

RESEARCH ARTICLE

EFFECTIVENESS OF COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES USED BY LOCAL LEADERS IN RESOLVING CONFLICT IN ONDO STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The study determined the communication strategies used in conflict resolution by local leaders in Ondo State, Nigeria. It identified the possible causes of conflict among rural farmers and examined the constraints to the effective participation of local leaders in conflict resolution. A multistage sampling procedure was used to select 117 local leaders from 3 LGAs in Ondo State. A validated interview schedule was used to collect data from the respondents and analysed using percentages, means and standard deviation, Chi-square and Pearson Product Moment correlation analysis were used to test the hypothesis. Results showed that (68.2%) of the respondents indicated a moderate level of effectiveness of communication strategies used in conflict resolution. Also, competition for land ranked the highest ($\bar{x}=3.02$) of all the possible causes of conflict. The result of correlation analysis showed that years of formal education ($r=0.231$), and years of leadership experience ($r=0.688$) had positive and significant relationships with the effectiveness of the conflict resolution strategies both at $p \leq 0.01$. The study concluded that the local leaders had a moderate level of effectiveness in using communication strategies in conflict resolution.

KEYWORDS

New media, universities, network public opinion, public opinion monitoring, new media characteristics

1. INTRODUCTION

Recently, some of the key issues identified as being responsible for surge in violence are inherent differences in value orientation, attitudes, competition for common, limited and declining natural resources, levels of understanding among human beings and climate change which has impacted on grazing patterns make conflict between people and communities inevitable. Conflicts are now a regular occurrence in all human groups. Nearly every community in Nigeria has experienced violent clashes of various kinds, including inter or intra-ethnic conflicts, violence in the name of religion (between Muslim factions, Muslims and Christians, and Christians and traditional religious groups), violence in the name of politics (among supporters of various political parties), and violence in the name of work (among employees and employers) (Mohammed and Abdul, 2020).

People fight with one another in various kinds of interpersonal interactions and social contexts. The absence of conflict typically indicates the absence of meaningful engagement because of the large variety of potential differences among people. Conflict on its own has no good or bad sides. Nevertheless, whether a confrontation is beneficial or detrimental depends on how it is handled. However, the capacity, tolerance, readiness and willingness of community, tribal, and political leaders to manage the frequent conflicts in collaborative ways can minimize its escalation whenever they occur (Chukwuemeka, 2022).

Conflict is perceived as an incompatibility of aims or values between two or more partners in a relationship, as well as control-seeking behaviour and hostility. The incompatibility or discrepancy may exist in actuality, or simply perceived by the parties involved. However, conflicting behaviors

and antagonistic feelings are fundamental characteristics of human conflict. The conflict can spark both massive destruction and constructive social progress. Therefore, it is crucial to comprehend the fundamental mechanisms underlying conflict so that we can take steps to increase positive results while reducing negative ones (Kuponiyi et al., 2021). According to the study, elders of today's farmers grew up together in the same areas and had a peaceful and harmonious social and economic relationship; there were fewer conflicts between them in the past (Adelakun et al., 2015). However, as human beings' value orientations, attitudes, and levels of understanding have changed over time, conflict has become inevitable between individuals and groups. Regardless of the level and form of the dispute, pragmatic measures must be taken to resolve it because of its origins and damaging effects (Chukwuemeka, 2022). As posits, conflict resolution occurs when disputing parties reach an agreement that addresses their core differences, accepts each other's continued participation as parties, and ends all hostilities (Ajudeon and Ossai, 2022). However, it is preferable to resolve disputes through the conventional procedures of conflict arbitration rather than to engage in protracted legal disputes that cost a lot of money and time. The term "traditional institution" refers to the indigenous political structures whereby leaders with a track record of success are chosen and put in place following the dictates of their local laws and customs. Traditional leaders have thorough local knowledge that dates back many years and may also have effective networks of grassroots communication that could be used to mediate conflict through titleholders.

Local leaders in Ondo State, Nigeria, use a various communication techniques and initiatives to help rural farmers resolve disputes. Local authorities could employ various tactics to mitigate the impact of farmer

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disputes. According to the study, community/traditional leaders working with the local government were ranked as the best ($\bar{x}=1.96$) conflict-resolution tactics by rural farmers and herders in Ogbomoso and Oyo agricultural zone of Oyo State, Nigeria (Kuponiyi et al., 2021). However, the study was conducted because the usefulness of local leaders' communication tactics in resolving disputes among rural farmers has not been sufficiently studied.

