

## Utilization of Community-Based Institutions in Addressing Farmers-Herders Conflict in Benue State, Nigeria

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### Abstract

This study examines the role of community based institutions in addressing farmers-herders conflict in Benue State, Nigeria. The conflict has shifted from localized disputes into a prolonged crisis which affects daily life. The study aimed to identify community institutions involved in conflict management, examine traditional mediation approaches across selected local government areas, and evaluate their outcomes and effectiveness. A cross-sectional design guided the study. Data came from 384 respondents drawn from conflict affected local government areas across the three senatorial zones of Benue State. The study used structured questionnaires, Key Informant Interviews, and community discussions. A multistage sampling procedure guided respondent selection. Descriptive statistics and thematic analysis supported data analysis. Findings show strong reliance on traditional institutions as first responders to conflict, although dominant actors differ across locations. Religious leaders led mediation in Katsina Ala with 79.4% reliance. Village heads and elders accounted for more than 80 percent in Kwande. Village heads handled 66.2% of cases in Guma and 82.8% in Gwer West. Elders' councils dominated in Agatu with 55.9% while chiefs led in Apa with 64.5%. Mediation and dialogue formed the core strategies. Compensation and spiritual rites appeared less often. These processes reduced violence but rarely produced lasting peace. Temporary ceasefires appeared as the most common outcome in several areas. Community institutions retain social legitimacy but face limits due to conflict militarization, weak enforcement capacity, and exclusion from state responses. Sustainable peace requires hybrid peacebuilding models which connect traditional authorities with formal governance and security institutions.

**Keywords:** farmer-herder conflicts, community-based institution, peacebuilding, livelihood recovery

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### INTRODUCTION

Conflict resolution and peacebuilding in West Africa has increasingly relied on Western institutions, with little to no input from traditional mechanisms. Western approaches, such as courts, the military and police, and panels of inquiry, have often been employed to address disputes and conflicts. However, these strategies have frequently fallen short, particularly when it comes to violent conflicts, like the ongoing farmers-herders crisis in Nigeria (Okonji, 2016). While the Nigerian Constitution does not officially recognize traditional institutions, there is growing recognition of the importance of "peacebuilding from below", a bottom-up approach that emphasizes the role of local, indigenous systems in managing resource-based conflicts, such as the farmers-herders conflict in Nigeria (Yahaya, 2019).

Farmers-herders conflicts have become persistent in Africa, particularly in Nigeria, where it significantly disrupts livelihoods. The violence associated with these conflicts has had devastating impacts on socio-economic activities and the social fabric of affected communities (Alozie, 2019). Despite ongoing efforts to resolve the issue, farmers-herders conflicts continue to present a major challenge in Nigeria and across the

region. These conflicts pose significant dangers to national stability, with dire consequences for national development and the well-being of the people (Oji, et al., 2015). According to Musa, et al (2016), the impacts of the conflict include displacement of farmers and herders, destruction of infrastructure, loss of livelihoods, loss of life, and the underdevelopment of the agricultural sector and national economy.

The farmers-herders conflict intensified over the past two decades, with a marked increase in frequency and severity from 2010 onwards. The humanitarian toll has been devastating, with thousands killed and many displaced (Amnesty International, 2018). According to Amnesty International, between January 2016 and October 2018, over 3,600 people were killed in Nigeria, with 57% of these fatalities occurring in 2018 alone. Benue State has been the hardest hit by the violence. In addition to the human cost, the economic toll on both State and Federal governments has been substantial. This ongoing conflict is emerging as a significant threat to state security and the peaceful coexistence of Nigeria's diverse populations (Alimba, 2014).

To address this crisis, it is essential to bring together traditional institutions and local communities in the process of conflict resolution. By integrating these indigenous mechanisms into peacebuilding efforts, a more sustainable and culturally relevant approach can be developed to address the root causes of the farmers-herders conflict and foster long-term peace in affected regions.

Farmers-herders conflict in Nigeria has evolved into a complex and persistent crisis, posing significant threats to national security, socio-economic stability, and the peaceful coexistence of various communities, particularly in the North-Central regions. Despite efforts by the Nigerian government and international partners to address the crisis, including the deployment of military and police forces, judicial measures, and the establishment of inquiry panels, the conflict remains unresolved and continues to disrupt the lives of thousands of people. The inability of these approaches to provide lasting solutions has raised concerns about their effectiveness, particularly in dealing with the local, socio-cultural dynamics that underlie the conflict.

Furthermore, while traditional institutions such as local councils of elders, community leaders, and indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms, have historically played a crucial role in mediating disputes and maintaining order within Nigerian communities, they have been largely sidelined in contemporary conflict resolution and peacebuilding efforts. The Nigerian Constitution does not officially recognize these institutions, further marginalizing their potential contributions to resolving the conflict. This exclusion has meant that a more inclusive and culturally relevant approach to peacebuilding, rooted in local traditions and practices, has not been adequately harnessed.

As the farmers-herders conflict continues to intensify, with severe humanitarian and economic consequences, including displacement, loss of life, destruction of property, and disruption of livelihoods, it becomes increasingly clear that the current conflict resolution strategies, which predominantly rely on top-down, state-driven interventions, are insufficient. There is an urgent need for a shift towards a more holistic approach that incorporates both formal state mechanisms and traditional, community-based institutions. This bottom-up approach, which seeks to empower local leaders and communities in the process of peacebuilding, could offer a more sustainable and culturally sensitive means of addressing the conflict.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### ***Description of the Study Area***

Benue State is located in the central region of Nigeria, often referred to as the "Food Basket of the Nation" due to its rich agricultural resources. It is situated in the Middle-Belt of Nigeria and shares borders with Nasarawa State to the north, Taraba State to the east, Enugu and Ebonyi States to the south, and Kogi State to the west (See Figure 1). The state covers an area of approximately 34,059 square kilometres and is divided into 23 local government areas (LGAs), with its capital located in Makurdi, a major urban centre in the state. Benue is known for its fertile land, which supports a wide range of agricultural activities, including the cultivation of crops such as yams, cassava, maize, rice, beans, and groundnuts, as well as the rearing of livestock like cattle, goats, and sheep. The state has an ideal climate for farming, with a long rainy season and

rich soil, making it one of Nigeria's top agricultural producers. As a result, Benue has become a hub for food production, contributing significantly to the country's agricultural output.

