

# Policyweekly

## Building Capacity of Local Leaders for Effective Resolution of Communal Conflicts in South-East, Nigeria



### Policy Recommendations

- 1** The government and development partners should collaborate with experts in peace and conflict to map local leaders and build their capacity for mediation in Igbo communities.
- 2** Local leaders and other stakeholders must understand the local context, develop a mediation plan, and focus on resolving the root issues in the conflict.
- 3** The mediators, including the state government, must provide an inclusive negotiation environment to persuade the key disputants in the kingship tussle to resolve the conflict amicably.
- 4** There is a need to understudy the beliefs of Igbos regarding kingship and how to use such knowledge in minimising the kingship tussles in many Igbo communities.

Communal conflicts are a recurring feature of some communities in South-East Nigeria. Data from [Nextier](#) violent conflict database shows that between January 2020 and August 2022, the South-East experienced at least nine violent communal conflicts in which at least 69 lives were lost. Interestingly, some conflicts usually begin in non-violent ways and last for years before taking a violent dimension. For example, Awka, the capital city of Anambra State, is currently experiencing communal conflict over kingship, which has lasted for many years. The kingship tussle is between Igwe Obi Gibson Nwosu, who the Anambra State government recognises as the traditional ruler of Awka, and Chief Austin Ndigwe, who also presents himself as the traditional ruler of Awka and is also recognised by a faction of Awka indigenes as the rightful traditional ruler. Although this tussle has been non-violent over the past years, on Saturday, September 10 2022, [security operatives sealed the palace of Chief Austin Ndigwe and dispersed people](#) who had gathered at the palace to celebrate the new yam festival.

The use of state security apparatus to seal off and disperse people from the palace of the factional traditional ruler is a new twist in the conflict, indicating the gradual introduction of violence in the hitherto non-violent conflict. The kingship tussle in Awka exemplifies many low-intensity communal conflicts across South-East Nigeria. Still, it has not attracted adequate media, academic and policy attention, perhaps because they are yet to turn violent. Reardon, Wolfe and Ogbudu (2021) remark that low-intensity conflicts do not usually draw the attention of policymakers. Kaplan (2017) summarised the poor attention to non-violent conflicts with the slogans: “if it bleeds, it leads... If it’s non-violent, it’s silent”. Yet, the dynamic character of communal conflict and its tendency to gradually become violent informs the need for urgent conflict resolution interventions aimed at nipping it in the bud through mechanisms such as mediation involving local actors. Recent studies have shown the significance of local actors in preempting violence and building peace through mediation (Reardon, Wolfe & Ogbudu, 2021; Ruppel & Leib, 2022). This edition of Nextier SPD Policy Weekly reflects on the need to build the capacity of local leaders for the effective resolution of communal conflicts in South-East Nigeria. It uses kingship tussles in Anambra State as a case study.

**Dynamics of the kingship tussle in Anambra State and challenges of state-led peace processes**

Nnoli (2003) noted that some of the root drivers of communal conflicts are non-material issues such as kingship, chieftaincy and other issues relating to identity, values, culture etc., which polarise the communities and do not submit to conventional methods of conflict management. The current kingship conflict in Awka reflects this thought of Nnoli. Currently, [half of the 191 communities in Anambra](#) state are involved in one form of kingship struggle or the other. Communities such as Umuoji, Alor, Nanka, Oba, Awka, etc., are either with Igwes( as kings are known in Anambra state) are unable to select or elect one after the death of the former Igwe. For instance, the conflict in Awka commenced after the death of Obi Alfred Ndigwe – Eze Uzu Awka I, with Igwe Obi Gibson Nwosu emerging as the Eze Uzu Awka II. According to a local interview respondent, this is in line with the historical tradition of Awka town to rotate the kingship among the three clusters of the 33 villages in Awka (Personal Communication). However, with the support of some members of Awka town, [Chief Austin Ndigwe](#) was said to have declared himself the traditional ruler of Awka - Eze Uzu Awka - even while Igwe Obi Gibson Nwosu is still alive and recognised by the state government as the traditional ruler of Awka. Supporters of Chief Austin Ndigwe advance various reasons why he should be the Eze Uzu Awka and why Igwe Obi Gibson Nwosu should no longer be recognised as Eze Uzu Awka. Some of such reasons include allegations that the current Eze Uzu Awka has desecrated the culture of the Awka people. One of such recent allegations is that Gibson supported the right of widows to perform ‘sand to sand’ rites, that is, women throwing sands in the grave

of their husbands during interment (Personal Communication).

While this conflict has remained non-violent over the years, it has polarised the communities in Awka into ‘us’ versus ‘them’. Some persons support Igwe Nwosu as the rightful Eze Uzu Awka in line with the historical traditions of Awka. While some other persons support that Austin Ndigwe is the rightful Eze Uzu Awka because of some allegations they level against Igwe Nwosu. These allegations include that he breached a code of conduct in the culture and is no Nwosu has violated our code of conduct and the community has the right to reject him” (Personal Communication). This polarisation of the communities over kingship tussle and other related emotive issues is a threat to the peaceful co-existence of communities in Awka, given that complicated issues over groups’ status, symbols and values may compel individuals to act violently even when they are not directly affected by the issues in dispute (Nnoli, 2003).

