E-ISSN: 1116 - 2619 P-ISSN: 3026-8524
MPRI-JHLAR | INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF HUMANITIES, LITERATURE AND ART RESEARCH
VOL. 06 NO. 6 – OCTOBER, 2024

ALTERNATIVE DISPUTE RESOLUTION AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT IN IMO STATE, NIGERIA

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DOI Unique ID: 10.70382/mejhlar.v6i6.007

Abstract

This study focused on alternative dispute resolution and community development in Imo State (2013 – 2022). The study was based on the need to ascertain the relevance of alternative dispute approach in the development of the communities. The researcher developed and used three research objectives, three research questions and three corresponding hypotheses. The study was anchored on social justice theory. Data were collected through primary source (questionnaire) and secondary source (published materials) and the study used survey research approach. The population covered the entire 1,394,800 people from six local governments of the study area (2 from each of the zones in Imo State). The sample was 400 from the entire population, but only 370 copies of the questionnaire were returned from the 400 copies distributed. The data collected were analyzed using simple percentage and the hypotheses were tested using chi-square. It was discovered that there is significant impact of alternative disputes resolution on settlement of kingship disputes in Imo State; there is significant relationship between the alternative disputes resolution mechanism and settlement of land disputes in Imo State; and there is significant effects of alternative disputes resolution on settlement of disputes arising from development project in Imo State. The study concluded that alternative dispute approach is a panacea for

Keywords:
Alternative Dispute Resolution, Community Development, Settlement of Kingship Disputes, Mechanism and Settlement of Land, and Settlement of Disputes Arising from Development Project.

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dispute resolution in rural communities and if well handled will lead to community development. The work recommended that Alternative disputes resolution strategies should be effectively employed in settling all disputes relating to kingship, land disputes, and community projects so as to achieve community development.

Introduction

Dispute in the society is as old as man. This is because there must be misunderstanding among people in their efforts to relate with one another, solve their problems, and acquire earthly properties. Based on the needs to achieve peaceful co-existence in the society, there are traditional and modern dispute management strategies employed by people to achieve peace and development (Uzorka & Adiele, 2021). The modern way of conflict management is the court or judicial system. It was introduced by the colonial masters, as it's not in African tradition. The reality is that the above may not actually give positive results at all times; hence the need for alternative disputes resolution which will add positive values to community development.

The alternative dispute resolution strategies are in line with African culture and tradition. According to Chukwu and Nwosu (2020), alternative disputes resolution are communal or traditional ways of settling conflict, instead of official court process. Historically, the alternative disputes resolution was practically used in different African countries during the pre-colonial era. According to Okafor, Ele, Mbam and Orji (2020), before 1900, the different ethnic groups that made up the present day Nigeria used different community based strategies for resolving conflicts. This situation continued till the British colonial rule which introduced the formal judicial system in practice today. In fact, the ADR processes were in practice in Africa even prior to the colonial era (Ngo-Pondi, 2021).

Our traditional societies settled disputes by referring them to the elders and other respected members of the society. The pre-colonial Nigeria era was constituted by settlements, communities, families, villages, hamlets, and most especially kingdoms and empires. These kingdoms and communities were not without conflicts; rather their disputes and challenges were adequately settled without litigation. In most cases, the disputes were referred to elders or other bodies set up for that purpose. Mazrui (1986 cited in Nwazi, 2017) maintained that public participation and mediation are not alien to Nigeria. Dispute resolution is a universal issue. Every race achieves it in its peculiar way since the law, in the real sense, is a reflection of how people live. Francis (2006) noted that Africa had developed rudimentary and in most cases, sophisticated political, socioeconomic and political institutions, and with developed approaches to conflict management.

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The alternative disputes resolution is a solution to conflict management in the traditional communities and when there is less conflict, community development will be achieved. According to Okeke (2021), in most cases, it has been proven very difficult to use the modern court process and resolve the issues of traditional/kingship disputes, land disputes, conflict about inheritance, family conflicts, and conflict about development projects in the communities. This means that community development will be affected if alternative conflict management strategy is not effectively used. In this direction, the community development in all segments of the communities can be achieve if there is peace in the community and such is possible through alternative disputes management strategies. The alternative disputes management strategy, also known as the traditional judicial institutions in Africa are very strong, less expensive and quick in dispensing justice in the manner that disputants get satisfaction and peace restored.

According to Nwankwo, Obikeze and Akam (2022), the idea of Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) is about the search for, and application of "non-conventional" peaceful methods of settling dispute and resolving conflict situations using the least expensive methods, and in ways that satisfy the parties, as well as that preserve relationships after a resolution might have been reached. It is strategic oriented in the sense that it adapts to situational circumstances, as it strives to find the "appropriate" dispute/ conflict settlement model(s). Basically, persistent dispute/conflict and its correlates of animosity and disagreement are internalized through biased socialization (Whitaker, 2019).

The biblical account of the judgment passed by King Solomon between two women laying claim to a child was accompanied with such a profound wisdom that, till date, it is traditionally considered the philosophical foundation of ADR. ADR is not new to Nigeria but deeply rooted in our culture. Patrick (2023), empirical evidence has clearly shown that a thorough understanding of local knowledge systems, institutions and social organizations is a prerequisite for supporting existing sustainable practices and for enhancing social and technological change. Negotiation and mediation have been integral parts of the traditional African decision making process. Traditionally, the elders play special roles such as managing public affairs, keeping the peace, serving as judges and looking after community welfare" (Mazrui, 1986 cited in Emem, 2022).

Statement of the Problem

The problems associated with litigation in the court system such as delays arising from long adjournments, costs, corruption, technicalities, congestion of case lists in the courts, formalities, etc. impede the realization of the purpose of the courts adjudicative process. Such situation has affected the level of community development. For example, some cases have stayed in court for years, and have generated more problems to the communities. Many land disputes, kingship conflicts, development project conflicts,

inheritance, and family conflict are still unresolved in the court system today. More so, even when there is judicial final judgement on such issues it has generated more enmity and crisis than peace; hence one can win the war, but loose the peace.

