

**PROCEDURAL MANUAL  
ON  
TRADITIONAL CONFLICT MANAGEMENT  
TECHNIQUES IN AFRICA**



**Author: Jonathan Tim Nshing**  
Co-author: Uchenna Rowland Onyeizu  
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## **ABOUT THIS MANUAL:**

This manual seeks to outline the different traditional institutions and mechanisms that are used in conflict management/resolution and prevention in the African setting. It is by no means, an exhaustive procedure on conflict management but an informative guide that examines the roles of each of the institutions/methods and symbols that some selected villages in Cameroon (Bafanji, Bambui, Bawock, Ndzah & Oku) and Nigeria (Ikwuano) used in the past and that are still used today.



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## TRADITIONAL CONFLICTMANAGEMENT METHODS/TECHNIQUES

### What is Conflict?

It is an inevitable aspect of human interaction, conflict is present when two or more individuals or groups pursue mutually incompatible goals. Conflicts can be waged violently, as in a war, or nonviolently, as in an election or an adversarial legal process. When channeled constructively into processes of resolution, conflict can be beneficial. It can also mean Violence *and* War. (USIP).

Conflict could also be a result of human greed. For the reason that scarcity of any resource is always a fact of life, there would always be a persistent competition to have a greedy control over these resources.



## **What is Conflict Management?**

A general term that describes efforts to prevent, limit, contain, or resolve conflicts, especially violent ones, while building up the capacities of all parties involved to undertake peacebuilding. It is based on the concept that conflicts are a normal part of human interaction and are rarely completely resolved or eliminated, but they can be managed by such measures as negotiation, mediation, conciliation, and arbitration.

Conflict management also supports the longer-term development of societal systems and institutions that enhance good governance, rule of law, security, economic sustainability, and social well-being, which helps prevent future conflicts. A closely related term is peacemaking – although peacemaking tends to focus on halting ongoing conflicts and reaching partial agreements or broader negotiated settlements. It can also refer to Conflict Prevention: measures taken to keep conflicts from escalating into violence and resolution which focuses more on addressing the root causes of conflicts by focusing on common interests and goals.

## **The Indigenous Concept of Conflict Resolution (Definition)**

The concept of traditional conflict resolution mechanism has been defined as the “capability of social norms and customs to hold members of a group together by effectively setting and facilitating the terms of their relationship... sustainability facilitates collective action for achieving mutually beneficial end.” The author goes further to affirm that over the years, there have developed inter group conflict over land; an increasing reliance on formal



shifts in methods of conflict resolution in that mediation seems to have given way to more confrontational statutory approaches based on formal court procedures. Despite all these, traditional methods still prevail, especially at the grassroots level. (Fred-Mensah, 2005).

## **Types of Conflicts in the traditional African Setting**

There are different kinds of conflicts in the traditional African society. These different types of conflicts have been defined below for the purpose of this manual as follows:

- Ethnic/tribal
- Religious
- Personal/Family
- Land disputes
- Succession disputes
- Witchcraft
- Ritual killings, kidnapping
- Others

### **Ethnic/Tribal Conflicts**

This refers to conflicts between one ethnic group or tribe against another. The underlying reason for fighting is to boost the superiority of one ethnic group or tribe or village over another that is considered different from it. Such conflicts are usually physical, psychological or spiritual. The reason for fighting is to protect the identity of the group among others and may involve



destruction and looting. They may fight for reasons such as land, language, culture, etc.

### **Religious Conflicts**

In this type of conflicts, the main reason for discord or fighting is to advance or protect the beliefs, way of worship (rituals, sacrifices, etc) of one group over the other. Inherently, one group considers its religious beliefs to be more superior to that of the others. Such fighting can be between groups or within a group and can also be motivated by the quest for position, privileges, money, etc.

### **Personal/Family Conflicts**

This refers to conflicts between an individual and themselves, and between individuals within a family. The motive for fighting can be for position, belief, money/property, etc. Family conflicts also include marital disputes between spouses, children in a particular compound, family members, amongst others.