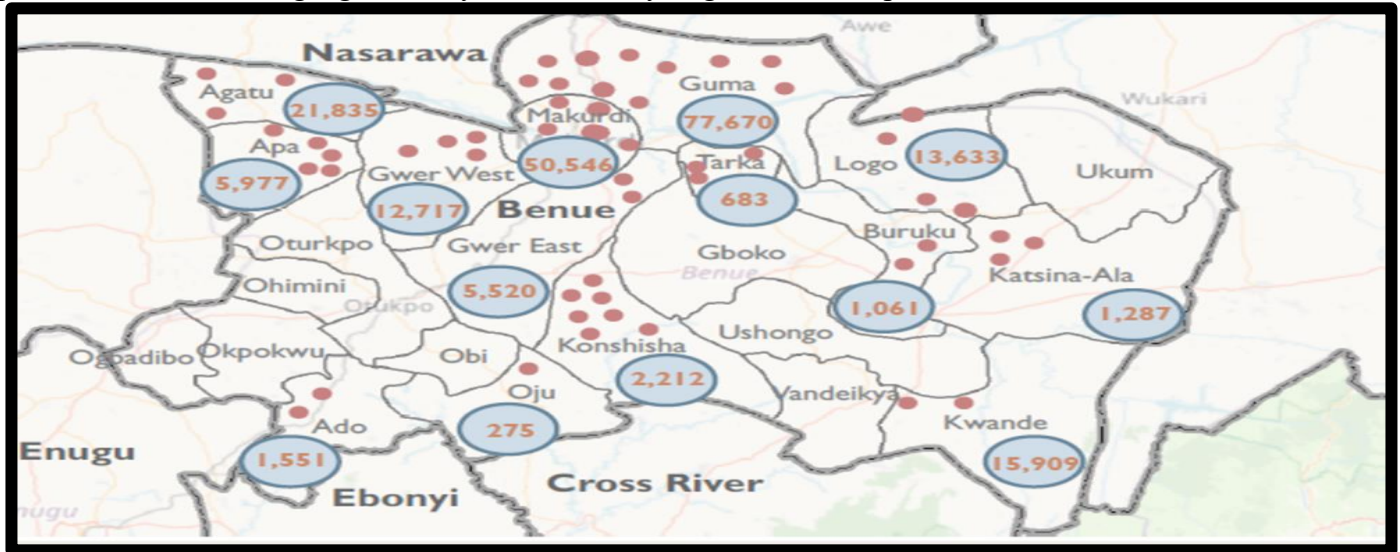


Figure 1: Benue State showing conflict affected Local Government Areas

Benue State, though agriculturally rich, has become a major centre of farmers herders conflict in Nigeria due to competition over land, grazing routes, climate pressure, and herder migration. Its location in the Middle Belt and its mix of farming and pastoral communities have increased pressure on resources and raised the risk of violent clashes. The conflict has badly affected livelihoods, caused displacement, destroyed farmlands and livestock, and worsened insecurity and food shortages. Benue's diverse ethnic groups, especially the Tiv and Idoma, have also faced growing strain from the violence. In this setting, traditional rulers and elders remain important because they are respected local authorities with long standing roles in mediation and peacebuilding. This makes Benue a strong case for studying how traditional institutions help manage conflict and support peace. The fieldwork focused on six conflict affected LGAs, Katsina Ala and Kwande in Benue North East, Guma and Gwer West in Benue North West, and Agatu and Apa in Benue South, because these areas have faced repeated clashes, displacement, farmland destruction, and livelihood disruption.

#### **Data Collection**

Primary data came from questionnaires, key informant interviews, and participant observation. The questionnaire survey generated quantitative data from 384 respondents and covered socio demographic features, exposure to farmer herder conflict, community institutions involved in resolution, mediation approaches, outcomes, penalties, and perceived effectiveness. The questionnaires were administered through face-to-face interviews to support respondents with limited literacy. Qualitative data came from semi structured key informant interviews with traditional leaders, government officials, civil society and NGO representatives, religious leaders, academics, researchers, and leaders of community associations, who provided deeper insights into the role of traditional institutions in conflict resolution and peacebuilding. Participant observation further enriched the study by examining how traditional leaders and community members interacted during mediation, meetings, and peacebuilding activities, as well as conditions in conflict affected areas. Secondary data were drawn from government reports, NGO and civil society publications, academic books and journal articles, and media reports. These sources provided background context and helped triangulate the primary findings.

#### **Sampling and Participant Selection**

The study targeted adult residents aged 18 years and above in the selected conflict affected LGAs. A sample size of 384 respondents was determined using Cochran's formula for large populations at a 95 percent confidence level and 5 percent margin of error. With Benue State's population estimated at over 5 million,

this sample size was considered statistically adequate for descriptive and comparative analysis. The formula used was  $n_0$  equals  $Z$  squared multiplied by  $p$  multiplied by  $q$ , divided by  $e$  squared, with  $Z$  set at 1.96,  $p$  at 0.5,  $q$  at 0.5, and  $e$  at 0.05. This produced 384.16, which was approximated to 384 respondents. The sample was then distributed proportionally across the six selected LGAs to reflect geographical spread and population distribution within the study area.

**Sampling Techniques**

A multistage sampling procedure was employed. First, conflict-affected LGAs were purposively selected across the three senatorial zones. Second, communities within these LGAs were selected based on documented exposure to farmer–herder conflict. Third, households within selected communities were systematically sampled, and one eligible respondent was selected from each household. For the qualitative component, purposive sampling was used to select key informants with in-depth knowledge of the conflict and peacebuilding processes. This was complemented by snowball sampling to identify additional participants, particularly community leaders and displaced persons who were not easily accessible through formal channels.

**Data Analysis**

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages, to summarize patterns of institutional use, mediation approaches, outcomes, and perceived effectiveness across LGAs and senatorial zones. Results were presented in tables to facilitate comparison. Qualitative data was analysed through a thematic analysis approach (data from KIIs, and participant observation). Thematic coding was used to identify key themes, patterns, and insights related to the role of traditional institutions in conflict resolution, their relationship with state institutions, and the challenges they face in promoting peace. The combination of qualitative and quantitative data collection methods provided a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of the farmers-herders conflict in Benue State and the potential role of traditional institutions in resolving this conflict. This mixed-method approach allows the study to gather rich, context-specific insights from a variety of sources, ensuring a well-rounded analysis of the conflict and peacebuilding processes in the region.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

**Socio-demographic characteristics**

Table 2 presents the socio-demographic profile of the respondents and provides important context for understanding how community-based conflict resolution approaches may function within the study area. The information reflects a society that is largely agrarian, moderately youthful but mature in outlook, and characterized by relatively low levels of formal education, factors that strongly shape local mechanisms for managing and resolving conflicts.

