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An Historical overview of traditional institutions conflicts in Kogi State and the response of the ministry for local government and chieftaincy affairs in their management 2015-2023.

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Abstract

Traditional institutions are essential parts of traditional political systems, which in Kogi State have historically played pivotal roles in governance, dispute resolution, and the preservation of cultural heritage. The period 2015 to 2023 witnessed heightened conflicts within and around these institutions; these crises were often linked to chieftaincy succession disputes, boundary demarcations, political interference, and competing claims over traditional authority. Against this backdrop, the Ministry for Local Government and Chieftaincy Affairs emerged as the central coordinating body for the management of such disputes, with its interventions oscillating between conflict containment, administrative adjudication, and mediation. This study adopts a historical and qualitative approach, drawing primarily from official reports, key informant interviews, and secondary literature to examine the trajectories of traditional institutions' conflicts in Kogi State during the stated period. It interrogates the socio-political underpinnings of the disputes, the legal frameworks governing chieftaincy matters. Particular attention is given to the institutional mechanisms, policy decisions, and enforcement strategies employed by the Ministry in contexts of entrenched communal rivalries and elite contestations. Findings reveal that while the Ministry played a significant role in mediating and resolving some disputes, its interventions were often constrained by political pressures and localised resistance to political decisions. Nonetheless, certain cases demonstrate the effectiveness of combining administrative procedures with customary reconciliation processes. The paper concludes that sustainable management of traditional institutions' conflicts in Kogi State requires a more balanced integration of indigenous conflict resolution models with state regulatory oversight.

Key Words: Conflict, Traditional institutions, KSLMCA, Kogi State

Introduction

Traditional institutions are indigenous and closely linked to the socio-cultural and political lives of Africans, and in this context, Nigerians. Their existence and importance to people's lives dates back to the pre-colonial period, where

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essential socio-economic and political life and activities of the people are guided by the institution.[2]With the advent of colonialism, the British especially in West Africa extensively used existing traditional institutions as tools to govern the people indirectly[3] and in cases where such institutions are not as prominent or powerful as they would have preferred for a representative government managed to create one.[4] This explains the importance or significance of these institutions even in the post-colonial era. Traditional institutions, although less powerful than they were during the colonial period, especially in terms of their roles and nature of authority and influences commanded by them, still wield considerable powerful influence on the people, especially at the traditional level. Among the many roles of traditional rulers, for instance, is to serve as custodians of the norms[5] and also a bridge between the government at the central level and the people at the local level.[6]

Among the many challenges related to traditional institutions in Nigeria is the challenge of conflicts. The most common conflicts in the traditional setting include land struggles, political competitiveness and struggles over legitimacy or for seeking offices, among others. These crises at the traditional level are proliferating across Kogi State, and appear in the form of boundary crisis, intra and inter-communal crisis, hegemony crisis within and between clans, struggle and agitations for upgrade of chieftaincy stools from lower class to higher one, indigene settlers crisis, among others, in all the senatorial districts of the state.[7] While enough attention has not been given to these struggles, especially the struggle over succession, it has led to several crises and violent situations, such as widespread violent killings and communal clashes claiming several lives and destroying several properties.[8] The apparent dangers of this conflict create security concerns, which not only affect the community and traditional institutions themselves, but also entire Kogi State and even the country, making the issue of management of the conflicts of importance. A prominent means by which the government therefore intervenes either in managing conflict related to traditional institutions or even in preventing such a crisis in Kogi State is through the Ministry of Local Government and Chieftaincy Affairs. While this

[2]AbdullahiGarba et al., "Traditional Institutions and National Integration for Sustainable Development in Nigeria," 2018, https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/234628676.pdf.
[3]A. D. Idonije, 'An evaluation of the relevance of traditional rulership institution in Nigeria State: A case of Edo State'. *The Social Science*, 3, No. 2, (2008): 164-173
[4]W. C. Reed, "Traditional Rulers and Current Politics in Nigeria."An unpublished manuscript written for the Department of State during a summer internship a t the U.S. Embassy, Lagos, Nigeria. 2000.
[5] Emmanuel Jatto, "Impact OfIjakadi Festival On Socio-Cultural Development Of Offa Community," Confluence Journal Of History & International Affairs. Vol. 1 No. 2, 2022, https://www.academia.edu/121497806/IMPACT_OF_IJAKADI_FESTIVAL_ON_SOCIO_CULTURAL_DEVELOPMENT_OF_OFFA_COMMUNITY.
[6] A. Sokoh, "The Changing Role of Traditional Rulers in Governance in Niger". *Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, Vol. 23, 2018: 51-62
[7]MomohZakariIsmaila, Conflicts and Socio-Economic Development in Kogi State: Analysis, Challenges, and Policy Recommendations, "ISRG Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences (ISRGJAHSS) II, No. Vi, (2024): 285-293. 290
[8]Adavize Emmanuel Jatto and Suberu Ochi Abdulrahman, "Party Politics and Elections in Kogi State between 1999 and 2015: A Case Study of The Peoples Democratic Party," *Wukari International Studies Journal* 8, no. 5 (2015): 238–47, 230 https://wissjournals.com.ng/index.php/wiss/article/view/429.