### **Land disputes**

This refers to fighting between individuals and groups such as families, ethnic groups/tribes and villages over parcels of land that one group considers to be theirs. These groups can fight to obtain or grab more land, keep their land and boundaries among others. They usual fight over resources like farmland, grazing land, water sources, shrines, places of worship, etc.

### **Succession Disputes**

These refer to conflicts that arise as a result of an individual or group of individual laying claim on the ownership of property such as a house, compound, farmland, cattle that have been left behind by a deceased person or persons. Such fights are usually within or between the members of the same family, clan, tribe/village, etc.



## **Witchcraft**

This refers to the art of using mystical or diabolic powers to cause another person to suffer physical, psychological, material or spiritual loss or damage by a more spiritually conscious person often times negatively. This can be an illness, madness, curse, poverty, etc. that is believed to have been caused by a witch or wizard on another person through obscure means such as the use of body parts, like hair, belongings such as clothes or in ways not rationally understood. This can result in madness or death among other things. This can also be manifested through kidnapping of people for ransom or to be used for sacrifice. This can also mean sorcery.

## **Ritual killings/kidnappings**

Ritual killings refer to the killing of people as a form of sacrifice, maybe, to please ones' ancestors or spirits. This kind of killing used to be common in the past, in some tribes; for instance, when the ruler died, he was often buried with a live person. However, this has been replaced by the sacrifice of animals. Other reasons for such killings were to obtain spiritual powers so as to be able to dominate another person or a tribe or village.

## **Other traditional conflicts**

The list of traditional conflicts is inexhaustible. Other types of conflicts here include: jealousy, envy, poisoning, looting, cursing, swearing, insults, lies-telling, sorcery, cattle/goat theft, marital issues, etc.



## **Traditional Conflict Management Techniques/Methods**

- Traditional rulers
- Secret Society (kwifon/ngomba,Otu-Nzuzo)
- Village/traditional councils
- Quarter head
- Oath swearing
- Rituals/sacrifices
- Use of plants
- Animal sacrifice
- Pouring of libation
- Religious leaders/churches
- Village Developmental groups
- Acknowledgement of guilt, remorse and compensation
- Calabash
- Others

### **Traditional rulers:**

Traditional rulers play a pivotal role in the settling of disputes in the village. The traditional ruler is at the summit of conflict resolution in the village. He/she is the leader of the community, usually through hereditary. It is believed that they have some supernatural powers and are a link between the living and the ancestors or spirits in the village and carry out certain duties on behalf of their communities and sit as a the final judge in the case of a dispute in the village. They are usually the official



representatives or intermediaries of their villages vis-à-vis other villages. In some villages they are called *fons* whereas in others they are simply referred to as chiefs, among other titles.

### **Secret Society (kwifon/ngomba/Otu-Nzuzo)**

Secret societies are executory organs under the authority of the traditional ruler and are usually attached to his palace. They usually act as an advisory body to the ruler. They regulate law and order in the community and ensure the enforcement of the decisions of the traditional ruler. They are usually made up of elderly persons who are considered to be responsible. In some villages, they are called *kwifon/kwifoin* while in others, they are known as *ngomba*; these names, however, vary from place to place. The organ is an exclusive club and is composed entirely of men.

### **Village/traditional council**

Village or traditional councils are under the authority of the ruler of the community and hierarchically below the secret societies. Traditional councils act as a court of first instance; this is where all disputes are referred to for settlement. Usually, an aggrieved person (plaintiff) lodges a complaint with this organ and the defendant is summoned for hearing.

Also, the conflicting parties are invited for hearing where a decision is taken or referred to a higher body for arbitration such as the traditional ruler or the secret society. The traditional council is usually headed by the *quarter head* or an appointed person.



## **Quarter head**

The *quarter head* is the head of a quarter/neighborhood in the village, ascension to this position is often hereditary. However, in other places, they are appointed by the traditional ruler or the administration; they are usually men. They oversee the smooth functioning of the village and can take some minor decisions without consulting the traditional council. But all major decisions are taken only by the entire traditional council. When they are unable to resolve a dispute, they normally forward it to the traditional council, secret societies or the traditional ruler for final arbitration or mediation.

