



CONFLICT RESOLUTION AND PEACEBUILDING IN NIGERIA: A STUDY OF IFE-MODAKEKE CRISIS

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Abstract

This study examines the ongoing ethnic conflict between the Ife and Modakeke communities in Nigeria, focusing on the underlying causes, the effectiveness of current conflict resolution techniques, and the prospects for a durable peace. The study intends to highlight the obstacles that hinder Nigeria's ability to resolve conflicts sustainably, particularly in addressing structural inequality, political marginalization, and economic inequities. A mixed-methods approach is employed, combining quantitative and qualitative data gathered through interviews, questionnaires, and secondary sources. Thematic analysis is used to identify key themes related to the nature of the conflict, the role of traditional conflict resolution mechanisms, and the efficacy of governmental interventions. The findings indicate that the Ife-Modakeke conflict is driven by multiple factors, including economic disparities, political marginalization, and land disputes. While traditional conflict resolution techniques have been useful, they have proven inadequate in resolving the systemic roots of the problem. Government actions, while providing temporary relief, often fail to address fundamental issues. The study concludes that achieving lasting peace requires addressing structural injustices and integrating conflict resolution strategies with broader national reforms.

Keywords: Conflict Resolution, Peacebuilding, Ife-Modakeke Crisis, Nigeria

Introduction

Nigeria, Africa's most populous nation, is a complex mosaic of over 250 ethnic groups, making it prone to interethnic and intra-ethnic conflicts that threaten its socio-political stability (Nwabueze, 2005). These conflicts, often rooted in competition for resources, political power, and identity, have persisted as significant challenges to national cohesion. Among these, the Ife-Modakeke crisis, a prolonged intra-ethnic conflict between the Ife and Modakeke communities in Osun State, stands out for its historical depth and recurring violence, spanning over a century (Akanji, 2008). This conflict, primarily driven by disputes over land ownership, chieftaincy titles, and political representation, has resulted in significant loss of life, property destruction, and social fragmentation, underscoring the urgent need for effective conflict resolution mechanisms. The Ife-Modakeke crisis exemplifies the broader challenges of conflict resolution in Nigeria, where ethnic loyalties and historical grievances often complicate peacebuilding efforts. Despite numerous interventions, including government-led peace committees and traditional

mediation, the conflict has flared intermittently, with notable escalations in the 1980s and 1990s (Albert, 1999). These episodes highlight the limitations of existing conflict resolution frameworks, such as inadequate implementation of peace agreements and distrust among stakeholders (Toriola, 2001). However, prospects for sustainable peace exist, including leveraging traditional institutions, fostering inter-community dialogue, and addressing socio-economic disparities that fuel tensions (Olajide, 2015). This study analyses the prospects and challenges of resolving the Ife-Modakeke crisis within the broader context of Nigeria's conflict resolution landscape. By examining historical and contemporary approaches, it identifies strategies that could foster lasting peace while addressing systemic issues like governance failures and ethnic rivalries that perpetuate conflicts (Egwu, 2011). Understanding these dynamics is critical for policymakers and peace practitioners aiming to build a more stable and cohesive Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

Nigeria faces significant security challenges, with ethnic conflicts posing persistent threats to national stability. The Ife-Modakeke conflict, a protracted intra-ethnic dispute in Osun State, exemplifies these complexities, driven by deep-rooted historical grievances over land, chieftaincy, and political representation (Zubair, 2021). Spanning over a century, the conflict has seen recurring violence, causing loss of lives and property. Effective resolution demands a critical examination of existing strategies, including government interventions and traditional mediation, which often falter due to distrust, poor implementation, and socio-economic disparities. Identifying these impediments is crucial for developing sustainable peacebuilding approaches to address the conflict's underlying causes and foster lasting reconciliation.

Objective of the Study

To understand the ways through which effective conflict resolution and peace-building strategies can be achieved for lasting peace in Nigeria, with specific reference to the Ife-Modakeke crisis.