ministry has done so much in recent times to check the spread of violence at the traditional level and also to see to development at the grassroots level in Kogi State, only very few of its efforts have been evaluated or discussed inthe literature generally. Hence, making this study a pertinent one. Also, the fact that most studies on traditional institutions always focuses majorly on areas like relevance of the institution to governance at the local level, as well as their contributions to community security[9], very few studies have been dedicated to examining what common forms of conflicts exists at the traditional institution level and how institutions such as the Ministry of Local Government and Chieftaincy Affairs contributes to managing such crisis.

Conflicts involving traditional institutions are among the deadliest conflicts in Nigeria.It has claimed several lives and led to the destruction of several properties in Kogi State and in Nigeria as a whole.[10] This underscores the importance of discussing not only the factors responsible for such conflict, or the destructive nature of such conflict, but more importantly, how such conflicts and crises are managed to avoid escalations and, in cases where they have escalated, how they were controlled. Hence, the importance of examining the efforts of the ministry in managing conflicts in Kogi State. This study, therefore, aims to examine the roles of the Ministry of Local Government and Chieftaincy Affairs in the Management of Traditional institutions ' conflicts in Kogi State from 2015 to 2023.

Traditional Institutions in Kogi State

The state comprises 21 local governments, each embodies constituted traditional bodies saddled with the responsibilities of managing the people at the local level, majorly upholding the traditions and customs of the people at the local level. At the head of most of these traditional bodies in respective communities are usually the kings, or their equivalent, or senior chiefs who reign and rule over the traditional affairs of the people, preside over traditional festivals and in some cases even appoint other lower-ranking chiefs and bestow honourary positions on some prominent members of the society. Among the many notable kings and chiefs within the state are: the Atta of Igalaland (Chairman of the state council of traditional rulers), the Ohinoyi of Ebiraland, the Obaro of Kabba, the Maigari of Lokoja, the Ohimege of KotonKarfe, the Akinrin of Ekinrin-Ade, the Olu of Oworo, among several others across the state. These institutions are significant to each of their communities, as they served as custodians of the culture of the people, and also serve as intermediaries between their people and government, which is among many other responsibilities associated with traditional institutions like them across Nigerian societies.

As observed earlier in this study, several issues of conflict can arise within traditional societies and institutions, part of which includes leadership struggle, and also the issue of legitimacy of coronation, land tenure conflicts, among

[9]Idonije, 165
[10] M. S. Audu, Life is endless battle and conflict: The world is becoming less peaceful. 7th Inaugural Lecture, Federal University Lokoja, Kogi State, Nigeria University Auditorium, Adankolo Campus, November 24, 2021.

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others. Many such issues, if not well managed, could and have often led to crises within and between communities within the state, that has led to the death, displacement and destruction of people's properties.[11]

A History of Kogi State Ministry of Local Government and Chieftaincy Affairs

The Kogi State Ministry for Local Government and Chieftaincy Affairs came into existence following the upgrading of the defunct Department of Local Government and Chieftaincy Affairs to a full-fledged Ministry with effect from 6 August 2007.[12] The Department existed as an arm of the government responsible for the administrative coordination of government at the grassroots level. The upgrading of the department into a ministry gives it a wider scope, covering areas like political administration of local government and coordination of events at the local levels. Like in many other states of Nigeria with similar ministries, the Ministry in Kogi State is statutorily responsible for monitoring the affairs of the twenty-one (21) Local Government Councils in the State and also coordinating the activities of the State Traditional Councils.
Some of the commissioners to have headed the ministry include: Barr. Ndamodu Ali, Honourable Abubakar Ainoko[13], Honourable Ozigi Salam.[14]The ministry had been able, among other functions, to play a major role in enhancing local governance in Kogi State.

Leadership Structure of KSMLGCA

The ministry is divided into departments, each of which operates comprehensively to achieve the stipulated goals of the ministry. For which it was set up. The major departments of the ministry include;

The Administration and Finance Department: saddled with the responsibility of handling the administration of the ministry as well as its day-to-day running, and it is also responsible for the coordination of finances and other economic activities of the ministry, to ensure smooth and timely disbursement of funds for stipulated projects, as well as smooth coordination of the ministry's activities.[15]

