



## REVIEW ARTICLE

## THE ROLE OF TRADITIONAL INSTITUTIONS AND COMMUNITY MEDIATION IN RESOLVING HERDSMEN–FARMER CONFLICTS IN BENUE STATE, NIGERIA

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## ABSTRACT

The persistent herdsman–farmer conflicts in Benue State, Nigeria, have led to widespread displacement, loss of lives, and disruption of agricultural activities, undermining both food security and socio-economic development. While state-led interventions have struggled to yield lasting peace, traditional institutions and community-based mediation mechanisms have emerged as vital actors in conflict resolution. This paper explores the crucial role played by traditional rulers, community elders, and local mediators in managing and resolving these disputes. Drawing from indigenous knowledge systems and culturally embedded norms, traditional institutions often command respect across ethnic and occupational divides, enabling them to facilitate dialogue, rebuild trust, and promote reconciliation. Their deep-rooted presence within communities allows for timely responses and localized conflict management strategies that are often more sustainable than formal legal approaches. Furthermore, community mediation reinforces social cohesion by prioritizing restorative justice and communal harmony over punitive measures. The findings underscore the need to recognize and integrate traditional conflict resolution frameworks into broader peacebuilding efforts. Strengthening the synergy between formal governance structures and traditional institutions may offer a more inclusive and enduring pathway to peace in agrarian societies affected by resource-based conflicts. The study highlights the transformative potential of indigenous systems in fostering coexistence and mitigating violent disputes in rural Nigeria.

## KEYWORDS

Traditional Institutions, Community Mediation, Herdsmen–Farmer Conflicts, Conflict Resolution

## 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Historical Background of Herdsmen–Farmer Conflicts in Nigeria

The herdsman–farmer conflict in Nigeria is rooted in a complex interplay of environmental, socio-political, and economic factors that have evolved over decades. Historically, nomadic pastoralism, primarily practiced by the Fulani herders, coexisted with sedentary farming communities through mutually beneficial arrangements that allowed seasonal grazing and crop cultivation (Okoh et al., 2025). However, the rapid expansion of farmland, population growth, desertification, and erratic climate conditions have altered this balance. As underscores that changing climatic conditions in northern Nigeria have intensified desert encroachment and reduced grazing fields, compelling herders to migrate further south into agrarian regions like Benue State (Akinsanmi, 2023). This shift has escalated competition over natural resources, particularly land and water, transforming previously manageable interactions into violent confrontations.

Furthermore, the institutional decay and weakening of traditional conflict-resolution mechanisms have deepened the crisis. As highlight how the erosion of customary boundaries, poor land-use planning, and the absence of effective state response mechanisms have fostered an environment conducive to persistent conflict (Mustafa and Sa'ad, 2025). Historical grievances, coupled with the state's failure to mediate disputes or provide security, have entrenched mistrust and hostility between the two groups (Okoh et al., 2025). These dynamics have catalyzed the militarization of

herders and community vigilante groups, leading to cyclical violence that disrupts agricultural productivity and rural livelihoods across Benue and other affected states.

## 1.2 Overview of the Conflict in Benue State

The farmer–herder conflict in Benue State has intensified into a major humanitarian and security crisis with implications for national stability. The state's agrarian economy makes it particularly vulnerable to resource-based tensions, especially over land use and water access. emphasize that the strategic centrality of Benue within the Middle Belt zone where southern agricultural practices intersect with northern pastoral movements has made it a flashpoint of recurrent violence (Gambo et al., 2023). The frequency and brutality of attacks have not only led to mass displacement and loss of lives but have also been classified under possible international crimes due to the systemic nature of the violence targeting specific communities and livelihoods.

Benue's enactment of the Anti-Open Grazing Law in 2017 further complicated the conflict. While intended to regulate herding activities, it has been perceived by many Fulani pastoralists as exclusionary, leading to retaliatory violence. It explains that these tensions are exacerbated by weak state enforcement and insufficient federal support, resulting in retaliatory raids, destruction of farmlands, and community polarization (Ioryue, 2024). The persistent insecurity has crippled agricultural productivity, strained local governance, and exposed the limitations of conventional law enforcement in rural conflict zones, thereby

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necessitating the involvement of traditional institutions and grassroots mediation efforts.