Here, access to justice means more than access to courts, and some disputes may not even be suited for the litigation process. The situation has given concern to stakeholders and community leaders; hence the need for alternative dispute resolution mechanism. In this direction, the Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) mechanisms serve as viable alternatives to judicial settlement of disputes in Nigeria in general and Imo State in particular. In all, the biblical account of the judgment passed by King Solomon between two women laying claim to a child was accompanied with such a profound wisdom that, till date, it is traditionally considered the philosophical foundation of ADR. Basically, former court process encourages high level of and sometimes unending litigations.

Based on the above, there is need to illustrate the issues raised using empirical evidence. A practical example is kingship dispute in Obokofia Egbema in Oloshi Autonomous Community in Ohaji/Egbema local government area of Imo State, which started in 2017 and the case is still in court; hence it has not ended till date. Another instance is land dispute in Mmahu Autonomous Community in Ohaji/Egbema local government area of Imo State, involving chief Collins Mgberekpe (late) and Late Pastor Andrew Ossai both from Umuobobo family of Mmahu Egbema Autonomous Community, which has lasted for years and yet to be settled.

Another instance is dispute arising from project development in Okigwe Town Autonomous Community in Okigwe local government area of Imo State. The Okigwe Town Autonomous Community is made up of Ubaha, Ndi-Akwueke, Federal Low Cost Housing Estate and Okigwe Township. The focus is on Ubaha Community that has four villages – Umurido as the senior village, Umuchima, UMuagem and Amaorji village. This crisis is in the allocation of these developmental projects which has resulted in the abandonment of development projects such as building of town hall, bore-hole water scheme, electricity, cottage hospitals etc within Okigwe Town Autonomous Community. Regular litigations on the above dispute have not yielded any positive results.

Litigation has also been criticized as responsible for the high cost of justice delivery, delay and increased conflict among parties who engage in settling conflicts through court process. Though it is believed that alternative dispute resolution based on its historical antecedent can serve as solution to lingling court cases, there is need for this study for more empirical proof. Based on the above, this study raise the research questions as presented in this work below:

Research Questions

1. How has alternative disputes resolution impacted on settlement of kingship disputes in Imo State?

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2. What is the relationship between the alternative disputes resolution mechanism and settlement of land disputes in Imo State?
3. To what extent has alternative disputes resolution affected settlement of disputes arising from development project in Imo State?

Objectives of the Study

The general objective of this study is to examine alternative dispute resolution and community development in Imo State (2013 – 2022). The specific objectives are to:

1. ascertain the impact of alternative disputes resolution on settlement of kingship disputes in Imo State.
2. find out the relationship between the alternative disputes resolution mechanism and settlement of land disputes in Imo State.
3. examine the effects of alternative disputes resolution on settlement of disputes arising from project development in Imo State.

Research Hypotheses

Hypothesis I

H_o: There is no significant impact of alternative disputes resolution on settlement of kingship disputes in Imo State.

H_1: There is significant impact of alternative disputes resolution on settlement of kingship disputes in Imo State.

Hypothesis II

H_o: There is no significant relationship between the alternative disputes resolution mechanism and settlement of land disputes in Imo State.

H_2: There is significant relationship between the alternative disputes resolution mechanism and settlement of land disputes in Imo State.

Hypothesis III

H_o: There is no significant effects of alternative disputes resolution on settlement of disputes arising from project development in Imo State.

H_3: There is significant effects of alternative disputes resolution on settlement of disputes arising from project development in Imo State.

Literature Review

Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR)

ADR is an acronym for Alternative Dispute Resolution. It is a broad range of mechanisms and processes designed to supplement the traditional courts litigations by providing more

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effective and faster resolution process. It is a procedure for the settlement of disputes by means other than confrontational and relationship destroying litigation (Ifedayo, 2005). Today, amicable settlement of disputes is preferred to litigation. The ADR mechanism was introduced into the Nigerian Legal System in the quest for speedy dispensation of justice. Its processes are not only less formal but also less expensive and more expeditious than the court processes.

By this method, a mere apology is enough to bring about settlement. Court processes are bedeviled with inordinate delays, technicalities, strict adherence to the rules of evidence and pre-trial preparations which are not only time consuming and frustrating but also costly, while complex cases are preserved for the courts. Other cases can be resolved through the ADR processes, thereby relieving the courts the time that would have been spent on such cases. Congestion of cases in the courts results in pressure on the judges and poor dispensation of justice. According to (Kabir, 2021; p. 57):

> Litigation has also been criticized as responsible for the high cost of justice delivery, delay and the spilling of bad blood often associated with court cases which is similar to ordinary battle field where there is always a victor and a vanquished (Kabir, 2021).

Alternative dispute resolution is an approach that seek to involve the disputing parties in the resolution of their conflict, thereby increasing the probability that each of them will be more satisfied with the outcome than a situation in which a manager or a trial judge imposes a decision (Oni-Ojo, Iyiola & Osibanjo, 2014). In conflicts of interest, confidentiality in ADR has become increasingly complex and controversial over the years. Thus, ADR has had to forge its own confidentiality protections so that parties may share settlement and other potentially compromising facts with each other without fear that such information will be used outside of the mediation. ADR refers to any mechanism or means of resolving disputes outside the courtroom. It is seen as any method of resolving disputes without litigation.

ADR is the procedure for settling disputes without litigation, such as arbitration, mediation, or negotiation (Findlaw, 2019). These processes can include everything that facilitated settlement negotiation, in which disagreeing parties are encouraged to consult directly with each other prior to some other legal process, to arbitration, which can look and feel very much like a standard trial. The most commonly used ADR systems are negotiation, mediation, collaboration, arbitration, communication, good governance, expert determination, mini-trial etc (Uwazie, 2011).