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[11]Adavize Emmanuel Jatto and Suberu Ochi Abdulrahman, "Party Politics and Elections in Kogi State between 1999 and 2015: A Case Study of the Peoples Democratic Party," *Wukari International Studies Journal* 8, no. 5 (2015): 238–47, https://wissjournals.com.ng/index.php/wiss/article/view/429.
[12]Achievements of the Ministry for Local Government and Chieftaincy Affairs Kogi State. Available online at: https://kogistate.gov.ng/wp-content/uploads/ministry-of-local-government-achievements.pdf. Accessed 29 September 2023.
[13] 'Kogi ex-appointees back Ododo's governorship ambition'. *Punch* 1st August 2023. Available online at: https://punchng.com/kogi-ex-appointees-back-ododos-gov-ambition/. Accessed 29 September 2024.
[14]OdogunGbenga, 'Your Allegations Against me Unfair; Monarch replies Kogi'. *Punch* 13 January 2023. Available online at: https://punchng.com/your-allegations-against-me-unfair-monarch-replies-kogi/. Accessed 20 October 2024.
[15]Oral Interview with Musa Adamu, 50, Civil Servant, Lokoja, 20 May 2025.

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Local Government Affairs Department: This department exclusively takes care of issues related to Local Government councils and areas within the state. The department receives reports on issues of Local Government Affairs, and presents the same to the Commissioner for upward consideration. Furthermore, the department is saddled with seeing to the smooth running of activities at the local or grassroots level of the state. The department works directly with the administrative heads of each 21 Local Governments in Kogi State, and receives periodic administrative reports.[16]

Monitoring, Evaluation and Inspectorate Department: This department is saddled with the responsibility of being a watchdog. Principally operates by monitoring activities of the ministry and evaluating various projects and governance at the grassroots level. This department also makes periodic and necessary inquiries into the activities of local government authorities to ensure transparency and accountability. This department is under a director who sees to the smooth running of the department and ensures proper coordination of the monitoring team.

Department of Chieftaincy Affairs; This department attends to issues that revolve around the appointment, coronation, giving of staff of office, promotion, as well as the coordination of the activities of traditional chiefs. This is a very strategic department in our present study, especially because it is through this department that the ministry relates better with the chiefs and other traditional rulers and leaders within the local governments within the state. This department sees to the affairs of coronation, as well as other major administrative matters concerning traditional rulership within the state.

Planning, Research, and Statistics: This department deals with issues of planning, research, and statistics. This department is saddled with the task of helping with information gathering, making systematic research and enquiries into issues that concern the development of the Local Government and Chieftaincy Affairs and its activities within the state. All these departments operate under the ambience of the state's commissioner for Local Government and Chieftaincy Affairs.

Traditional Institutions' Conflicts in Kogi State: An Historical Appraisal

Violent Conflict at the traditional level is not new to the terrain of Kogi state, just as it is not new in many Nigerian states. Over the years, this has been attached to the high esteem being apportioned to the traditional ruler's office, and the high level of boundary delimitation issues that are a result of colonial heritage in Nigeria. One of the older violent conflicts at the traditional level in Kogi state, overtime, has been that in Kogi Local Government area (the Egbura and Bassa communal clashes), Omala local government, Lokoja local government, among others.

[16]Oral Interview with HarunaMuhammed, 56, Civil Servant, Lokoja, 20 May, 2025.

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Some Major Conflicts Involving Traditional Institutions in Kogi Local Government

The Egbura and Bassa communities are found in Toto and Doma Local Government Areas of Nassarawa state, and the two have been living together for a long time, although the Egbura largely claim that the Bassa are settlers. The Egbura are found in the north and east of the confluence of the Niger and Benue Rivers. They are, therefore, found in Kogi, Edo, Nassarawa, Niger and the FCT. The Bassa who claim ownership of the area are also domiciled in the FCT, Niger and Kogi. But principally, they are found in Toto Local Government Area (LGA) of Nassarawa State and Koton Karfe and Bassa Local Government Areas in Kogi State.[17] The parts of the groups within Kogi state are usually called Egbura-Koto and Bassa-Kwomu, respectively. However, of notable concern is that any time conflict erupts between their kiths and kin in Nassarawa State, it usually spills into their kith and kin communities in Kogi State, and vice versa.[18] And this has been a major challenge to peace in that area. Historically, in modern times, the conflict between the two groups first broke out in 1986, and there have been several conflicts of that kind between them, even up to 1998 and beyond.[19]

The major crisis started in 1986 after the death of the Ohinoyi of Toto, which brought about serious agitation over the need to change the title of the traditional head of Toto by other ethnic groups who felt marginalised in the traditional arrangement and wanted the title to be rotated among the ethnic groups.[20] Although some studies have claimed that the underlying bone of contention was about the ownership of the land, and the claim by the Egbura to be indigenes and other groups to be settlers in the area, among other factors.[21] The Bassa claim ownership of the land. They felt short-changed by the Egbura, aided by the government in the creation of the kingdom. When the area was under the former Plateau state government before it was carved out to be part of the present Nassarawa State, the former had created two chiefdoms for Egbura without creating anyone for Bassa and Gbagyi.