Table 2: Socio-demographic characteristics

Scio-demographic characteristics	Options	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Female	150	39.1
	Male	234	60.9
Age	18-30	90	23.4
	31-45	146	38.0
	46-60	121	31.5
	60+	26	6.8
	Educational level	No formal education	125
	Primary	154	40.1
	Secondary	72	18.8
	Tertiary	33	8.6
Occupation	Civil Servant	32	8.3

Farmer	258	67.2
Others	14	3.6
Student	51	13.3
Trader	29	7.6

Source: Fieldwork, 2025

The socio-demographic profile of respondents shows that men constitute the majority of respondents (60.9%), while women account for 39.1%, reflecting socio-cultural norms that privilege men in public decision-making and conflict mediation roles. As a result, structures such as councils of elders, village heads, and farmer associations remain largely male-dominated, which may strengthen legitimacy among men but risks marginalizing women’s perspectives, particularly on land use, household disputes, and access to resources. Age-wise, most respondents fall within the economically and socially active brackets of 31–45 years (38.0%) and 46–60 years (31.5%), indicating that conflict resolution is largely driven by middle-aged actors who are regarded as custodians of land rights, community norms, and family responsibilities. Younger respondents aged 18–30 years (23.4%) remain significant, suggesting a generational mix that can both enrich and complicate conflict management, as elders often favour customary approaches while youths may advocate more formal, transparent, or rights-based mechanisms.

Educational and occupational characteristics further reinforce the customary nature of conflict resolution practices. Over 70% of respondents have no formal education or only primary education, encouraging reliance on oral traditions, customary laws, and informal negotiations led by respected community actors. While these mechanisms can be effective where trust and shared values are strong, low literacy levels limit awareness of formal legal rights, statutory dispute resolution options, and documentation processes, potentially disadvantaging vulnerable groups. Farming dominates livelihoods, accounting for 67.2% of respondents, indicating the centrality of land, water, and natural resources as key drivers of conflict. Disputes therefore commonly revolve around land boundaries, grazing rights, crop damage, and access to shared resources, making customary land tenure systems more attractive than formal courts, which are often seen as costly and slow. Although smaller in number, students, traders, and civil servants introduce alternative perspectives and may serve as bridges between traditional and formal systems. This implies that conflict resolution and peacebuilding in the area is male-led, agrarian-focused, experience-driven, and rooted in customary practices, indicating the need for more inclusive, educated, and hybrid approaches that integrate women, youth, and formal institutions to enhance fairness, sustainability, and social cohesion.

### **Traditional methods used in mediating disputes between farmers and herders**

#### ***Benue North East***

The data in Table 3 reveal the dominant actors involved in traditional dispute resolution across Katsina-Ala LGA and Kwande LGA, reflecting different local governance cultures and trust structures. In Katsina-Ala, religious leaders overwhelmingly dominate the dispute resolution space, accounting for 79.4% of responses, while traditional authorities such as village heads (12.7%) and elders’ councils (6.3%) play marginal roles. This pattern suggests a context where moral authority, spiritual legitimacy, and faith-based mediation are central to social regulation, likely shaped by prolonged conflicts and the perceived neutrality of religious leaders. By contrast, Kwande LGA presents reflective situation where village heads/chiefs (51.5%) and elders’ councils (28.8%) jointly anchor dispute resolution, while religious leaders account for only 16.7%. This points to a more deeply rooted and functional traditional governance system, where customary institutions retain legitimacy and command community confidence.

Table 3: Lead Actor in traditional dispute resolution in Benue North East

Lead actor	Katsina Ala LGA		Kwande LGA	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Village head/chief	8	12.7	34	51.5
Elder’s council	4	6.3	19	28.8

Religious leaders	50	79.4	11	16.7
Community peace committee	1	1.6	1	1.5
Youth associations	0	0.0	1	1.5
Women’s group	0	0.0	0	0.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: Fieldwork, 2025

The differences show that institutional trust and past experience shape the actors’ communities rely on during conflict. In Katsina Ala, the strong role of religious leaders suggests that traditional authority may have weakened through politicization, generational change, displacement, or prolonged conflict, making faith leaders appear more morally credible and less partisan. In Kwande, the prominence of chiefs and elders shows stronger continuity of customary conflict management, with lineage, age, and customary law still carrying weight. The weak role of women’s groups, youth associations, and community peace committees in both LGAs reveals a major gap in inclusion and shows that formal or hybrid peace structures still lack local legitimacy. These patterns suggest that although both LGAs depend on traditional mechanisms, the form of tradition differs, with Katsina Ala leaning more on faith-based authority and Kwande on customary leadership. The data also show that mediation and dialogue remain the dominant approaches in both areas, reflecting a shared preference for consensus, reconciliation, and relationship preservation rather than punitive forms of conflict resolution.

Table 4: Traditional approaches used

Approaches	Katsina Ala LGA		Kwande LGA	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Mediation	54	33.96	52	40.63
Dialogue	51	32.08	50	39.06
Compensation agreements	24	15.09	18	14.06
Spiritual/cultural rites	30	18.87	8	6.25
Total	159	100	128	100

Source: Fieldwork, 2025

A clearer contrast between the two LGAs emerges in the use of compensation agreements and spiritual/cultural rites. Katsina-Ala records higher frequencies for both compensation agreements (24 cases) and spiritual or cultural rites (30 cases) compared to Kwande’s 18 and 8 cases respectively. This disparity suggests that Katsina-Ala communities may attach greater importance to restitution and ritual cleansing as mechanisms for restoring moral and social balance after disputes. In contrast, the relatively low reliance on spiritual or cultural rites in Kwande may reflect gradual shifts toward more pragmatic or less ritual-centred approaches, possibly influenced by modernization, or declining authority of traditional institutions. The comparative pattern reinforces the argument that traditional approaches to conflict resolution are not uniform, even among culturally related communities. While Katsina-Ala appears to maintain a broader mix of conciliatory, compensatory, and ritual-based practices, Kwande shows a narrower reliance, concentrated mainly on dialogue and mediation. This finding aligns with Zartman, (2000), Otite, (1999) findings, which holds that indigenous conflict-resolution mechanisms are adaptive and context-specific, evolving in response to social change, state presence, and community values. Consequently, policies or interventions that seek to strengthen local peacebuilding efforts must be sensitive to these local variations rather than assuming a one-size-fits-all traditional system.