Lawyers often play a major role in ADR processes, either by advising clients on and representing them in proceedings or by serving as adjudicators, arbitrators, conciliators as well as mediators. ADR refers to a variety of processes and techniques designed to help

disagreeing parties come to an agreement short of litigation. The alternative dispute resolution centre is established to resolve certain disputes arising from labour, employment, industrial relations, work place, etc, between parties using the process of mediation and/or conciliation techniques to assist parties resolve their dispute and arrive at mutually acceptable agreement in less costly, speedy and efficient manner (National Industrial Court of Nigeria, 2019).

Community Development

Development involves not only economic growth but also conditions in which people in a country have adequate food, jobs, and the income inequality among them is greatly reduced. Pearce et al (2016) held that development is a value word, implying change that is desirable. They added that what constitutes development depends on what social goals are being advocated by the development agency, government, analyst or advisers. Community development is a social action process in which people of community organize themselves for planning and action to improve their infrastructure and human capital (Nwapi, Ubah & Onyeiwu, 2023). They identify their common and individual needs and problems, make group and individual plans to meet these needs, execute these plans with a maximum reliance upon community resources.

Community development is about self-help development efforts from members of the community (Nwakoby, 2017). Thus, an urban community that identifies a need for a transformer in its locality and takes initiative to raise the required funds and other resources with which to provide for itself is actually undertaking community development. Similarly, community development can also occur in the rural areas. In fact, many rural communities are often found with one form of community development project or another. These include community roads, markets centres, village squares among others. It is development that is "self-started" or self-engineered within the community.

For Chukwuezi (2000), Community development is a strategy or approach for improvement that is directed towards a specific field of social development requiring action on the part of the people to improve their condition of living, whether social, economic or cultural. Its effect in the field of social development is socially conditioned, since it brings about awareness and the improvement of relationships between individuals, groups, communities and organizations to ensure a sustained development. In this light, from a humanitarian perspective, it may be seen as a search for community, mutual aid, social support and human liberation in an alienating, oppressive, competitive and individualistic society.

Alternative Dispute Resolution Strategies for improve community development in Nigeria

The Alternative Dispute Resolution strategies which the Africans in general and Nigeria in particular vis-a-viz Imo State have adopted in settling dispute that have imparted

positively towards the development of their various communities include but not limited to the following.

1. **Village assembly:** This is also called the general assembly. The village assembly is the highest level of decision making in every community in Igboland. The members of the assembly comprise every adult male up to 18 years and above who is an indigenous member of the community (Nwazi, 2017). During conflict resolution, the village assembly takes decision on issues based on their fat findings. Usually, the village assembly is not a conventional dispute management body, however, in some cases, the elders council will have to invite the village assembly (all male in the community), to seek for their opinion so as to take final decisions and resolve dispute or conflicting matters. The village assembly are normally invited as alternative dispute resolution mechanism mainly when most or some indigenous persons who are living in the town comes to the village during festive period. During this period, some critical issues are settled through the village assembly.
2. **Council of elders:** The council of elders is made up of representatives of each family or kindred, and it is headed by the most senior elder who is originally an indigenous person. Usually, the most elderly person from each family or kindred represents his family or kindred in the family of elders (Ogworoka, 2022). The council of elders in most cases are also called "the aka ji ofors" and the traditional issues of the community are brought to them for decisions and settlement. Issue relating land dispute, cultural/traditional matters, traditional marriage and many other issues are settled by the council of elders. People report matters to them and they invite the person to whom the matter was reported against. They fix date for hearing of the matter based on their fact findings and therefore take decisions. In most cases, people accept their decisions instead of taking the matter to higher level. Issues that were not amicably resolved by the council of elders are taken to the traditional rulers or sometimes to the modern court system.
3. **Titled men:** Every traditional community in Igboland have some titled individuals. They include but not limited to Ozo title holders, Nze title holders, Ekpe title holders and other chieftaincy title holders (Okafor, Ele, Mbam & Orji, 2020). The title holders in most cases settle dispute among their members or people who are directly or indirectly affiliated to them. Unlike the village assembly, elders' council and traditional rulers who settles conflict for the community in general, titled men involved in dispute settlement which involves or affects their members or their affiliates.
4. **Traditional rulers:** The traditional rulers are the final stage in the utilization of Alternative Dispute Resolution in the communities. The traditional rulers with their traditional council handle all manner of dispute within the community which

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affects the community or its members directly or indirectly (Umar, 2018). Here, matters are reported by aggrieved individuals and traditional council through the traditional ruler invites the opposing or second party, a date is fixed for hearing and judegments are taken based on fact findings. Since this is the final stage of alternative dispute management, dispute matters that were not resolved at this stage sometimes are taken to the judicial level based on the Nigerian court system.

5. **Through kinsmen:** Each kindred or family in Igboland have different approach they adopt to settle disputes. Before an issue is taken to the elders council, village assembly or the traditional ruler; it is expected that the kindred of the parties involved in the disputes have handled the matter, and maybe there were no resolution and/or amicable settlement (Uzorka & Adiele, 2021). Based on that, when there is conflict between two people from the same kindred, the kindred intervene and try to resolve the matter. If the conflict is between people from different kindred, the two kindreds are expected to come together and resolve it, but if not resolved, take it to the higher level.
6. **Umuada:** Umuada are indigenous women who are married either outside or within the community. Their parents and siblings are basically indigenous members of the community (Onyia, 2006). Umuada are strong groups when it comes to dispute management because they try as much as possible to intervene and make peace among their parents, siblings, relations and the entire members of the community. Umuada in some cases are invited to handle matters involving women married to the community/family and involving their siblings/parents. They adopt different approaches to make sure that they achieve peace and unity through alternative dispute strategy.
7. **Umunwanyi:** Umunwanyi are women from outside or within the community married to a particular family within the community (Osabiya, 2015). They are the wives to indigenous men and mothers to indigenous children. They try as much as possible to adopt different approaches to make peace at the family level, kindred level and community level. They use their women associations and groups to intervene in dispute so as to achieve peace and unity.
8. **Age grades:** Age grade are people within same age bracket and the seniority ranges within five years among the group. People who are in the same age grade in most cases adopt different peaceful mechanism approach to achieve peace and unity within the age group (Okeke, 2021). In most cases, age grades only intervene and solve conflicting problem within their age group or for people that are affiliated to them directly or indirectly. Unlike the village assembly, council of elders and traditional rulers, the age grade resolve conflicting matters among