The conflict between the two groups has resulted in killings. For example, in 1987, disagreement over the appointment of an Egbura man to the post of Sarkin Kasuwa (Head of Market) to succeed another Egbura man who died (because Bassa people felt that the Egbura man should be succeeded by his deputy, who was a Bassa man) led to a bloody battle in which seventy-two (72) people lost their lives.[22] However, 1997/98 marked the bloodiest clash between

[17] F. C. Sheidu, 'Evaluation of government strategies for managing conflict in Okene Local Government Area of Kogi State 1999-2007' (Unpublished dissertation submitted to the school of postgraduate studies, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of a master degree in political science. September 2016.
[18] J. Sanda, "Bassa- Egbura Conflict in Nassarawa State" in Imobighe, T.A (ed) *Civil Society and Ethnic Conflict Management in Nigeria* (Ibadan: Spectrum Books Ltd. 2003): 106-127
[19] I. Jooji, 'Traditional Rulers and Conflict Prevention and Resolution in Kogi Local Government Area of Kogi State'. *International Journal of Advanced Research,* 10, No. 09, (2022): 597-604
[20]Jooji, 599
[21]Jooji, 600
[22]Jooji, 601

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the two groups, especially because sophisticated weapons and mercenaries were used and deployed during the crisis, thereby leading to the death of over three thousand people and leaving more than a hundred thousand (100,000) more homeless.[23]

This conflict has also been stimulated in very recent times, with several forms of insurgent attacks and skirmishes directed against themselves, which have created a high level of destruction of properties and massive displacements of people, making the area a very volatile region for violence within the state.

The Bagana/Otutubatu Crisis in Omala Local Government Area

Another major area of traditional conflict within the state was in the Bagana area of Omala Local Government. Bagana is a riverside community in Omala Local Government Area of Kogi State; however, the area has witnessed fratricidal conflicts, which have claimed many lives and destroyed many properties. A major feature of the area is that it is a boundary community between Kogi and neighbouring states like Nasarawa, Benue and the Federal Capital Territory.[24] Thus, making it a melting pot for different groups such as the Hausa, Fulani, Ebira, Nupe, Kanuri, Kakanda and so on. The major economic activities of the area include farming of rice, cattle rearing.

On the genesis of the crisis, of major importance is the pent-up anger between the Agatu and Fulani, who had been involved in a supremacy battle over the ownership of the community. The incident, according to findings, started in 2013 when the Agatu in Benue and the Fulani also in Benue had a crisis, which led to a series of attacks and deaths in the area. Some of those who fled Benue on both sides were said to have relocated to Bagana for temporary refuge till the dust raised by the attacks settled. However, in the aftermath of the crisis, not all those who escaped to Bagana came back to their homes inAgatu. On a market day in 2014, the Agatus allegedly invaded the cow market, said to have been operated by the Fulani. In the wake of the attack, five people and 33 cows were slaughtered. That was the first time the town would witness such a massive slaughter. Since then, the residents have been living in fear and mutual suspicion of each other.

The problem of the community was said to have been compounded by the existence of two hostile clans that have been at each other's throats over the control of the town. The clans, Otutubatu, with headquarters in Omagede, and Ihankpe, whose headquarters are in Patayin, have pockets of their people in Bagana. These clans were said to have relocated their seats of power to Bagana, as their heads now control and rule their communities from the palaces built on the soil of Bagana. Suspicious of each other, they have been trying to outsmart each other whenever it comes to laying claim to the ownership of the town.

[23] J. Sanda, "Bassa- Egbura Conflict in Nassarawa State" in Imobighe, T.A (ed) Civil Society and Ethnic Conflict Management in Nigeria.
[24]'Inside Bagana: A Community at War with Itself'. *Nigerian Tribune* April 28, 2019. Available online at: https://tribuneonlineng.com/inside-bagana-a-community-at-war-with-itself/. Accessed 16 November 2024.

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When it was discovered that the crisis would not abate, the state government created the office of the district head and that of Oga Onu Ife as a third-class chief for the town. It was headed by Alhaji Ali Haruna, an Igala man, and was appointed to occupy the two posts. But the decision to create the chieftaincy did not go down well with some sections of the town. Despite this, the Agatus and the Fulanis, particularly, have continued to watch their backs as the fear of attack from both camps continuously pervades the community.