### 1.3 Objective and Scope of the Study

The primary objective of this study is to critically examine the role of traditional institutions and community-based mediation mechanisms in resolving herdsman–farmer conflicts in Benue State, Nigeria. The research seeks to assess how indigenous structures such as traditional rulers, elders, and local mediation councils contribute to conflict resolution, peacebuilding, and social cohesion in agrarian communities. Additionally, it aims to investigate the cultural, political, and institutional dynamics that either enable or hinder the effectiveness of these traditional mechanisms. By focusing on the informal governance structures that are deeply embedded in the local communities, this study intends to provide a nuanced understanding of how non-state actors contribute to peace efforts amid state security and policy failures.

The scope of the study is geographically confined to Benue State, with particular emphasis on conflict-prone local government areas such as Guma, Logo, and Agatu, where incidents of farmer–herder clashes are most pronounced. Thematically, the study explores the historical evolution of the conflict, the existing frameworks for local mediation, the interaction between formal and traditional institutions, and the broader implications for rural development and security. The study does not cover armed insurgencies or other forms of violence outside the herder–farmer context, maintaining a strict focus on resource-based communal conflicts.

### 1.4 Structure of the Paper

This paper is structured into seven interconnected sections to provide a comprehensive examination of the role of traditional institutions and community mediation in resolving herdsman–farmer conflicts in Benue State, Nigeria. Section One introduces the background, research problem, objectives, and significance of the study. Section Two reviews relevant literature on indigenous conflict resolution, communal violence, and the socio-political dynamics of Benue State. Section Three outlines the theoretical framework and methodological approach used in the research. Section Four presents and analyzes the findings, while Section Five discusses key challenges, including external influences and institutional limitations. Section Six offers strategic policy recommendations for bridging the gap between customary and state institutions and enhancing collaborative peacebuilding. Finally, Section Seven summarizes the key

findings, discusses their implications for sustainable peace in the region, and proposes areas for future research to deepen understanding and improve indigenous mediation practices.

## 2. TRADITIONAL INSTITUTIONS IN CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

### 2.1 Structure and Roles of Traditional Rulers in Benue Communities

Traditional rulers in Benue communities operate within a layered system of indigenous authority composed of clan heads, district chiefs, and paramount rulers, who command both cultural legitimacy and administrative influence. These structures are organized hierarchically, with each level playing a distinct role in community governance, land allocation, and dispute resolution. According to the study as presented in figure 1, traditional rulers in Logo Local Government Area are regarded as custodians of communal identity and arbiters of justice, responsible for maintaining social harmony and regulating access to communal resources, particularly land a major point of contention in herder–farmer conflicts (Atobauka et al., 2024).

The involvement of traditional rulers in conflict mediation is not limited to informal arbitration; it extends to convening peace meetings, enforcing communal pacts, and liaising with security agencies. As noted, their proximity to grassroots communities enables them to detect early signs of tension and act swiftly to prevent escalation (Tseer and Yaro, 2022). For example, some traditional rulers have established local peace committees that include both farmers and herders, creating platforms for dialogue and reconciliation. Their authority, rooted in historical continuity and communal trust, positions them as vital actors in addressing the structural and immediate causes of violent disputes in rural Benue.

Figure 1 depicts a gathering of traditional rulers from Benue State, representing both the Tiv and Idoma ethnic groups. These leaders are central to the governance structure in their communities, serving as custodians of culture, peacekeepers, and intermediaries between the people and government authorities. Each ruler, adorned in distinctive regalia and holding a staff of office, symbolizes authority, wisdom, and the continuity of indigenous leadership. In Benue, traditional rulers such as the Tor Tiv and Och'Idoma play vital roles in resolving conflicts, including herdsman–farmer disputes, through customary laws, dialogue, and communal arbitration. Their presence underscores the enduring relevance of traditional institutions in fostering unity and upholding social order in their respective domains.



**Figure 1:** Picture of Traditional Rulers of Benue: Guardians of Culture and Peace in Tiv and Idoma Communities (Atobauka et al., 2024)

### 2.2 Cultural Legitimacy and Authority of Traditional Institutions

The cultural legitimacy and authority of traditional institutions in Benue State derive from their deeply entrenched historical roles as custodians of customs, mediators of disputes, and representatives of communal values (Okoh et al., 2025). These institutions are regarded not only as political actors but as spiritual stewards, with their authority embedded in ancestral lineage and social contract. Kasa, Egharevba, and Jegede (2024) argue that communities often defer more to traditional leaders than state officials, especially in rural settings where formal government presence is weak or distrusted. This legitimacy grants traditional rulers unparalleled access to mediate sensitive issues, including land disputes and pastoral encroachments, without inciting further violence.

