

Traditional Mediation: Using Community Leaders in Resolving Political Conflicts and Building Peace in Obrikom-Omuoku, Rivers State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Traditional mediation has long been a cornerstone of conflict resolution in Nigerian communities, drawing upon the cultural authority and influence of community leaders to foster reconciliation and peace. This study examines the role of traditional mediation in resolving political conflicts in Obrikom-Omuoku, Rivers State, Nigeria, a community that has faced recurring tensions and violence stemming from political rivalries, resource control disputes, and socio-economic inequalities. The research focuses on the period from 2014 to 2019, a time of heightened political unrest in the community. Through interviews, surveys, and focus group discussions, the study identifies the remote and immediate causes of the conflicts, assesses the strengths and limitations of traditional mediation, and explores opportunities for integrating traditional methods with modern conflict resolution frameworks. The findings reveal that community leaders were instrumental in fostering trust and dialogue between conflicting factions, leveraging their cultural knowledge and moral authority to mediate disputes effectively. Traditional mediation was found to be culturally relevant, accessible, and centered on restorative justice, making it a preferred mechanism for conflict resolution in the community. However, the process faced significant limitations, including perceived bias, lack of formal enforcement mechanisms, and difficulties in addressing systemic political and economic grievances. The study concludes that while traditional mediation remains a valuable tool for fostering peace, its effectiveness can be enhanced through hybrid approaches that integrate its cultural strengths with the formal structure and resources of modern institutions. Such collaboration can provide a more sustainable framework for resolving conflicts and building lasting peace in Obrikom-Omuoku and similar politically volatile communities.

Keywords: Traditional Mediation, Political Conflicts, Conflict Resolution, Peacebuilding, Community Leaders, Obrikom-Omuoku

INTRODUCTION

Conflicts, particularly political disputes, have been a recurring challenge to communities in Nigeria, often undermining community cohesion and stability, particularly in the Niger Delta communities such as Obrikom in Ogba/Egbema/ Ndoni Local Government Area of Rivers State, Nigeria where socio-economic inequalities, resource control issues, and power struggles often intertwine with local governance. Obrikom, a small but strategically significant community in Rivers State, Nigeria, exemplifies the complexities of these conflicts. This Niger Delta is renowned for its agricultural wealth and proximity to oil installations, Obrikom holds a unique position in the socio-political fabric of the Niger Delta. However, this position has also made it a hotbed of political tension and rivalry.

From 2014 to 2019, Obrikom experienced a series of political conflicts that disrupted the peace and stability of the community. These conflicts were driven by intense rivalries between factions vying for local political dominance, fueled by issues such as contested elections, perceived marginalization, and disputes over the allocation of resources. The situation escalated into violent confrontations, destruction of property, and loss of lives, leaving deep scars on the social fabric of the community.

Historical Contexts

Conflicts in Obrikom-Omuoku can be traced back to the early 2000s when the Niger Delta's struggle for resource control and fair governance began to intensify. As oil companies established operations in the region, local communities became increasingly vocal about their grievances over environmental degradation, lack of development, and exclusion from decision-making processes. Obrikom-Omuoku, like many other communities in Rivers State, found itself caught between powerful external interests and internal political dynamics. By the mid-2000s, political affiliations within Obrikom-Omuoku became sharply divided along party lines, with two dominant factions emerging. These factions represented different ethnic and ideological interests, with one aligning closely with the ruling party at the state level and the other supporting opposition forces. Over time, these divisions deepened, fueled by allegations of electoral fraud, political patronage, and uneven distribution of benefits from oil revenues.