On the outcomes from traditional peacebuilding sessions in Katsina Ala and Kwande LGAs, Table 5 reveal both similarities and contextual differences in the effectiveness of local conflict resolution mechanisms. In both LGAs, temporary ceasefire represents the most common outcome, accounting for 57.1% in Katsina Ala and 30.3% in Kwande, suggesting that traditional systems are more effective in de-escalating violence than achieving long-term peace. However, Kwande recorded a higher rate of verbal reconciliation and agreement

(36.4%) compared to Katsina Ala (9.5%), implying stronger community cohesion or perhaps greater trust in traditional leaders' mediation. Conversely, Katsina Ala shows a higher tendency for temporary and unstable resolutions, which could reflect the more protracted nature of conflicts or weaker institutional backing for traditional peace processes in that area. The low instances of cases referred to the police, none in Katsina Ala and only 6% in Kwande indicate a preference for informal justice systems over state institutions.

Table 5: Outcomes from traditional sessions

Outcome	Katsina Ala LGA		Kwande LGA	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Compensation or restitution	15	23.8	15	22.7
No resolution	6	9.5	3	4.5
Temporary ceasefire	36	57.1	20	30.3
Verbal reconciliation and agreement	6	9.5	24	36.4
Case referred to police	0	0.0	4	6.0
Total	63	100.	66	100

Source: Fieldwork, 2025

These findings align with studies by Boege et al., (2009), and Akinwale, (2011) that traditional institutions play a crucial role in conflict mediation across Nigeria, especially where state presence is limited or not trusted. The prevalence of temporary ceasefires rather than durable agreements shows that traditional peace processes often emphasize social harmony and immediate cessation of hostilities over structural conflict transformation. Similarly, the low referral rates to formal authorities align with Ogbanga, and Bukie, (2024), who notes that traditional leaders command greater legitimacy in rural conflict management compared to police or courts. Nonetheless, the higher reconciliation outcomes in Kwande suggest the possibility of more inclusive or community-driven peace structures, consistent with findings of Orimaye, (2025) indicating that the success of traditional mediation depends on local participation and trust.

In terms of penalty imposed through traditional systems in Katsina Ala and Kwande LGAs Table 6 reveals notable variations in the approaches to conflict resolution and community justice. In Katsina Ala, banishment (33.3%) and community service (4.8%) are relatively more pronounced compared to Kwande, where the emphasis lies on non-punitive outcomes, specifically, "no penalty imposed" (62.1%) and lower rates of banishment (15.2%). This pattern suggests that traditional justice in Katsina Ala retains a stronger inclination toward social sanctions that reinforce communal order and deterrence, while Kwande reflects a more reconciliatory or lenient approach, possibly rooted in efforts to maintain social cohesion. Interestingly, both LGAs share identical rates for public apology (15%), indicating that symbolic restitution remains an essential cultural mechanism for restoring harmony without material or physical punishment.

Table 6: Type of penalty imposed through traditional system

Penalty	Katsina Ala LGA		Kwande LGA	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Community service	3	4.8	2	3.0
Banishment	21	33.3	10	15.2
Payment in cash/livestock	1	1.6	3	4.5
public apology	10	15.9	10	15.2
None of the above	28	44.4	41	62.1
Total	63	100.0	66	100.0

Source: Fieldwork, 2025

These findings align with Igwe (2020), Azoro-Amadi, and Uche (2025), and Okoro, (2020) emphasizing the diversity of traditional conflict resolution systems in Nigeria which is shaped by local histories, power structures, and cultural philosophies of justice. The traditional institutions in Tivland and the wider Middle

Belt prioritize restorative justice, focusing on reintegration rather than retribution. The high rate of “no penalty imposed” in both LGAs supports earlier observations that many disputes are resolved through mediation and reconciliation rather than formal sanctions. Moreover, the persistence of banishment and public apology reveal the coexistence of punitive and reconciliatory norms, reflecting the adaptive nature of customary systems in balancing deterrence with social stability. These insights demonstrate that traditional justice mechanisms remain context-specific, functioning as vital tools for local governance and conflict management within plural legal framework.

On the effectiveness of traditional system in the area, the data presented in Table 7 reveals significant variations in the perceived effectiveness of the traditional system between Katsina Ala and Kwande LGAs in Benue North East. In Katsina Ala, a greater proportion of respondents (65.1%) rated the traditional system as *effective*, compared to 53.0% in Kwande. Similarly, a slightly higher percentage (7.9%) in Katsina Ala considered the system *very effective* than in Kwande (7.6%). Conversely, perceptions of ineffectiveness were more pronounced in Kwande, where 36.4% viewed the system as *ineffective* against 22.2% in Katsina Ala. Although the proportions of those rating the system as *very ineffective* are relatively low in both LGAs, the slight edge in positive responses from Katsina Ala suggests a relatively higher confidence in the functionality and legitimacy of traditional conflict resolution mechanisms in that locality.

Table 7: Effectiveness of traditional system in Benue North East

Level of effectiveness	Katsina Ala LGA		Kwande LGA	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Effective	41	65.1	35	53.0
Ineffective	14	22.2	24	36.4
Very effective	5	7.9	5	7.6
Very ineffective	3	4.8	2	3.0
Total	63	100	66	100

Source: Fieldwork, 2025

These agrees with findings by Boege et al. (2009), and Bawa, (2025) who has consistently shown that the effectiveness of traditional institutions in peacebuilding and conflict management often varies across communities, influenced by socio-cultural cohesion, leadership credibility, and historical patterns of local governance. For instance, Boege et al. (2009) emphasized that traditional authorities tend to be more effective in communities with strong kinship structures and cultural homogeneity. Similarly, Bawa, (2025) observed that in regions where traditional rulers retain moral legitimacy and community trust, such systems are more effective in mediating disputes and maintaining order. The relatively higher effectiveness observed in Katsina Ala could, therefore, reflect stronger communal trust and adherence to traditional norms, whereas the lower ratings in Kwande might signal weakening authority structures or increasing interference from modern political systems,

Historically, respondents recalled a time when farmers and herders lived side by side in relative peace, guided largely by the authority of elders, chiefs, and informal community negotiations. These relationships were not perfect, but they were functional and grounded in mutual understanding. As one traditional ruler reflected that, “*Before now we had a cordial relationship with the herders... They even offered us their cows about to die to use as meat.*” This statement captures a period when social bonds, reciprocity, and everyday interactions helped to manage tensions before they escalated into open conflict.

During this period of peaceful coexistence, traditional conflict resolution mechanisms played a central role. Disputes were addressed through dialogue facilitated by elders, land-use negotiations that clarified grazing and farming boundaries, and informal compensation when crops were damaged or misunderstandings occurred. Beyond these mechanisms, social interactions and cultural exchanges such as shared meals, mutual assistance, and informal visits, helped to build trust and reinforce peaceful relations. These practices allowed both farmers and herders to coexist, especially during seasonal movements, without resorting to violence.