## **Oath swearing**

Parties to a dispute are sometimes required to swear an oath; this is usually when one of them wants to prove that they not guilty. It is strongly believed that persons who swear to a piece of land which is not rightfully theirs will end up cursed by the oath – this is regarded as guilt. The resultant effect is that they can get mad, blind and even die among others. Swearing is a solemn and sacred act performed in the presence of a sooth-sayer or diviner.

## **Rituals/sacrifices**

Rituals and sacrifices are often performed as part of reconciliation or during ceremonies aimed at cleansing an individual or the land of evil. These sacrifices are mostly done with animals such as goats and fowls. However, in the past, human beings were usually sacrificed during such ceremonies to cleanse the land of evil believed to have been committed by the villagers or its rulers. These ceremonies are



usually accompanied by ritual incantations, as well.

### **Use of plants**

Plants play a very central role in peace-making in African communities. They are often used to symbolize peace and as landmarks to demarcate boundaries between villages and plots of lands. All public ceremonies are usually graced with plants such as palm fronds, peace plant, etc. For use as village boundaries, the peace plant (*nkeng*), the fencing tree, bitter leaf plant and the fig tree are the ones that have mostly been used.

### **Pouring of libation:**

In conducting rituals and sacrifices, there is often the pouring of libation to please the ancestors and the spirits not to bring malediction upon the land. This is usually the action of pouring wine (often palm wine) on the ground accompanied by other actions like: incantations; calling on the names of gods, spirits and ancestors to accept the gifts being offered; and sometimes the offering of food – all these believed to calm the spirits of the ancestors and the gods who will in turn forgive the offender(s). and show mercy on the land.

### **Religious leaders/churches**

Churches and other religious leaders (such as imams) often play very important roles in fostering peace in their communities. With the advent of Christianity, religious leaders have now often served as mediators in their communities to bring about peace.



## **Village development groups**

Village development groups or meetings are often developmental in nature and work to bring about developmental projects such as roads, bridges, schools, health centers, etc. These developmental groups, through these projects, ensure social cohesion in the communities, thus bringing in peaceful coexistence among the villagers and sometimes called upon to mediate in conflicts.

## **Acknowledgement of guilt, remorse and compensation**

The acknowledgement of guilt is at the core of the peaceful resolution of conflicts within the community. When an offender acknowledges guilt or responsibility for causing pain, death, destruction, etc. on another person, they are often expected to step up to their crimes. By accepting guilt, they atone for their offences and are expected to apologize and pay reparation/compensation as a sign of remorse. This is commonly in kind, like a gift or community service, or cash (money).

### **Calabash**

The calabash oftentimes is filled with palm wine with leaves of the peace plant (*nkeng*) jutting from its mouth or opening. This combination (calabash, palm wine and *nkeng* leaves) signifies fertility, the yearning for more children (including twins) and also for abundant harvest from their farms.

### **Others**

Other peacemaking mechanisms include: palace emissaries, known as *nchindas*, sharing of wine from a single cup to the contending parties; use of food; embracing each other as a sign of peace; payment of fines; sharing and eating of kola nuts, etc.



## PROCEDURE FOR TRADITIONAL CONFLICT MANGEMENT IN BAWOCK

### ROLES OF ACTORS/INSTITUTIONS

#### THE TRADITIONAL RULER (FEU/EZE)

He is the village head and rules over the village; he is responsible for maintaining peace in the village and also advises his people to always live in peace. In case of any problem, he uses some of his notables to solve the problem. He serves as the liaison between his village and the administration. He is locally called *feu*.

#### THE SECRET SOCIETY (NGOMBA)

The secret society in Bawock is also known as the *ngomba*. These are specially chosen people in the village. Their main function is to maintain peace and order in the community. They move around the village, especially at night, and conduct sacrifices to cleanse the village.

#### THE TRADITIONAL COUNCIL (SAHDINGOH)

The traditional council in Bawock is called *Sahdingoh*. They are responsible for overseeing the functioning of the village. Their peace and justice commission is charged with the handling of disputes in the village. They are also empowered to withdraw disputes that have already been sent to court for adjudication. They represent the *feu* in the village and judge all cases in the palace and are also charged with the maintenance of peace in the village. When the traditional council is unable to handle a dispute, it is then referred to the *ngomba* and/or the *feu*.