The Political Conflict in Obrikom-Omuoku (2014–2019)

The political conflict in Obrikom reached a critical point in 2014 during the build-up to the 2015 general elections. The contest for local leadership positions, particularly the chairmanship of the local government council, became a flashpoint for violence. Allegations of voter suppression, manipulation of electoral processes, and intimidation by political thugs created a climate of fear and mistrust. In the aftermath of the 2015 elections, tensions between the two factions escalated. Supporters of the losing side accused the winners of marginalization and retaliated through protests and occasional violent clashes. The situation worsened in 2016 when disputes over access to oil company contracts and revenue-sharing agreements further polarized the community. Key leaders of the opposing factions mobilized their supporters, leading to a series of violent incidents, including arson attacks on community leaders' homes, destruction of public facilities, and targeted killings. By 2017, the crisis had drawn the attention of both state and federal authorities, who deployed security forces to restore order. However, the interventions often lacked a deep understanding of the cultural and political nuances of Obrikom-Omuoku, leading to accusations of partiality and further alienating segments of the community.

Statement of the Problem

The Obrikom-Omuoku community in Rivers State has faced persistent political conflicts rooted in rivalries between opposing groups. Modern conflict resolution mechanisms, such as court interventions or government-led processes, have been less effective due to their bureaucratic nature and lack of cultural sensitivity. Traditional mediation, which relies on community leaders' influence and wisdom, has proven to be an effective tool for conflict resolution in many Nigerian communities, including Obrikom-Omuoku as Community leaders hold a unique position as cultural custodians and trusted mediators, making them instrumental in addressing political disputes.

Aim/Objectives of the Study

The motivation for carrying out this study was borne out of the fact that despite attempts by government agencies and formal mediators, the underlying issues persist, leading to recurrent hostilities. This study, therefore sought to evaluate the role of traditional mediation by community leaders which draws upon local customs, trust, and cultural familiarity in resolving political conflicts and to also identify the peacebuilding strategies adopted by the leaders in bringing peace to the Obrikom-Omuoku Community.

Research Questions

This study examines the role of traditional mediation by community leaders in addressing political conflicts in Obrikom-Omuoku, focusing on its root causes, benefits, limitations, and integration into modern peacebuilding frameworks. The following research questions guide the investigation:

1. What were the remote and immediate causes of the political conflict in traditional mediation to resolve political conflicts in Obrikom-Omuoku community?
2. What role did community leaders play in traditional mediation in resolving political conflicts in Obrikom-Omuoku community?

3. What were the benefits and limitations of using traditional mediation by community leaders in these conflicts in Obrikom-Omuoku community?
4. How can traditional mediation be effectively integrated into modern conflict resolution frameworks by community leaders in Obrikom-Omuoku community to build peace?

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section gives a summary of existing literature on the issue of conflict and crisis management and peacebuilding. It also identifies gaps in the literature which this present work sought to fill.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework defines the core concepts relevant to this study. The following concepts were clarified in this sub-section:

Traditional Mediation

A conflict resolution process rooted in indigenous practices, led by respected community leaders who mediate disputes based on cultural norms, emphasizing community involvement, restorative justice, and the maintenance of social harmony. Unlike formal legal systems, traditional mediation often relies on customary laws, on traditions, elders' wisdom, and consensus-building approaches.

Bercovitch and Jackson (2009) in their study explored various mediation practices, highlighting the significance of cultural contexts in shaping mediation processes. They argue that traditional mediation methods are integral in societies where communal relationships and social cohesion are paramount. These methods prioritize reconciliation and the restoration of relationships over punitive measures.

Similarly, Duursma (2014) analysed international mediation efforts and highlighted the importance of understanding local customs and traditional conflict resolution mechanisms. He posited that integrating traditional mediation practices with modern approaches can enhance the effectiveness of peacebuilding initiatives, especially in regions with rich cultural heritages. Standifer and Wall (2009) outlined a theoretical framework for mediation, discussing the evolution of mediation practices from traditional to contemporary forms. They observed that traditional mediation often involves respected community figures facilitating dialogue, aiming to achieve mutually acceptable solutions while preserving relationships and community integrity.

Collectively, these studies emphasized the relevance of traditional mediation in various cultural settings. They advocate for a nuanced understanding of these practices, suggesting that incorporating traditional methods can complement formal mediation strategies, leading to more sustainable conflict resolution outcomes.