However, respondents emphasized that these traditional mechanisms began to collapse as the nature of the conflict changed. What were once manageable disputes over land and resources became increasingly violent, particularly with the introduction of firearms. A traditional ruler from Kwande described this turning point unambiguously: *“Once our people tried meeting them... they got killed.”* This moment symbolizes the breakdown of dialogue and the erosion of trust, as attempts at peaceful engagement were met with deadly force. Fear replaced negotiation, and traditional authorities lost their ability to mediate effectively.

The analysis suggests that traditional conflict resolution systems were most effective when disputes remained low-intensity, seasonal, and primarily economic in nature. Their breakdown reflects deeper structural changes, including the militarization of herding activities, the growing involvement of external actors and armed groups, and the erosion of long-standing trust between communities. In addition, the commercialization of land by political and economic elites has further complicated local land-use arrangements, undermining the authority of traditional leaders and fuelling competition over scarce resources.

**Benue North West**

The situation of lead actors in traditional dispute resolution in Benue northwest as presented in Table 8 reveals that in both Guma and Gwer West LGAs of Benue North West, traditional dispute resolution is dominated by village heads or chiefs, who account for 66.2% and 82.8% of conflict mediation respectively. This pattern indicates the enduring influence of traditional authorities as primary custodians of peace and order in rural communities. While the elder’s council ranks second in both LGAs (17.6% in Guma and 13.8% in Gwer West), their relatively lower participation compared to village heads suggests a shift toward more centralized traditional leadership in conflict management. Interestingly, religious leaders play a comparatively greater role in Guma (13.2%) than in Gwer West (1.7%), indicating that in Guma, religious institutions are more integrated into local conflict resolution mechanisms. The community peace committees, though present in both LGAs, have minimal involvement, only 2.9% in Guma and 1.7% in Gwer West, suggesting that such peace structures remain weak or secondary to traditional leadership systems.

Table 8: Lead Actor in traditional dispute resolution in Benue North West

Lead actor	Guma LGA		Gwer west LGA	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Village head/chief	45	66.2	48	82.8
Elder’s council	12	17.6	8	13.8
Religious leaders	9	13.2	1	1.7
Community peace committee	2	2.9	1	1.7
Total	68	100	58	100.

Source: Fieldwork, 2025

These findings corroborate studies by Boege (2006), Emmanuel (2025), emphasizing the pivotal role of traditional institutions in peacebuilding and dispute resolution in Nigeria’s rural contexts. Emmanuel (2025) argue that traditional leaders command community legitimacy, cultural authority, and moral influence that formal justice systems often lack. Similarly, studies in Benue State (Utile, and Tarnongo, (2024), Okoha, 2025) confirm that village heads remain the first point of recourse for communal disputes, particularly in agrarian and pastoral communities affected by land and resource conflicts. However, the limited role of community peace committees indicates a missed opportunity for integrating formal and informal mechanisms, which could strengthen local resilience and participatory conflict management frameworks. The pattern thus reflects both the resilience of traditional governance and the need for hybrid models that institutionalize collaboration between traditional, religious, and formal actors in sustaining peace at the grassroots level.

Traditional approaches used in Guma and Gwer West LGAs reveals variations in preference and practice. Table 9 reveal that mediation ranks first in Guma, indicating that local communities rely heavily on elders,

chiefs, and informal mediators to resolve disputes, reflecting a preference for consensus-building and reconciliation. Compensation agreements follow closely in second place, suggesting that reparative justice remains vital for restoring social balance after conflicts. In contrast, dialogue and spiritual or cultural rites are less utilized, implying that structured discussions and ritualistic reconciliations are secondary mechanisms in Guma. However, the situation differs in Gwer West, where dialogue ranks first, surpassing mediation, indicating a stronger inclination toward inclusive communication and participatory problem-solving. Spiritual or cultural rites and compensation agreements occupy the third and fourth ranks respectively, pointing to a more diversified but less material approach to reconciliation compared to Guma.

Table 9: Traditional approaches used in Benue North West

Approaches	Guma LGA		Gwer west LGA	
	Frequency	Rank	Frequency	Rank
Mediation	49	1	50	2
Dialogue	19	3	54	1
Compensation agreements	42	2	33	4
Spiritual/cultural rites	1	4	34	3

Source: Fieldwork, 2025

These findings align with studies by Boege (2006) and Oladipo (2022), affirming that while mediation and dialogue are central to conflict resolution, their prominence varies by community structure and cultural orientation. The dominance of mediation in Guma corresponds with the communal leadership structures characteristic of Tiv society, while the prioritization of dialogue in Gwer West reflects evolving participatory tendencies in conflict management. Similarly, the relatively high ranking of spiritual and cultural rites in Gwer West indicating the persistence of indigenous cosmologies in conflict resolution, consistent with findings by Akpomuvie, and Forae (2024) that spirituality remains embedded in African restorative justice practices. Thus, both LGAs demonstrate the dynamism of traditional approaches, adapting them to contemporary peace and security challenges in rural Benue.

The outcome of traditional sessions in the area as presented in Table 10, reveal notable differences between Guma and Gwer West LGAs in terms of effectiveness and sustainability of peace outcomes. In Guma, verbal reconciliation and agreements (44.1%) and compensation or restitution (27.9%) were the dominant outcomes, reflecting the strong influence of customary norms and traditional authority in mediating and restoring social harmony.

Table 10: Outcomes from traditional sessions In Benue North West

Outcome	Guma LGA		Gwer west LGA	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Compensation or restitution	19	27.9	6	10.3
No resolution	2	2.9	0	0.0
Temporary ceasefire	15	22.1	25	43.1
Verbal reconciliation and agreement	30	44.1	27	46.6
Case referred to police	2	2.9	0	0.0
Total	68	100	58	100.

Source: Fieldwork, 2025

This finding aligns with a study by Aluaigba, (2009) that show compensation mechanisms and reconciliation rituals remain central to peacebuilding in Tiv communities. However, the relatively low proportion of temporary ceasefires (22.1%) and the minimal cases referred to police (2.9%) suggest that traditional systems in Guma still command high legitimacy and operate with limited formal institutional involvement. Such outcomes emphasize local ownership and trust in community-led justice but may also indicate limited integration with statutory conflict resolution frameworks. Conversely, in Gwer West, verbal reconciliation

(46.6%) and temporary ceasefire (43.1%) dominate, with minimal instances of compensation or restitution (10.3%) and no formal referrals to law enforcement. This pattern suggests that peace efforts in Gwer West are often fragile and short-term, relying more on dialogue than on tangible reparations. It corroborates findings of Aluaigba, (2011), and Vanger, (2018) that post-conflict settlements in parts of Benue often achieve only temporary stability due to weak enforcement mechanisms and recurring disputes over resources. While Guma’s outcomes reflect a relatively restorative justice orientation, Gwer West’s pattern reveals a tendency toward conflict containment rather than resolution. Overall, both LGAs demonstrate the continuing relevance of traditional peace institutions, but with varying degrees of durability and integration into modern governance structures, indicating the need for hybrid models that link customary mediation with formal justice systems for sustainable peace.

