Integrating Traditional Institutions into Contemporary Conflict Resolution and Development Strategies in Northwest Nigeria

Auwalu Mukhtar[1] & Yakubu Jafaru[2]

[1]Sustainable Development Centre, University of Abuja
[2]Sociology Department, University of Abuja

Abstract	Original Research Article

Despite years of state intervention, Northwest Nigeria continues to struggle with ongoing insecurity and underdevelopment. This article examines the role of traditional institutions—such as emirs, district heads, and religious leaders—in conflict resolution and local development within this unstable region. Drawing on qualitative data gathered from key informant interviews, focus group discussions, and document analyses across four states (Zamfara, Sokoto, Kebbi, and Katsina), the research assesses the effectiveness, limitations, and potential incorporation of traditional institutions within modern governance frameworks. The results indicate that traditional leaders maintain significant legitimacy, utilise culturally appropriate conflict resolution methods, and are essential in facilitating development initiatives. Nonetheless, their complete participation in peacebuilding and development planning is hindered by structural exclusion, policy neglect, and capacity deficiencies. The study recommends a hybrid governance model that blends formal institutions with traditional authority, ensuring local ownership and cultural alignment in Nigeria's peace and development efforts.

Keywords: Traditional Institutions, Conflict Resolution, Development Strategies, Northwest Nigeria, Hybrid Governance, Peacebuilding, Indigenous Knowledge, Governance Integration.

1. INTRODUCTION

Northwest Nigeria is currently experiencing an escalating crisis characterised by a multifaceted reality of insecurity, developmental stagnation, and governance challenges. The region includes states such as Zamfara, Sokoto, Kebbi, Katsina, Kaduna, and parts of Niger. It has become a focal point for various violent incidents, including armed banditry, conflicts between herders and farmers, ethno-religious tensions, and terrorist attacks (International Crisis Group [ICG], 2020; Aliyu, 2022). Armed groups have exploited the weak presence of the state and porous borders, taking advantage of rural inhabitants and threatening national security (Ologbonori, Magaji, & Musa, 2025). Rural communities have primarily suffered from these crises, enduring displacement, loss of livelihoods, disrupted education, and a decline in trust towards formal state institutions (Mustapha, 2023).

Despite various attempts by federal and state authorities, including military operations such as Operation Hadarin Daji

and peace talks, achieving a sustainable resolution has proven challenging. Many of these initiatives have primarily relied on top-down approaches that often overlook the sociocultural aspects of the affected communities (Yahaya & Olanrewaju, 2023). Development efforts have similarly faced obstacles, as insecurity has obstructed infrastructure projects, disrupted agricultural activities, and deterred potential investors (Ibrahim, Olusola, & Magaji, 2025). As the country confronts rising insecurity and stagnating development, it is essential to investigate alternative, community-focused methods for conflict resolution and development planning (Zailani, Magaji, & Jafaru, 2025).

One alternative solution involves recognising and incorporating traditional institutions. These include local authorities such as emirs, district heads, village chiefs, religious leaders, and community elders, who have traditionally served as guardians of peace, ethics, and community development. Embedded in customary laws and indigenous knowledge systems, traditional institutions have played a vital role in conflict mediation, land

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governance, inter-group dialogue, and community engagement (Zartman, 2000; Ekeh, 2016). In many rural regions of Northwest Nigeria, traditional leaders continue to enjoy a level of legitimacy and trust that formal institutions often lack, particularly in areas where state authority is either weak or disputed (Ibrahim & Shehu, 2022).

However, despite their importance, traditional institutions are often overlooked and underutilised in the formal governance and development framework. Numerous policies and development initiatives exclude traditional actors, frequently restricting their roles to ceremonial duties. This marginalisation of these institutions from formal peacebuilding and development processes not only diminishes their potential contributions but also results in a fragmented approach to addressing conflicts and promoting inclusive development (Adewale & Garba, 2024). This is especially concerning in regions like Northwest Nigeria, where cultural legitimacy and community involvement are vital for the success of any intervention.