their members or between their members and another person, between their group or another person or another group, and sometimes they can report a matter to a higher alternative dispute organs like elders council or traditional rulers.

9. **Secret cult group:** The secret cult in the traditional Igbo community entails a traditional/cultural group that do not reveal all its activities to the general public. It covers but not limited to masquerade group, some traditional title groups and so on (Okafor, Ele, Mbam & Orji, 2020). The above groups like the age grade resolve matters involving their members or their affiliates or issues that are their core area of handling (e.g. masquerade matters for masquerade group). Some higher issues may be reported to the traditional rulers or council of elders for resolution.
10. **Chief priest of various shrine:** Chief priest of various shrines are the traditional servants of the shrines who consult the shrine and interpret issues to the public (Ogworoka, 2022). In some cases, conflicting matters are reported to the shrines and chief priests after consulting the gods, take decision, resolution and judgement on the matter. Sometimes, the matter ends in oath taking for and or against the parties involved.
11. **Community town union:** The town union members are people that are indigenous in a particular community who are residents in the city or abroad. In some cases, town union people are involved in resolving dispute affecting the communities (Nwazi, 2017). Most people respect their sense of judgement and decisions because of their exposure/enlightenment as they live outside the community and because of their lack partisan/affiliation or interest in such conflicting matters. Most times, the town union members or what is popularly called "abroad branches" are utilized for conflict management during festive period like Christmas, Esther and other festive time that bring the people from the town to the village.
12. **The use of masquerade:** The use of masquerade is one of the alternative dispute resolution approaches which exist in some communities in Igboland. In the use of masquerade, the masquerade group uses the masquerade to put palm front in the disputing property (e.g. land) and such property will not be used by any of the disputing groups until the matter is solved (Ubah, 2023). The masquerade group carries out investigation on issues of dispute and in some cases make the people involved to swear an oath before the property could be handed over to any of the group. In Arondizuogu for example, the masquerade is used as the first strategy to calm down the situation and start the peace process which will be taken and settled in the traditional council group (Ubah, 2023).

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Areas where Alternative Dispute Resolution Strategies Could be Used for improve community development

Alternative disputes resolution strategies could serve as solution to the conflicting issues listed below:

1. **Kingship tussle**

   The importance of traditional leadership in traditional African setting cannot be underscored. It is no longer news that traditional authorities do not have official role to play in the political sphere and governance in Nigeria, rather, they serve in an unconfirmed position as consultative body to the Local, state, and Federal government events. A traditional ruler is a person divinely chosen by the divinity or by the people of that community through careful selection process to govern the social, economic and political affairs of that society. It can also be seen as a person from a royal background or lineage from birth with the scepter of leadership to successfully lead the people without fear or favour as it is hereditary. Often times, they are usually individuals or group of people who have the traditional background, knowledge and wisdom to decipher situations when they occur. Several scholars have defined traditional rulers based on time and circumstances. Brems (2010) defined a traditional ruler as a person who by reason of his ancestral position, occupies the throne or stool of an area, and who has been appointed to it in accordance with the customs and traditions of the area, and whose throne has been in existence before the advent of the British in Nigeria. Based on this definition, the traditional ruler has outright executive, legislative as well as judicial powers.

   Some autonomous communities in Imo State are into Ezeship conflict which has affected community development (James, 2017). Such conflict in different communities have led to death of some people and made many not to take active part in development of their communities. Most of the cases relating to kingship are in court with little or no results. The Igbo people have a way of selecting traditional rulers/chiefs considering issues like age, position (first born/family), first settlers and so on. But most communities are into conflict because the above ways were ignored (Anderson, 2014). The Igbo people practice an egalitarian system of living anchored on gerontocracy. Decisions were jointly taken by the elders in the village square.

   The modern way of chieftaincy was unknown to Igbo people before the emergence of the imperialist system of governance in Nigeria. At present, the majority of the villages in the Igbo land in general and Imo State in particular have one challenge or the other linked to chieftaincy/ezeship tussle. It is believed that the use of ADR for settlement of kingship challenges will give positive results,

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more especially if age, position (first born/family), first settlers and so on are considered. Kinship according to Inyang (2018) should not be an issue of election contest since its real traditional for every family village, and community to have a head.

2. **Land related matters**

There are numerous land cases in different levels of Nigeria court system (Lisa, 2012). Most of the cases have lasted for very long time, and there is no hope for settlement; hence the need for alternative dispute resolution. When ADR is used, community development will be achieved as there will be peace and unity. Imo state people consider land as sacred, the believe that land is their sources of strength and power, ancestral heritage, sustains the livelihood, hence, at the beginning of the farming season, a ritual is carried out to appease the gods in charge of harvest to look after their crops from theft, intercede, among others that may impede a huge harvest. Land belongs to the entire family that should be passed from one generation to the other that are yet unborn.