### **THE QUARTER HEAD (NTAH-TANLAH)**

The quarter head in Bawock is known as *ntah-tanlah*. They are charged with the daily functioning of their quarters and are directly accountable to the *feu*, and are his personal representatives at the quarter level. They report serious matters of the quarter to the palace. They are also charged with passing on complaints from the village to the *feu* and passing on instructions from the *feu* to the village as well as settling minor cases of disputes through the mediation and arbitration of their justice and peace commission.

### **QUARTER COUNCIL**

They assist the traditional council in the quarter and play a similar role as that of the traditional council at the level of the quarter in terms of peacebuilding and conflict management by hearing disputes and passing judgment on matters brought before them.

### **WOMEN'S GROUPS**

They are usually mothers and they use the peace plant in all matters of the village in which they have a role to play. They also see into it that the palace wives are well organized and help to keep the palace clean. They equally convey information from the palace to the rest of the women in the village and also maintain peace in their midst.

### **YOUTH GROUPS**

They help to keep the palace clean and also do discuss development issues in the village and pay constant regular visits to the palace. They also help to maintain peace in the village and keep guard at the palace.

### **THE COURT MESSENGERS (CHEDFEU)**

They are responsible for communication in the village; they spread



information throughout the village using the gong. They are locally called *chedfeu*. They also follow-up the villagers to ensure that they respect village public holidays, otherwise known as "Country Sunday" or *ntonte* as it is locally known. They are always in the palace to receive and interview visitors/strangers. They also vet strangers or visitors to the palace before presenting them to the *feu*.

#### **THE QUEEN MOTHER (MOFEU)**

The *mofeu* has as responsibility to take care of the *feu* in the palace. She also conveys some very important messages from the women to the *feu*. They are usually the *feu*'s wives including his "mothers", that is his late father's wives that he inherited. They provide the *feu* with emotional and psychological balance to carry out his duties.

#### **THE FAMILY**

Peace is maintained at the level of the family through the family head, who is usually a man; the family heads manage all conflicts at their level and if the problem is beyond their ability to resolve, they then refer the matter to the *ntah-tanlah*.

### **SYMBOLS USED IN TRADITIONAL CONFLICT MANAGEMENT IN BAWOCK**

#### **Peace Plant (*Feukang*)**

The *feukang* is used in the village and palace by almost all groups. Whenever there is a problem in the village, the *feukang* is used to symbolize peace. It is also used for land demarcation and to announce events in the village.



### **Fig tree**

The fig tree also known as *ncheh* is mostly used for land demarcation and in sacred places to carry out rituals. It is also used to determine truth between people who are locked in a dispute, to prove who among them is lying. The leaves have to produce a particular pattern when displayed on the ground in order for truth to be ascertained among the disputing parties.

### **Calabash**

It is locally known as *ndeteh*. It is essentially for the pouring of libation during rituals and to offer palm wine to people as a sign of peace. In most cases, the calabash is topped with leaves of the peace plant. It is also used during weddings.

### **Kola nut**

The kola nut is a fruit from the kola tree that gives a bitter-sweet taste when chewed. It is usually accompanied by palm wine or corn beer. It is used for rituals and offered to people, especially strangers, as a sign of a peaceful welcome.

### **Pouring of libation**

The pouring of libation is usually accompanied with most of the items above and is used to appease their gods and ancestors; similarly, it is used to seek for fertility on behalf of families and on the land for abundant harvest; it is also used to find out the culprit in a dispute between two parties. Palm wine is usually what is used to pour libation; but, corn beer or water can also be used.

### **Palm wine**

It is essentially used in the pouring of libation, drunk as a symbol of reconciliation or as a sign that the conflicting parties will not go



back to fighting.