The main objective of the study was to assess the effectiveness of communication strategies used by local leaders in conflict resolution among rural farmers in Ondo State, Nigeria. The specific objectives were to:

- identify cause of conflict among rural farmers;
- determine the perceived effectiveness level of communication methods used in conflict resolution by the local leaders among rural farmers; and

examine the constraints to effective participation of local leaders in conflict resolution among rural farmers.

2. METHODOLOGY

The study was carried out in Ondo State between July and December of 2021. There are 18 local government areas in the state. The state is located between longitudes 5°45 and 8°15" north of the equator and between longitudes 4°30 and 6" east of the Greenwich Meridian. Respondents were chosen using a multistage sampling procedure (Oguntola, 2022). At the first stage, three out of the eighteen local government areas (LGAs) in the State were randomly selected (Odigbo/Ore, Ondo West and Ile Oluji/Okeigbo). At the second stage, proportionate sampling technique was used to select three, four and two communities, respectively from Odigbo/Ore, Ondo West and Ile Oluji/Okeigbo LGAs due to rural characteristics of the communities, making a total of nine communities. These were: Oniparaga, Ayesan and Araromi Obu from Odigbo/Ore LGA; Lugbogi, Araromi Oke, Abusoro and Lapawe from Ondo West LGA; and Okeigbo and Bankemo from Ile Oluji/Okeigbo LGA. At the last stage, 13 local leaders were randomly selected via snow ball from each of the selected communities making a total of 117 respondents selected for the study. Interview schedule was used to elicit relevant quantitative data on the identification of possible causes of conflict among rural farmers, effectiveness of communication strategies used by the local leaders and

the constraints to effective participation of local leaders in conflict resolution. Data collected were analyzed using percentages, means and standard deviations while Pearson Product Moment correlation and Chi-square analyses were used to draw inferences on hypothesis at both 99% and 95% confidence levels.

The dependent variable for this study was effectiveness of communication strategies used by local leaders in conflict resolution which was operationalized by using 'face to face', 'mass media and 'social media communication strategies. Respondents scores from these communication methods were summed up to obtain the effectiveness score. For 'face to face strategy', respondents were asked to indicate how effective 'friends and family', 'meeting and seminars' and 'group discussion method of communication can be used in resolving conflict resolution using 4-point Likert-type scale of 'not at all'=0, 'little'=1, 'moderate'=2 and 'very well'=3. mass media strategy; respondents were asked to indicate how effective is 'telephone calls', 'E-mail', 'text messages' and 'town criers' method of communication can be used in conflict resolution using 4-point Likert-type scale of 'not at all'=0, 'little'=1, 'moderate'=2 and 'very well'=3. Social media communication strategy/channel; respondents were asked to indicate how effective 'whatsapp', 'facebook', 'twitter and 'instagram' methods of communication can be used in conflict resolution using 4-point Likert-type scale of 'not at

all'=0, 'little'=1, 'Moderate'=2 and 'very well'=3 respectively. Effectiveness of conflict resolution strategies was categorized into low, moderate and high-level using equal interval.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Causes of Conflict

Table 1 shows that respondents indicated multiple cause(s) of conflict. The majority (97.0%) of the respondents indicated competition for land and its resources as the leading possible cause(s) of conflict. Followed by misperceptions and strong negative emotions (84.8%), competition over perceived incompatible needs such as money or time (78.8%), cultural differences (77.3%), religion (74.2%), oppressive behaviour exerted on others (68.2%), while revenge (60.6%) ranked the least of all the possible cause(s) of conflict in the study area. This implies that land is a major and crucial factor that could cause conflict in the study area. This finding corroborates the findings of Bolarinwa, that land is one of the key resource responsible for most conflicts in the study area (Abdulsalam-Saghir and Oyekunle, 2013).

Table 1: Possible causes of conflict

| Possible causes* | Percentage (n=117) |
|---|--------------------|
| Competition for land and its resources | 97.0 |
| Misperceptions and strong negative emotions | 84.8 |
| Competition over perceived incompatible needs such as money or time | 78.8 |
| Cultural differences | 77.3 |
| Religion | 74.2 |
| Oppressive behaviour exerted on others | 68.2 |
| Revenge | 60.6 |

Source: Field survey, 2021.

*Multiple responses

3.2 Effectiveness of communication strategies used by the local leaders

This was measured using face to face, mass media and social media communication strategies/channels.

