RETHINKING THE ROLE OF TRADITIONAL INSTITUTIONS IN CONFLICT MANAGEMENT IN THE NIGER DELTA: THE EXPERIENCE OF BRASS, 1800-2022

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Abstract
The study investigated of the role of indigenous traditional institutions in management of conflict in Brass. This study is significant, as it revealed age long practices, as well as contemporary strategies used in the management of conflicts in Brass. The study employed the primary, secondary, and the multidisciplinary approaches in its collations and interpretations of data. It made use of the Structural functionality and Role theories in its analysis. The study, however, revealed that conflict in Brass Local Government Area takes the same pattern as in most traditional African society. It stressed that conflicts in Brass Local Government Area, emanate from the family setting and snowball to the larger society, where its consequences ranges from mild to hostile conditions. The research revealed that claims to ownership of land, conquest and territorial expansion, competition for natural resources, trade monopoly, siting of basic infrastructure, and cultism etcetera are the main causes of conflicts in Brass L.G.A. The study, thus, argued that indigenous institutions like Kings, House Chiefs, and Family were traditional mean through which conflict are addressed in Brass Local Government Area. The study recommended that resolution of disputes can be facilitated by the active involvement of the chiefs and elders from the disputing parties, who should consistently engage in constructive dialogue and collaboratively propose viable solutions, measures, and procedures. The study concluded that conflict is a natural phenomenon that affects all societies of the world, as such, requires sincerity, competence and innovativeness in addressing it, as none innovative methods, may lead to disastrous outcomes.

Introduction

It is a widely accepted fact that kingship was the first form of human administration. In Africa, the institution was developed in accordance with the laws and traditions of the people and was thus, a part of its cultural legacy. The traditional institution was used in

opposition to the contemporary form of governance or control that European colonialists imposed on Africa (Mohammed, 2006).

In Nigeria, as well as in a great number of other precolonial and postcolonial African nations, the traditional institutions are held in high regards, because of the role they play in maintaining peace, stability, and serenity in their various communities. For example, in a state like Bayelsa, which has had numerous social disputes and unrest, the traditional institutions have been very helpful in mediating and resolving social problems. As a consequence of this, the traditional institution continues to grow in significance, and major parties routinely rely on them to intervene in conflict situations when it is essential to do so (Brobbey, 2008).

Interestingly, the traditional institutions also acts as the eyes and ears of the government on matters that are of interest to the local community. They work along with other institutions of the state to uphold good governance. Even in our day-to-day lives, an individual who is looking to resolve a conflict may choose between formal institutions inspired by Western culture and traditional norms/institutions. This decision is seldom influenced by a number of factors, including location, the problem at hand, the individual's level of education, preference, and trust in the institution. In this sense, traditional institutions are essential to the formation as well as the management of (violent) conflict. Hence, the impact of both age-old establishments and contemporary democratic structures on internal societal conflicts can differ significantly. According to Busia (1968), the traditional institution was initially and largely the focal point of governance in pre-colonial Africa. With the help of their council of elders, they performed combined legislative, administrative, judicial, religious, and military duties at every level, from the village to the state (Acquah, 2006).

The traditional institution which is well known for its vitality, endurance, and eternal relevance, was one of the most developed aspects of African civilization. According to Nweke (2012), the traditional political system refers to a native political setup where ethical leaders are chosen and inaugurated based on indigenous customs and regulations. Despite the challenges posed by modernization, this customary political framework has endured and adapted, continuously evolving to maintain its significance and adaptability. In the majority of Nigerian cultures and communities, it has continued to be the dominant traditional political system and continues to play an active role in the management and settlement of conflicts, particularly in the conflict-prone Niger Delta region (Abolarin, 2017, Isaac, 2003),

Statement of the Problem

Before the arrival of Europeans, traditional institutions served as driving forces of progress within their own spheres of influence. They were responsible for all of the tasks that were necessary for the formation of the nation. The incursion of Europeans and the adoption of Western-style institutions into our political cum economic structures, however, caused the traditional institutions to lose their significance, which in turn led to their gradual decline. In the grand scheme of things, they were consigned to the background, and some of them were utilized in the exploitative and manipulative practices directed at the indigenous people. Nonetheless, post-independence policies across much of Nigeria have sought to revitalize the indigenous traditional institution with its seeming recognition by the government and policymakers alike. This recognition is made even more concrete by the role indigenous traditional institutions play in the maintenance of a stable cum peaceful society. In many Bayelsa communities, for instance, the traditional institutions have helped to maintain/negotiate peace, by introducing and applying indigenous conflict management strategies in the handling of conflicts. Although, despite the efforts made by traditional institutions in the maintenance and settlement of disputes, not much has been recorded about them, particularly as regards to Brass. Against this backdrop, therefore, this study will

examine traditional institutions and conflict management in Brass from the period; 1800-2022.

Conceptual Review
Tradition institution

"Traditional institutions" signify native political structures where leaders of proven merit are chosen and appointed in alignment with the guidelines set by their regional customs and regulations (Orji and Olali, 2010, p.402). The institutions' primary functions are to maintain the traditions and customs of the people, as well as to mediate disputes that may arise within the community or between its members through the application of the laws and traditions that the people have developed over time.