Even though the land is shared with members of the family, the title of the land has not changed but remains the property of the family (Umar, 2018). Several cases involving land matters are settled amicably by the traditional Arbitration in different communities. During land adjudication, if the third party must visit the scene, individual disputant shall provide a goat. The disputant in giving the historical perspective of the land shall mention witnesses who shared boundaries with him. Those witnesses will be invited to answer one or two questions concerning their foreknowledge about the land under dispute. There are two ways of arriving at the judgment (Kenneth, 2021).

One is to give judgment based on the overwhelming evidence before the elders. Second, if there is doubt or suspected conspiracy, the party will compel the other to take an oath indicating that the land belongs to him. Oath-taking in different traditional communities is a way of been vindicating the accused from any allegation. The oath is procured from any oracle (Albert, 2021). However, if the accused survives the oath, the plaintiff is compelled to shave his hair, which was not touched for one year, the land goes to him. On the contrary, if the person dies, the land in question goes to his opponent.

3. **Disputes relating to community development projects**

There exist dispute within communities concerning development project. Community development is concerned with the efforts of community stakeholders in improving infrastructure and rural capital development of the community (Nwaneri, 2011). However, in an effort to take decision on which project to be executed and where to site the project, conflict sometimes emanate

within communities. Such conflict include the issue of grading roads instead of electrification, the issue of building town hall instead of market square, the issue of how community members will finance the project through individual contributions /amount to be paid and the issue of where to locate and put a particular development project.

Most times, the above issues lead to conflict which usually ends up in normal court process; hence the matter becomes unending. It is believed that through negotiation, compromise, consensus, arbitration and other alternative dispute resolution process, conflict in the communities could be resolved and development projects will be carried to achieve the development of the community (Ikechukwu, 2015). Here, there is need for the entire community stakeholders including the elders, women, youths and religious institutions to work effectively and encourage the adoption of alternative dispute resolution so as to resolve conflict emanating from development projects.

Empirical Review

Ajayi, Ajayi and Fashina (2021) focused on Nigeria: face acts in alternative dispute resolution television program: the case of Ìgbìmo Ìpètù. The concept of Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) has largely been under explored from the linguistic lens, particularly in the Nigerian context. This study thus provides a scholarly intervention in this regard. Drawing insights from Brown and Levinson's face theory, four randomly sampled recordings of Ìgbìmo Ìpètù, an alternative dispute resolution television programme on the Ekiti State Television (EKTV) in southwestern Nigeria was analyzed in this study. Focus was placed on the face acts as well as their pragmatic functions in the programme. Findings revealed that bald on-record Face-Threatening Acts (FTA), bald off-record FTA and positive face acts characterized the discursive interaction of participants on the programme. While bald on-record and off-record FTAs were deployed by the panel to criticize and condemn actions considered unsavory on the part of complainants and the accused, complainants and accused persons deployed on-record FTAs to protest/redress the panel's decisions found unacceptable. The panel used positive face acts as a general principle in the interaction, particularly with cooperative accused persons, while accused persons deployed positive face acts to negotiate the discursive interaction and for face-damage repair.

Ogworoka (2022) investigated the use of Alternative Disputes Resolution (ADR) mechanisms in resolving labour disputes in Nigeria. This study examined the theoretical framework for industrial conflict generally. The study conceptualizes labour matters and, seldom, inevitable disputes. It emphasized the mechanisms, flagging the settlement of labour dispute resolution mechanisms while appreciating the effective application of

alternative dispute resolution mechanisms to such matters, particularly as provided under the Trade Disputes Act. Overall, the study queried the undue statutory ministerial interference with labour dispute resolution processes and decisions. The study submitted, and accordingly recommended, inter alia, that although there may be a need eventually to supervise or, otherwise, regulate the settlement processes, like the general rules guiding arbitration and conciliation processes under the Arbitration and Conciliation Act, conferring the Minister with powers to interfere, as in the extant Trade Disputes Act, stands completely out of the mark.

Chukwu and Nwosu (2020) examined the role of lawyers in fostering alternative dispute resolution in the multi-door courthouse against the background of the duties of lawyers in the civil justice system generally and in specific ADR processes. The concept of multi-door courthouse is rapidly gaining currency in Nigeria, having been recently introduced into the civil procedure rules of courts and even backed up by legislation. It underscores the prerequisites of commitment to professional ethics as well as continuing legal education and skills acquisition on the part of lawyers for them to effectively perform their role, which is unquestionably pivotal to the administration of justice via the multi-door courthouse.

Patrick (2023) researched on alternative dispute resolution in Nigeria: breaking new boundaries. The field of alternative dispute resolution is familiar. This may be due to the invariably recurring decimal of conflicts in society's various human and commercial interactions. Arbitration has moved from the stage of rejection to suspicion and acceptance. It is still budding in the Nigerian legal system but creating workable avenues and mechanisms to solve conflicts remains indispensable. Litigation, being the structured court system based on adversarial conversations and determination of the disputes, which is determined by a judgment produced in a win-lose situation, may therefore be defined as the opposite of alternative dispute resolution, which is purely non-adversarial and utilizes the expertise and assistance of a skilled, impartial and neutral third party. Since the 2005 Bank Consolidation Era and the 2008 Financial Crisis, there have been calls for the arbitration of banking disputes. However, these calls are yet to be embraced, given the reactionary response of banks toward referring conflicts to litigation forums. This leaves so much to be desired. As a result, this paper highlights the recent incorporation of alternative dispute resolution into conflict resolution rules and discusses the necessity for appropriately specified procedural frameworks.