In terms of the penalty imposed through traditional systems, the information in Table 11 reveals significant variations in the types of penalties imposed through traditional systems between Guma and Gwer West LGAs. In Guma, public apology (57.4%) is the most dominant form of sanction, reflecting a communal emphasis on reconciliation, moral restitution, and social cohesion rather than material or punitive retribution. This aligns with restorative justice practices prevalent in many Tiv traditional societies, where community harmony and forgiveness are prioritized. In contrast, Gwer West demonstrates a stronger inclination toward payment in cash or livestock (63.8%), suggesting a more compensatory and economically driven approach to justice. The relatively high proportion of cases with no penalty imposed (22.4%) in Gwer West also indicates potential leniency or perhaps the erosion of traditional authority structures, which could weaken the deterrent function of indigenous justice systems.

Table 11: Type of penalty imposed through traditional system

Penalty	Guma LGA		Gwer west LGA	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Community service	2	2.9	1	1.7
No penalty imposed	4	5.9	13	22.4
Banishment	2	2.9	3	5.2
Payment in cash/livestock	21	30.9	37	63.8
public apology	39	57.4	2	3.4
Total	68	100.	58	100.

Source: Fieldwork, 2025

Corroborating these findings with Osei-Hwedie (2012), that traditional justice mechanisms across Nigeria often reflect local sociocultural orientations. Public apology and restitution serve as instruments for conflict resolution that preserves community relationships, particularly in agrarian societies where social interdependence is strong. Conversely, the reliance on monetary or livestock compensation, as observed in Gwer West, may indicate modernization pressures and the commodification of justice, consistent with the arguments of Zartman (2000) that traditional institutions evolve to reflect changing socioeconomic realities. This finding indicates how varying community norms and institutional integrity shape traditional conflict resolution practices in Benue State.

Also, the level of effectiveness of the measures as presented in Table 12 reveals significant variations in the perceived effectiveness of traditional systems across Guma and Gwer West LGAs in Benue North West. In Guma, the majority (76.5%) of respondents rated the traditional system as effective, suggesting a relatively strong level of trust and functionality in traditional institutions for governance and conflict resolution. However, in Gwer West, only 43.1% viewed the system as effective, while a notable 27.6% considered it very effective, indicating a polarized perception of performance. Interestingly, Gwer West also recorded higher levels of very ineffective responses (24.1%) compared to Guma (7.4%), reflecting possible institutional inconsistencies, weakened traditional authority, or differing contextual challenges. The higher effectiveness rating in Guma may be linked to stronger traditional leadership structures or closer community

cohesion, while the mixed perceptions in Gwer West could point to socio-political interference or reduced influence of customary institutions in managing local affairs.

Table 12: Effectiveness of traditional system in Benue North West

Level of effectiveness	Guma LGA		Gwer west LGA	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Effective	52	76.5	25	43.1
Ineffective	8	11.8	3	5.2
Very effective	3	4.3	16	27.6
Very ineffective	5	7.4	14	24.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Fieldwork, 2025

These findings align with studies by Ogbanga, and Bukie (2024), Utile, and Tarnongo, (2024), Emmanuel (2025) emphasizing the performance of traditional governance systems across Nigeria. Traditional institutions remain vital in grassroots conflict mediation and social regulation but are increasingly undermined by political intrusion and modernization pressures. Similarly, Okoli and Atelhe (2014) argue that the legitimacy and efficiency of traditional systems depend largely on community trust and the degree of state support. The observed disparities between Guma and Gwer West thus reflect broader national trends, where the historical authority of chiefs and elders continues to decline in areas experiencing high competition over land, identity, and resource control. Strengthening traditional institutions through integration with formal governance structures

The findings from the KII reveal a deep sense of frustration and marginalization among traditional rulers and community elders who, despite their long-standing historical role as custodians of peace and mediators of local disputes, have been largely excluded from the current response to the farmers–herders conflict. Rather than being engaged as partners in dialogue or early warning, these leaders described a conflict management structure that operates above and around them, leaving them without voice or authority. This exclusion has weakened community confidence in both traditional and state institutions and has contributed to the escalation of tensions at the local level.

One traditional ruler expressed this sense of sidelining very clearly, noting that the government has made no effort to formally engage traditional authorities since the conflict began. As he put it: *“I am a traditional ruler and since the conflict has been ongoing, I cannot recall any instance where the Government called the Traditional Rulers to dialogue.”* (Kindred Head, Gwer-West). This statement reveals a critical breakdown in communication between the state and grassroots governance structures. Traditionally, rulers and elders served as first responders to disputes over land, farming boundaries, and resource use. However, the absence of consultation has rendered them powerless spectators in a conflict unfolding within their own jurisdictions.

Religious leaders, particularly Christian clerics, have attempted to fill part of this vacuum by appealing to moral values, coexistence, and respect for livelihoods. Through sermons, counselling, and informal dialogue, they have sought to frame the conflict as a violation of shared ethical principles and communal harmony. One religious leader articulated this moral logic: *“Rearing cattle is their business, while others cultivate and harvest crops... they cannot encroach into another person’s form of business.”*(religious leader, Naka – Gwer-West). While such moral persuasion resonates at the community level, the findings show that religious leaders lack the authority and enforcement capacity to prevent armed conflicts or protect farmlands. Their influence remains advisory rather than coercive, limiting their effectiveness in a context where violence is increasingly militarized.

The findings suggest that traditional and faith-based conflict resolution mechanisms still exist and retain social legitimacy, but they have been structurally disempowered. The absence of legal recognition, institutional support, and formal linkages to state security and governance systems has significantly reduced

their capacity to mediate disputes or de-escalate violence. As a result, local peacebuilding structures are unable to function effectively, not because they are irrelevant, but because they have been deliberately excluded from the formal conflict response framework. This disconnect continues to undermine sustainable peace efforts in affected communities.