According to Wardak (2004), traditional institutions and other types of leadership emerged from people's innate need to protect themselves and their communities. All cultures' histories show that battles were a common feature of their early history, including wars of conquest and wars fought for survival in the face of diseases, famines, famines, and natural calamities. He stated that these battles and contributions to the society's survival inevitably generated brave men who rose to become the first members of its leadership. This assumes that individuals hold leadership positions during historical eras simply because of the power and courage they displayed during battles and other interactions the society had to endure.

Traditional institution according to the Osborn Concise Law Dictionary (1976, p.40), refers to an institution or authority that is inherited and passed from one generation to the next. It is debatable, however, whether this definition encompasses the current meaning of these terms, as in Nigeria traditional authorities must also have the blessing of public authority in order to legally wield power, right, and prescribed functions.

Naagbanton (2011), sees traditional institution as an organization or institution tasked with safeguarding indigenous traditional ways of life. This encompasses any customary governing bodies that oversee the day-to-day affairs within a particular community. These may comprise various roles such as court historians, jesters, and praise singers, alongside traditional leaders or chiefs, familial lineages, extended and nuclear families, age-based social groups, and vocational guilds. Traditional leaders across the country have contributed to maintaining our national security in the past and will do so in the future.

Conflict

The term "conflict" has a multiplicity of meanings. To many people, conflict means a destructive tendency. However, conflict must not only be viewed from this negative perspective, as conflicts, inasmuch as it can be destructive, can sometimes lead to positive outcomes. According to Ihejirika (2001), when people hear the word "conflict," images of war, fighting, misunderstanding, disagreements, anarchy, stress, crisis, aggressiveness, and so on pop into their heads between individuals, groups, communities, nations, and states. Those who view disputes negatively, as Ihejirika notes, are more likely to respond destructively to them. He suggests that keeping an optimistic outlook on disagreements is key to handling them in a productive way that leads to outcomes like more communication, better understanding, and stronger bonds.

Conflict, according to Swanstrom and Weissmann (2005), is a complex phenomenon with overlapping dynamics and processes. They also stated that most individuals would compromise or negotiate if a dispute merely involved a choice between two options. However, power struggles are frequently present in conflicts, and how choices are made, how people communicate with one another, and unsolved issues from previous contacts all affect how things turn out. It's possible for many of these characteristics to be present at once, making it difficult to identify the true source of the issue.

For De Dreu and Weingart (2003), the common understanding of the term "conflict" reflects the common belief that conflict comprises not only disagreements but also incompatible aims and that it is a "win-lose" situation. Indeed, studies that employ surveys asking individuals about conflicts, without specifying whether they are win-lose scenarios, frequently reveal a negative correlation between various forms of conflict and outcomes.

Conflict, according to Grey and Starke (1984), occurs when one person or group acts in a way that obstructs the aims of another person or organisation. Conflict will happen if conduct is accompanied by hostile emotional displays. Conflict, according to Hellriegel and Slocum (1996), is antagonism brought on by differences in goals, viewpoints, or emotions inside or between individuals, groups, departments, or organisations. The essence of opposition is to prevent someone or a group from achieving predefined goals, and doing so will surely lead to conflict because the party being prevented will immediately make an overt response. Conflict can also be defined as the expression of (overt or covert) conflicts among interdependent people.

Conflict management

Conflict management is a broad phrase that refers to any methods done to limit the horizontal and vertical escalation of a violent conflict's severity. Conflict management is based on the assumption that conflict is unavoidable and, while not always resolvable, can be controlled. Lederach (1997) asserts that the study of conflict management is essential because it aids companies in identifying and resolving issues. Conflict management is to promote positive behavioral changes among the parties involved in order to lessen current violence and prevent it from occurring again. Thus, conflict management is related to the internal procedures used by various agencies to address issues without completely removing them. Although some publications use the phrases interchangeably, it is important to understand that conflict management differs from conflict resolution when addressing problems.

According to Hughes (1998), conflict management is the act of confining, reducing, or neutralizing a dispute without necessarily finding a resolution to the issue. Wallensteen and Swanstrom (2002) defined conflict management as changing harmful patterns of interaction into constructive patterns of interaction. For Zartman (2005), effective conflict management requires the elimination of violent and violently associated activities as well as the political level transfer of responsibility for conflict resolution. In his thesis, he was challenged for a number of reasons, one of which is that non-governmental organizations (NGOs), academic institutions, and semi-formal organizations (track two) have become important actors and now have influence over the process of conflict resolution. Furthermore, it is contended that Wallensteen's emphasis on conflict management tends to concentrate primarily on the military dimensions of warfare.

Theoretical Framework
Structural Functionality theory

Functionalism, another name for structural-functional theory, originated with Hebert Spencer's ideas (1820–1903). This is a positivist perspective that draws parallels between the human body and society. The "Functionalism" perspective posited that shared symbols, languages, and values serve as cohesive forces within society, forming a complex network of interconnected components that collaborate to maintain stability (Durkheim, 1893). While society may be made up of individuals, Durkheim and his contemporaries felt that social facts, rather than individuals, should be the primary subject of society studies. Hence, social facts encompass the entirety of cultural norms governing societal interactions, encompassing laws, ethics, values, religious convictions, customs, trends, and ceremonies (Durkheim, 1895). Each of these social realities serves a function within a society. For instance, laws

within a society may have various aims, such as ensuring public safety, deterring criminal behavior, and safeguarding the community from violence.