When the first major attack occurred in 2014, the local government set up a committee to look into the causes of the crisis and the possible solutions. The committee, which was headed by the then Secretary to the Local Government (SLG), Julius Atabor, also had as members the district head, people from the major ethnic groups and the leader of the youth groups in the area. It was, however, gathered that the committee could not achieve much as the stakeholders were allegedly not truthful enough.[25]

Four years and four months after the first attack, Bagana again witnessed another round of invasion from the two warring ethnic nationalities. Before the attack, there had been rumours of a planned attack on the Fulani settlement by the Agatu, while another version said it was the Fulani who wanted to invade the Agatu community. Palpable fear enveloped the community, making people evacuate their families to neighbouring communities in Nasarawa and Benue states. Evidence of an attack was seen on some farms in Bagana as four young men were allegedly ambushed and massacred by gunmen.[26]

On Sunday, April 7, 2019, in a reprisal attack, Fulani herdsmen invaded the community and killed three of the policemen who were guarding the town. They later went on to kill about 15 people, mostly women and children, and also set houses located in the Agatu-dominated area of the community on fire. The following morning, the Agatus, who were caught unawares by the Fulani invasion, also carried out a counterattack, and killed some Fulani and also burnt houses that belonged to them. The destruction was said to have spread to other communities of Ogba and Patanyi, where 15 people were killed and many houses also burnt.

Oworo Crisis in Lokoja Local Government Area

Lokoja sits at the confluence of the Niger and Benue rivers. The city is in Kogi State, and is home to various ethnic groups from the ten bordering states. The strain of rapid urbanisation, lack of opportunities for young people, and land degradation, causing loss in livelihoods and food security, has resulted in friction among different groups vying for limited resources.[27] However, of major concern in the Oworo community is the traditional conflict over the chieftaincy title and rulership, which has left the area tense and political tension

[25]Interview with Pa. James Anuku, 65, Lokoja, May 2025
[26]Inside Bagana: A Community at War with Itself'. *Nigerian Tribune*
[27] A. O. Aina, 'Meet the peacebuilders' *Mercy Corp Nigeria Limited*. Available online at: https://www.mercycorps.org/blog/nigeria-peace-conflict-community. Accessed November 15, 2024.

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high, largely because of the struggles between major ruling houses like Okpoto of Ika, Akposi, Aba, Ajokpa, and Ajeto. And more importantly, theIwomasi ruling houses, which insist that the legitimate seat of governance must be at Agbaja, and Mohammed Baiyerohi (the present Olu of Oworo), who has chosen to situate his palace in his traditional abode. The struggle has led to increased tension in the environment and has also led to the writing of several petitions and court litigation demanding the removal of the Olu of Oworo for not staying in Agbaja but rather choosing to stay within Lokoja.[28] This struggle back and forth has made the issue of traditional rulership in the area of source of concern for governments of the state, and a major issue of significance is also the struggle for and claim of land ownership and first settlement over other groups in the area.[29]

Ohionwa Clan crisis in Okehi Local Government Area

History has it that Emani and Ohionwa are both children of the father of Ihima (Onotu). It was believed that Emani was the eldest son of Onotu, while Ohionwa was a younger son. Others are Ure, Oha, Odumi, and Ohueta. These six became the founders of the six clans named after them.[30] The rivalry between Emani and Ohionwa was age-long and had defied several attempts and steps for settlements over the years. Several attempts had been made by other clans, community leaders, religious leaders, clan heads, governmental bodies, and non-governmental organisations, such as Ihima Welfare Association, Ebira People's Associations, etc, yet no meaningful resolution had been reached. At some points, when it seemed a breakthrough was in sight and relative peace was recorded, the crisis erupted over and over again. This has come to made Ihima a hot spot in the entire Ebira land. The young and emerging generations of the clans have come to develop hatred for each other, even when they were not born when the crisis started; perhaps the young generations had been brainwashed by each of their progenitors into believing that they are each other's enemies. The six clans in Ihima had adopted titles or nomenclatures by which they addressed their heads. The clan heads and titles are:Obobanyi of Emani, Ogasube of Ure, Obobanyi of Ohueta, Obobanyi of Ohionwa, Idu of Oha, and Ohiomata of Odumi.

While the other four clans have not had any serious issues, the Emani and Ohionwa clans have been in the eye of the storm of crisis in Ihima, as it were. Between December 2005 and January 2006, Ihima witnessed a series of clannish disturbances between the Emani and Ohionwa, which resulted in the destruction and loss of lives and properties, mainly houses, thereby rendering

[28]Refusal to reside in his domain, ruling houses call for dethronement of Olu of Oworo in Kogi.*Nigerian Tribune* February 23, 2020. Available online at: https://tribuneonlineng.com/refusal-to-reside-in-his-domain-ruling-houses-call-for-dethronement-of-olu-of-oworo-in-kogi/. Accessed 16 November 2024.
[29]Adamu, I. 'Kogi Land Dispute Igalas are mere joiners in Lokoja-Oworo People Insists'. *Nairaland* June 24, 2020. Available online at: https://irukkanews.com/index.php/2020/06/24/kogi-land-dispute-igala-are-mere-joiners-inlokoja-oworo-peoples-insist/. Accessed 16 November 2024.
[30]Borok Andrew Maren and George Adavo Ayo, 'An Appraisal of Intra Ethnic Conflict in Ebira Land: A Case of Ihima District in Nigeria up to 2007'. *Humanus Discourse* Volume 3.Number 3. 2023: 1-10

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many people homeless, resulting in the attendant rise of Internally Displaced People (IDPS).