Nwazi (2017) focused on assessing the efficacy of Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) in the settlement of environmental disputes in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria. This study presents a detailed and critical review of the Alternative Dispute Resolution as a non-judicial mechanism for the settlement of environmental disputes in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. Ordinarily, disputes whether environmental or otherwise are resolved through

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court processes, but due to delays, costs, publicity and technicality associated with litigation, Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) mechanisms evolved. There are several bitter complaints from the victims of pollution in the Niger Delta region that the courts, conventionally the last hope of the common man, have not lived up to expectations in environmental litigations thereby justifying their recourse to ADR as a better option. A significant number of environmental cases were lost on flimsy reasons. Today, ADR procedures are considered imperative worldwide, and are used by a wide range of courts, tribunals, organizations and victims of pollution in Nigeria as tools for overcoming environmental impasse, improving the efficiency of difficult negotiations, and achieving durable settlements. It takes different forms as arbitration, mediation, conciliation, negotiation, among others. The detailed discussion of these forms, and their advantages vis-à-vis the courts' processes will facilitate an informed appreciation of the use of ADR in the environmental disputes settlement.

Gap in Literature

Based on the empirical review above, the research gaps were discussed in this work. To the best of the researcher's knowledge, none of the previous studies exactly covered the subject matter. The gap could be explained at four different levels which included:

Gap on independent and dependent variables: From the previous studies above, no study was carried out on both independent variable (alternative dispute resolution) and dependent variable (community development) in this work. Previous researches covered related topics but not on the exact dependent and independent variables of this work.

Gap in geographical location: This work covered Imo State and therefore utilizes the local government in Imo State as the focal point.

Gap in the indices in objectives: This work used kingship dispute, land dispute, conflict of insecurity, dispute of development project and conflict between husband-wife for the study. No previous studies used the exact indices as stated above; hence they used only related.

On the basis of the above, it could be seen that the subject matter of this work has not been covered. For that, research gap exist and there is need for this study.

Theoretical Framework

Social Justice Theory

The social justice theory was developed between 1912-1930s by scholars like Hunter Lewis and Thomas Sowell. However, the theory was popularized by John Rawls in (1971). Social justice refers to the fair division of resources, opportunities, and privileges in society. The theorists emphasized fairness in how society divides its social resources. This means that Social justice is a multifaceted concept which focused on creating a fair and equitable

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society. It challenges systemic inequities and strives to redistribute resources and opportunities to disadvantaged groups. The term social justice has many uses and interpretations, but in its most basic and universal sense, social justice is a philosophical construct - in essence, a political theory or system of thought used to determine what mutual obligations flow between the individual and society. As such, social justice is distinct from the concept of individual justice, the latter pertaining only to obligations that exist among individuals. The use of social justice theory was informed by the desire of everybody in the society to get justice, fair play and equity in their dealings with others. It is expected that alternative dispute resolution provide more alternative ways of resolving dispute and ensuring social justice for everyone.

This work was anchored on social justice theory. This is true because recent realities (including unending litigations) have indicated that the former judicial process (the court system) in most cases has not provided social justice, equity, understanding and everlasting peace among conflicting parties. However, the alternative dispute approach from time immemorial, communities have always used the alternative dispute approach to resolve conflict and the approaches of the alternative dispute have already provided better understanding, improved social relations, equity and lasting peace; hence encouraging social justice system. The court system lacks social justice because most times, the poor and the average citizens find it difficult to get justice because they may not have the financial resources to sponsor and receive justice from the judiciary. But, the alternative dispute resolution encouraging social justice says it is less expensive and in line with the culture/tradition of the people. The principles of social justice theory which made the researcher to adopt the theory include:

a. **Access:** Since the alternative dispute is less expensive and in line with the norms and traditions of the people, most people have access to it. Equal access to social goods is one of the most fundamental principles of social justice. This holds that society's resources should be equally available to all.
b. **Equity:** Through social justice system, most people feel belonging in the society. Alternative dispute resolution therefore encourage equity; hence the issue of no discrimination. Equity is the principle that people should have the same opportunities to succeed, despite any past injustices or systemic discrimination.
c. **Participation:** There is high level of participation in alternative dispute resolution; hence the parties involved in conflicting situation and others are well consulted for effective participation before justice is passed. Participation is the principle that everyone in a community should have a voice in making important decisions.

Methodology

In this study, descriptive survey research design was adopted. The population of this study was 1,149,700. The population is presented in the table thus:

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S/N	Name of Local Government	2022 Projected Population
1	Owerri North local government area (For Owerri Zone)	245,100
2	Ahiazu Mbaise local government area (For Owerri Zone)	237,400
3	Isiala Mbano local government area (for Okigwe Zone)	275,100
4	Okigwe local government area (for Okigwe Zone)	184,500
5	Orlu local government area (for Orlu Zone)	198,500
6	Ohaji/Egbema local government area (for Orlu Zone)	254,200
	Total	**1,394,800**

Source: National Population Commission, 2023 census projection

This work used stratified random sampling technique. This technique was used because the population is divided into different subgroups (strata), like the local governments that was used, through which the researcher collected data. The sample size is mathematically derived using Taro Yamane Formula which is expressed as:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Where

n = sample size

N = population

1 = constant

e^2 = error of significance

$$n = \frac{1{,}394{,}800}{1+1{,}394{,}800(0.05)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{1{,}394{,}800}{1+1{,}394{,}800(0.0025)}$$

$$n = \frac{1{,}394{,}800}{1+3{,}487}$$

$$n = \frac{1{,}394{,}800}{3{,}488}$$

$n = 399.88$

Approximately = 400

In this study, the researcher used both primary data, through questionnaire. The data collected in this study was analyzed using Simple Percentage, and Chi-square.

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Data Presentation and Analysis

It should be noted that out of 400 copies of questionnaire distributed to the sampled population, only 370 copies were properly filled and returned. Therefore, the 370 copies is now our sample size.

Item 1: Alternative disputes resolution have been used for settlement of kingship disputes in your community.

Table 1: Responses on if alternative disputes resolution have been used for settlement of kingship disputes in your community.

Option	No of respondents	% of responses
Strongly agree	306	82.7
Agree	30	8.1
Disagree	24	6.5
Strongly disagree	10	2.7
Total	**370**	**100**

Source: field survey (2024)

The above analysis has shown that 82.7% of the respondents strongly agreed, 8.1% of the respondents agreed and 6.5% of the respondents disagreed while 2.7% of the respondents strongly disagreed.