Additionally, the renewed focus on hybrid governance models throughout Africa has prompted academics and policymakers to reassess the role of traditional institutions in contemporary governance. Hybrid governance, characterised by the coexistence and collaboration between formal state entities and informal or customary organisations, has demonstrated potential in enhancing local governance, bolstering legitimacy, and delivering public services more efficiently in vulnerable contexts (Logan, 2009; Moe & Suykens, 2017). In regions affected by conflict, this approach has been linked to improved conflict resolution, increased civic engagement, and more responsive governance frameworks that better meet the needs of citizens.

This article aims to thoroughly investigate how traditional institutions can be successfully incorporated into modern conflict resolution and development strategies in Northwest Nigeria. The goal is to examine the specific functions these institutions serve in peacebuilding, identify the challenges to their integration, and provide actionable policy recommendations to foster collaboration between traditional and formal governance systems. The primary assertion is that achieving lasting peace and development in Northwest Nigeria requires a reevaluation of governance strategies to recognise the importance of indigenous knowledge systems, community legitimacy, and grassroots engagement.

In this way, the study contributes to the broader conversation on sustainable development, peacebuilding, and governance in sub-Saharan Africa. It aligns with Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16, which advocates for the encouragement of peaceful and inclusive societies, justice for all, and the establishment of effective, accountable institutions at every level (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2022). It also aligns with SDG 17, which emphasises the importance of partnerships in achieving development outcomes, highlighting that cooperation between traditional and contemporary institutions can yield more locally driven and sustainable solutions.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Conceptual Framework

Traditional Institutions: Traditional institutions refer to long-established indigenous frameworks of authority, governance, and social regulation that existed prior to the influence of colonial powers. These institutions are generally founded on ethnic, cultural, or religious principles and are frequently represented by leaders such as emirs, chiefs, district heads, councils of elders, and spiritual figures. In the context of Northwest Nigeria, these entities play a vital role in community dynamics and hold considerable sway over social behaviour, intergroup relations, dispute resolution, and local resource management (Ekeh, 2016; Ibrahim & Shehu, 2022). Unlike formal government structures that are based on codified laws and bureaucratic systems, traditional institutions operate through unwritten norms, community consensus, and historical practices. Their authority stems from cultural legitimacy and lineage, positioning them as pivotal to community identity and cohesion (Logan, 2009). Such institutions often intervene in familial disputes, land conflicts, inheritance matters, and decisions regarding community development. Their deep-rooted connection to local social frameworks allows them to respond promptly and effectively, especially in situations where state mechanisms may be regarded as sluggish, detached, or lacking legitimacy (Zartman, 2000; Yahaya & Olanrewaju, 2023).

Conflict Resolution: Conflict resolution encompasses a diverse range of processes designed to resolve or mitigate violent conflict through non-violent means, including mediation, arbitration, negotiation, and reconciliation. In Western peacebuilding frameworks, these processes are largely state-driven and entail formal methods, such as court litigation, truth commissions, or international mediation (Lederach, 1997). Conversely, in traditional African cultures, conflict resolution is often informal, community-centred, and deeply rooted in cultural practices. In Northwest Nigeria, conflict resolution facilitated by traditional leaders typically involves consensus-building, verbal apologies, symbolic restitution, reconciliation rituals, and principles of restorative justice (Olanrewaju et al., 2024). These approaches are embedded in the shared values of the community. They not only aim to resolve disputes but also to restore social harmony and deter future vengeance (Abubakar, Magaji, & Ismail, 2025). The credibility and impartiality of traditional authorities often position them as favoured mediators in local conflicts, particularly those relating to land, grazing routes, or ethnic tensions (Mustapha, 2023).

Nexus Between Conflict and Insecurity: The relationship between conflict and insecurity describes the interconnected and mutually influential dynamics where conflict—whether violent, political, ethnic, or resource-driven—creates conditions of insecurity, and ongoing insecurity, in turn, incites

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further conflict. Conflict is generally defined as a situation of discord arising from clashing interests, values, or goals among individuals, groups, or nations. Insecurity, conversely, is defined by the lack or collapse of physical safety and political stability (Abiola, Magaji, & Musa, 2025), economic stability, and social unity (Adekoya, Magaji, & Ismail, 2025), typically evident as threats to lives, property, and livelihoods.