Conflict resolution and conflict management

Rawat and Mahajan (2022) examined various definitions and approaches to conflict management. Their study maintained that effective conflict management is essential for the smooth functioning of organizations and the personal, cultural, and social development of individuals. The authors stressed that the manner in which conflict is managed can significantly influence the tension and outcomes within a situation.

Luo and Lu (2020) studied the relationship between team conflict, conflict management, and team performance. Their review showed that while conflict is an inevitable aspect of teamwork, its management plays a crucial role in determining team outcomes. Effective conflict management strategies can mitigate negative impacts and enhance team performance.

Wang and Wu (2020) argued that traditional conflict management approaches often fall short in complex programme environments due to the intricate interdependencies involved. The authors proposed a systematic approach tailored to the unique challenges of programme management, emphasizing the need for strategies that

address cross-project relationships and the multifaceted nature of conflicts in such settings. Advocating that conflict management and resolution are 2in1.

Peacebuilding

Oxfam (2005) examined five contrasting publications on peacebuilding, including the 2004 UN report "A More Secure World." This review highlighted the complexities and varying approaches to peacebuilding, emphasizing the need for context-specific strategies that consider local dynamics and the importance of integrating real peace, security, development, and human rights initiatives.

Haider (2010) explored the interplay between state-building and peacebuilding efforts and discussed how effective service delivery can contribute to legitimacy and stability in fragile states, underscoring the importance of aligning peacebuilding initiatives with state-building processes to create resilient institutions.

Similarly, Duursma (2014) examined international mediation efforts and stressed the importance of understanding local customs and traditional conflict resolution mechanisms. He posits that integrating traditional mediation practices with modern approaches can enhance the effectiveness of peacebuilding initiatives, especially in regions with rich cultural heritages.

Standifer and Wall (2009) provided a theoretical framework for mediation, discussing the evolution of mediation practices from traditional to contemporary forms. They note that traditional mediation often involves respected community figures facilitating dialogue, aiming to achieve mutually acceptable solutions while preserving relationships, harmony and community integrity.

Cultural sensitivity in conflict resolution

Cultural sensitivity is essential for effective conflict resolution, particularly in societies with distinct traditions and values, such as Obrikom-Omuoku. Understanding local customs and practices is crucial to ensuring that mediation processes are both accepted and effective. A lack of cultural awareness can lead to misinterpretation of issues, escalating conflicts instead of resolving them. As Bercovitch and Jackson (2009) suggest, successful mediation practices must be context-specific, emphasizing cultural nuances and bridging gaps between conflicting parties. Similarly, Akomolafe (2019) highlights how indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms, such as those practiced by the Awori people of Nigeria, focus on non-adversarial approaches that promote reconciliation and community harmony, underscoring the importance of culturally sensitive mediation for fostering sustainable peace by fair hearing justice to all and sustainable development.

Collectively, these studies emphasize the enduring relevance of traditional mediation in various cultural settings. They advocate for a nuanced understanding of these practices, suggesting that incorporating traditional methods can complement formal mediation strategies, leading to more sustainable conflict resolution outcomes through a due diligent mediation and fair hearing system.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this section, the following theories, which form the foundation of this study were reviewed:

Indigenous Knowledge Systems

Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) According to Onwu & Mosimege (2004), refer to the cumulative body of knowledge, skills, and practices developed by indigenous communities through their interactions with their environment. This knowledge is transmitted orally across generations and emphasizes the interconnectedness of ecological, cultural, and spiritual elements (Iaccarino, 2003). It is deeply rooted in sustainable practices and holistic worldviews, often in contrast with Western scientific paradigms (Venkatesan et al., 2020). In this system, knowledge is shared through stories, songs, and rituals, preserving the cultural identity of communities (Iaccarino, 2003). IKS is deeply rooted in sustainable practices and holistic worldviews, often contrasting with Western scientific paradigms (Venkatesan et al., 2020). It is a traditional pattern.