3.3 Face to Face Strategy

3.3.1 Friends and Family

For 'Face to Face' (friends and family), Results in Table 2 show that respondents indicated friends and family communication method was

very well effective for setting up of committee of enquiry (mean=2.64), for sanction(mean=2.58), reconciling the two parties separately (mean = 2.52) and dialogue/convening a meeting inviting the parties involved (mean= 2.52). While they indicated that friend and family was moderately effective for provision of protective measures (mean=2.41), and in use of agents to monitor conflict (mean=2.38). Friends and family were less effective for involvement of law enforcement agencies (mean=1.33), calling on government for a clear-out policy on the issue (mean=1.30), and use of indigenous knowledge/traditional oath taking (mean = 1.09) while friends and family was not effective for imposing curfew (mean= 0.39). This implies that in conflict resolution, use of family members and friends to set up committee to investigate the cause of conflict is a very effective strategy in conflict resolution.

Table 2: Communication strategies used by the local leaders (friends and family)

| Communication strategies | Mean (n=117) | Std. Deviation |
|--|--------------|----------------|
| Setting up of committee of enquiry | 2.64 | 1.20 |
| Use of sanction | 2.58 | 1.01 |
| Reconciling the two parties separately | 2.52 | 0.91 |

Table 2 (cont): Communication strategies used by the local leaders (friends and family)

| | | |
|--|------|------|
| Dialogue/convening a meeting inviting the parties involved | 2.52 | 0.91 |
| Provision of protective measures | 2.41 | 0.86 |
| Use of agents to monitor conflict | 2.38 | 0.78 |
| Involvement of law enforcement agencies | 1.33 | 0.61 |
| Calling on government for a clear-out policy on the issue | 1.30 | 0.46 |
| Use of indigenous knowledge/traditional oath taking | 1.09 | 0.30 |
| Imposing curfew | 0.39 | 0.10 |

Source: Field survey, 2021.

3.4 Face to Face

3.4.1 Group Discussion

For 'Face to Face' (group discussion), Results in Table 3 show that respondents indicated that group discussion communication method was moderately effective for setting up of committee of enquiry (mean = 2.30), use of sanction (mean = 2.23), use of agents to monitor conflict (mean = 2.15), reconciling the two parties separately (mean = 2.14), dialogue/convening a meeting inviting the parties involved (mean = 2.08) and provision of protective measure (mean = 2.02). Group discussion

communication method was less effective for calling on government for a clear-out policy on the issue (mean=1.44), involvement of law enforcement(mean=1.41), use of indigenous knowledge; traditional oath taking(mean=1.03) while group discussion communication method was not effective for imposing curfew (mean=0.77) in conflict resolution. This inferred that group discussion is an effective way of resolving conflict among rural farmers. This corroborates the findings of United States Environmental Protection Agency (US EPA) (2022) that engaging groups to clarify important aspects of the conflict clearly defines the conflict and identifies key issues using fact findings, focus groups and individual meetings in conflict resolution.

Table 3: Communication strategies used by the local leaders (group discussion)

| Communication Strategies | Mean (n=117) | Std. Deviation |
|--|--------------|----------------|
| Setting up of committee of enquiry | 2.30 | 1.01 |
| Use of sanction | 2.23 | 0.91 |
| Use of agents to monitor conflict | 2.15 | 0.82 |
| Reconciling the two parties separately | 2.14 | 0.75 |
| Dialogue/convening a meeting inviting the parties involved | 2.08 | 0.69 |
| Provision of protective measures | 2.02 | 0.58 |
| Calling on government for a clear-out policy on the issue | 1.44 | 0.50 |
| Involvement of law enforcement agencies | 1.41 | 0.45 |
| Use of indigenous knowledge/traditional oath taking | 1.03 | 0.29 |
| Imposing curfew | 0.77 | 0.02 |

Source: Field survey, 2021.

3.5 Mass Media Channel

3.5.1 Telephone Calls

For 'mass media' (telephone calls), Results in Table 4 show that respondents indicated that telephone calls communication method was moderately effective for setting up of committee of enquiry(mean=2.42), dialogue/convening a meeting inviting the parties involved(mean=2.12), reconciling the two parties separately (mean=2.11), use of agents to monitor conflict(mean=2.09), use of sanction (mean=2.06) and provision

of protective measure (mean=1.68). Telephone calls communication method was less effective for calling on government for a clear-out policy on the issue (mean=1.38), involvement of law enforcement (mean=1.36) and for use of indigenous knowledge/traditional oath taking (mean=0.55) while telephone calls communication method was not effective for imposing curfew (mean=0.32). This implies that for mass media channel, larger numbers of the respondents use telephone calls for setting up of committee of enquiry for conflict resolution. This corroborates the findings of Shanka and Thuo (2017) that use of telephone calls is also a medium by which conflict could be resolved.