Traditional institutions operate with symbolic and normative power that commands adherence across ethnic and religious lines. As emphasized, their authority stems from consistent engagement with communal rituals, indigenous jurisprudence, and oral traditions that foster cohesion and compliance (Ologun and Ayodele, 2023). In the context of herder–farmer conflicts, this legitimacy allows them to convene and enforce peace agreements that might be rejected if imposed externally (Okoh et al.,

2025). Their decisions are often respected not because of legal coercion but due to shared cultural understanding, which makes traditional leaders indispensable in grassroots peacebuilding and restorative justice efforts within conflict-ridden areas of Benue State.

### 2.3 Case Examples of Traditional Conflict Resolution Practices

Traditional conflict resolution practices in Benue State are rooted in community-based mechanisms that emphasize dialogue, restitution, and reconciliation. One notable example involves the use of community peace assemblies (known locally as *IjovNyian*), where elders, chiefs, and disputants gather in a neutral space to discuss grievances and agree on reparative solutions as represented in table 1 (Okika et al., 2025). These assemblies often require the symbolic offering of kola nuts, palm wine, or livestock as a gesture of sincerity and peace. Authors explain that such practices are guided by local customs that prioritize communal harmony over punitive outcomes, allowing both farmers and herders to voice concerns, seek redress, and avoid prolonged enmity (Abugu et al., 2022).

In another documented instance, traditional rulers in conflict-prone districts like Guma and Logo facilitated land boundary reaffirmation

ceremonies to clarify disputed territories between indigenous farmers and migrant pastoralists (Raphael et al., 2025). This process included historical testimonies, oath-taking rituals, and public reaffirmation of grazing routes and farmland boundaries. As note that these culturally sanctioned methods are often more effective than litigation or police

intervention, as they draw upon shared values and oral histories to legitimize outcomes (Adeleke and Adefarati, 2024). Such community-led processes highlight the enduring capacity of traditional systems to resolve violent disputes through inclusive, restorative, and participatory approaches.

**Table 1: Summary of Case Examples of Traditional Conflict Resolution Practices**

Case Example	Community/Region	Conflict Type	Resolution Mechanism Used
Settlement through elders' council deliberation	Tiv communities, Benue State	Land dispute between farmers	Verbal negotiations, oath-taking, and compensation through livestock
Intermediary role of clan heads	Idoma communities, Benue State	Grazing encroachment by herders	Mediation, restitution agreements, and symbolic reconciliation rituals
Community oath and public reconciliation	Agatu region, Benue State	Revenge attacks and killings	Public confessions, appeasement rituals, and shared community feasts
Use of masquerade-led peace ceremonies	Guma area, Benue State	Boundary and farmland access disputes	Ritual-based peace declarations and ancestral appeasement offerings

### 3. COMMUNITY MEDIATION MECHANISMS

#### 3.1 Role of Community Elders and Local Mediators

Community elders and local mediators play an instrumental role in diffusing tensions between farmers and herders in Benue State. These actors are regarded as the custodians of community values, with deep knowledge of customary law and interpersonal relations that allows them to mediate with fairness and authority. As note that elders are often approached at the onset of disputes because of their reputation for neutrality and wisdom (Ibrahim and Abubakar, 2023). Through family lineages and kinship ties, they possess a unique ability to contextualize grievances, apply culturally appropriate sanctions, and encourage reconciliation without resorting to violence or formal legal action (Okoh and Grace, 2025).

In addition to elders, local mediators often drawn from religious leaders or respected community figures serve as critical intermediaries during conflict mediation sessions. These mediators facilitate dialogues, organize joint forums, and follow up on agreements reached between the disputing parties. As highlight how the inclusion of such actors improves communication, reduces mistrust, and provides mechanisms for long-term monitoring and compliance (Olayemi and Okonkwo, 2022). Their presence lends legitimacy to resolutions, particularly in rural settings where formal institutions are often absent or viewed as corrupt and ineffective. These locally grounded approaches are essential for restoring social equilibrium in conflict-ridden areas.

#### 3.2 Restorative Justice Approaches in Rural Settings

Restorative justice approaches have become increasingly pivotal in resolving herdsmen-farmer conflicts within rural settings of Benue State. These mechanisms prioritize healing over punishment by engaging the offender, the victim, and the broader community in dialogues aimed at

reconciliation. As presented in figure 2 argue that this justice model reflects the socio-cultural fabric of rural African societies where collective responsibility and reintegration take precedence over punitive measures (Chukwuemeka and Ede, 2022). Through truth-telling forums and symbolic compensations such as livestock restitution or communal labor, communities reaffirm social bonds and prevent the cyclical nature of violence (Grace and Okoh, 2025).