Also, Robert Merton (1910–2003) noted that social processes frequently serve several purposes. As he emphasized, latent functions represent the unintended consequences of a social process, while manifest functions are the intended or anticipated outcomes. For example, acquiring new knowledge, preparing for employment, and securing a fulfilling job that utilizes one's education are evident advantages of attending college. On the other hand, forming new connections, participating in extracurricular activities, and possibly finding a life partner are instances of latent functions during one's college experience. Establishing a hierarchy of jobs depending on the degree of education gained is another latent function of education. Latent functions may have positive, neutral, or negative effects. Therefore, social processes that negatively impact how society functions are referred to as dysfunctions. This theory, thus, is important for Brass, because it clarifies the intricate dynamics that shape the conflict scenario in the area.

Land and people of Brass

The people of Brass are among the Ijaw speaking tribe of Bayelsa State, who had settled at their present home about hundreds of centuries ago. According to Alagoa (1964, p.4), the name Brass was given to natives who lived and transacted business on the Rivers Nun, Brass and St. Nicholas. According to this view, the early European traders who had earlier contacts with these people noticed that the indigenes were hard and difficult bargainers who often referred to their customers as "Barasin" literarily meaning "let go" which implied that, if the price of a product was not right, the buyers (Europeans) should leave. Following this development, the early European traders nicknamed the people as the "Barasin" people, which was later corrupted to "Brass" (Alagoa, 1964). Conversely, Ama-Ogbari (2018), however, argued that, the expression "Barasin" referred to the ungodly practice of the European traders who were fond of touching the native female traders on sensitive organs. Thus, the reaction of these female traders to this attitude of the European traders was the resultant expression "Barasin". However, a third school of thought has it that Brass, a "metal" was used extensively during trade transaction along the Rivers Nun, Brass and St. Nicholas during the early European contact, and this might have formed the background of the name "Brass". Following from the above, the name Brass might have originated from either and /or any of the above postulations. In Brass Local Government Area, the Nembe dialect of the Ijo language of the present Eastern Ijo groupings is spoken in the area. That is, Tuwon (twon), Okpoama, Odioma, Enoama and some communities around Nembe.

In the Brass Island, we have Towns like Twon (Tuwon), Okpoama and Ewoama. The towns and semi-autonomous communities in St. Nicholas Island are: Odioama, Diema, Ekebeleama and Obioku. The island of Cape Formosa is located along Twon-Brass, separated by the Brass River. The island is inhabited by some autonomous and semi-autonomous communities (Toipre, 2023). These are Liama, founded at about 1735, Egwema 1759 and Beletiema 1835. Other settlements on the island are camps and offshoot to the original three (3) communities of Liama, Egwema, Igbabele and Beletiema. They are Liama Ama-Ogbo, Egwema Ama-Ogbo and Beletiema, Ama-Ogbo which are ancestral houses of Liama, Egwema and Beletiema respectively. Egeregre, Wagetie and Gbene were founded by the descendants of Egwema, Oginbiri, and Hununu were founded in the later part of 18th century and have close ties with Akassa (Akaha) across the River Nun (Ama-Ogbari, 2018).

There are also numerous fishing settlements founded by inhabitants of the original towns of Liama, Egwema and Beletiema. Igbabeleu was founded shortly after the establishment of Beletiema by the people Bletiema. Oruokolo was founded for the worship of

a deity called Ogidi fariye. We also have Fantuo and Akassa towns. The Akassa people are found at the Nun estuary West of Brass River estuary. The people of Cape Formosa and Akassa share close link with the Twon people, a smaller settlement close to Akassa, owned by the Akassa people is fish town. The most important means of communication with the surrounding settlements are Riverine routes and in modern times road networks as well (Ayebaifiemi, 2023).

Geographical Location

Brass Local Government Area (BALGA), is one of the Eight (8) Local Government Areas of Bayelsa State, situated in the Eastern fringes of the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. It is bounded to West by Koluama on the East by St. Bartholomew and St. Nuhoas near Kula in Rivers State, on South by the Atlantic Ocean, and to the North by Nembe Local Government Area of Bayelsa State (Ama-Ogbari, 2014). It has an estimated population of about 246,000 according to the 2006 population census, and an area of about 1,404km^2. Brass, is located between latitude $4,3665^0$ or 4021'59 North and Longitude $6,4546^0$ or $6^027^117^0$ East, with an elevation of 5 meters (16 feet). Its headquarters is situated at Twon-Brass, on the Brass Island along the coastline measuring about 90km off the Bight of Bonny. Much of the area is occupied by the Eduymanon national forest, and possess a sandy beach geographical belt (Ama-Ogbari, 2018).