## PROCEDURE FOR TRADITIONAL CONFLICT MANGEMENT IN BAMBUI

When there is a dispute between two or more people in the quarter, the quarter head called the *taa-teh* is first of all consulted. The matter is judged at this level and a decision rendered. If the verdict is not accepted by either the complainant or the defendant, they have the right to appeal at the level of the traditional council. The matter is then referred to the traditional ruler or the traditional council for hearing. If the matter proves to be beyond the competence of the *fon* or the traditional council, it is then referred to the secret society (*ngomba*), which is the highest decision-making organ in the village. If the dispute revolves around a murder or witchcraft, for instance, the suspect (which may be a wizard or witch) if found guilty, will be banished from the village. This usually entails a procession of the entire village taunting the culprit with items like wood ash and 'garden egg' (stoning the culprit with the garden egg and blowing the ash behind his/her body) and escorting them right to the village boundary. Thereafter the culprit is expelled by blowing the wood ash on him/her and throwing the egg behind them; this usually signifies that he/she has been exiled from the village and should not return under any circumstances.

### ROLES OF ACTORS/INSTITUTIONS IN BAMBUI

#### Traditional Ruler

The traditional ruler or the *fon* is the head of the village and does not directly take part in the resolution of conflicts. He has at his disposal, institutions that are directly responsible for managing conflicts on a daily basis and reporting back to him. These institu-



tions are examined in detail below.

### **Secret Society or *Ngomba***

The *Ngomba* is a final decision-making body and usually receives matters referred to it by the traditional council and/or the *fon*.

### **The traditional council**

The traditional council is an institution where disputes, such as land disputes, are settled between people. The traditional council usually settles land disputes among people by planting the peace plant on the accepted boundaries.

### **Sub-Chief (*tse*)**

The sub-chief is someone who is hierarchically next to the *fon*, in the absence of the *fon*, he is expected to handle all disputes in the village. They are spread out in the village to resolve problems or disputes among people.

### **Quarter Head (*Taa-teh*)**

The quarter head is usually nominated by the inhabitants of the quarter to see into the management of their problems.

### **Queen mother (*Ma-Nfor*)**

The queen mother is an elderly wife of the *fon*; she takes care of the new wives of the *fon* and settles disputes among them.

### **Court messenger (*nchinda*)**

The court messenger, also called *nchinda*, is a guard at the palace and if any villager or visitor is looking for the *fon*, the *nchinda* will be the one to announce the person's presence to the *fon*.

### **Women's Groups (*Takumbeng*)**

The *takumbeng* is a secret society comprised only of women and has similar roles to that of the *ngomba*. When there is a serious



problem or crisis in the village, they come out and walk in files through the village, brandishing poles (palm fronds, sticks, etc.), peace plant and calabashes bearing the leaves of the peace plant; their coming together with the items they bear symbolize their peaceful approach to conflict resolution.

### **Twins**

When a woman gives birth to twins, another woman who is usually a traditional healer will use *alligator pepper* to rub on the body of the new mother; she will also use the peace plant to gently pat the young twin babies as a sign that is anticipated to make them grow up well or recover from illnesses – these gestures are expected to bring about peace in the family and the village in general.

## **SYMBOLS**

### **The calabash (*futem*)**

It is locally called the *futem*. It was used to carry water in the past and is still used today to symbolize peace.

### **Peace Plant (*nkeng*)**

The *nkeng* or peace plant is used to demarcate land boundaries between two parties; it is also used to celebrate the birth of twins in a family. The *nkeng* (green with white patches) represents the palace and in a land dispute for instance, represents an injunction from the *fon* and the normal one (all green) represents an injunction from the quarter/villagers and is used for twins.

### **Egg plant**

The egg plant is also called *naaria* and is often used to exile an offender, especially in a murder or witchcraft case.



**The alligator pepper**

It is also called *alakata pepper*. In the past, it was used as first aid to revive someone who collapsed; it was chewed and sprayed on the person's body and the person was reanimated. It was also used to find out the truth between two disputing parties. A soothsayer would use it and ask the parties to swear, the liquid from the pepper will mysteriously enter the eyes of the person who was lying and that would be proof that the person lied and by so doing, exonerated the honest disputing party.

**Kola nut**

Kola nut is usually shared in the family or village to symbolize peace. Usually, by accepting kola nut, it shows that the disputing parties have reached an amicable settlement. Furthermore, it shows that they are ready for peace and rejecting an offer of kola nut symbolizes enmity or war.