Significance of the Study

This study contributes to the body of knowledge by re-examining the tactics and methods used in conflict resolution and peace-building, as well as the obstacles that hinder these processes. It highlights the need to re-evaluate the internal logic and workings of democratic systems in resolving conflicts and calls for renewed search for alternative conflict resolution and peace-building strategies.

Literature Review

The establishment of the United Nations post-World War II marked a turning point in peace and conflict resolution (PCR) studies, promoting rigorous methodologies to address global conflicts (Bercovitch & Jackson, 2009). This global shift led to increased academic focus on PCR, with universities worldwide integrating it into curricula to equip students with tools for peacebuilding. In Nigeria, the adoption of PCR courses in universities, polytechnics, and colleges reflects this trend, tailored to address local challenges like ethnic strife and insurgency. The growing recognition of PCR's value among academics

and policymakers underscores its role in fostering sustainable solutions to Nigeria's complex security issues.

Conflict Resolution

Given the pervasive and destructive nature of conflict, conflict resolution has emerged as a crucial endeavour in the modern world. It plays a vital role in managing conflicts and fostering peace at various levels, from interpersonal relationships to international relations (Chitondo., Chanda., Mwila, & Madoda, 2024). Conflict resolution encompasses a diverse array of methods and approaches, each designed to address conflict in a constructive manner. These methods include diplomacy, which involves communication and negotiation between states; negotiation, a process of dialogue aimed at reaching a mutually acceptable agreement; mediation, where a neutral third party facilitates communication and helps parties find common ground; and dialogue, which emphasizes open and respectful exchange to promote understanding and build relationships (Minko, 2024).

Global and Regional Conflict Trends

The world has witnessed a surge in violent extremism, with 78% of terrorist incidents in 2014 occurring in Afghanistan, Syria, Iraq, Pakistan, and Nigeria (Cordesman, 2015). In contrast, only 7% of attacks took place in OECD nations, highlighting the concentration of violence in specific regions. Nigeria faces unique challenges, including the Boko Haram insurgency, which has claimed over 20,000 lives, primarily in the Northeast (Abubakar & Amurtiya, 2023). Unresolved issues such as farmer-pastoralist conflicts, religious tensions, political power struggles, and corruption have fuelled terrorism, cattle rustling, armed robberies, and kidnappings, destabilizing communities and hindering development (Summersett, G. P., & Alade, A. A. 2022).

Theoretical Perspectives on Conflict

Conflict is defined as prolonged disagreement or animosity, often involving struggles over power, resources, or beliefs (Oberschall, 1978). Marxist theory, as articulated by Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, views conflict as a driver of societal change, rooted in class struggles over resources (Chapman, 2023). The Nigerian Civil War (1967–1970) exemplifies this, fueled by the Eastern region's push for sovereignty against national unity. Conflicts, whether internal or external, escalate when groups organize to pursue common objectives, making effective management critical to mitigate their destructive impacts (Dayton & Kriesberg, 2022).

Prospects for Sustainable Peacebuilding

Prospects for resolving conflicts like Ife-Modakeke lie in integrating traditional and modern approaches. Traditional institutions, such as community elders and cultural frameworks, can facilitate trust-building and dialogue, addressing local grievances (Olajide, 2015). Promoting social justice, equitable resource distribution, and inclusive governance can tackle root causes like poverty and ethnic rivalries. Strengthening institutions and fostering inter-community collaboration are essential for sustainable

peace, ensuring Nigeria's multiethnic society achieves cohesion and stability (Egwu, 2011). These strategies, if effectively implemented, offer hope for mitigating conflicts and building a resilient nation.

Methodology

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach, integrating quantitative and qualitative data to provide a comprehensive understanding of the Ife-Modakeke conflict and its resolution strategies. Primary data is collected through semi-structured interviews and questionnaires administered to 150 participants, including local residents, traditional leaders, and government representatives from Ife and Modakeke. The sample is purposively selected to ensure diverse perspectives. Secondary data is sourced from scholarly publications, official reports, and historical records. To address potential data gaps, multiple imputation by chained equations (MICE) is used to estimate missing responses, ensuring data integrity. Data analysis is conducted in two phases, as outlined below.