Table 4: Communication strategies used by the local leaders (telephone calls)

| Communication strategies | Mean (n=117) | Std. Deviation |
|--|--------------|----------------|
| Setting up of committee of enquiry | 2.42 | 1.11 |
| Dialogue/convening a meeting inviting the parties involved | 2.12 | 1.05 |
| Reconciling the two parties separately | 2.11 | 0.90 |
| Use of agents to monitor conflict | 2.09 | 0.77 |
| Use of sanction | 2.06 | 0.69 |
| Provision of protective measures | 1.68 | 0.51 |
| Calling on government for a clear-out policy on the issue | 1.38 | 0.33 |
| Involvement of law enforcement agencies | 1.36 | 0.30 |
| Use of indigenous knowledge/traditional oath taking | 0.55 | 0.09 |
| Imposing curfew | 0.32 | 0.08 |

Source: Field survey, 2021.

3.6 Mass Media Channel

3.6.1 Town Criers

For 'mass media' (town criers), Results in Table 5 show that respondents

indicated that town criers communication method was less effective for setting up of committee of enquiry(mean=0.61). Town criers' communication method was not effective for reconciling the two parties separately(mean=0.42), use of sanction (mean=0.36), use of agents to monitor conflict (mean=0.33), dialogue/convening a meeting inviting the parties involved (mean=0.29), provision of protective measure

(mean=0.21), use of indigenous knowledge/traditional oath taking (mean=0.09), involvement of law enforcement (mean=0.05), calling on government for a clear-out policy on the issue(mean=0.03) and imposing curfew (mean=0.02). This implies that for mass media channel, larger numbers of the respondents use telephone calls for setting up of

committee of enquiry for conflict resolution. This agrees with the findings of Apata (2019) that town crier is the primary source of information dissemination and it brings the community members together through traditional means of communication.

Table 5: Communication strategies used by the local leaders (town criers)

| Communication strategies | Mean (n=117) | Std. Deviation |
|--|--------------|----------------|
| Setting up of committee of enquiry | 0.61 | 0.31 |
| Reconciling the two parties separately | 0.42 | 0.17 |
| Use of sanction | 0.36 | 0.12 |
| Use of agents to monitor conflict | 0.33 | 0.08 |
| Dialogue/convening a meeting inviting the parties involved | 0.29 | 0.05 |
| Provision of protective measures | 0.21 | 0.04 |
| Use of indigenous knowledge/traditional oath taking | 0.09 | 0.01 |
| Involvement of law enforcement agencies | 0.05 | 0.00 |
| Calling on government for a clear-out policy on the issue | 0.03 | 0.00 |
| Imposing curfew | 0.02 | 0.00 |

Source: Field survey, 2021.

3.7 Social media channel

3.7.1 Whatsapp

For 'mass media' (whatsapp), Results in Table 6 show that respondents indicated that whatsapp communication method was not effective for setting up of committee of enquiry (mean=0.34), reconciling the two

parties separately(mean=0.30), use of sanction (mean=0.18), use of agents to monitor conflict (mean=0.15), dialogue/convening a meeting inviting the parties involved (mean=0.11), provision of protective measure (mean=0.06), use of indigenous knowledge/traditional oath taking (mean=0.02), involvement of law enforcement (mean=0.00), calling on government for a clear-out policy on the issue(Mean=0.00) and imposing curfew (Mean=0.00). This implies that for social media channel, very few of the respondents uses whatsapp for conflict resolution.

Table 6: Communication strategies used by the local leaders (whatsapp)

| Communication strategies | Mean (n=117) | Std. Deviation |
|--|--------------|----------------|
| Setting up of committee of enquiry | 0.34 | 0.15 |
| Reconciling the two parties separately | 0.30 | 0.11 |
| Use of sanction | 0.18 | 0.08 |
| Use of agents to monitor conflict | 0.15 | 0.04 |
| Dialogue/convening a meeting inviting the parties involved | 0.11 | 0.02 |
| Provision of protective measures | 0.06 | 0.01 |
| Use of indigenous knowledge/traditional oath taking | 0.02 | 0.00 |
| Involvement of law enforcement agencies | 0.00 | 0.00 |
| Calling on government for a clear-out policy on the issue | 0.00 | 0.00 |
| Imposing curfew | 0.00 | 0.00 |

Source: Field survey, 2021.