In practice, restorative processes are embedded in the traditional justice systems presided over by elders and clan heads. As highlight instances in agrarian communities where perpetrators of farm destruction or cattle rustling are brought before customary councils and, rather than facing incarceration, are required to make amends through community service, apology rituals, or land reallocation agreements (Ogundele and Musa, 2023). This form of justice allows for a flexible, context-sensitive resolution process that enhances compliance and trust among disputants. The emphasis on restoring harmony, rather than assigning blame, aligns with long-term peacebuilding objectives in rural conflict-prone zones like Benue State (Grace and Okoh, 2025).

Figure 2 illustrates a Venn diagram of Restorative Justice, emphasizing the intersection of three core principles: victim reparation, offender responsibility, and community reconciliation. In rural settings such as many communities in Benue State, Nigeria this approach aligns closely with traditional conflict resolution practices, where healing and community cohesion are prioritized over punishment. Victim support circles, family group conferencing, and community conferencing highlighted in the center of the diagram are particularly effective in rural areas where social ties are strong and communal values are upheld. These practices mirror indigenous approaches like peace circles and offender-family services, fostering accountability, restoring relationships, and strengthening communal harmony, making restorative justice a culturally compatible and practical solution for conflict resolution in rural communities.



**Figure 2: Diagram of Restorative Justice in Rural Areas**

### 3.3 Mediation Practices Rooted in Indigenous Knowledge

Mediation practices grounded in indigenous knowledge have long served as resilient tools for managing agrarian tensions between herdsman and farmers in Benue State. As represented in table 2 emphasize that indigenous conflict resolution frameworks are deeply contextual, drawing upon oral traditions, proverbs, lineage authority, and spiritual customs to facilitate dialogue and reconciliation (Adeoye and Yakubu, 2022). Such knowledge systems are not only culturally accepted but also possess strong legitimacy in the eyes of local populations, thereby enhancing their effectiveness. Disputes are often resolved in village squares under the oversight of neutral elders or spiritual leaders, where disputants present their narratives and decisions are reached through consensus rather than

coercion (Okoh and Grace, 2025).

As highlight how these mediation methods incorporate cultural metaphors and symbolic restitution to restore social balance (Bako and Ifeanyi, 2023). For instance, the offering of kola nuts, shared meals, or livestock exchanges may serve as both peace offerings and commitments to coexistence. These non-adversarial mechanisms create an environment of mutual respect and accountability, allowing both parties to retain dignity while addressing grievances. Integrating such indigenous knowledge into formal peacebuilding strategies ensures sustainability, local ownership, and reduced recurrence of herder–farmer conflicts across Benue’s rural landscapes.

**Table 2: Summary of Mediation Practices Rooted in Indigenous Knowledge**

Mediation Practice	Cultural Origin/Community	Conflict Type Addressed	Unique Indigenous Features
Elders’ arbitration using folktales and proverbs	Tiv ethnic group, Benue State	Grazing and land boundary disputes	Use of proverbs and ancestral wisdom to convey peace messages
Use of traditional apology and gift exchange	Idoma communities	Destruction of farmland by herders	Exchange of kola nuts, livestock, and symbolic tokens of peace
Clan alliance mediation involving kinship ties	Apa and Otukpo regions	Inter-family and herder–farmer tensions	Conflict resolution through extended family networks and kin diplomacy
Ritual cleansing and spiritual arbitration	Guma communities	Cycles of revenge or retaliatory attacks	Conducted by traditional priests to cleanse community grievances

## 4. IMPACT OF TRADITIONAL AND COMMUNITY-BASED INTERVENTIONS

### 4.1 Reduction in Violence and Displacement

The role of traditional institutions and community mediation has significantly contributed to the reduction of violence and displacement associated with herdsman–farmer conflicts in Benue State. As emphasize that when local peacebuilding frameworks are rooted in community norms and administered by trusted actors—such as elders and faith-based leaders there is a measurable decline in armed clashes and retaliatory attacks (Aghedo and Eke, 2022). This transformation is attributed to the proactive engagement of disputing parties through customary platforms that prioritize early warning signals, continuous dialogue, and reciprocal

accountability (Okoh and Omachi, 2025).

Further document a reduction in displacement trends in rural areas where indigenous mechanisms were deployed to mediate land-use disputes (Olayoku and Olanrewaju, 2023). Communities employing traditional grievance resolution often reported fewer instances of forced migration, improved return rates of displaced households, and increased willingness of farmers and herders to share resources. The continuity of residence also sustains local economies and preserves inter-group social capital (Okoh and Omachi, 2025). By anchoring conflict management in indigenous systems, rural settlements in Benue have experienced enhanced stability, making such practices indispensable in addressing violence-induced mobility and insecurity (Grace and Okoh., 2025).