At the conceptual heart of this relationship is the notion that conflict fosters an atmosphere of fear, displacement, and instability, undermining institutions' abilities to uphold law and order. This results in a vicious cycle wherein insecurity diminishes trust in governance, exacerbates grievances, and incites retaliatory violence or armed opposition (Magaji et al, 2024). In vulnerable areas like Northwest Nigeria, unresolved disputes over land, identity, or political exclusion frequently escalate into widespread insecurity, characterised by banditry, insurgency, and community displacement (Olusola, Magaji, & Musa, 2025).

Therefore, the conflict-insecurity relationship underscores the mutual dependence between peacebuilding and security governance, highlighting the necessity for comprehensive approaches that concurrently tackle the root causes of conflict (such as marginalisation and poverty) and structural factors driving insecurity (like weak institutions and deficient justice systems). Understanding this relationship is crucial for developing effective strategies to prevent conflict, promote peacebuilding, and foster development in areas prone to conflict.

Nexus Between Poverty and Conflict: The relationship between poverty and conflict represents a complex, two-way connection in which poverty both contributes to the emergence and perpetuation of conflict, and conflict, in turn, exacerbates and perpetuates poverty. Poverty is commonly viewed as a state of severe deprivation in terms of income, access to basic needs, opportunities, and human capabilities (Musa, Ismail, & Magaji, 2024). Simultaneously, conflict involves violent or non-violent struggles among individuals, groups, or institutions over conflicting interests.

At the core of this relationship is the idea that poverty breeds grievances—including social exclusion (Jafaru, Magaji, & Abdullahi, 2024), unemployment, and food insecurity (Magaji & Musa, 2024), as well as limited access to education and justice—that can propel individuals and communities toward violence or rebellion. In numerous fragile and underdeveloped regions, poverty erodes trust in state institutions, encompassing education (Magaji, 2008). It diminishes the opportunity costs associated with engaging in conflict, rendering violence more appealing or practical for the impoverished and marginalised.

On the other hand, conflict exacerbates poverty by destroying infrastructure, displacing populations, disrupting educational systems for children and markets, halting investments, and redirecting public resources from development to security (Magaji, 2007). In regions affected by conflict, livelihoods are frequently jeopardised, health and education systems collapse, and economic growth stagnates, further embedding cycles of deprivation.

This cyclical interaction establishes a poverty-conflict trap, where each condition sustains the other, complicating recovery and peacebuilding efforts. Addressing this relationship necessitates integrated development and peacebuilding strategies that relieve poverty while simultaneously addressing the structural factors of conflict. Initiatives must extend beyond humanitarian assistance to confront root causes such as inequality, marginalisation, and weak governance frameworks.

Development Strategies: Development strategies are defined as organised efforts aimed at improving the socioeconomic well-being of communities through access to education (Gabdo, Magaji, & Yakubu, 2025), healthcare, infrastructure, job opportunities, and security (Magaji, Musa, & Salisu, 2022). These strategies are typically developed and implemented by governments, international organisations, and civil society entities. In areas affected by fragility or conflict, the success of such strategies is often limited by poor governance, insecurity, and insufficient community involvement (UNDP, 2022). Traditional institutions have been recognised as vital facilitators of grassroots development. They act as intermediaries between development stakeholders and local communities, ensuring cultural relevance, mobilising local labour and resources, and fostering community ownership of development initiatives (Adewale & Garba, 2024). In agrarian economies like those found in Northwest Nigeria, traditional leaders frequently manage equitable land distribution, settle farming disputes, and encourage collective actions for environmental protection or infrastructure development (Aliyu, 2022). Their participation in project planning and evaluation can enhance accountability and long-term viability (Magaji, 2004).

2.2 Theoretical Framework

This research is based on two interconnected theoretical frameworks: Hybrid Governance Theory and Conflict Transformation Theory.