History of conflicts in Brass Local Government Area

The history of conflicts in Brass Local Government Area is traceable to the family setup. Conflicts in Brass Local Government Area, grows and extends from families to the larger society. It emanates from home which transcends into the community, then, finally to the society. Thus, scholars seldom traces the root of conflict to the family, being the basis of foundation of every existing being (Martins, et al., 2021). It is worthy of note that, conflict is usually home grown, locally owned, historically and culturally embedded, socially and religiously practiced or observed as the case may be. Hence, conflict is imbedded culturally in a people's history and culture because, it is, in itself, considered by many as an unwelcomed disturbance of the people's peaceful co-existence. Since the family is the basic social unit having members as its nucleus, were two or more adults living together in the same house – holding and co-operating in various economic, social and protective activities and in the care of their own, and/or adopted children, avoiding conflicts becomes extremely impossible, since egos may tend to clash.

According to Fairchild (1964), one of the purpose and task of the family consist in the upbringing of children and the care for daily needs of members. Sadly, sexual male adjustment (impotency) or barrenness, infidelity, financial constraints, drunkenness, religious extremism and deviant behaviours all lead to problems which are true definition of instabilities, constant quarrels, stealing, lies and gossips nurtured in the family. It is in the family that the children copy good as well as bad behaviours due to proper parental care which they later manifest in the society, thus, the over pampering of children, and other times single parentage, sometimes leads to children exhibiting bad behaviours and leading to conflict in the family which may snowball to the larger society. One, thus, can argue that conflicts emanate first from the family, since it is the first moral teacher of the child. Quarrels over needs like food, shelter, clothing, sexual satisfaction, favouritism amongst wives or children instigate conflict root and are from the family. The family is thus, the first breeder of conflict where it later transmits itself into the society at large and in various magnitudes. Therefore, the fundamental social structure involving individuals of one or both genders cohabiting in a society, sanctioned by social norms and often long-lasting, committed sexual relationships, along with their children, is the primary origin of conflict (Yebei, 2023).

Causes of Conflicts in Brass Local Government Area

According to Okaripre (2023), the causes of conflicts are multi-faceted among families, communities, towns, cities, countries and the societies at large. However, the major conflicts to be examined in this study could serve as sample of what is obtainable in Brass Local Government Area of Bayelsa State, and that similar to other communities or societies. The causes of conflicts in Brass Local Government Area of Bayelsa State like in many other regions of Nigeria and in the world are classified into economic and political causes. They includes but not limited to the following: Discovery of Crude Oil (Economic Cause), Land Ownership/Expansion and Ownership of Titles, Conquest and Territorial Expansion, Competition over Natural Resources, Insensitivity to the plight of the Citizenry, Citing of Basic Amenities, Clash of Beliefs/Ideology, Trade Monopoly Cultism, Greed/Self-Interest, Absence of Truth, Chieftaincy Tussle.

Traditional institutions and conflict management

The practice of resolving conflicts through peaceful and non-violent means has existed for generations. Across many African communities, there is a strong inclination towards settling disputes peacefully, following the norms and values ingrained within the community's institutions (Gaya Best, 2006). Violence is generally disapproved of, and in rare cases where it might be accepted, it is the community, not the individual, that must authorize it. Sanctioning occurs through a proper process, and in all civilized societies worldwide, there is an increasing trend towards resolving conflicts peacefully. Numerous communities, families, clusters of households, and local governing bodies engage in extensive peaceful and non-violent dispute resolutions, often overlooked by the media. A diverse array of non-violent conflict management methods are accessible to societies focused on transforming conflicts. These methods are accessible at various levels, including individual, family, cluster of households, community, and local government levels. Peaceful methods can be categorized into two main groups. The first category, proactive methods, involves approaches aimed at preventing conflicts from arising initially. Illustrations consist of unrecorded trust-building initiatives within communities, effective communication, governance practices, and inter-party cooperation. The second category, reactive methods, addresses responses to already conflicted situations or those with potential conflict. These responses may involve third-party interventions such as mediation, brokerage, conciliation, arbitration, and litigation (Gaya, 2006).

In Africa, particularly Brass Local Government Area of Bayelsa State, there are structures and procedures indigenous for non-violent transformation and peace building, especially the African Alternative Dispute Resolution. But what exactly is conflict resolution? It implies reaching a conclusive agreement where all parties involved in a conflict are content with the settlement outcome, resulting in a genuine resolution of the conflict (Gaya, 2006). Certain conflicts, particularly those related to resources, can be permanently resolved. When considering needs, a conflict is considered resolved once the fundamental needs of the parties involved have been adequately addressed, along with alleviating their concerns. Conversely, conflicts over values may not be entirely resolvable but can be transformed, regulated, or managed to some extent. Additionally, closely tied to conflict resolution is conflict management. It involves mitigating the harmful and detrimental effects of conflict through various strategies and by collaborating with the parties engaged in the conflict (Gaya, 2006). At times, this term is interchangeably employed with "Conflict Regulation." It encompasses the comprehensive spectrum of effectively managing conflicts at various phases, including proactive measures aimed at prevention. This involves practices such as conflict limitation, containment, and legal proceedings (Gaya, 2006). Closely linked to the aforementioned concepts is conflict transformation. It arises from acknowledging the dialectical nature of conflict, emphasizing the inevitability of change (Gaya, 2006). Furthermore, it acknowledges

the impartiality of conflict itself, understanding that conflict can have either negative or positive implications, yet parties can convert it into a constructive force to capitalize on opportunities. Another associated notion is conflict suppression, which describes the reluctance of more influential parties or stronger interveners, capable of transforming or managing a conflict, to take the necessary actions towards conflict management or resolution.