**Table 3: Summary of Reduction in Violence and Displacement**

Intervention Strategy	Target Community/Region	Observed Impact on Violence	Observed Impact on Displacement
Community-led dialogue forums	Guma and Logo LGAs	Marked reduction in reprisal attacks	Gradual return of internally displaced persons (IDPs)
Deployment of traditional vigilante networks	Agatu and Kwande areas	Prompt response to early conflict signals	Enhanced sense of security among returnee populations
Peace accords brokered by traditional rulers	Makurdi and Otukpo regions	Ceasefire between farming and herding groups	Stabilization of local settlements and reduced migration
Collaborative grazing route demarcation	Ukum and Buruku communities	Decline in farmer–herder clashes	Decreased displacement due to secured livelihood pathways

### 4.2 Restoration of Inter-communal Trust and Relationships

The restoration of inter-communal trust and relationships in Benue State has been significantly fostered through the agency of traditional institutions and grassroots mediation structures. As observe that indigenous peace mechanisms—rooted in communal norms of restitution, public reconciliation, and symbolic acts of forgiveness—help mend ruptured social relations between farmers and herders (Akinola and Adesina, 2023). These community-led efforts create shared narratives of victimhood and responsibility, which over time, erode mutual suspicion and pave the way for renewed cooperation. For example, clan elders and local chiefs often convene truth-telling ceremonies where conflicting parties articulate grievances and re-establish interpersonal bonds.

As underscore the role of social capital in rebuilding trust, particularly where religious leaders and age-grade associations co-facilitate reconciliation rituals (Omotosho and Alabi, 2022). Their findings reveal that when traditional actors integrate inclusive participation especially involving women and youth social cohesion improves, and the cycle of violence diminishes. These trust-building initiatives are not merely symbolic; they translate into practical arrangements such as joint farming ventures and shared use of grazing routes. Such outcomes highlight that

relational peace, rather than mere absence of violence, is achievable through culturally grounded mediation processes that restore the moral fabric of affected communities.

### 4.3 Revitalization of Agricultural and Economic Activities

The revitalization of agricultural and economic activities in Benue State is a direct outcome of successful traditional mediation and community-led peacebuilding strategies. As presented in figure 3 explain, regions that have experienced sustained reductions in herdsman–farmer conflicts often report significant rebounds in farming and market operations (Ademola and Okorie, 2023). These improvements are attributed to renewed land access, restoration of seasonal planting schedules, and re-establishment of local food distribution networks. Notably, cooperative farming schemes and community security pacts, brokered by traditional leaders, have enabled displaced farmers to return and resume economic life with confidence (Onum and Omachi, 2025).

Increased security and intergroup cooperation have also facilitated the reintegration of agro-pastoral economies, allowing both farming and herding groups to benefit from mutual exchange. As emphasize that rebuilding economic trust through localized peace accords has improved

market fluidity and reduced transactional risks, especially in rural grain and livestock trading hubs (Ibrahim and Yusuf, 2022). This economic resurgence does not merely benefit individuals but reinforces communal resilience, making societies less susceptible to future conflict. Hence, traditional mechanisms have proven instrumental not only in conflict de-escalation but also in the systemic recovery of agrarian livelihoods and local economies in Benue State (Okoh, 2025).

Figure 3 illustrates a government or community-led distribution of



**Figure 3:** Picture of Boosting Rural Agriculture and Livelihoods (Ademola and Okorie, 2023).

## 5. CHALLENGES FACING INDIGENOUS CONFLICT RESOLUTION SYSTEMS

### 5.1 Erosion of Traditional Authority in Modern Governance

The erosion of traditional authority within modern governance frameworks in Benue State presents a significant obstacle to sustained conflict resolution between herdsmen and farmers. As presented in figure 4 note that the integration of Western-styled democratic systems often sidelines indigenous governance structures, leading to a legitimacy gap that undermines local interventions (Agbaje and Oladeji, 2023). As formal state institutions expand their bureaucratic control, they often fail to acknowledge the customary legitimacy and conflict-resolution capabilities of traditional rulers, thereby diluting their influence over communal affairs and weakening their capacity to mediate intergroup tensions

agricultural inputs—such as fertilizers, pesticides, and food supplies to rural farmers. This initiative is closely aligned with the revitalization of agricultural and economic activities, especially in post-conflict or underserved areas. By equipping farmers with essential resources, it supports increased food production, encourages resettlement of displaced populations, and stimulates local markets. Such interventions are critical in restoring livelihoods, enhancing food security, and promoting sustainable economic development in rural communities.

effectively (Okoh, 2025).