Hybrid Governance Theory: This theory offers insights into how formal governmental structures and informal traditional systems coexist and interact in diverse societies, particularly in post-colonial and conflict-affected states (Boege et al., 2009). Instead of viewing traditional authority as conflicting with modern governance, this theory highlights the potential for collaboration between the two. Hybrid governance systems often gain greater legitimacy and effectiveness in situations where the state is weak or lacks public confidence. In the context of Northwest Nigeria, hybrid governance is especially pertinent due to the state's limited influence and the legitimacy challenges facing formal institutions. Traditional leaders frequently act as first responders in conflicts, coordinators of local development initiatives, and facilitators for state and NGO interventions (Logan, 2009). Acknowledging and integrating their roles into broader governance frameworks can enhance state authority, improve public service delivery, and facilitate

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conflict resolution and management. Hybrid governance also presents a framework for examining power distribution, resource allocation, and institutional diversity. It permits the coexistence of multiple authority sources, each fulfilling distinct functions, thus alleviating governance gaps and institutional overlaps (Moe & Suykens, 2017).

Conflict Transformation Theory: Conflict transformation, as proposed by John Paul Lederach (1997), focuses not merely on resolving surface issues but also on tackling the underlying causes of conflict and transforming the relationships, attitudes, and structures that perpetuate violence. It prioritises long-term peacebuilding, cultural awareness, and the inclusion of grassroots participants. This theory is especially relevant for analysing traditional conflict resolution practices, which tend to be restorative and relational rather than punitive. In Northwest Nigeria, where various local conflicts are influenced by identity, land, and religion, conflict transformation provides a normative framework for understanding the more profound societal shifts necessary to foster lasting peace. When adequately engaged, traditional institutions can facilitate conflict transformation by promoting reconciliation, preserving historical narratives, fostering intergroup discussions, and rebuilding trust. Their influence in socialisation and moral education allows them to cultivate enduring peace cultures within communities (Yahaya, 2023).

2.3 Empirical Literature Review

An increasing amount of empirical research supports the ongoing significance and efficacy of traditional institutions in conflict management and development, particularly throughout sub-Saharan Africa.

Zartman (2000) offers critical insights into the shortcomings of modern, externally imposed peacebuilding approaches in Africa, arguing that they often overlook indigenous conflict resolution practices. He asserts that traditional institutions provide culturally valid processes that are more likely to be recognised and upheld by local populations. For Nigeria, these methods encompass the involvement of elders' councils, the use of oaths, family mediation, and clan alliances.

Ibrahim and Shehu (2022) discovered, in their investigation of Sokoto and Zamfara States, that traditional leaders played essential roles in reducing tensions between pastoralists and farmers through community dialogue, the establishment of grazing boundaries, and the enforcement of communal agreements. Their study indicated a notable decline in retaliatory violence in regions where traditional authorities actively engaged as mediators.

Yahaya (2023) similarly explored the influence of religious and traditional leaders in preventing youth radicalisation and violent extremism in Katsina State. The research highlighted how timely intervention by religious clerics, in collaboration with village leaders, effectively reduced the recruitment of young individuals into bandit groups. The leaders organised vocational training and spiritual counselling, providing alternative avenues for at-risk youth.

In another study, Olanrewaju et al. (2024) investigated the role of traditional councils in facilitating humanitarian access and development efforts in conflict-affected rural areas. Their results indicated that NGOs and government bodies achieve improved outcomes when they collaborate with local chiefs and religious leaders. For example, vaccination campaigns and school enrollment initiatives were more effective in communities where traditional rulers spearheaded the awareness campaigns.

Adewale and Garba (2024) conducted a study focusing on the role of traditional leadership in land administration and infrastructure development in Kebbi State. Their findings revealed that land disputes were settled more swiftly and with fewer legal challenges when resolved by traditional authorities. Furthermore, development initiatives, such as rural road construction and water borehole projects, garnered stronger community backing when traditional leaders were involved in the initiation and oversight of these projects.

The existing literature robustly supports the notion that traditional institutions can play vital roles as effective partners in conflict resolution and development, particularly in culturally diverse and fragile contexts, such as the Northwest region of Nigeria. Their legitimacy, deep-rooted community presence, and capacity to mobilise resources render them crucial actors. However, their integration into formal governance structures necessitates the development of intentional policy frameworks, institutional reforms, and capacity-building initiatives. The following sections of this paper will empirically examine these dynamics across selected states and propose practical strategies for developing a hybrid governance model that harnesses both modern and traditional strengths.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This research utilised a qualitative research design to investigate the roles, capacities, and challenges faced by traditional institutions in conflict resolution and development strategies within Northwest Nigeria. The qualitative approach was chosen due to its effectiveness in revealing nuanced and context-specific insights into socio-political dynamics, cultural practices, and governance relationships (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The study aimed to gather comprehensive perspectives from key stakeholders engaged in peacebuilding and development initiatives, emphasising local knowledge and experience.