Item 2: There is significance relationship between the alternative disputes resolution mechanism and settlement of land disputes in Imo State.

Table 2: Responses on if there is significance relationship between the alternative disputes resolution mechanism and settlement of land disputes in Imo State.

Option	No of respondents	% of responses
Strongly agree	309	83.5
Agree	28	7.6
Disagree	18	4.9
Strongly disagree	15	4.1
Total	**370**	**100**

Source: field survey (2024)

The above analysis has shown that 83.5% of the respondents strongly agreed, 7.6% of the respondents agreed and 4.9% of the respondents disagreed while 4.1% of the respondents strongly disagreed.

Item 3: Most alternative disputes resolution is the best for settlement of disputes arising from development in your community.

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Table 3: Responses on if most alternative disputes resolution is the best for settlement of disputes arising from development in your community.

Option	No of respondents	% of responses
Strongly agree	299	80.8
Agree	43	11.6
Disagree	14	3.8
Strongly disagree	14	3.8
Total	**370**	**100**

Source: field survey (2024)

The above analysis has shown that 80.8% of the respondents strongly agreed, 11.6% of the respondents agreed and 3.8% of the respondents disagreed while 3.8% of the respondents strongly disagreed.

Data Analysis

Re-statement of Hypothesis One

The hypothesis was tested on three level responses. They include strongly agree, agree, disagree (disagree comprises disagree and strongly disagree).

H_{o1}: There is no significant impact of alternative disputes resolution on settlement of kingship disputes in Imo State.

H_{i1}: There is significant impact of alternative disputes resolution on settlement of kingship disputes in Imo State.

To test this hypothesis, table 1 was used.

Table 4: Observed frequency for hypothesis one.

Option	No of respondents	% of responses
Strongly agree	306	82.7
Agree	30	8.1
Disagree	34	9.2
Total	**370**	**100**

Source: field survey (2024)

Expected frequency = $\frac{\text{All observed frequency}}{\text{Number of observations}}$

= 370/3 = 123.3

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Table 5: Chi-square distribution table for hypothesis one.

Fo	Fe	Fo-Fe	$(Fo-Fe)^2$	$(Fo-Fe)^2/Fe$
306	123.3	182.7	33379.29	270.7161
30	123.3	-93.3	8704.89	70.5993
34	123.3	-89.3	7974.49	64.6755
Total = 370				**406.0**

Source: field survey (2024)

X^2 calculated value = 406.0

X^2 calculated value at 0.05 level of significance with degree of freedom = 3.841.

Decision

Since the calculated value of chi-square, 406.0 was more than the tabulated value, 3.841, the alternative hypothesis was accepted and the null hypothesis rejected. Hence, the conclusion was that there is significant impact of alternative disputes resolution on settlement of kingship disputes in Imo State.

Re-statement of Hypothesis Two

H_{o2}: There is no significant relationship between the alternative disputes resolution mechanism and settlement of land disputes in Imo State.

H_{i2}: There is significant relationship between the alternative disputes resolution mechanism and settlement of land disputes in Imo State.

To test this hypothesis, table 2 was used.

Table 6: Observed frequency for hypothesis two.

Option	No of respondents	% of responses
Strongly agree	309	83.5
Agree	28	7.6
Disagree	33	8.9
Total	**370**	**100**

Source: field survey (2024)

Expected frequency = $\frac{\text{All observed frequency}}{\text{Number of observations}}$

= 370/3 = 123.3

Table 7: Chi-square distribution table for hypothesis two.

Fo	Fe	Fo-Fe	$(Fo-Fe)^2$	$(Fo-Fe)^2/Fe$
309	123.3	185.7	34484.49	279.6796
28	123.3	-95.3	9082.09	73.6585

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33	123.3	-90.3	8154.09	66.1321
Total = 370				**485.5**

Source: field survey (2024)

X^2 calculated value = 485.5

X^2 calculated value at 0.05 level of significance with degree of freedom = 3.841.

Decision

Since the calculated value of chi-square, 485.5 was more than the tabulated value, 3.841, the alternative hypothesis was accepted and the null hypothesis rejected. Hence, the conclusion was that there is significant relationship between the alternative disputes resolution mechanism and settlement of land disputes in Imo State.

Re-statement of Hypothesis Three

H_{o3}: There is no significant effects of alternative disputes resolution on settlement of disputes arising from development project in Imo State.

H_{i3}: There is significant effects of alternative disputes resolution on settlement of disputes arising from development project in Imo State.

To test this hypothesis, table 3 was used.

Table 8: Observed frequency for hypothesis three.

Option	No of respondents	% of responses
Strongly agree	299	80.8
Agree	43	11.6
Disagree	28	7.6
Total	**370**	**100**

Source: field survey (2024)

Expected frequency = $\frac{\text{All observed frequency}}{\text{Number of observations}}$

= 370/3 = 123.3

Table 4.27: Chi-square distribution table for hypothesis three.

Fo	Fe	Fo-Fe	$(Fo-Fe)^2$	$(Fo-Fe)^2/Fe$
299	123.3	175.7	30.870.49	250.3689
43	123.3	-80.3	6448.09	52.2959
28	123.3	-95.3	9082.09	73.6585
Total = 370				**376.3**

Source: field survey (2023)

X^2 calculated value = 376.3

X^2 calculated value at 0.05 level of significance with degree of freedom = 3.841.

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Decision

Since the calculated value of chi-square, 376.3 was more than the tabulated value, 3.841, the alternative hypothesis was accepted and the null hypothesis rejected. Hence, the conclusion was that there is significant effects of alternative disputes resolution on settlement of disputes arising from development project in Imo State.