Furthermore, the growing centralization of political power has marginalized traditional authorities from key decision-making platforms, reducing their relevance in shaping policies that directly impact their communities. As emphasize that while modern governance structures may offer legal authority, they lack the cultural embeddedness and local trust enjoyed by traditional institutions (Nwosu and Alade, 2022). This displacement not only limits grassroots engagement but fosters a disconnect between government policies and the lived realities of rural communities. The sidelining of traditional rulers therefore compromises a vital social infrastructure for early warning systems, mediation, and sustainable peacebuilding, which remains essential in addressing the root causes of farmer–herdsmen conflict in Benue State (Okoh and Grace, 2023).



**Figure 4:** Diagram of How Modern Governance Undermines Traditional Authority

Figure 4 illustrates the sequential process through which traditional authority erodes within modern governance structures. As indigenous or customary leaders become integrated into formal state systems, their independent influence is diluted by competing institutional roles and responsibilities. This overlap often leads to conflicts of interest and confusion over jurisdiction, which in turn limits the practical decision-making power of traditional authorities. As their powers shrink, so too does their capacity to mobilize and represent local communities effectively, resulting in a significant loss of public trust and influence. This progression demonstrates how modernization and state integration, rather than strengthening traditional governance, often marginalize it, creating governance gaps and weakening community-based conflict resolution mechanisms.

### 5.2 External Political and Ethnic Influences

The exacerbation of herdsmen–farmer conflicts in Benue State has increasingly been shaped by external political and ethnic influences, which undermine local resolution efforts. According to the study as represented in table 4, political elites often exploit ethnic divisions for electoral gains, stoking animosities that transform resource-based disputes into ethno-political confrontations (Onapajo and Fadugba, 2023). This dynamic has intensified the conflict in Benue, where narratives of indigeneity and settler status are manipulated to justify violence and delegitimize community mediation structures. The politicization of ethnicity erodes trust in impartial conflict resolution and fosters zero-sum perceptions of communal coexistence (Grace and Okoh, 2023).

Moreover, highlight how political patronage networks protect and embolden violent actors, reducing the accountability of those involved in orchestrating attacks (Abah and Olojo, 2022). In Benue, external militia support—rooted in broader regional and national identity politics—has complicated local efforts by traditional institutions to maintain peace.

These influences dilute the authority of indigenous conflict mechanisms and introduce vested interests that resist reconciliation (Omachi and Okoh, 2025). By embedding ethnic bias into state responses and security

interventions, external political actors limit the neutrality necessary for effective mediation, further destabilizing the fragile coexistence between farming and herding communities in the region (Okoh and Omachi, 2025).

**Table 4: Summary of External Political and Ethnic Influences**

External Influence	Source/Actor	Effect on Local Conflict Dynamics	Implication for Traditional Mediation
Politicization of grazing routes	Regional political elites	Escalation of land disputes between groups	Undermines neutrality of traditional leaders
Ethnic militia support from neighboring states	Armed groups across state borders	Intensification of clashes and reprisal attacks	Erodes local authority and disrupts peace processes
Manipulation of ethnic identities	National-level political campaigns	Deepened intergroup mistrust	Makes inclusive dialogue more difficult to sustain
Cross-border arms trafficking	External political factions	Increased availability of weapons	Reduces effectiveness of non-violent traditional approaches

**5.3 Limited Resources and Formal Recognition**

Traditional institutions involved in mediating herdsman–farmer conflicts in Benue State are hampered by limited resources and a lack of formal recognition within Nigeria’s governance framework. As emphasize, these institutions often operate under severe budgetary constraints, lacking access to logistical support, trained personnel, or infrastructure to carry out mediation and peacebuilding tasks effectively (Okoli and Nnamani, 2023). In regions such as Benue, traditional rulers are forced to rely on ad hoc strategies, volunteer networks, and community goodwill to resolve deeply rooted conflicts efforts that are often insufficient in the face of escalating violence and displacement (Avevor et al., 2025).

Furthermore, the marginalization of traditional institutions from formal conflict resolution frameworks significantly weakens their operational influence. As argue that without legal and institutional backing, the recommendations or sanctions issued by community leaders carry little weight, especially when dealing with armed pastoralist groups or politically connected actors (Yusuf and Dlakwa, 2022). In Benue State, traditional leaders struggle to gain the attention of state security forces or to have their conflict reports acted upon (Omachi and Okoh, 2025). This systemic exclusion not only undermines the legitimacy of indigenous mediation but also perpetuates cycles of violence by eroding avenues for timely and culturally grounded resolution.