Conflict Transformation Theory

Conflict Transformation Theory Tackles all aspects of conflict—personal, relational, structural, and cultural and emphasizes addressing the root causes of conflicts and transforming social structures to promote sustainable peace. Rather than resolving only surface-level disputes, it seeks to change relational, structural, and cultural dimensions of conflict (Lederach, 2003; Galtung, 2000). This approach is inclusive, fostering collaboration and empowerment to rebuild relationships and the active participation of marginalized groups in the peacebuilding process (Miall, 2004). It is sustainable, transformative, anchored on justice to one is justice to all principles.

Restorative Justice Theory

Restorative Justice Theory focuses on repairing harm on victims and communities caused by conflict or crime by bringing together victims, offenders, and communities. It emphasizes accountability, reconciliation, and healing rather than punitive measures (Zehr, 2002). The approach is deeply participatory, promoting dialogue and mutual understanding (Braithwaite, 2002).

Review of Empirical Studies

The empirical review was based on the review of specific literatures on community development, political conflict, conflict resolution and conflict management and Peace building. The first study, conducted by Schutte (2016), examined the concepts of community development and participation, focusing on the importance of indigenous approaches. The study utilized a literature review method to critically analyze existing theories and practices in community development, without involving a specific population or sample size. Schutte found that authentic community development requires genuine participation, emphasizing the need to align projects with local contexts while leveraging community strengths. The study recommended that practitioners prioritize indigenous strategies to foster sustainable and locally driven development initiatives.

In the second study, Tan (2009) explored the integration of community development theory into social work practice, addressing the divide between micro and macro approaches. The study, also theoretical in nature, analyzed the relevance of community development principles through a review of existing literature. Tan argued that these principles are essential at all levels of social work and can enhance participatory democracy, sustainable development, and social justice. The study recommended that social work education include community development theories to better prepare practitioners to address complex social challenges using participatory and sustainable methods.

The third study, conducted by Marisca (2013), investigated the role of informal communities of practice in fostering innovation and resilience, particularly in developing economies. Using a case study approach, Marisca analyzed the activities of the Twin Eagles Group, a Peruvian video game development community from the 1990s. The study found that informal communities of practice contributed significantly to innovation by reverse engineering global technologies and adapting them to local needs. Marisca recommended that developing economies support such communities by providing resources and reducing barriers to collaboration, recognizing their value in building cultural and economic resilience.

SUMMARY OF LITERATURE REVIEW/GAPS IDENTIFIED

Existing research on community development showed the strengths of traditional mediation, including its accessibility, cultural relevance, and ability to foster trust. These studies collectively highlighted the relevance of grassroots participation, the integration of development theories into practice, and the role of informal networks in fostering innovation within communities.

Thus, while reviewed studies dwelt largely on urban or semi-urban areas, often neglecting smaller communities, identified gaps remain that there is limited research in understanding how traditional mediation addresses the complexities of modern political conflicts, hence, this study aimed to fill that gap by investigating on how communities leverage local leadership, communal efforts, cultural values in peacebuilding to attract development.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted the descriptive Research Design and exploratory designs to understand the dynamics of traditional mediation in political conflict resolution. The questionnaire, interview and focus group discussions were the instruments used for data collection. In-depth Interviews were conducted with community leaders, political stakeholders, and residents directly involved in or affected by the conflicts.

Furthermore, Focus Group Discussions were held with diverse groups in Obrikom- Omuoku community to gather reliable information, The target population of Omuoku community is projected at 442,224, according to 2006 census, while the sample size of 15 respondents was drawn using purposive sampling technique. The respondents used in this study included community leaders, traditional rulers, political actors and other residents of Obrikom-Omuoku community affected by the conflicts including those with firsthand knowledge of the conflicts and those with direct experience in conflict resolution.

Population of the Study Target Population

Community leaders, political actors, and residents of Omuoku affected by the conflicts. Data for the study was collected from the respondents by the researcher while using qualitative analysis, responses from the participants were thematically analysed, employing quantitative analysis, descriptive statistics from survey responses was employed to support qualitative findings.