Rather than addressing the issues directly, they employ tools of power or coercion to sweep problems under the rug or enforce an unsustainable solution that fails to satisfy the involved parties (Gaya, 2006). Further, the African people represented by a diversity of culture and religion as applies to the Brass local government people is their practice of peace building. Diversity plays a significant role in shaping the methods employed for handling disputes, conflict resolution, and peacebuilding within traditional contexts. These approaches vary across different levels of conflict and encompass a range of issues such as property disputes, land disputes, family conflicts, marital disputes, community conflicts, and tensions between traditionalists and Christians. In some cases, other religions have nearly completely displaced the traditional institutions and peace building methods. In some regions, the prevailing practice of Christianity has influenced certain aspects of traditional customs, leading to their redefinition and modification, while leaving others unchanged. Within traditional institutions and peace-building efforts, the societal structure of the locality dictates the approach to peacebuilding in Africa. Social organization and political dynamics are defined by centralized authority and state systems led by longstanding Paramount Rulers/Kings and Chiefs, many of whom have existed for centuries or decades prior to the colonial era in Africa. Such authoritarian state systems existed in different parts of Africa. For instance, the Ancient Brass – Nembe kingdom, Ancient Benin Kingdom, Ancient Yoruba kingdoms in Nigeria; Ashanti Kingdoms of Ghana, the Emirates of Northern Nigeria etc. In other parts, there are paramount traditional leaders known as chiefs or by some other names, as well as sub-chiefs (Gaya, 2006). It is also possible to have conglomerates of this ethnic groups.

In the social and political framework of traditional African institutions, the authority vested in the king or paramount traditional leader results in a rigid dispute resolution and peacebuilding system. This typically involves judicial arbitration, with limited emphasis on negotiation and mediation as commonly practiced in Western contexts. It takes also the form of conciliation as well. Typical example are to be found in the Brass-Nembe, Ogbia societies in Bayelsa State, Igbo societies too. The Mumye, Fulbe and Wuikum in Benue and Taraba State respectively. In this context, there is no overarching centralized authority, and decisions are made within smaller units such as families, groups of houses, canoe houses, clans, cultural groups, and age-grade levels. Councils of chiefs and councils of elders, typically composed of the most senior and elderly members of the community, may also handle individual and communal disputes. Conflict resolution in this setting is informal, characterized by a sense of democratization in both the process and the outcome (Gaya, 2006). The community perceives and actively participates in the process, viewing dispute resolution as a form of justice in which the community, rather than individual leaders, takes precedence at the core.

Another area of discourse in traditional institution and peace building is the egalitarian political system in African Societies which was obtained during the pre-colonial African. Some of the element of the process are as follows:

- **Setting**

In segmented or egalitarian systems, dispute resolution typically occurs in neutral locations like the village square, an open hut, or the town hall. When conflicts arise over boundaries between individuals, families, clans, or villages, the disputed boundary itself might serve as the meeting place. Sometimes, these disputes may involve profound spiritual

aspects. Conflicts may also be resolved in village or community adjudication centers like the village square, market square, or town halls. Matters involving religious or spiritual significance, necessitating ancestral intervention, might be addressed at traditional community shrines. The selection of the venue underscores the community's primacy and importance above all other individual or social entities.

▪ **Gender**

In African shrines, women are typically excluded, and participants in peacebuilding efforts generally consist of adult males, although this may vary based on the sensitivities and customs of each community. However, the decisions made are intended to encompass and impact women and children as well. In many instances, the outcomes and decisions tend to favor adult males the most.

▪ **Process**

The traditional African dispute resolution process typically commences with initial preparations. This phase includes consultations, sending out invitations to relevant individuals, gathering materials for rituals such as sacrificial animals and local brew for libations, and selecting a suitable date that does not conflict with other events like market days or farming activities. Once the right participants are assembled, a call for silence is made, often by the town crier or an esteemed elder of the community. Silence symbolizes the reverence and honor of the people involved in the dispute resolution process, especially in societies where religion holds significant sway, as is common in many African cultures today. This often involves invoking pledges or calling upon ancestors and ancestral spirits, performing libations, and sacrificing live animals. In certain instances, invoking the spirits of the gods may be used to deter dishonesty or interference with the process, or to ward off potential threats from enemies who might seek divine retribution against the community.