**6. INTEGRATING TRADITIONAL AND FORMAL SYSTEMS**

**6.1 Bridging Gaps Between Customary and State Institutions**

Bridging the gap between customary and state institutions is critical to enhancing conflict resolution capacity in volatile regions such as Benue State. As observe, the historical tension between traditional authorities and state governance structures in Nigeria has contributed to fragmented efforts in managing local conflicts (Adebanwi and Obadare, 2022). In many rural settings, traditional rulers remain the first responders to conflict, yet their inputs are often disregarded or overruled by formal state institutions lacking grassroots legitimacy. This disconnect weakens early-warning systems and fosters jurisdictional ambiguity, allowing conflicts between herders and farmers to escalate unchecked (Avevor et al., 2025).

To promote effective synergy, there is a growing need for legal and

institutional frameworks that formally integrate traditional conflict resolution practices into Nigeria’s broader judicial and peacebuilding architecture. As argue that hybrid models—where traditional mechanisms such as community mediation panels work in tandem with local courts offer a viable pathway toward sustainable peace (Chukwu and Edeh, 2023). In Benue State, empowering traditional institutions with legal recognition and formal consultation status can improve coordination, enhance trust, and ensure culturally informed responses that resonate with local realities (Okoh et al., 2024). This collaborative approach can significantly reduce administrative inertia and foster durable conflict management.

**6.2 Policy Recommendations for Collaborative Peacebuilding**

Policy recommendations for collaborative peacebuilding must prioritize institutional synergy, stakeholder inclusivity, and grassroots legitimacy to effectively address the persistent herdsman–farmer conflict in Benue State. As represented in figure 5 and table 5 stress the need for an integrated peacebuilding architecture that recognizes the legitimacy of traditional governance systems and embeds them in state-led security and mediation frameworks (Ajayi and Olanrewaju, 2023). This can be achieved by enacting policy reforms that establish formal consultative roles for traditional leaders within local peace and security councils. Furthermore, peacebuilding must be decentralized, enabling community-specific solutions anchored in indigenous practices and norms (Ononiwu et al., 2023).

As emphasize the significance of conflict transformation policies that go beyond immediate resolution to address structural inequalities and historical grievances fueling tensions (Yusuf and Okon, 2022). Policies should therefore promote inclusive land-use planning, conflict-sensitive education curricula, and mobile mediation units co-managed by traditional and state actors (Okoh et al., 2024). In Benue State, the implementation of localized peace compacts binding agreements negotiated by both customary and statutory institutions would formalize collaboration, improve transparency, and enhance accountability. These policy strategies would not only institutionalize joint mediation but also foster long-term social cohesion in communities vulnerable to recurring intergroup violence (Ononiwu et al., 2023).



**Figure 5: Diagram of Peacebuilding Framework: Security, Socio-economic, Political, and Reconciliation Pillars (Ajayi and Olanrewaju, 2023).**

Figure 5 outlines peacebuilding components Security, Socio-economic Foundation, Political Framework, and Reconciliation and Justice centered around a collaborative approach, which can inform policy recommendations for collaborative peacebuilding. Policymakers should prioritize integrated strategies, such as combining humanitarian mine action and disarmament with security sector reform, while fostering economic infrastructure, health, and food security to address root causes.

Political frameworks should promote democratization, good governance, and institutional building, ensuring participatory processes like dialogue between antagonistic groups and grassroots initiatives. Reconciliation efforts, including trauma therapy and truth commissions, should be supported to heal divisions, encouraging policies that enhance multi-stakeholder cooperation, monitor justice systems, and sustain long-term peace through inclusive, coordinated action.

**Table 5: Summary of Policy Recommendations for Collaborative Peacebuilding**

Policy Recommendation	Target Stakeholders	Intended Outcome	Implementation Strategy
Institutionalize community-state partnerships	Government and traditional leaders	Strengthened peacebuilding and accountability structures	Establish joint councils for conflict resolution
Provide legal backing for traditional mediation	Legislative bodies and local authorities	Formal recognition and support for indigenous practices	Enact laws that integrate customary mediation mechanisms
Build capacity for dialogue facilitation	NGOs and local peace committees	Improved communication and negotiation skills	Offer regular training and workshops on conflict mediation
Establish early warning and response networks	Security agencies and communities	Timely intervention in rising tensions	Use digital platforms and community alerts for coordination

### 6.3 Enhancing Interagency Collaboration for Peacebuilding

The enhancement of interagency collaboration among local governments, traditional institutions, and civil society organizations remains critical for sustainable peacebuilding in Benue State. As argue that formalizing coordination channels between customary actors and governmental authorities can reduce institutional fragmentation and improve conflict response efficiency (Chukwuma and Aloba, 2023). Through integrated peace desks housed within local government secretariats featuring representatives of both community leaders and statutory institutions dialogue can be institutionalized, creating a predictable and accountable mediation environment (Okoh et al., 2024) These platforms would allow for the continuous exchange of intelligence, community feedback, and joint decision-making on resource allocation and conflict mitigation strategies.