RESULTS, DISCUSSION, AND FINDINGS

This section presents the study's findings, structured around the research questions, and discusses their relevance to the research objectives. The findings are based on interviews and focus group discussions with community members, political stakeholders, and leaders in Obrikom-Omuoku.

Research Question 1: What were the remote and immediate causes of the political conflict in Obrikom-Omuoku community?

When asked about what led to the political conflicts in Obrikom-Omuoku, many respondents attributed the root causes to long-standing socio-economic inequalities and the exclusion of locals from the benefits of oil revenue, which intensified frustration among residents. Participants noted that the presence of multinational oil companies in the region heightened tensions, as promises of development and employment were perceived to be unmet. Additionally, political marginalization and unfair distribution of resources created deep divides within the community.

On immediate causes, participants explained that contested elections and accusations of vote manipulation often escalated into violent confrontations. For example, the 2015 general elections served as a major flashpoint, with allegations of voter suppression and intimidation deepening mistrust between rival factions. Many also observed that retaliatory violence between opposing political groups, particularly the PDP and APC, further fractured community relationships. These findings align with the research objective of identifying the causes of political conflict, demonstrating that systemic inequalities created a tense foundation while immediate events like elections and revenue disputes fueled open confrontations.

Research Question 2: What role did community leaders play in traditional mediation in resolving political conflicts?

Participants described community leaders as central figures in mediating conflicts in Obrikom- Omuoku. They explained that these leaders were respected for their cultural authority and moral standing, which made them trusted intermediaries. Many noted that community leaders facilitated dialogue by creating neutral spaces for conflicting parties to share their grievances. They also utilized customary laws and cultural practices to ensure that mediation processes resonated with local traditions and values.

For example, participants shared that community leaders often mediated land disputes and electoral disagreements by encouraging parties to abide by cultural norms. In some cases, restorative practices, such as

public apologies and symbolic reconciliations, were employed to rebuild relationships. Several respondents emphasized that these efforts helped to restore peace by fostering mutual respect and addressing grievances in a culturally relevant manner.

These findings support the research objective of exploring the role of traditional mediation, showing how community leaders used their social influence and cultural knowledge to mediate conflicts effectively.

Research Question 3: What were the benefits and limitations of using traditional mediation in these conflicts?

Respondents spoke positively about the benefits of traditional mediation. They emphasized its accessibility, noting that it was free of the financial burdens associated with formal legal systems and open to all members of the community. Many appreciated its cultural relevance, explaining that mediation led by elders and leaders familiar with local customs made the process relatable and acceptable. Additionally, participants highlighted the restorative nature of traditional mediation, which prioritized reconciliation and repairing relationships over punitive measures. This approach, they explained, fostered long-term healing and harmony within the community.

However, participants also identified significant limitations. Some reported instances of bias, where mediators appeared to favor one faction over another, undermining trust in the process. Others expressed concerns about the lack of enforcement power, explaining that decisions made during mediation often relied on voluntary compliance. The exclusion of women and youth from the process was another recurring criticism, with many participants noting that these groups were rarely given opportunities to contribute, despite being directly affected by the conflicts. These insights align with the research objective of evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of traditional mediation, demonstrating that while it has significant benefits, challenges such as exclusion and limited enforcement need to be addressed.

Research Question 4: How can traditional mediation be integrated into modern conflict resolution frameworks to build peace?

Participants proposed several strategies for improving traditional mediation through integration with modern conflict resolution frameworks. They suggested that governments should formally recognize traditional mediation processes and provide legal backing to ensure decisions are respected. Respondents emphasized the importance of training community leaders in modern mediation techniques, including conflict analysis and human rights, to equip them for handling more complex disputes.