Another major cause of the crisis is the adoption of the title "Obobanyi of Ihima" as against "Obobanyi of Emani" by His Royal Highness (HRH) SiyakaOkaragaLawal in 1984 when he was installed as the clan head of Emani. This generated serious controversy, while the Emani clan contended that the title had been used by their Chiefs from pre-colonial times, the Ohionwa clan refuted any argument to prove the legitimacy of the title "Obobanyi of Ihima". The remaining four clans (Ure, Ohueta, Odumi, and Oha) in Ihima agreed that His Royal Highness SiyakaOkaragaLawal is only the clan chief of Emani and not a paramount ruler of Ihima District, as the title suggests. In addition, the Ohionwa clan alleged that by some manipulations, the Emani clan chief had imposed himself over and above other clan chiefs, whereas all clan Chiefs had equal status. The dispute over the nomenclature adopted by Emani was later taken to the courts by the Ohionwa on the 14th day of February 1996. The case has lingered for years and is still in court.[31]

A basic fact to know about the IhimaOhunowa-Emani issues is the resurgence of struggles in the area in recent times, occasioned by political clashes and issues relating to political affiliations in the area, struggles which have kept the area volatile and the atmosphere tense.

Bassa-Egbura Land Dispute 2022

The Bassa and Egbura people are major ethnic groups of the Bassa Local Government Area of Kogi state, while the environment has been known to be volatile for tense conflicts over land ownership. However, renewed violence ensued between the two groups as recently as 2022. The two ethnic groups have been fighting over land ownership and fish ponds for a long period of time until the intervention of the Governor Yahaya Bello administration. The renewed hostility cropped up on Monday, May 30, 2022, when two people believed to be of Bassa ethnic nationality were allegedly killed on a farm at Uga-Cheure near Oguma, the headquarters of the council and Korumu near Udogbo.

The Bassa people believed the killing was masterminded by IgburraMozum because of the existing hostility between the two ethnic groups.The Bassa people reported the incident to the divisional police post at Oguma.[32] On Thursday evening, another two Bassa people were allegedly killed on a farm in Sheria and Korumu near Odugbo, thus unleashing more strain of violent attacks across the community between the two traditional communities.

[31]HabibuSaniAngulu, *Chieftaincy Declaration, and Succession Procedures: Some Customary Orders in Ebiraland*, (Okene: Desmond Tutu Publishers 2011. P. 26-72
[32]Nnakaike Victoria, '18 feared dead in fresh crisis in Kogi'. Available at: https://businessday.ng/news/article/18-feared-dead-in-fresh-crisis-in-kogi/. Accessed on 16January, 2025.

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Roles/Efforts of the Ministry of Local Government and Chieftaincy Affairs in Conflict Management in Kogi State

The government, over the years, has placed serious efforts into tackling the various issues of conflicts in the communities of Kogi State. Some of these measures include: use of security agents, especially the police and the military, to ensure immediate calm is restored to the areas under conflict. This is a common measure adopted by the government in almost all the struggles that degenerated into violent conflicts, conflicts such as the Bassa-Egbura crisis, the Bagana crisis and so on. The police are often deployed immediately to keep the peace and reduce all issues of conflict. This is often done to reduce the number of casualties involved and to arrest possible miscreants who are responsible for the crisis.[33]While this has helped in no small ways to reduce casualties, it has not been able to create a lasting peace or successfully manage the conflicts.

Measures adopted by the Ministry of Local Government and Chieftaincy Affairs in Conflict management

In-depth Inquiries into issues of Conflicts within the State

The Ministry, through its department on planning, research and statistics, was able to launch a comprehensive investigation into the history, nature and causes of traditional conflicts in Kogi State. This was necessary in order to understand the factors fuelling the conflicts and how best to tackle or manage the conflicts. Among other things, the enquiries showcased that boundary disputes occasioned by indigene settlers' issues, as well as chieftaincy tussles between houses, clans and individuals are key factors causing incessant conflicts within the state.[34] Also, the research indicated that several measures involving the use of conventional security forces have been adopted over time in tackling the conflicts; however, it was not successful in completely managing the conflicts from degenerating into a full-fledged crisis or from resurging, hence creating the need for a more intensive and inclusive approach to the management of such conflicts. Thus, with this knowledge, the ministry was able to initiate other approaches outside the conventional use of security forces in attempting to manage conflicts across the state.