**Palm Wine**

It is usually used in almost all traditional rites, drinking it together shows agreement. It is also used to pour libation thereby symbolizing peace.

**Raffia leaves**

The soft tissue of the raffia palm is used as an injunction in a land dispute. When it is placed on a piece of land, it means that nobody is supposed to trespass or work on the said piece of land.

**Pouring of libation**

The pouring of libation is usually done when someone falls sick. The pouring of libation, usually palm wine, is to ask for the mercy of the ancestors, because it is believed that the sick person's ill-luck or illness is a result of wronging of the person, their relative(s) or



ancestors. Palm wine or *muluh* as it is locally known, is poured into a traditional cup and given to the sick person. All the family members drink from that same cup and the rest is poured onto the ground for the ancestors as a sign of atonement for wrongdoing. After this, the sick person is expected to get well thereafter, and happiness and peace returns to the family and the entire village.

**What an offender does to show remorse and what the community does to show that they have forgiven an offender in return:**

In the case of a crime, such as adultery, if it was not intentional, the offender is taken to the shrine bringing along customary items (like a goat and palm wine), wherein cleansing is then carried out. Once blood is spilled, there must be cleansing and the community must know what the offender did so that they can be able to accept them back into the community.

In the case of witchcraft, the offender is isolated until such a time when he or she comes to beg for forgiveness or confess and this is done in public and the offender is reintegrated into the society. The items provided by the offender include: goats, palm wine and raw food (such as baskets of groundnuts, and corn grains that can be planted, since the offender is being reintegrated back into society symbolizing rebirth). Cleansing is only done when the crime is connected with the spilling of blood.

In the case of theft, the thief is expected to confess in public. In the case of destruction of property, such as houses, when the offender owns up to the offense, they must be cleansed – this is because it is believed that they brought a curse on themselves and the entire community by that misconduct.



If a tenant commits suicide inside the house he/she is renting, the owner of the house is expected to offer certain items for cleansing, which is done on them. To cleanse the house, the house owner is expected to bring a goat and all the persons who saw the deceased's corpse are asked to bring fowls.

In cases where mob justice is exacted on a thief, if the thief shows contrition, he/she can run to the palace where they will be referred to the *ngomba* (the institution that is responsible for carrying out such rituals).

## PROCESS OF TRADITIONAL CONFLICT MANAGEMENT IN OKU

### Family/Family Head

The family head is called *babeh*. All serious problems in the family are solved by the family head. If he cannot be able to solve them, and if the family is a religious family, then they can go to the church to resolve it. On the other hand, a non-religious family takes the problem to the village head. They take part by giving advice to the disputing family members.

### Quarter Head/Village Head

The village head is called *banteck*. He assists the traditional ruler to solve minor conflicts of various types in the quarter. If he cannot resolve the conflict, it is forwarded to the traditional council.

### Traditional Council

It sits every *ngokse* (week or after seven days). The conflicting parties are usually present before the council with their witnesses. If the case is a land issue, the council sends emissaries to the land in question to get its history from those farming around that vicinity. After the visit, the council on its next session will pass its verdict. If one of the parties is not satisfied with the verdict, it is sent to the



Secret Society (*Kwifon*): The Traditional Council can levy fines.

### **The Traditional Ruler/Fon/ Village Head**

Generally the *fon* plays an advisory role in conflict management. When a conflict is reported to the village head, he calls the quarter heads. The conflict is normally presented first to the quarter heads. Most often, those involved in the conflict are present. The village head with his quarter heads will then try to resolve the issue amicably. If the *fon* is unable to solve it, he sends it back to the traditional council. Reason why these conflicts are brought to the *fon* is because if they are taken elsewhere, without the consent of the *fon*, they will be returned. The *fon* cannot levy fines.

### **Secret Society (*kwifon*)**

This is the supreme council or traditional court that passes the final judgment. Once the *kwifon* passes its judgment, no other traditional institution can object. Usually if the case is complicated, for instance in a land dispute, the *kwifon* sends its *nchindas* (envoys or representatives) to do a proper investigation. It must involve the traditional council and the traditional ruler. Once the *nchindas* return, the *kwifon* passes out its verdict. If conflict continues on the said piece of land, the *kwifon* comes with its injunction to put on that land until a peaceful resolution is done. Once put, nobody can trespass on the land again. The *kwifon* can levy fines.