3.2 Study Area

The research was carried out in selected states of Northwest Nigeria—namely Zamfara, Sokoto, Kebbi, and Katsina—which have recently faced significant levels of communal conflict, armed banditry, and developmental challenges. These states also possess strong traditional governance systems that continue to influence local dispute resolution and community engagement. Their selection was

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based on the variety of conflict types, the existence of operational traditional structures, and ongoing development efforts by state and non-state actors.

3.3 Target Population and Sampling

The target population for the study included traditional rulers, religious leaders, local government officials, development practitioners, women leaders, and youth representatives. These individuals were chosen due to their direct involvement in community governance, mediation, and development coordination.

A purposive sampling method was employed to select participants with rich, relevant experience and insider knowledge on the topic. A total of 40 respondents were engaged across the four states through 12 Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with traditional rulers, religious leaders, and government officials, as well as 4 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) held in each state with youth groups, women's associations, and local development committees. This sampling approach ensured a diversity of perspectives while remaining relevant to the research aims.

3.4 Data Collection Methods

A variety of qualitative techniques were utilised to ensure data triangulation and validity:

a. Key Informant Interviews (KIIs)

Semi-structured interviews were carried out with traditional and religious leaders, security personnel, and local development officials. The interview guides contained questions focused on the traditional roles of these institutions in conflict resolution, their perceived effectiveness in fostering development, obstacles to collaboration with contemporary governance actors, and recommendations for enhanced integration. Each KII lasted between 30 and 45 minutes and was audio-recorded with the participants' consent.

b. Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

Each FGD involved 6–8 participants and investigated community-level encounters with conflict, peacebuilding efforts, participation in development, and views on traditional authority. FGDs facilitated interactive discussions that included diverse generations and genders. Sessions were guided by structured outlines and lasted around 90 minutes.

c. Document Analysis

Relevant documents, including state development plans, local government regulations, NGO peacebuilding reports, and charters from cultural associations, were examined to understand the current policy frameworks and institutional arrangements that involve traditional institutions.

3.5 Data Analysis

All qualitative data were transcribed and analysed thematically using NVivo software to pinpoint recurring themes and patterns. The thematic coding adhered to Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step process: becoming familiar with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final report.

Codes were initially based on research objectives (deductive) but were adjusted according to emerging patterns observed in the data (inductive). Key themes encompassed the legitimacy of traditional institutions, functions in conflict mediation, impediments to formal integration, and prospects for hybrid governance.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant institutional review board at the academic establishment. Informed consent was attained from all participants, ensuring confidentiality and the voluntary nature of their involvement. Identifiable information was anonymised to protect the respondents. Data from interviews and FGDs was stored securely and utilised exclusively for academic purposes.

Participants were also notified of their right to withdraw from the research process at any time. Cultural sensitivity was observed throughout the study, with deference shown to traditional protocols and hierarchies in all engagements.

3.7 Limitations of the Study

While the study provides significant insights, certain limitations warrant acknowledgment: Geographic Constraints: Security issues restricted access to certain remote conflict-affected areas; Participant Availability: Arranging interviews with high-ranking traditional leaders required prolonged negotiations and flexibility in scheduling; Scope of Data: The qualitative nature of the study implies that findings are not generalizable but relatively contextually rich and exploratory. Nevertheless, these limitations were addressed through methodological rigour, diversity of respondents, and data source triangulation.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

A total of 40 participants took part in the study, representing four conflict-prone states in Northwest Nigeria: Zamfara, Sokoto, Kebbi, and Katsina. The demographic profile is summarised in Table 1 as follows:

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Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Category	Number of Participants	Gender	Age Range (Years)
Traditional Rulers (Emirs, Chiefs)	8	Male	50–70
Religious Leaders (Imams, Pastors)	4	Male	40–65
Local Government Officials	6	5 Male, 1 Female	35–55
Development Practitioners (NGOs)	6	4 Male, 2 Female	30–50
Women Leaders	4	Female	35–55
Youth Representatives	12	7 Male, 5 Female	20–35

Participants encompassed a diverse range of stakeholders involved in local governance, peacebuilding, and development, with more than 60% having firsthand experience in mediating or participating in conflict resolution and community mobilisation efforts.