Many participants also advocated for collaborative platforms where traditional leaders could work alongside government representatives, civil society organizations, and legal professionals. They explained that such partnerships could address both immediate disputes and systemic issues, such as resource control and political marginalization. Inclusivity was another key recommendation, with participants calling for the active involvement of women and youth to ensure diverse perspectives in the mediation process. These findings align with the research objective of exploring strategies for integrating traditional and modern approaches, highlighting the potential for hybrid models that combine cultural sensitivity with institutional support.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The study found that political conflicts in Obrikom-Omuoku were driven by systemic issues such as inequality and resource control, compounded by immediate triggers like contested elections. The findings of this study will be organized into the following themes:

Role of Community Leaders

The study found that community leaders played a pivotal role in mediating political conflicts in Obrikom-Omuoku. These leaders, respected for their cultural authority and moral standing, were able to bridge divides between warring factions by leveraging the trust and influence they held within the community. Their involvement was particularly instrumental in resolving disputes related to contested elections and access to

communal resources. Respondents cited examples of successful interventions, such as mediating post-election conflicts and negotiating reparations for damages caused by violent confrontations. The impartiality and wisdom exhibited by these leaders helped to restore dialogue and cooperation among opposing parties, ensuring that reconciliation efforts were rooted in mutual respect and shared values.

Strengths of Traditional Mediation

Traditional mediation in Obrikom-Omuoku demonstrated several strengths that contributed to its effectiveness. One of the most notable strengths was its cultural relevance. Community members felt more connected to mediation processes led by individuals who shared their cultural heritage and understood the nuances of their traditions. Unlike formal legal systems, traditional mediation emphasized restorative justice, focusing on repairing relationships rather than punishing offenders. This approach fostered long-term healing and social cohesion. Additionally, traditional mediation was accessible and cost-effective, as it avoided the bureaucratic delays and financial burdens often associated with formal court systems. These qualities made it a practical and trusted mechanism for addressing conflicts at the grassroots level.

Limitations of Traditional Mediation

Despite its numerous strengths, traditional mediation faced notable challenges that limited its overall impact. One of the primary issues was the perception of bias among some mediators. In certain instances, respondents noted that community leaders appeared to favor specific factions, undermining the credibility of the process. Additionally, traditional mediation lacked the enforcement power required to ensure compliance with agreements, which weakened its ability to resolve deeply rooted political grievances or systemic issues. The complex nature of some conflicts, particularly those involving external actors such as oil companies, further complicated the effectiveness of traditional mediation. These challenges highlight the need for complementary support from formal institutions to address the broader dimensions of such disputes.

Integration Opportunities

The findings of this study emphasized the potential for integrating traditional mediation into modern conflict resolution frameworks to enhance peacebuilding efforts in Obrikom-Omuoku. Respondents advocated for the development of hybrid models that combine the strengths of traditional methods with the authority of formal legal systems. For example, creating platforms where community leaders work in collaboration with government agencies and security forces could help address the root causes of conflicts while ensuring accountability and transparency. This integration would enable traditional mediators to address immediate disputes while leveraging formal structures to tackle systemic issues, such as political marginalization and resource allocation. By combining these approaches, the community could build a more comprehensive and sustainable framework for resolving conflicts and promoting peace. The findings of this study align with existing research on traditional mediation, which underscores its value in culturally relevant conflict resolution. The trust, accessibility, and restorative nature of traditional mediation observed in Obrikom-Omuoku reflect the principles highlighted in Bercovitch and Jackson's (2009) work on culturally embedded mediation practices. However, the study also confirms the limitations identified by Duursma (2014), particularly the challenges of addressing structural conflicts and the lack of formal recognition for traditional mediators. These insights reinforce the need for a blended approach that integrates the cultural sensitivity of traditional methods with the enforcement power and resources of modern frameworks.

CONCLUSIONS

This study examined the role of traditional mediation by community leaders in resolving political conflicts and fostering peace in Obrikom-Omuoku, Rivers State, Nigeria. The findings demonstrate that political conflicts in the community were fueled by a combination of systemic issues, such as socio-economic inequality and exclusion from oil revenues, and immediate triggers, such as contested elections and retaliatory violence. Community leaders, as custodians of culture and trusted intermediaries, played a pivotal role in mediating these conflicts. They utilized customary laws, cultural practices, and restorative justice to foster reconciliation and rebuild relationships.