3.8 Social media channel

3.8.1 Facebook

For 'mass media' (facebook), Results in Table 7 show that respondents indicated that facebook communication method was not effective for setting up of committee of enquiry(mean=0.08), reconciling the two parties separately (mean=0.03), use of sanction(mean=0.02), use of agents to monitor conflict (mean=0.02), dialogue/convening a meeting inviting

the parties involved (mean=0.02), while imposing curfew (mean=0.02) provision of protective measure (mean=0.00), use of indigenous knowledge/traditional oath taking (mean=0.00), involvement of law enforcement (mean=0.00) and calling on government for a clear-out policy on the issue (mean=0.00). This implies that majority of the respondents do not use facebook communication channel to settle conflict. This corroborates the findings that facebook usage ranked the least of the social media used by the farmers in sharing farm informations (Ayush et al., 2022).

Table 7: Communication strategies used by the local leaders (facebook)

| Communication strategies | Mean (n=117) | Std. Deviation |
|--|--------------|----------------|
| Setting up of committee of enquiry | 0.08 | 0.02 |
| Reconciling the two parties separately | 0.03 | 0.01 |
| Use of sanction | 0.02 | 0.00 |
| Use of agents to monitor conflict | 0.02 | 0.00 |
| Dialogue/convening a meeting inviting the parties involved | 0.02 | 0.00 |
| Imposing curfew | 0.02 | 0.00 |
| Use of indigenous knowledge/traditional oath taking | 0.00 | 0.00 |
| Involvement of law enforcement agencies | 0.00 | 0.00 |
| Calling on government for a clear-out policy on the issue | 0.00 | 0.00 |
| Provision of protective measures | 0.00 | 0.00 |

Source: Field survey, 2021.

3.9 Level of Effectiveness of Communication Strategies used by the Local Leaders in Conflict Resolution

Composite effectiveness scores of respondents from the three indicators were categorized into high, moderate and low levels using equal interval. Figure 1 shows that 18.2% of the respondents indicated high effectiveness

in communication strategies used by local leaders in conflict resolution, more than two-third (68.2%) indicated moderate effectiveness while very few (13.6%) had low level of effectiveness. The fact that minority of the respondents had low effectiveness in communication strategies could be an indication that these communication channels/strategies contributed significantly to conflict resolution in the study area.

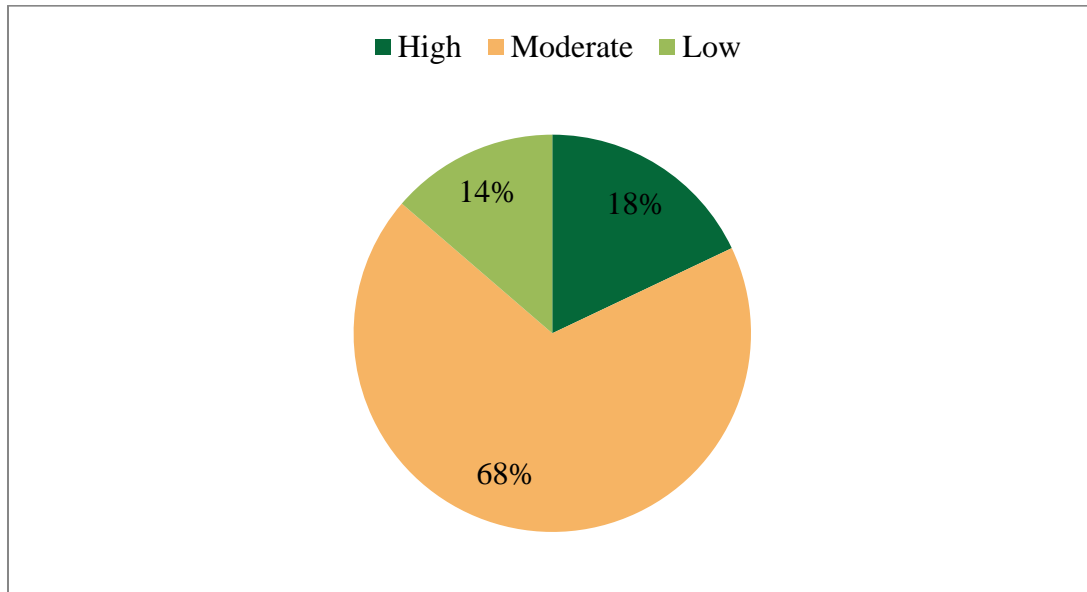


Figure 1: Level of Effectiveness in Communication Strategies used by the Local Leaders in Conflict Resolution