Facilitation of Negotiations

One of the basic measures adopted by the ministry in handling conflict issues is the facilitation of negotiation, especially between struggling factions who are in conflict. The negotiation often involves the head of the traditional council within the state. A case in point was the conflict in Bagana, in which the government had to get the traditional rulers council within the state involved, and this included the Atta of Igala, who had to call several meetings, as supported by the state, of various chiefs in the area to ensure that ways of lasting peace are found in managing the crisis.[35] This system entails exploring traditional institutions as a tool to settle issues relating to traditional institutions. This initiative has, in no

[33]Oral Interview with Supol. Adebayo Femi, 65, Police Officer, (rtd). October 12, 2023.
[34]Oral Interview with LawalOnoja, 55, Lokoja, Civil Servant, 2nd November 2023.
[35]Oral Interview with ChiefOjoma, Enejo, 60, Idah, May 23, 2025

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small way, encouraged integration among the council members who now have a further responsibility of ensuring that other traditional communities around them or under their control remain peaceful. This series of negotiations facilitated by the Ministry has enabled the Ministry to bring under control some of the major crises in the state by engaging various stakeholders and respected traditional rulers within the state, in the process of finding solutions to the conflicts.

Formation and Membership of Boundary Committee

Also, a product of the ministry's efforts at advising the government of Kogi State on better ways to handle conflicts at the traditional level, especially that revolving around boundary crises, led to the creation and inauguration of the boundary committee by the Kogi State government of AlhajiYahaya Bello. First was the committee jointly inaugurated by Enugu and Kogi States on the 24th May 2017 which among other duties have the focus of ensuring the settlement of boundary disputes between Kogi and Enugu states, and other related boundary challenges facing the state[36] also aside the committee jointly inaugurated by Kogi and Enugu state to examine the Kogi Enugu boundary conflict, the Kogi state government also inaugurated a 15-man Kogi State Boundary Committee chaired by the Deputy Governor, Chief Edward Onoja, charging the Committee to work towards the lasting resolution of all lingering boundary concerns across the state,[37] which include some of the boundary issues identified above among others.

The committee was chaired by Chief Edward Onoja, the deputy governor of Kogi State. Other members of the committee included; Edward Egbuka, (State Commissioner of Police); Hon. Kingsley Femi Fanwo, (Commissioner for Information and Communications); Hon. AsiruIdris, (Commissioner of Finance, Budget and Economic Planning); Mohammed Sani Ibrahim, SAN, (Attorney General and Commissioner of Justice); Hon. Ozigi Deedat, (Commissioner for Local Government and Chieftaincy Affairs) and Hon. NazirAchin, (Director General Bureau of Lands). Others are Mustapha Salihu (State Surveyor General); Musa Yunusa (State Comptroller of Customs); TosinAjayi (State Director, Department of State Service); HRM Mathew AlajiOpaluwa (the AttahIgala and President, Kogi State Council of Chiefs); Alh. DaudaMukailu, (Kogi West Senatorial District Representative); Alh.SeediqAbdulRahman, (Kogi Central Senatorial District Representative) and Mr. Lawrence Eguma, (Kogi East Senatorial District).[38] Of prominent note in the members of the committee above is the Honourable commissioner for

[36]Sesan, 'Kogi, Enugu set up committee to resolve boundary dispute'. *Punch* 23 May, 2017. Available online at: https://punchng.com/kogi-enugu-set-up-committee-to-resolve-boundary-dispute/. Accessed 23 May 2025.
[37]Kogi Inaugurates State Boundary Committee, KGSG August 6, 2022. Available Online at: https://kogistate.gov.ng/kogi-governor-inaugurates-state-boundary-committee-2/. Accessed 24 May 2025.
[38] O. F. Odimayo, 'External Factors wants to destroy my kingdom; Kogi Monarch Cries out'. *Fresh Angle*, October, 23, 2020. Available online at: https://freshangleng.com/13458/external-factors-want-to-destroy-my-kingdom--kogi-monarch-cries-out. Accessed 16 November 2023.

Local Government and Chieftaincy affairs, who occupied a strategic part of the committee, depicting one of the efforts and the roles of the ministry in seeing to the management of boundary-related crisis within the state.

Point of Order for Traditional Rulers

Another measure adopted by the commission is the raising of a point of order and strong admonition of traditional rulers to end the practice of arbitral appointment of chiefs or leaders, especially since the ministry discovered that a major issue contributing to chieftaincy crisis within the state is the arbitrary appointment of chiefs and conferment of chieftaincy titles by traditional rulers in the state. A statement made by the commissioner of the Ministry of Local Government and Chieftaincy Affairs to the traditional rulers council in the state reiterated the commissioner's efforts at admonishing the rulers. He stated thus:

> Crime and criminality have left the local area and moved to the highways because of government efforts; what is left in the rural areas are chieftaincy crises. We are asking you to make the sacrifice for peace. The state government is spending heavily to tackle insecurity. When you create such positions and crises engulf you, then the state government will now be running around to settle it. Such money used to curb such crises would have been used to handle other projects.[39]