Successive governments in Anambra State have intervened in the conflict by recognising only one of the traditional rulers and issuing the certificate of recognition to the same. More recently, the Anambra State government intervened by [banning](#) Chief Austin Ndigwe from parading himself as the traditional ruler. However, what is clear is that state intervention has not been able to address the kingship tussle as the factional king is still recognised by some members of the communities in Awka. The official recognition of Igwe Obi Gibson Nwosu by the Anambra State government, the recent sealing of his palace by security agencies and the banning of Austin Ndigwe from parading himself as the traditional ruler tend to make some persons perceive the state as being involved in the conflict on the side one party and as an attempts to impose a traditional ruler. As noted by one respondent: “It is the community that crowns the traditional ruler, not the government; the government gives a certificate to who we choose”. Kingship tussles in many African traditional societies can be fierce and destructive if not handled well. For instance, the deaths of South Africa’s AmaZulu King, Goodwill Zwelithini, on March 12, 2021, and the regent Queen Mantfombi Dlamini Zulu on March 24, 2021, led to a non-violent struggle on who to take over [the throne of Zulu](#), until the High on March 2, 2022, confirmed the identification and nomination of Prince Miszulu as the successor to the Zulu throne.

**Resolving the kingship tussle in Igbo communities through enhancing the participation and capacity of Local leaders**

Peace-building succeeds more when local people are involved in the process because they are enabled and supported to build their own peace (Ruppel & Leib, 2022). This underscores the need to mainstream local leaders to resolve many ongoing conflicts over kingships in many Igbo communities like Awka. One way through which local leaders can play a significant role in resolving the ongoing conflict is through mediation, in which they act as impartial interveners assisting parties

in a dispute to achieve voluntary settlement of their differences through non-violent means. Local leaders are sine qua non for resolution of the kingship tussle in Igbo communities through mediation. This is because, beyond their nearness to the people, local leaders command respect, and their opinions are acceptable to the people by virtue of their position. The people's nearness, influence and acceptability are critical ingredients required for effective mediation in the conflict (Godongs, 2006).

### Recommendations

Given the complex nature of the kingship tussle among the Igbo tribe in Nigeria, the following recommendations are put forward for successful peace programming.

#### **Build capacity of local leaders in mediation:**

Enhanced capacity of local leaders in mediation is key to successful mediation and conflict resolution. Therefore, the government and development partners should collaborate with experts in peace and conflict to map local leaders (traditional, religious and opinion leaders) in Igbo communities, build their capacity in mediation and deepen their involvement in resolving the kingship tussles. This view is supported by recent empirical studies, which demonstrated that the enhanced capacity of local leaders in mediation translates to successful peace programming in their communities (Reardon, Wolfe, & Ogbudu, 2021).

#### **Understand the local context of the conflict:**

The peace process in local communities must be pursued within the context of local needs, historical culture, traditions and structures of the particular local communities. Therefore, local leaders and other stakeholders acting as mediators must understand the local context and develop a mediation plan that takes cognisance of the local environment and focuses on resolving the conflict's root issues.

**Adopt inclusive peace programming:** The mediators, including the state government, must provide an inclusive negotiation environment to persuade the key disputants in the kingship tussle to demonstrate a willingness to resolve the conflict amicably without resorting to violence. Furthermore, where such disputes are resolved by the court and not through the traditional mediation process, there are always two parties, and it requires the new throne to work to unite the community. For example, after being cleared to inherit the throne by the court, the current King of Zulu, during his coronation, declared that he would work to unite the Zulu nation.

### **Researching Igbo Republican Nature and**

**Monarchial system:** There is a need to understudy the beliefs of Igbos regarding kingship and how to use such knowledge in minimising the kingship tussles in many Igbo communities.

### Conclusion

Communal conflicts are sometimes rooted in non-material issues about kingship, values and symbols. This makes such conflicts almost intractable. Many ongoing kingship conflicts among Igbos of South-East Nigeria require urgent attention from critical stakeholders for timely resolution. Local leaders are critical in resolving the conflict. They should be rightly positioned to do so by enhancing their capacity in mediation to effectively address the roots of the kingship tussles in many communities.

### References

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# Weekly Update

**THE ELECTRICITY HUB** **Power Dialogue**

**Wed, 28th September 2022**  
@5:00pm - 6:30pm

**Thought Pyramid Art Centre,**  
18 Libreville Crescent, Wuse II,  
Abuja

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### Are State-Owned Electricity Markets the Future?

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Reflections on Anambra State, Nigeria

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Doing Well Out of Violence

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**Conflict Actors in Zamfara State:**  
Doing Well Out of Violence

Zamfara State has been on the edge of a precipice in the last couple of years because of escalated banditry.

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Its Implications for Nigeria's 2023 General Elections

Vol 8 Issue 21 August 9th - 12th, 2022

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A fair democratic election is held in an atmosphere free of mortal dangers and ideally free from vote rigging.

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Bringing History into the Resolution of Banditry in Zamfara State

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**Bringing History into the Resolution of Banditry in Zamfara State**

Protracted banditry has undermined human and livelihood security in Zamfara State in recent years.

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Its Potential Effects on the 2023 General Elections

Vol 8 Issue 21 July 19th - August 1st, 2022

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**Attacks on Nigeria's Electoral Empire:**  
Its Potential Effects on the 2023 General Elections

General elections in Nigeria will take place on February 2023, which is seven months away.

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Exploring Other Steps to Peace in Anambra State, Nigeria

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Exploring other Steps to Peace in Anambra State, Nigeria

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Zamfara Residents:  
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To Bear or Not to Bear Firearms?

Gun violence has become a terrible source of security threat across the world. However, nations respond to the threat posed by firearms abuse differently.

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Violence in Advance  
Living in the Mind of the Enemy

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Living in the Mind of the Enemy

Ambush has been a regular feature in Nigeria's terrorism and banditry landscape.