Data Analysis Techniques

Thematic analysis is employed to identify recurring themes, with qualitative data coded using NVivo software to systematically categorize interview responses into key patterns, such as conflict drivers and resolution challenges. Quantitative data, derived from structured questionnaires, is analysed using descriptive statistics in SPSS (Version 27). The quantitative analysis focuses on variables such as perceptions of conflict causes, effectiveness of resolution strategies, and socio-economic impacts. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, are computed to summarize respondent views. For instance, Likert-scale questions (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree) assess attitudes toward traditional mediation and government interventions. The analysis includes cross-tabulations to explore relationships between demographic factors (e.g., age, community affiliation) and perceptions of peacebuilding efforts. Missing data, affecting approximately 12% of responses, is handled using MICE to generate plausible values based on observed patterns, ensuring robust statistical outcomes. This dual approach enables a nuanced understanding of the Ife-Modakeke crisis, combining rich qualitative insights with structured quantitative findings.

Analysis

A thematic analysis of data collected from respondents in Ife and Modakeke, offering insights into the conflict's dynamics and resolution efforts. The analysis is structured around key themes derived from interview transcripts and questionnaires, reflecting the perceptions and experiences of those affected.

Conflict Resolution Strategies in Nigeria

Nigeria employs various conflict resolution strategies, including negotiation, policy dialogue, constitutional provisions, and institutions like the National Boundary Commission (Emiowele & Oji, 2020). However, these efforts often face challenges, as seen in the Ife-Modakeke crisis, where historical disputes over land and chieftaincy have led to recurring violence (Akanji, 2008). Ineffective implementation, lack of stakeholder trust, and failure to address socio-economic disparities hinder

sustainable peace. The reliance on government-led peace committees has proven inadequate, with agreements often ignored or poorly enforced, perpetuating cycles of conflict.

The analysis identifies reliance on traditional mechanisms, such as mediation by elders, and government interventions, including peace committees. Quantitative findings indicate that 72% of respondents (n=108) agree traditional methods are effective (mean=4.0, SD=0.9), particularly among older respondents (age >50, 78%). However, government efforts score lower, with 65% (n=98) questioning their impartiality (mean=2.8, SD=1.1). Cross-tabulations reveal that government officials (80%) are more optimistic about state interventions than residents (60%), highlighting a perception gap. The Ife-Modakeke crisis exemplifies these challenges, with past resolutions faltering due to mistrust and unaddressed grievances over land and political marginalization.

Challenges to Peacebuilding

Respondents identify a lack of political will, corruption, and socio-economic inequalities as major barriers. Quantitative data shows 58% (n=87) cite economic disparities as a key driver (mean=4.1, SD=0.7), with younger respondents (age <30, 63%) emphasizing unemployment. The judiciary's perceived bias is a concern for 62% (n=93, mean=2.9, SD=1.0), with Ife respondents (67%) expressing stronger distrust than Modakeke respondents (56%). These factors perpetuate cycles of violence in Ife-Modakeke, compounded by inadequate stakeholder engagement.

The findings underscore the need for a holistic conflict resolution approach. Respondents advocate integrating traditional mediation with modern governance structures, with 80% (n=120) prioritizing education and job creation (mean=4.5, SD=0.6). Cross-tabulations indicate stronger support among women (85%) for community-based initiatives. Strengthening institutions, enhancing judicial impartiality, and fostering inclusive dialogue are critical. For Ife-Modakeke, sustained commitment to addressing land disputes and political marginalization is essential for lasting peace.

This analysis highlights the complexity of the Ife-Modakeke conflict and the necessity of multi-faceted strategies to achieve sustainable resolution in Nigeria's multiethnic context.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of the study, draws conclusions based on the evidence presented, and offers recommendations aimed at fostering lasting peace, particularly within the context of the Ife-Modakeke conflict.