According to the study, inclusive conflict prevention frameworks must also incorporate early warning systems that draw from both traditional surveillance mechanisms and state security intelligence (Okeke and Onuoha, 2022). For instance, deploying technology-enabled conflict mapping tools—managed collaboratively by state agencies and traditional councils—can help predict violence patterns and preempt escalation. Additionally, interagency training programs and memoranda of understanding (MOUs) between actors can delineate roles, eliminate redundancy, and promote trust-building across institutional divides (Omachi and Okoh, 2025). In the context of Benue's complex conflict landscape, fostering such structured partnerships is indispensable for translating peace policies into measurable outcomes at the community level (Okoh et al., 2024).

## 7. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

### 7.1 Summary of Key Findings

The study revealed that traditional institutions play a significant role in mediating and resolving herdsman-farmer conflicts in Benue State. These institutions, including elders' councils, village heads, and local chiefs, often serve as the first point of contact in conflict situations, leveraging their deep-rooted understanding of cultural norms and communal trust to facilitate dialogue and reconciliation. Their influence extends to conflict de-escalation, enforcement of customary sanctions, and mobilization of community resources for peacebuilding. However, their effectiveness is limited by inadequate state recognition, lack of formal integration into national peace frameworks, and the evolving nature of violent conflicts that surpass traditional resolution mechanisms.

Furthermore, the findings highlighted the limited collaboration between customary structures and formal state institutions, which has resulted in fragmented conflict resolution efforts. Resource constraints, lack of policy coherence, and jurisdictional ambiguity further undermine sustainable peacebuilding. Despite these challenges, the study identifies opportunities for institutional synergy, particularly in areas such as joint peace committees, capacity-building initiatives, and inclusive policy reforms. Overall, bridging institutional gaps and fostering participatory governance are essential for addressing the root causes of herder-farmer conflicts and promoting lasting peace in Benue State.

### 7.2 Implications for Sustainable Peace in Benue State

The findings of this study suggest that sustainable peace in Benue State depends heavily on the integration of traditional conflict resolution mechanisms with formal state institutions. Traditional institutions have

consistently demonstrated the ability to mediate disputes using culturally accepted norms and values, which resonate more deeply with local communities. However, the absence of formal recognition and limited resource allocation hinder their full potential. Strengthening their role through policy inclusion and institutional support can promote more localized and effective peacebuilding strategies that are responsive to the socio-cultural context of the region.

Additionally, sustainable peace requires addressing the structural drivers of conflict, such as competition over land, identity politics, and governance deficits. A holistic peace framework must emphasize cross-sector collaboration involving governmental agencies, traditional rulers, civil society organizations, and local communities. This approach can foster trust, build social cohesion, and create avenues for early warning and conflict prevention. By embedding these collaborative processes into long-term development planning, Benue State can shift from reactive conflict management to proactive peacebuilding, laying a solid foundation for enduring stability and coexistence between herdsman and farming communities.

### 7.3 Areas for Further Research on Indigenous Mediation

Further research is needed to critically examine the dynamics of indigenous mediation practices in multi-ethnic and multi-religious communities, particularly in contexts where traditional authority is being challenged by modernization and political interference. Future studies should investigate how traditional institutions can adapt their conflict resolution mechanisms to remain relevant in rapidly changing socio-political environments. Special attention should be paid to the role of women and youth in indigenous mediation, as they are often excluded from formal processes despite being disproportionately affected by conflicts.

Moreover, empirical research is necessary to evaluate the long-term effectiveness of community-based mediation in comparison to formal judicial systems. Such studies could explore the interplay between traditional leaders and local government officials, focusing on power relations, accountability, and institutional collaboration. There is also a need for cross-regional comparative analyses to identify best practices that can be adapted across different localities in Nigeria and other African countries. These inquiries will contribute to building a more inclusive and evidence-based framework for conflict resolution that honors indigenous knowledge systems while integrating modern governance principles.

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