▪ **Openness**

Conflict resolution is often conducted in public to ensure that future generations within the country understand the process and value systems of peacebuilding and conflict resolution. Essentially, it serves as a form of socialization for younger generations. This is why younger individuals tend to engage more in listening and observing the actions of their elders rather than actively participating or contributing. Indeed, young people are seen but not heard. Here, it is seen that because traditional institutions combines negotiation, arbitration, adjudication and other methods put together. Additionally, traditional conflict resolution lacks certain components such as confidentiality, the ability to freely disagree with mediators, flexibility, a focus on achieving win-win outcomes, sensitivity to gender dynamics, the presence of trained and professional mediators, assurance of mediator neutrality, addressing emotional aspects, and the formal signing of agreements. Instead with the traditional institutions, cases are open to every male member of the community. Certain communities may allow the participation of female members in the traditional conflict resolution process. It prioritizes the community over individual disputants, utilizing spiritual and communal authorities and traditions, incorporating gender-specific perspectives, and assigning elders a pivotal role. Verdicts regarding right and wrong are determined by the governing authority rather than being reached by the involved parties themselves.

Approaches adopted by traditional institutions in managing conflicts

Style is seen as the manner of doing or presenting things especially a fashionable one or particular way in which something is done, while management could be seen as the judicious use of means to accomplish an end (Michael, 2022). This is the skill or act of dealing with people or situations in a successful way. Hence, conflict management or handling style could be seen as a particular means of managing conflict that will bring about

peace or de-escalate or that will not degenerate to a crisis situation (Michael, et al., 2022). The indigenous nature of conflict management is usually embedded right from the time which are aboriginal, locally, owned, historically and culturally attacked and religiously emphasized to be observed. Hence, the dictum "I am, therefore you are, and since you are, therefore, I am" depicts the aboriginal characteristics of the nature of African community and Brass people inclusive in conflict management.

The unity of all members is reiterated and the search for peace and collective coexistence is an ultimate goal that is initiated and promoted. Management of conflict indigenously becomes effective and permanent solution based on the aboriginal system which produces more effective as in resolving conflicts because the traditional people or indigenous people seeks reconciliation system, which produces more effectiveness in resolving conflicts because the traditional indigenous system, seeks reconciliation, restoration and sustained relationship between standard rules as instituted (Oshita, et al., 2015).

The styles in conflict management among the Brass people is basically reconciliatory, therapeutic and in extreme cases capital. It is because it mainly fosters peace and co-existence and also rehabilitate or compensate those deemed through injustice right form the home before venturing into the community architecture of conflict management (Keremah, 2023). Hence, the nature of indigenously style of conflict management among the Brass people is almost similar to the real African setting in conflict management. It is worthy of note that taking into consideration the period under discourse from 1800, the present Brass Local Government Area was with the present Nembe Local Government Area and the indigenous management style had some links with the Nembes as well. The indigenous management styles as practiced by the Brass people are categorized by their standards which were indication of the grievances of the cases (Okutuate, 2023). The management styles as practiced by the Brass people included, Oath-Taking, Mediation/Negotiation, The family, House Chief, Group of Chieftaincy Houses, Summon before a God/Goddess, Court Of Appeal – Ibidi Kiri (Adjudication/Litigation), Adjudication and Litigation, Mediation, Conciliation, Dialogue, Confrontation/Fighting, Suppression, Negotiation, Arbitration, Alternative Dispute Resolution Style (ADR).

Fig.1: House of Chiefs and the Opu Sekiapu (Masquerade Dancing Club)

Source: Fieldtrip   **Date: 17/09/2021**

Fig. 2: HRM. Alfred Diete-Spiff (Amanayanabo of Twon-Brass)

Source: Google.com   Date: 12/05/2023

Fig 3: A Twon Brass Chief and his Council-of-Elders Settling Dispute

Source: Fieldtrip   Date: 12/08/2023

Challenges of traditional institutions in conflict management

Despite the fact that traditional institutions play significant role in peace building in Brass Local government area of Bayelsa, it could be observed that it had some challenges confronting the revered institution. Some of these challenges we can identify are as follows:

Firstly, is the issue of acceptance of the outcome of the arbitration, resolution, mediation etc. by both parties to the disputes or conflict? The judgment passed by the arbitors/jury etc. is determined by both parties to the conflict because any of them can decide not to accept it. It can decide to disagree to the judgment at it is not in its favour. Here acceptance or rejection of the judgment is based on internal convictions, respect, moral liability and good conscience by the parties involved in the conflict. Flowing form this acceptability of the judgment by the parties to the conflict is the instrument of sanction or punishment. Even though the gods or ancestors, oath taking, ancestral involvement, the traditional institution does not have the authority instrument of state to punish or sanction the guilty to bring its pronouncement to force. Related to this is the issue of enforcement of decisions reached at the end of the resolution of conflict between two parties in the dispute. A case in point is the land/boundary dispute between Kula and Adioma in Rivers and Bayelsa State respectively. Another one is the land/boundary dispute between Okpoama and Twon-Brass, it is as a result of this that land boundary conflicts in Brasss LGA had ended up in the modern court of law. Some have even sent as far as the Supreme Court for final determination. The land/boundary as well as oil conflict between Akass/Eguema, Eguema/Liama in 2012-2014 that after the intervention of the Nembe Council of chiefs just observed a truce and later hostilities starts again.