The investigation into the Ife-Modakeke conflict reveals a complex web of interconnected factors that have contributed to its protracted nature. The study highlights that the conflict is not a monolithic entity but rather a multifaceted issue rooted in historical grievances, socio-economic disparities, and political marginalization.

Specifically, the research underscores the following key findings:

The enduring legacy of historical grievances, primarily centered on land ownership disputes between the Ife and Modakeke communities, remains a fundamental driver of the conflict. These unresolved issues have created a fertile ground for mistrust and animosity, perpetuating a cycle of violence and instability.

Economic inequalities, characterized by unequal access to resources and limited opportunities, have further exacerbated tensions between the two communities. The perception of unfair distribution of wealth and resources has fuelled resentment and a sense of injustice, contributing to the persistence of the conflict.

Feelings of political exclusion and inadequate representation among certain segments of the Ife and Modakeke populations have also played a significant role in sustaining the conflict. The struggle for political power and recognition has often manifested in violent clashes, hindering efforts to achieve lasting peace.

Previous attempts to resolve the Ife-Modakeke conflict have frequently fallen short of their objectives. This can be attributed to a combination of factors, including a failure to address the underlying structural issues and a lack of sustained commitment from all parties involved. These shortcomings have resulted in a cycle of temporary lulls in violence followed by renewed outbreaks of hostilities.

Furthermore, the study's analysis of conflict resolution mechanisms reveals that both traditional approaches and government interventions have played a role in managing the conflict, albeit with certain limitations. While traditional methods, such as mediation by community elders, have been valuable in preventing escalation and fostering dialogue, they have proven insufficient in resolving the deep-seated structural problems that lie at the heart of the conflict. Similarly, government interventions, often characterized as reactive and inconsistent, have been criticized for their failure to address the root causes of the conflict and for their perceived lack of impartiality.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The Ife-Modakeke crisis serves as a stark reminder of the complexities inherent in conflict resolution, particularly in contexts marked by a confluence of historical grievances, socio-economic inequalities, and political contestations. The findings of this study underscore the limitations of piecemeal approaches to conflict resolution and highlight the urgent need for a more holistic and integrated strategy. Such a strategy must be capable of addressing both the immediate manifestations of violence and the underlying structural factors that perpetuate it.

In light of the findings, the study puts forth the following recommendations, aimed at promoting lasting peace and stability in Ife and Modakeke:

- Conflict resolution efforts should adopt an integrated approach, combining traditional conflict resolution mechanisms with modern governance structures. This entails leveraging the strengths of both systems to address the multifaceted nature of the conflict, ensuring that interventions are both culturally relevant and aligned with principles of good governance.
- The government must transition from a reactive to a proactive stance in conflict resolution. This requires a sustained political commitment, coupled with substantial investments in socio-economic development projects that benefit both Ife and Modakeke. These initiatives should focus on addressing the root causes of inequality and promoting inclusive growth.
- Targeted interventions are needed to mitigate economic disparities and ensure equitable access to resources and opportunities for all residents. This may involve implementing policies aimed at

promoting economic diversification, creating employment opportunities, and improving access to education and healthcare.

- Efforts should be made to strengthen the capacity and impartiality of local institutions, including security forces and the judiciary. This is crucial for ensuring that disputes are resolved in a fair and just manner, and that all parties have confidence in the rule of law.
- Peace processes should prioritize the active participation and ownership of the Ife and Modakeke communities. This entails empowering local stakeholders to play a central role in shaping solutions and ensuring that interventions are tailored to their specific needs and contexts.

Achieving lasting peace requires a long-term commitment from all stakeholders, including the government, local communities, and civil society organizations. This commitment must be sustained over time, recognizing that peacebuilding is a marathon, not a sprint, and that setbacks and challenges are inevitable.

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