4.2 Thematic Findings

Thematic analysis of the qualitative data (Key Informant Interviews, Focus Group Discussions, and document reviews) revealed four main themes:

4.2.1 Legitimacy and Trust in Traditional Institutions

In rural communities, traditional leaders and religious figures remain the most trusted individuals. Recognised as guardians of peace and culture, they are frequently approached by those in disputes before involving law enforcement, due to their perceived fairness and approachability.

"The people respect the emir more than the police. He understands their language, is aware of their history, and they trust his fairness." (Traditional Ruler, Sokoto)

Their trust stems from cultural continuity, kinship relationships, and their visible involvement in the community. Traditional institutions have played a crucial role in mitigating ethnic conflicts and resolving disputes between herders and farmers over land use.

4.2.2 Customary Conflict Resolution Mechanisms

Participants noted a prevalent reliance on verbal negotiations, reparations, and elder mediation. These traditional approaches prioritise reconciliation and social harmony over punitive responses.

"When a conflict arises, we do not hastily go to court. The village head gathers both parties and elders to meet under the tree. They will converse until they reach an acceptable solution for both parties." (Youth Representative, Zamfara)

This culturally grounded, non-adversarial approach promotes community unity, especially in post-conflict situations.

4.2.3 Limited Integration with State Structures

Traditional leaders voiced their dissatisfaction with being excluded from formal peace and development planning processes. Government representatives acknowledged this issue, citing an absence of policy frameworks.

"When government officials come to execute projects, they do not seek our input. They view us as merely ceremonial figures. However, when issues arise, they return to request our assistance." (Traditional Ruler, Kebbi)

This disconnection diminishes the potential for hybrid governance and weakens the grassroots credibility of state efforts.

4.2.4 Traditional Institutions as Development Enablers

Traditional authorities frequently provide land, address local issues, and engage communities in development initiatives. They facilitate NGO access and shield development projects from local pushback.

"When we aimed to establish a women's centre, the traditional ruler convened the men and urged them to support their wives' involvement. Without his support, it would have faltered." (NGO Official, Sokoto)

Nonetheless, limited educational opportunities, a lack of digital skills, and generational divides hinder their effectiveness in cooperating with contemporary institutions.

4.3 Summary of KII and Document Analysis Outcomes

To reinforce the thematic findings, the study reviewed relevant documents and conducted key informant interviews (KIIs) across the four states. Table 2 below summarises their combined outcomes:

Table 2: Summary of KII and Document Analysis Outcomes

Theme	KII Insights	Document Review Observations
Legitimacy and Trust	Traditional leaders emphasised their moral authority and role as custodians of peace.	State plans seldom mention them despite widespread community reliance.
Customary Conflict Resolution	The use of verbal mediation, apology rituals, and restitution was cited as a practical approach to resolving disputes.	Mercy Corps (2023) notes its role in de-escalating conflicts, though formal documentation is scarce.
Lack of Integration with State	Traditional rulers lack structured involvement in governance, officials confirm.	Local Government policies focus on elected representatives; traditional authorities are omitted.
Role in Development Facilitation	Traditional leaders mobilise communities, resolve land disputes, and ensure participation.	UNDP Nigeria (2022) observed better project outcomes with traditional involvement.
Barriers to Engagement	Leaders cited a lack of training, generational tension, and limited digital skills as key challenges to their success.	Strategy documents lack provisions for capacity-building or formal support for traditional institutions.

4.4 Explanation of Outcomes

4.4.1 Cultural Embeddedness and Local Legitimacy

The results indicate that traditional institutions are considered more trustworthy and accessible than formal authorities, particularly in rural settings. This supports Moe and Suykens' (2017) claim that informal governance structures are often underappreciated despite their practical significance.