Again, one of the challenges of traditional institutions to peace building is the issue that nay party6 to a dispute or conflict can disagree on the judgment anytime because it is not legally binding and not instruct of authority and instrument of enforcement so long as its instantly in the present or in the future. Even if you decided to disagree or refuse compliance with the judgment, no punishment would be meted out to the one who refused to comply with the judgment. That apart, any party to a dispute can decide to withdraw from the resolution process mid-stream without apologies. Further, one of the challenges of the traditional institution in peace building is because the institution does not have laid down and written documents with codes of punishment to back its resolution and setting process. This means that the traditional institution lacks written and rigid procedures laid down for the people to follow and judgment enforced. All the procedures of the traditional institution are dispute resolution are unwritten. And also, no provision for only professionals to settle disputes, it is meant for all elders, chiefs, kings, and Amanyanabos to settle disputes. That is why the young can only listen and observe but not participate in dispute resolutions. The methods are not universally known and important within the context as indicated in the conflict management. Also the procedures do not provide inclusion since cases are confined to key conflict actors (police, soldiers, civil defense, vigilante association etc.).

The method of conflict mitigation is reiterated daily through verbal medium for emphasis and observances. There is involvement of family, elders, chiefs etc. in deliberating and finding for lasting peace. Further, women are not allowed to settle conflicts in the traditional institutions in peace building in Brass LGA because they are seen as been incapable of such responsibilities. Women are to be seen but not heard in peace building traditionally. Though in some areas, where they have women groups, they can settle minor disputes amongst themselves to foster unity, brotherliness and communal peace and stability.

Strategies to ensuring sustainable peace in Brass LGA

Conflicts and conflicts prevention has been on the top of the agenda of the United Nations, African Union, Economic Community of West Africa States etc. even individuals and corporate bodies have set up various conflict prevention mechanisms or bodies or agencies in the world because of the place of peace and security in the world. For there to be growth and development in any society, there must be relative peace and stability. Even universities, have set up institutes of peace studies and conflict resolutions because of the important of peace. Governments over the world have even set up special institutes dedicated to the study of peace and conflict resolutions and management. However, there are strategies geared towards having and Brass Local Government Area and its people traditional are not left out in this cause. Some of the strategies adopted by the Brass LGA people to ensuring sustainable peace as follows:

- Providing conditions favourable for peace.
- Respect for human rights and fundamental freedom
- Tolerance of differences
- Culture of fairness and fair play in public affairs

Notwithstanding, for the above to be achieved the Brass people have adopted what could be referred to as the Early warning measures. Early warning typically involves a series of actions focused on gathering, organizing, and analyzing data to recognize and address the indicators of an impending crisis before it escalates into widespread violence. Early warning is therefore more than the mere exercise that consists of identifying the structural or mobilizing characteristic of an event or a phenomenon and determining whether they are or are not prone to generate conflict. However, what may appear as warning signs of an imminent conflict to one analyst or participant may not be perceived as such by another. This variation is influenced by differing interpretations of early warning signals and the political and personal interests involved in each conflict situation.

The primary measure of the effectiveness of an early warning system aside from the mere function of data gathering is its ability to "trigger" rapid reactions to a degenerating crisis situation. For prompt reaction to be possible, the analysis of early signals of impending conflict has to combine with several indicators for effective sustenance of peace, some of such indicators are:

- **Personal Security:** The topics include maintaining legal frameworks, the dynamics between civilian and military sectors, and the spread of small arms and light weaponry.

- **Environmental Indicators:** Water security, natural catastrophes, epidemic and pandemics.

- **Economic Indicators:** Factors such as the expenses of daily life, inflation levels, joblessness, shortages, security conditions, and the availability of crucial resources all contribute to the overall environment.

- **Political Indicators:** The internal political landscape encompasses various elements including the involved political figures, institutions, processes, and concerns. It involves examining the extent of public engagement in decision-making processes and institutions, electoral systems, and issues revolving around identity and citizenship.

Peace in a community particularly in Brass Local Government Area does not merely mean absence of wars. It goes beyond that, peace means a state of order within the society. It means freedom from disquieting or oppressive thoughts or emotions, harming in personal relations (Webster, 1998). Peace means an internal harmony and other inhuman existence. A society that is not experiencing war or social conflict could be in a state of confusion and deficient in peaceful state. This fact is important in the study of peace making. In most African societies, there are conflicts, war, lack of tranquility, and consequently deficiency of peace and order. An African society like Brass Local Government Area of Bayelsa State is characterized by life-threatening social conflicts which have been on overtly or covertly, for decades. Most of the wars or social disturbances have been managed by various peace making bodies, yet peace has remained elusive in the continent. In fact, many African societies especially in Brass Local Government Area facing profound and multi-faceted internal and external crises which have put the question of survival and human development on the centre stage (Ujomu, 2000).

Most attempts at resolving and restoring peace have not even succeeded in stopping overt social conflicts and wars, while the cause of these wars and conflicts continue to wax strong underneath (Michael, 2022). The issue is what are the strategies to ensuring sustainable peace in Brass Local Government Area of Bayelsa State? Some of the possible strategies are as follows: Initially, spouses and their relatives cultivate qualities of patience, love, and tolerance to foster harmonious relationships and prevent conflicts from arising in any situation (Martins and Tonga, 2020).