### **OTHER ACTORS/SYMBOLS:**

We have palm wine drunk not poured on the ground, as in the case of libation, elephant stalks used to send away thieves, mediation by elders, wine jugs, and fines collected from conflicting parties. We also have observers, witnesses and *kenluu* (Traditional Women's Group).



### **Religious Groups/Institutions**

Some churches pray for those who have accepted their guilt in a conflict so that peace can reign. The Oku people believe that God created man in his own image. Religious leaders mostly play a role only when the problem concerns members of their religion.

### **Development Groups**

Elite development groups usually call conflicting parties to try to settle disputes.

*Nchindas* (emissaries or messengers of the *fon* and *kwifon*)

They receive information from the *kwifon* and the *fon* to the community and take the response from the community back to the *fon* and *kwifon*. Village folk also talk or communicate to the *fon* via the *nchindas*.

## **SYMBOLS**

### **Peace Plant**

It is also called *kelang* or *nkeng* and generally signifies peace. It is used by the *kwifon* as an injunction on people who have

disrespected it. When seen on any spot as an injunction, it is

understood that there has been a dispute or trespassing. It is also used by the *fon* and individuals as well, to maintain peace between people and quarters.

### **Nkeng and Calabash**

A combination of the peace plant (*nkeng*) and the calabash (*futem*) when seen anywhere means that that spot should not be tampered with. Such a place usually signifies a shrine or sacred/holy place.

### **Injunction**

It is a pole (bearing three stripes on it) that has been put on a piece of land. This is usually placed somewhere by the *kwifon* to indicate



that nobody should occupy that spot. It is usually placed only by the *nchindas*. (*kwifon's* envoys)

### **Fig Tree**

This is used to demarcate land boundaries between people or between the communities. It is known in Oku as *kighum*.

### **Other plants**

We also have the following plants that are symbolically, used to settle disputes in Oku: raffia palm leaves, king grass, bitter leaves, *milk stick* (also known as boundary stick or tree).

### **Pouring of Libation**

Palm wine is usually poured on the ground (floor or soil) to make peace between individuals or the community and the ancestors; often, the said individual or community on whose behalf it is poured supposedly had a problem with the ancestor. Furthermore, palm wine is poured to the gods of the land to make peace at the start of every farming season. Finally, after a conflict has been resolved, the traditional council gives out palm wine to the conflicting parties to symbolize peace.

### **Oath Swearing**

This is done only at the palace and nowhere else in Oku. During times when conflicts are too difficult to be resolved, people are bound to swear in order to attest their truthfulness. Symbolically, it is done by gently "patting the *fon's* legs" or "tapping the Royal Seat". The guilty party usually experiences dire consequences afterwards.

### **Rites/Sacrifices**

When the *kwifon* has placed an injunction, rites must be performed to cleanse the land before the injunction is removed on the said



piece of land; if anyone goes ahead to remove the injunction on their own, a curse will fall on that person.

### **Others symbols**

Boundary pillars are mainly used in demarcating land boundaries in the case of land disputes.

## **PROCESS OF TRADITIONAL CONFLICT MANAGEMENT IN BAFANJI**

### **Settlement of Family Problems**

According to the Bafanji tradition, family disputes can be settled using palm wine. Standing inside the house, the person

performing the ritual, throws palm wine outside for a good person and inside for a bad person. Afterwards, conflicting parties drink from the cup and all family members present drink as well as a sign of the peaceful resolution of the conflict.

If the problem arises again or in case of a problem that is difficult to resolve, it will be taken up to the *tanteh*

### ***Quarter Head ( tanteh )***

Both parties appear before the *tanteh's* compound. He can either warn them seriously or sit with a five-member panel to arrive at a decision. After listening to their problems, both parties will answer a few questions and the *tanteh* will ask them if they want the issue to end at that level or be forwarded. If anyone opposes, the matter will be taken to higher quarters for resolution.

