data presentation it was discovered that corruption, poverty, modernization lack of objective, lack of legitimacy are some of the factors that seriously affected effective management of conflict in Nigeria, particularly in Ohaozara Local Government Area.

Conclusion and recommendations

Conclusion

This paper showed some factors such as corruption, political interferences, modernization, lack of objectivity and legitimacy as some of the factors responsible for inability of traditional rulers in

conflict resolution in various communities in Ohaozara Local Government Area of Ebonyi State. It argues that unless these obnoxious practices are abolished it will be difficult for traditional rulers in Nigeria particularly Ohaozara Local Government Area to effectively resolve conflict.

Recommendations

In view of the above, the following recommendations are made

1. Traditional rulers who are found involve in any form of corruption in their area of influence should be dethroned and punished.
2. Independence of traditional authorities should be encouraged. Government should try as much as possible to avoid unnecessary interference in the traditional authority
3. Traditional rulers should inculcate modern values in their political system
4. Traditional rulers in Ohaozara Local Government Area and Nigeria at large should not be powered by edict rather have constitutional framework for effective administration in their various communities

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