3.10 Constraints to Effective Participation of Local Leaders in Conflict Resolution

Result in Table 8 show that poverty status (mean = 1.56) ranked the highest constraints to effective participation of local leaders in conflict resolution identified by the respondents followed by lack of institutional support by government (mean = 1.47), lack of commitment and poor accountability on the part of community leaders (mean = 1.42), lack of cooperation among farmers (mean = 1.41), low level of respect for community leaders (mean = 1.33), lack of protective measure to counter hostile parties (mean = 1.33), declining influence of traditional rulers (mean = 0.85) while ethnicity/language barrier (mean=0.74) ranked the least of all the constraints. The grand mean is 1.26 which shows that there were minor constraints associated with participation of the local leaders in conflict resolution among the rural farmers in the study area.

| Constraints | Ranked mean (n=117) |
|---|---------------------|
| Poverty status | 1.56 |
| Lack of institutional support by government | 1.47 |
| Lack of commitment and poor accountability on the part of community leaders | 1.42 |
| Lack of cooperation among farmers | 1.41 |
| Low level of respect for community leaders | 1.33 |
| Lack of protective measure to counter hostile parties | 1.33 |
| Declining influence of traditional rulers | 0.85 |
| Ethnicity/language barrier | 0.74 |

Source: Field survey, 2021

Grand Mean= 1.26

3.11 Relationship between Communication Channel Effectiveness in Conflict Resolution and Socio-economic Characteristics of Respondents

Results of Chi-square analysis in Table 9 show that there was a significant association between the effectiveness of communication strategies and sex ($\chi^2 = 12.108$), marital status ($\chi^2 = 11.043$) and leadership position ($\chi^2 = 9.867$) of the respondents at $P \leq 0.01$. This implies that sex can influence the participation of respondents in conflict resolution among rural farmers in the study area. Similarly, for marital status, this result suggests

that those who are not married have low accord in conflict resolution than their counterparts who are married. It may also be inferred that the leadership position of a local leader is highly respected due to marriage. On the other hand, results in Table 10 show that age ($r = 0.079$), household size ($r = 0.063$), years spent in formal education ($r = 0.231^{**}$) and years of leadership experience ($r = 0.688$) had positive and significant relationship with the effectiveness at $p \leq 0.05$. This implies that increase in household size and formal education by the respondents, and increase in years of leadership experience will enhance the effectiveness of communication strategies to settle conflict. This is in agreement with the findings that, the more educated the community leader is, the higher the level of his participation in conflict resolution in his community (Oyedokun et al., 2017).

| Variable | χ^2 - value | D.f |
|---------------------|------------------|-----|
| Sex | 12.108** | 2 |
| Religion | 1.067 | 2 |
| Marital Status | 11.043 | 4 |
| Leadership Position | 9.867 | 8 |

Source: Field survey, 2021.

Significant at $p < 0.05$

| Variables | r-value |
|--------------------------------|---------|
| Age | 0.079 |
| Household size | 0.063 |
| Years of formal education | 0.231** |
| Years of leadership experience | 0.688** |

**Significant at $P \leq 0.01$

Source: Field survey, 2021.

4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Based on the findings of the study, the local leaders indicated a moderate level of effectiveness in communication strategies used in conflict resolution. However, of all the possible causes of conflict, competition for land and its resources ranked the highest while lack of finance, lack of institutional support by government, lack of commitment and poor

accountability on the part of community leaders, lack of cooperation among farmers were the major constraints to effective participation of local leaders in conflict resolution.

Traditional leaders should hold regular or yearly meetings with farmers to prevent dispute among themselves in order to maintain peace and order among rural farmers, in collaboration with all village stakeholders. Additionally, traditional institutions should be strengthened through constitutional modification in order to regain the authority that the 1976 Local Government Reform had taken away from them to resolve disputes in rural areas.

In order to reduce the existing level of conflict in the conflict-prone areas, local leaders and the government must collaborate and take more proactive action.

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