Traditional mediation proved effective due to its cultural relevance, accessibility, and emphasis on restoring harmony. However, limitations such as perceived bias, lack of enforcement mechanisms, and the exclusion of marginalized groups hindered its overall effectiveness. The findings underscore the need to address these challenges and to integrate traditional mediation into modern frameworks for sustainable peacebuilding. The study concludes that while traditional mediation remains a valuable tool for resolving local conflicts, its impact can be enhanced through strategic collaboration with formal conflict resolution systems, capacity-building initiatives, and efforts to ensure inclusivity.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Address the Root Causes of Conflicts

Tackling the systemic issues that fuel conflicts in Obrikom-Omuoku is critical. Governments and oil companies must work together to address long-standing socio-economic inequalities and ensure that resources from oil revenues are equitably distributed. Many respondents emphasized that the community often feels excluded from the benefits of resource wealth, which breeds resentment, especially among the youth. By implementing development projects that genuinely reflect the needs of the people—such as better infrastructure, job creation, and educational opportunities—these frustrations can be alleviated, reducing the risk of future conflicts.

Empower Community Leaders with Modern Skills

While community leaders have earned trust and respect within the community, equipping them with modern conflict resolution skills can enhance their effectiveness. Training programs in conflict analysis, negotiation, and human rights would prepare them to handle complex and evolving disputes. Respondents suggested that such training would strengthen the leaders' credibility and build greater trust in their ability to mediate impartially. Periodic workshops or seminars could also help leaders learn from best practices in other communities, ensuring that their methods remain effective in today's rapidly changing socio-political context.

Promote Inclusivity in Traditional Mediation

Ensuring that women, youth, and other marginalized groups have a seat at the table is essential for making traditional mediation more inclusive. Many respondents noted that these groups are often excluded from decision-making, despite being directly affected by conflicts. Community leaders should actively involve women and youth in advisory roles, consultations, or even leadership positions within the mediation process. This would enrich discussions with diverse perspectives and foster a greater sense of collective ownership over conflict resolution efforts. Empowering these groups would also help address grievances that are specific to their experiences.

Integrate Traditional Mediation with Modern Frameworks

Bridging the gap between traditional and formal conflict resolution systems is essential for tackling both local and systemic issues effectively. Governments should formally recognize traditional mediation processes and provide them with legal backing to ensure their decisions are enforceable. Hybrid models could be developed where traditional leaders collaborate with government agencies, civil society organizations, and legal institutions. For instance, local disputes could be resolved through culturally rooted mediation, while more complex conflicts involving resource control or political grievances could be escalated to formal institutions. This integration would ensure that both systems complement each other's strengths.

Establish Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanisms

Consistent monitoring and evaluation of traditional mediation efforts are necessary to measure their impact and identify areas for improvement. Community leaders and external stakeholders should document mediation processes, including agreements reached and their outcomes over time. This would provide valuable data to refine mediation strategies and make them more effective. Respondents stressed the importance of learning from past experiences to avoid repeating mistakes and to ensure that future mediation efforts are more impactful.

Regular evaluations would also enhance accountability, as leaders could track whether agreements are being honored and identify gaps that need to be addressed.

Foster Collaboration with External Stakeholders

Engaging oil companies and other external actors in peacebuilding initiatives could help address key grievances in Obrikom-Omuoku. Many respondents highlighted that unresolved tensions often stem from the activities of multinational corporations in the region. Encouraging these companies to partner with community leaders and traditional mediators as part of their corporate social responsibility programs could ease tensions related to resource control and environmental concerns. For instance, companies could support development projects identified by the community or fund mediation workshops to strengthen local conflict resolution capacity. By implementing these recommendations, the unique strengths of traditional mediation can be preserved while addressing its limitations, paving the way for more sustainable peacebuilding efforts in Obrikom-Omuoku and other conflict-prone communities across all the Niger delta states.

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