Again, ensuring that traditional rulers, religious leaders, elders as well as educators be good agents of mitigating conflicts among their subjects. Hence the search for collective peace be of utmost concern in conflict mitigations. This could be achieved through the formation of conflict resolution and management committees at all levels of the communities in the Local Government Area. Also, integrating traditional methods of conflict management into the peace architecture of the local government area. Again, since land ownership/boundary conflict is very prevalent in the area, communities are encouraged to engaged the services of land surveyors with the support of the Local Government Area

Council to survey its land to forestall future land disputes that apart, elders, Amanyanbos, Chiefs who is found wanting in giving false historical facts on land matters are sanctioned. Government that is the Brass Local Government Council to integrate the indigenous styles of peace and conflict architecture with a view to achieving sustainable peace, stability and development in the area. She should also not relent but give credence to the efficacy of harmonizing the two styles of conflict management for the desired result to be achieved.

Parents are enjoined to give proper upbringing to their children. Parents must rise and combat conflict at the family level as first teachers of their children (Dagin, 2006). They should bring their children as seen above with sound moral values on the need to tolerate4 and show love to one another devoid of any family, ethnic, political and religious affiliation for peace and tolerance to prevail as a way of addressing social uprising. Parents should also as a matter of fact help to inculcate sound knowledge of the fear of God. So as to serve as the Ambassadors of conflict management in the society. Family members, clans, friends and associates should learn to tolerate one another for the interest of peace and development to be realized. Tolerance and mutual respect must be fostered at all times (Alkali and Martins, 2018). Again, chiefs, Amayananbos, elders are strictly enjoined to give impartial and honest judgment in settling conflicts to avoid escalation of the conflict that is matters should be resolved of the initial stage of the conflict.

Conclusion

This work, traditional institutions and conflict management in Brass Local Government Area; 1800-2022, is an examination of traditional institution and her role in conflict management in Brass. The study began by giving a brief description of the historical origin and migration, environment, physical features, climate, and economic activities of the people. The study, thus, exposed the nature and patterns of conflict in Brass Local Government Area and further assessed the various indigenous conflict management strategies in Brass, as well as the role of traditional institutions in managing conflict. The study concluded by asserting that conflict in Brass Local Government Area of Bayelsa is similar to those found in traditional African societies, particularly those of the Niger Delta. It further highlighted and proffered new solutions in the management of conflict in Brass, one of which is identifying early warning signals. The study also suggested that each community comprising Brass Local Government Area, form their own conflict resolution committees as a preemptive measure aimed toward fostering an atmosphere of peace.

Recommendations

In view of tackling conflict situations in Brass Local Government Area of Bayelsa, the following are recommendations made by the researcher. They include:

➢ That the government enhance and fortify the current state structures and institutions in order to facilitate the resolution of disputes and establish early warning systems that are essential for the timely identification and effective management of conflicts, thereby preventing their escalation into violent confrontations.

➢ That resolution of disputes can be facilitated by the active involvement of the chiefs and elders from the disputing parties, who should consistently engage in constructive dialogue and collaboratively propose viable solutions, measures, and procedures.

➢ That indigenous traditional institutions strive to eliminate any form of tribal or ethnic alienation, sentiments or prejudices when addressing issues of conflicts.

➢ It is also recommended that the government undertake a comprehensive evaluation of the existing legislation pertaining to the traditional institution, or alternatively, introduce new legislation, as their incorporation may contribute to a decrease in the frequency of conflicts within the Brass Local Government Area.

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S/N	NAME	AGE	SEX	OCCUPATION	PLACE OF INTERVIEW	DATE OF INTERVIEW
1	Mr. Mark Ayebaifiemi	62	M	Teacher	Odioma	23/07/2023
2	Dr. Titus Toipre	54	M	Lecturer	Okpoama	20/07/2023
3	Mr. Austin Yebei	58	M	Broadcaster	Akassa	28/07/2023
4	Capt. Kingdom Okoripre (Rtd.)	69	M	Retired Naval Officer	Akassa	02/06/2023
5	Hon. Douprebo Ikuromo	77	M	Public Servant	Okpoama	12/07/2023
6	Capt. Keremah Christian (Rtd.)	70	M	Retired Army Officer	Nembe (Bassambiri)	16/07/2023
7	Mr. Okutuate Benson-Agah	49	M	Administrator	Okpoama	03/06/2023
8	Chief Beye Pogo Sherri	60	M	Civil Servant	Ewoama	12/07/2023
9	Chief Ayonimite Ikuromo	64	M	Businessman	Virtual Interview	25/08/2023
10	Mr. Jonathan Otonte	50	M	Businessman	Ewoama	14/08/2023
11	Mr. Fiepreye Ekini	45	M	Civil Servant	Virtual Interview	12/07/2023
12	Miss. Mekuma Oruabere	52	F	Teacher	Okpoama	27/08/2023
13	Mr. Tarinyo Akonu	47	M	Journalist	Virtual Interview	10/08/2023
14	Mrs. Christianah .B. Sele	64	F	Business woman	Ewoama	18/06/2023
15	Miss. Yanate Aga	NIL	F	Civil Servant	Virtual Interview	04/07/2023

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