Furthermore, as a way of tackling the arbitrary appointment of chiefs by traditional rulers, the ministry under the leadership had to caution the chiefs, the commissioner stated thus:

> No traditional ruler must take any step to create any chiefdom without the notice or authority of the state government. No traditional institution must create or crown any chief or district head, either temporarily or permanently, without government authority. The creation of such chiefs and heads by traditional rulers has caused a lot of crises in the state. The majority of the insecurity witnessed in the state, and 70 per cent of legal matters against the state government, stemmed from chieftaincy and land crises. Any undue appointments or creation of traditional heads without recourse to the government will be dealt with; there will be consequences; both the

[39]Kogi Government bans traditional rulers from creating Chiefdom, and district heads. *Vanguard News* 02, 2020 Available online at: www.vanguardngr.com/2020/02/kogi-govt-bans-traditional-rulers-fromcreating-chiefdom-district-head/. Accessed 20 October 2023.

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appointed and the traditional ruler who made such appointments will not be spared.[40]

This action enables the ministry to play its regulatory roles more in managing the affairs of appointments of traditional leaders at the lower level in a way that would prevent crisis and engender peace in the Kogi communities.[41]

Attending to and Taking Petitions and Complaints arising from intra and Inter-Local Government Boundaries and Disputes;

This is another area the ministry had contributed to the management of crisis in Kogi State, by attending to public complaints and petitions arising from intra and inter-Local Government boundaries and disputes; this is a specific function of the ministry given the fact that boundary issues and conflicts have been of major concern to the Kogi State administration, and since most of these crisis appears at the grass root or local government levels, the ministry performs the function of attending to every form of complaints and petitions revolving around boundary and boundary conflicts settlements. It is in response to these general complaints that the ministry concludes the issue of arbitrary appointments by traditional rulers as a major issue fuelling conflicts, hence placing a ban on such action without approval from the government through the ministry.

Upgrading of Chiefs to Reduce Tension over Power Struggle among Traditional Rulers in the State

One of the basic factors fuelling the crisis within the state at the traditional level is also the power struggle. There exist apparent struggles between rulers and their various people in the state for an upgrade of the position of their chiefs and leaders; some of these struggles have emerged in the form of competition and even power tussles between traditional rulers and their various supporters.[42]

To bring this struggle and competition under control and to ensure that it does not create a crisis that could affect the security of the state, the Ministry made recommendations to the state government about the need for general and holistic upgrades of chieftaincy stools across the state, to help douse existing tensions, and also help eliminate cases of inequalities. Hence, between 2022 and 2023, the Kogi State government, through the Ministry of Local Government and Chieftaincy Affairs, embarked on a holistic upgrade of many of the traditional rulers' stools across the state. In March 2022, for

[40]Kogi Government bans traditional rulers from creating Chiefdom, and district heads.
[41]Oral Interview with Dr.AdeolaAdeyanju, 48, Abuja, Lecturer, October 20, 2023.
[42] Oral Interview with SaiduJamiu, 44, KotonKarfe, Trader, November 2, 2024.

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instance, about 104 upgraded chiefs were given staff of office.[43] While about 300 stools were also upgraded in 2023.[44]

Conclusion

Traditional Rulers and institutions play important roles in the management of conflicts, especially in situations which could have escalated into a major crisis in many villages and Local Government areas capable of causing deaths and destruction on massive scales. However, conflicts within such traditional institutions themselves must also be tackled because it has far-reaching effects on peace and the peaceful co-existence of people, as demonstrated by the varied effects of some of the conflicts identified in this study.

It is therefore important to note that although the Ministry of Local Government and Chieftaincy Affairs have played and continues to play serious roles in ensuring that issues of conflicts within traditional institutions are managed and prevented from degenerating into violence, more still needs to be done in this regards especially in the areas of orientation of the institutions, in conflict handling styles such as avoidance, collaboration, confrontations, among others, and also on the lasting effects of conflicts, and the need to initiate conflict management process before conflicts degenerates into violence. The major challenges common to the ministry in her roles in conflict settlement include: political pressures and localised resistance to externally imposed decisions. Hence, the ministry can furthermore make efforts to create an early warning system to monitor the indicators of violent conflicts so as to be able to handle them before they transform into a crisis.

[43]OdogunSesan, '104 Upgraded Monarchs of Kogi state gets staff of Office'. *The Punch* March 8, 2023. Available online at: https://punchng.com/104-upgraded-kogi-monarchs-get-staff-of-office/. Accessed 23 May 2025.
[44]'Kogi Government Grades, Upgrades 300 Traditional stools'. *Peoples Gazette*, September 26, 2023. Available online at: https://gazettengr.com/kogi-govt-grades-upgrades-300-traditional-stools/. Accessed 13 November 2024.

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