Discussion of Findings

The impact of alternative disputes resolution on settlement of kingship disputes in Imo State.

It was discovered in hypotheses one that there is significant impact of alternative disputes resolution on settlement of kingship disputes in Imo State. This means that alternative dispute approach is the best way to settle kingship related conflict in the autonomous community level (Whitaker, 2019). For Okeke (2021), most of the cases relating to kingship are in court with little or no results; hence the neglect of alternative disputes resolution. Basically, the Igbo people have a way of selecting traditional rulers/chiefs considering issues like age, position (first born/family), first settlers and so on. But most communities are into conflict because the above ways were ignored (Abdulla, 2019).

The Igbo people practice an egalitarian system of living anchored on gerontocracy. Decisions were jointly taken by the elders in the village square. The modern way of chieftaincy was unknown to Igbo people before the emergence of the imperialist system of governance in Nigeria. At present, the majority of the villages in the Igbo land in general and Imo State in particular has one challenge or the other linked to chieftaincy/ezeship tussle. It is believed that the use of ADR for settlement of kingship challenges will give positive results, more especially if age, position (first born/family), first settlers and so on are considered. Kinship according to Inyang (2018) should not be an issue of election contest since its real traditional for every family village, and community to have a head.

The relationship between the alternative disputes resolution mechanism and settlement of land disputes in Imo State.

Based on research hypotheses two, this work discovered that there is significant relationship between the alternative disputes resolution mechanism and settlement of land disputes in Imo State. This means that the best approach to settle dispute relating to land is through alternative dispute. In Igboland in general and Imo state in particular, Land belongs to the entire family that should be passed from one generation to the other that are yet unborn. Even though the land is shared with members of the family, the title of the land has not changed but remains the property of the family (Umar, 2018).

Considering the nature of land, several cases involving land matters are settled amicably by the traditional Arbitration in different communities. Ogugua (2023) explained the

application of alternative dispute resolution on land dispute thus: during land adjudication, if the third party must visit the scene, individual disputant shall provide a goat. The disputant in giving the historical perspective of the land shall mention witnesses who shared boundaries with him. Those witnesses will be invited to answer one or two questions concerning their foreknowledge about the land under dispute. There are two ways of arriving at the judgment.

One is to give judgment based on the overwhelming evidence before the elders. Second, if there is doubt or suspected conspiracy, the party will compel the other to take an oath indicating that the land belongs to him. Oath-taking in different traditional communities is a way of been vindicating the accused from any allegation. The oath is procured from any oracle (Beky, 2021). However, if the accused survives the oath, the plaintiff is compelled to shave his hair, which was not touched for one year, the land goes to him. On the contrary, if the person dies, the land in question goes to his opponent. For that, the application of Alternative dispute approach on land dispute is the best hence land is historical, cultural, and traditionally based.

The effects of alternative disputes resolution on settlement of disputes arising from development project in Imo State.

The result of the hypothesis three indicated that there is significant effects of alternative disputes resolution on settlement of disputes arising from development project in Imo State. This result above means that through community based discussions, compromise, dialogue and consensus community projects could be executed and there will be peace and improved development (Iledіegwu, 2021). This can be achieved through alternative dispute strategy.

In different communities, conflict and misunderstanding arises on development projects. Such conflict include the issue of roads infrastructure instead of electrification, the issue of building town hall instead of market square, the issue of how community members will finance the project through individual contributions/amount to be paid and the issue of where to locate and put a particular development project (Ekpu, 2018). Some people will support one side and other people will support other side; hence to conflict on development matters.

It is believed that through negotiation, compromise, consensus, arbitration and other alternative dispute resolution process, conflict in the communities could be resolved and development projects will be carried to achieve the development of the community (Ikechukwu, 2015). Here, there is need for the entire community stakeholders including the elders, women, youths and religious institutions to work effectively and encourage the adoption of alternative dispute resolution so as to resolve conflict emanating from development projects.

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Conclusion

In Imo State traditional communities, like it is in other communities in Igbo land, the traditional judicial arbitration used to be very strong, powerful and facilitated social cohesion among the people. The judicial system operates on village democracy anchored on gerontocracy. However, the current judicial system of dispute resolution which is practically in practices with legal backing has proven ineffective, and inability to resolve community based disputes relating to kingship, land-disputes, and development project related projects. The above calls for reutilization, and effective implementation of alternative dispute resolution process.

To achieve community development, it is expected that alternative dispute resolution is the best to be employed to settle different phases of conflict in the communities. The prowess of the traditional council through the traditional rulers, Umuada, age grades, and so on are to be displayed in the mediation process to bring peace and harmony among the people and the community at large; hence achieving community development. More so, reconciliation and mediation are the methods to be employed to settle dispute at the community levels so as to achieve community development. The study concludes that alternative dispute approach is a panacea for dispute resolution in rural communities and if well handled will lead to community development.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made:

1. **Settlement of kingship disputes:** Alternative disputes resolution strategy should be effectively employed in settlement all disputes of kingship. Communities should adopt the Igbo kingship selection strategy which give consideration to issues like age, position (first born/family), first settlers and so on. The government should stop imposition of traditional rulers to the autonomous communities; hence using traditional approach in selecting traditional leadership.
2. **Settlement of land disputes:** The use of alternative dispute approach should be adopted in settling land related disputes. Traditionally, land belongs to different communities, and to different families. People within the different communities and families knew the history of each other and the land of each people. For that, applying alternative dispute resolution approach is recommended since different community stakeholders will be involved settling different land dispute.
3. **Settlement of disputes arising from development project:** Dispute arising from development project is a regular thing within the communities. This is because each side of the community wants to some main projects to be cited within their area. For that, such dispute could best be settled through alternative dispute approach. The communities and people involved in development projects should

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carry everybody along in taken decision on where and where to put certain development projects and conflict from development project should be handled through alternative dispute resolution.

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