**Benue South**

The data in Table 13 reveal both shared traditions and clear contrasts in how traditional dispute resolution is led in Agatu and Apa LGAs of Benue South. In Agatu LGA, conflict resolution is more dominated by the Elders’ Council (55.9%) than by village heads or chiefs (42.6%). This suggests a collective and consultative approach where authority is diffused among respected elders, reflecting a governance culture that values consensus-building and communal wisdom. In contrast, Apa LGA shows a stronger reliance on village heads/chiefs, who account for 64.5% of resolution leadership, while elders’ councils play a secondary role (35.5%). This difference points to a more centralized traditional authority structure in Apa, where legitimacy and decision-making power are more closely tied to formalized chieftaincy institutions.

Table 13: Lead Actor in traditional dispute resolution in Benue South

Lead actor	Agatu LGA		Apa LGA	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Village head/chief	29	42.6	40	64.5
Elder’s council	38	55.9	22	35.5
Religious leaders	1	1.5	0	0.00
Total	68	100.0	62	100.0

Source: Fieldwork, 2025

The near absence of religious leaders in both LGAs, appearing marginally in Agatu (1.5%) and not at all in Apa, indicating the continued importance of customary institutions over faith-based actors in resolving local disputes. This aligns with broader evidence from rural Nigerian contexts, where traditional authorities are often perceived as more legitimate and culturally grounded arbiters of conflict than religious institutions, especially in land, family, and inheritance disputes. The stronger role of elders in Agatu may also reflect historical experiences of communal conflict and land pressure, where inclusive deliberation is necessary to maintain social cohesion. Apa’s emphasis on village heads, on the other hand, may indicate clearer hierarchical lines of authority, which can enable quicker decision-making but may limit broad-based participation in dispute resolution processes.

These findings are consistent with Boege, (2006), Obi and Rustad, (2011), Zartman, (2000) on traditional governance and conflict management in Nigeria and sub-Saharan Africa, that elders’ councils are central in societies where age, experience, and moral authority support social regulation. While, chiefs dominate in settings with more institutionalized traditional rulership systems. Furthermore, traditional dispute resolution mechanisms remain effective because they emphasize reconciliation, restitution, and social harmony rather than punishment, a feature evident in both LGAs despite their institutional differences. This indicates how local history, power structures, and cultural norms shape who leads dispute resolution, even within the same geopolitical zone.

The data in Table 14 reveal both shared practices and contrasts in how communities in Agatu and Apa LGAs of Benue South rely on traditional mechanisms for managing disputes. In Agatu LGA, mediation dominates, ranking first with the highest frequency, suggesting a strong preference for the involvement of respected intermediaries such as elders or community leaders to restore harmony. Dialogue follows closely, indicating that open discussion between disputing parties is also well entrenched.

Table 14: Traditional approaches used in Benue South

Approaches	Agatu LGA		Apa LGA	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Mediation	46	43.0	38	37.3

Dialogue	43	40.2	54	52.9
Compensation agreements	17	15.9	9	8.8
Spiritual/cultural rites	1	10.9	1	1.0
Total	107	100	102	100

Source: Fieldwork, 2025

By contrast, Apa LGA places dialogue at the top, with mediation ranked second. This shift implies that while third-party intervention is still valued in Apa, there is greater emphasis on direct communication and negotiation between parties. This finding agrees with Boege, (2011), and Osaghae and Suberu, (2005) studies on conflict management in rural African settings, that dialogue-based approaches often flourish where communal ties and interdependence encourage parties to talk through grievances rather than immediately escalate them.

Compensation agreements occupy a middle position in both LGAs but are more frequently reported in Agatu than in Apa. This suggests that material restitution, often in the form of livestock, crops, or monetary payments, remains a relevant but secondary strategy, typically used when dialogue or mediation alone cannot fully resolve disputes. The lower frequency in Apa may reflect economic constraints or stronger norms favouring reconciliation without material exchange. This pattern aligns with findings of Blench, (2010), Tonah, (2006) that compensation mechanisms in agrarian communities are context-dependent and often influenced by the severity of disputes and local perceptions of justice. Notably, the similar ranking of compensation in both LGAs indicates a shared cultural understanding of restitution, even if its practical application differs.

Spiritual and cultural rites rank last in both Agatu and Apa, with extremely low frequencies, pointing to a gradual decline in the reliance on ritual-based conflict resolution. While such rites historically played a central role in restoring moral and spiritual balance after conflicts, their marginal use here may reflect the influence of modernization, Christianity, Islam, and formal legal institutions. This aligns with the findings of Akinwale, (2010) that although spiritual approaches remain symbolically important in many African societies, they are increasingly reserved for exceptional or deeply rooted conflicts rather than routine disputes.

The outcomes from traditional conflict resolution sessions in Agatu and Apa LGAs of Benue State presented in Table 15 reveal both similarities and variations in how local peace mechanisms address conflicts. In both LGAs, verbal reconciliation and agreement emerged as the most common outcome, accounting for 45.6% in Agatu and 46.8% in Apa LGAs.

Table 15: Outcomes from traditional sessions in Benue South

Outcome	Agatu LGA		Apa LGA	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Compensation or restitution	5	7.4	2	3.2
No resolution	7	10.3	8	12.9
Temporary ceasefire	24	35.3	23	37.1
Verbal reconciliation and agreement	31	45.6	29	46.8
Case referred to police	1	1.5	0	0.0
Total	68	100	62	100

Source: Fieldwork, 2025

This suggests a strong reliance on dialogue, persuasion, and moral values which are core elements of traditional African conflict resolution systems where consensus and social harmony are prioritized over punitive measures. Similarly, the high incidence of temporary ceasefire, 35.3% in Agatu and 37.1% in Apa, reflects a recurring pattern of fragile peace, indicating that while traditional mechanisms are effective in de-escalating violence, they often lack the institutional and enforcement capacity to sustain long-term peace.

The relatively low frequency of compensation or restitution (7.4% in Agatu and 3.2% in Apa) indicates the gradual decline of customary sanctions and accountability systems due to modern legal influences and declining traditional authority.

Comparatively, no resolution outcomes are slightly higher in Apa (12.9%) than Agatu (10.3%), which may suggest differences in the complexity of disputes or in the perceived legitimacy of traditional institutions across communities. The negligible reference of cases to the police, particularly the absence of any referral in Apa, demonstrates a continued preference for intra-community settlement rather than engagement with formal state justice systems. Corroborating these findings, studies by Kifle, and Mekonnen, (2024), affirm that in rural areas, traditional systems remain central to grassroots peacebuilding despite limitations in enforcing durable outcomes. These indicate that while traditional mechanisms in both LGAs remain instrumental in fostering dialogue and temporary reconciliation, their limited capacity to enforce restitution and sustain peace reveals the need for hybrid approaches that integrate traditional and formal conflict management frameworks.