4.4.2 Customary Justice and Reconciliation

Traditional methods of dispute resolution align with cultural values and focus on restoration rather than retribution. This aligns with Lederach's (1997) Conflict Transformation Theory, which asserts that lasting peace is founded on repairing relationships and fostering communal healing.

4.4.3 Institutional Disconnect

Although traditional leaders have significant influence in real-time situations, there is a notable absence of legal or policy mechanisms for their involvement in governance. This void diminishes coordination and weakens the legitimacy of top-down approaches, as illustrated by numerous development failures identified in the reviewed literature.

4.4.4 Enabling Development at the Grassroots

Traditional institutions have played a crucial role in the effective implementation of development initiatives, primarily through conflict prevention and community engagement. Nevertheless, they continue to be underutilised due to insufficient funding, inadequate training, and the lack of structured cooperation channels.

4.4.5 Capacity and Generational Gaps

Many traditional leaders, especially in isolated regions, lack formal education and awareness of modern human rights, gender equality, and digital governance standards. This leads to tensions, particularly among younger generations and civil society advocates who promote modernisation and inclusivity.

4.5 Conclusion of Findings

Traditional institutions play a vital role in peacebuilding and development efforts in Northwest Nigeria. Their cultural authority, local integration, and expertise in conflict resolution position them as essential players. However, their potential is hindered by institutional marginalisation, capacity limitations, and a lack of formal acknowledgement. To achieve sustainable peace and development, Nigeria must adopt a hybrid governance model that combines the strengths of traditional and formal systems through organised collaboration, clear delineation of responsibilities, and investment in capacity building.

5. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The insights from this study present important policy recommendations for governance at both national and sub-national levels in Nigeria:

1. Inclusion of Traditional Institutions in Governance Frameworks: It is crucial to officially recognise and incorporate traditional authorities into local and state-level policies for peacebuilding and development. Their cultural authority enables them to be effective initial responders to conflict and drivers of grassroots development.

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2. Hybrid Governance for Conflict-Affected Areas: In vulnerable regions like Northwest Nigeria, combining state and traditional governance systems (hybrid governance) can improve policy legitimacy and outreach, especially where formal institutions are perceived as weak or untrustworthy.

3. Capacity Building for Traditional Leaders: Policies need to target the knowledge and skill deficiencies encountered by traditional institutions—particularly in digital proficiency, conflict sensitivity, gender inclusivity, and development planning—via structured training programs.

4. Legal and Institutional Reforms: Local governance legislations and rural development strategies should be revised to clearly outline the consultative and operational roles of traditional leaders in governance, conflict resolution, and service provision.

5. Participatory Development Approaches: For development initiatives to be effective and sensitive to conflict, governments and NGOs must engage traditional authorities systematically and create inclusive platforms for community involvement.

6. CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated that traditional institutions in Northwest Nigeria continue to play a key role in peacebuilding and development. Grounded in cultural customs, social trust, and local authority, these institutions offer proven strategies for conflict resolution and community mobilisation for development. However, despite their relevance, traditional institutions are predominantly excluded from formal governance frameworks, which restricts their ability to contribute to sustainable development.

The gap between informal and formal systems has hampered attempts at inclusive peace and effective development implementation in the area. Bridging this divide necessitates a transformative approach that welcomes hybrid governance and utilises indigenous knowledge systems. By incorporating traditional institutions into policy-making, planning, and execution, Nigeria can enhance community resilience, promote inclusive development, and foster peace in its most vulnerable regions.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the study's conclusions, the following suggestions are proposed:

1. Formalise the Role of Traditional Authorities in Peace and Development Committees: Governments should establish official positions for emirs, chiefs, and religious leaders within local peacebuilding and development initiatives.

2. Offer Training and Resource Assistance: Traditional leaders ought to receive training focused on conflict-sensitive programming, governance principles, and development strategies aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

3. Create National Guidelines for Hybrid Governance: A national policy framework is essential for aligning the roles of traditional and formal governance structures, ensuring clarity and accountability.

4. Enhance Youth and Women's Participation: Traditional councils should be urged to include the perspectives of youth and women to ensure relevance across generations and promote inclusivity.

5. Improve Monitoring and Documentation Systems: Governments and NGOs should facilitate the recording of traditional conflict resolution methods and their outcomes to inform learning and guide policy development.

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