The data presented in Table 16 on types of penalty imposed through the traditional system reveals differences between Agatu and Apa LGAs in how local justice and conflict resolution are enforced. In Agatu, banishment constitutes the most dominant traditional sanction, accounting for 61.8% of penalties, followed by no penalty imposed (17.6%) and community service (10.3%). This pattern indicates a stronger reliance on exclusionary and deterrent-based mechanisms, reflecting a traditional justice culture aimed at maintaining communal harmony through social control and moral discipline. In contrast, Apa LGA exhibits a more lenient and reconciliatory pattern, with no penalty imposed representing over half (54.8%) of the cases, suggesting a preference for tolerance, negotiation, or informal settlements over punitive measures. The higher incidence of public apology (14.5%) in Apa further reinforces this restorative approach, which prioritizes reconciliation and social reintegration rather than exclusion.

Table 16: Type of penalty imposed through traditional system

Penalty	Agatu LGA		Apa LGA	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Community service	7	10.3	4	6.5
No penalty imposed	12	17.6	34	54.8
Banishment	42	61.8	15	24.2
Payment in cash/livestock	2	2.9	0	0.0
public apology	5	7.4	9	14.5
Total	68	100	62	100

Source: Fieldwork, 2025

These findings align with the Studies by Eneyew and Ayalew, (2023), on indigenous conflict management, which emphasizes the variability of traditional justice systems across ethnic and cultural contexts. This indicates that while communities like the Idoma (to which Agatu and Apa belong) share cultural roots, the degree of social cohesion, leadership authority, and historical exposure to conflict shape the form of justice applied. In conflict-prone areas like Agatu that is frequently affected by farmer–herder clashes, traditional authorities tend to impose strict sanctions to deter future violence and restore order. Conversely, Apa’s relative stability fosters an environment where restorative justice practices, such as public apologies, are favoured to sustain social ties and peacebuilding efforts. Thus, the findings indicate that traditional justice systems are context-specific and adaptive, reflecting the socio-political realities and historical experiences of each community.

Table 17: Effectiveness of traditional system in Benue South

Level of effectiveness	Agatu LGA		Apa LGA	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Effective	45	66.2	34	54.8

Ineffective	10	14.7	21	33.9
Very effective	11	16.2	4	6.5
Very ineffective	2	2.9	3	4.8
Total	68	100	62	100

Source: Fieldwork, 2025

The information in Table 17 reveals a notable difference in the perceived effectiveness of the traditional system between Agatu and Apa LGAs in Benue South. In Agatu, a higher proportion of respondents (66.2%) considered the traditional system effective compared to 54.8% in Apa, suggesting a stronger reliance on and confidence in traditional institutions for governance, dispute resolution, and community cohesion in Agatu. Additionally, 16.2% of Agatu respondents rated the system as very effective, while only 6.5% did so in Apa. This variation may be attributed to differences in the strength of traditional leadership structures, community participation, and local adaptation mechanisms. Apa recorded higher levels of perceived ineffectiveness (33.9%) compared to Agatu (14.7%), implying possible decline of trust or reduced influence of traditional institutions due to modernization, political interference, or weakened customary authority.

These findings align with Ajayi and Buhari, (2014), emphasizing the uneven effectiveness of traditional governance systems across Nigerian communities. It indicates that traditional institutions remain critical in conflict resolution and community mobilization but vary in performance depending on local socio-political dynamics and external influences. Similarly, Umar, (2022) argues that traditional governance thrives where community trust, cultural legitimacy, and autonomy from political structures are preserved. The comparatively stronger performance of Agatu's traditional system could thus reflect greater cohesion and localized governance legitimacy, while Apa's weaker performance may reveal the challenges of institutional fragmentation and diminishing traditional authority observed in several multi-ethnic localities of Benue South.

Traditional institutions in Benue South as revealed by the KII continue to hold moral authority and symbolic significance within the community, but their practical ability to mediate disputes or prevent violence has been greatly weakened by the changing nature of the farmers–herders conflict. In the past, conflicts between farmers and herders were often resolved through dialogue facilitated by elders and traditional rulers, who negotiated grazing routes, seasonal access to land, and mutual obligations based on long-standing customs. These processes relied on trust, respect for authority, and the absence of heavy weaponry. However, the current conflict is no longer driven by negotiation or misunderstanding alone; it is marked by armed confrontation and intimidation, which has rendered dialogue-based traditional mechanisms largely ineffective.

This shift is clearly reflected in the account of the traditional ruler, who described how the herders entered the community without prior consultation or consent, breaking long-established norms of engagement. As he explained, *“They didn't tell us anything or ask us where to live... they only said they came to stay with us on our land.”* This statement reveals the decline of traditional protocols that once governed coexistence between farmers and herders. The absence of consultation not only undermined communal authority but also created fear and resentment among residents, making peaceful mediation almost impossible.

Rather than exercising authority or enforcement power, the traditional ruler expressed regret and a sense of moral responsibility, indicating the limitations of traditional leadership in the face of militarized violence. His admission that *“There is nothing we can do than apologize to our youths and parents of the deceased for not listening to them earlier”* illustrates how traditional institutions have been reduced to symbolic roles, offering consolation rather than protection. This expression of apology reflects the emotional burden borne by traditional leaders, who are still expected to safeguard their communities but lack the means, legal backing, or security support to do so effectively. The experiences from Apa LGA show that while traditional institutions remain culturally relevant and emotionally significant, their capacity to manage contemporary farmers–herders conflict is severely constrained. The presence of armed actors, the breakdown of customary

norms, and the absence of state support have collectively weakened traditional authority, turning elders and rulers into witnesses of violence rather than active mediators of peace.

## CONCLUSION

The study finds that community-based institutions remain central to conflict resolution in Benue State because traditional rulers, elders, and religious leaders still command local trust and legitimacy. Communities continue to prefer these indigenous structures for mediation, dialogue, and reconciliation. Yet their capacity has weakened as farmers' herders' conflict has become more violent, prolonged, and militarized. In many areas, they now achieve only temporary de-escalation rather than lasting peace. The study also shows that stronger and more trusted traditional institutions produce better reconciliatory outcomes, while weakened ones lead to fragile settlements. Their exclusion from state responses, together with the marginalization of women and youth, has further weakened local peace structures. The study therefore concludes that traditional institutions remain indispensable but need formal recognition, legal backing, capacity building, and stronger collaboration with state security and justice systems. Peacebuilding in Benue State should also be more inclusive and context-specific by integrating women and youth and by adapting interventions to local governance realities.

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