### **Traditional Council**

The traditional council or the *grandfrednduah* settles conflicts that the *tanteh* could not solve. In case of land issues, it uses "boundary sticks" (locally known as *mafondo*) to differentiate boundaries. If



either of the parties is not satisfied, the matter is taken up to the traditional ruler.

### **The Traditional Ruler or Village Head**

Once the matter is brought before the village head, the *fon* sends a "town crier" or *nchinda* (messenger) to call the conflicting parties to appear before him. After hearing from them and passing his judgment, he will ask them to take the traditional oath. The oath requires both of them swearing on the Royal Seat to guarantee that the conflict will not repeat itself. It is believed that once sworn, any party that goes against it will face dreadful consequences afterwards. If the conflict concerns bloodshed or human life, the village head forwards it to the *ngomba* (secret society).

### **Secret Society (*ngomba*)**

This is the highest authority in the village and often dubbed the "heart of the village". The *ngomba* sends out its own *nchinda* (messenger) with a pole (stick), a bundle of kola nuts and some palm wine to the area where the conflict is. After an investigation, the conflicting parties are sent to the shrine. There at the shrine, half-naked, they swear. After the customary rituals at the shrine, they are sent back home with the belief that the guilty party will experience grievous reactions shortly afterwards.

The calabash, locally known as *ntang*, is mostly used to carry palm wine in occasions like wedding ceremonies, or in occasions when traditional rites are performed or disputes are being settled.

### **Plants**

Plants like the *nkeng* and fig trees locally known as *ncheh* are used to demarcate boundaries. The *nkeng* is further used as a sign of peace during all public manifestations.



## **Animal Sacrifices**

*Nchindas* bring along wine especially palm wine and goats that are slaughtered to perform traditional sacrifices, which are believed to settle disputes between the living and the dead; that symbolizes what the forefathers of Bafanji practiced a long time ago and it still prevails today.

**Oath Swearing:** After an oath is taken, anybody that goes against its rules may die.

## **Cam wood and kola nut**

It is rubbed by a bereaved family to signify that the deceased was good natured and that he or she should take his/her kindness alongside with their soul to their final resting place. Kola nut is shared in almost all village gatherings as a sign of peace.

## **Village Development Groups**

The village development meeting settles minor disputes or can go to the *tanteh* to settle disputes or go to sacred traditional places or shrines (e.g. the *mamangieh*).

## **Elders**

Village elders cut the top of a new calabash and cam wood is put inside to be used to rub on villagers as a sign of peace.

## **Women**

Women use the *nkeng* or peace plant to signify peace; this is usually done symbolically by waving the *nkeng* in the air.



## Significance of the Palm wine and *nkeng*

When someone carries palm wine in a calabash with *nkeng* in it, it means the wine is reserved either for the *tanteh* or a twin mother.

### Twin mother

If the carrier of the palm wine is going to the "baby shower" of twins (*mefiah*) (traditional ceremony where newborn twins are bathed), the *nkeng* is removed from the calabash containing the palm wine. It is then placed on the fence surrounding the house (a makeshift house in which the twin mother of the newborn twins temporarily stays; the mother of the twins can stay in that fenced house for up to one year). The mother is compelled to stay in the fenced house until the children are two years of age, during which period she is expected to have no sexual contact with her husband.

### Palace

At the palace, when a lady carries a bucket of water with the *nkeng* in it, it means that the water is meant for the *fon* only.

### Palm wine tapper

When a palm wine tapper bears a calabash of palm wine with *nkeng* leaves in it, only special people can greet him like a prince, princess, *nchinda* or a twin.

Generally, the twin in the Bafanji community is regarded as bearer of joy, happiness and peace to the village folk.

N/B: The Bafanji people also use kola nuts, palm wine etc. in conflict resolution.



## PROCESS OF TRADITIONAL CONFLICT MANAGEMENT IN NDZAH

### **Traditional ruler**

The traditional ruler is known as '*Tokben*'. He is the ruler of the village. He maintains peace and order in his village and protects his people. He is the liaison between the village and the administration and represents the village in all public functions or delegates someone to do so on his behalf.

### **Secret society (*Ngomba*)**

They handle the spiritual life of the community and carry out oaths and rituals on behalf of the village. They help in demarcating land boundaries. In case of a boundary dispute between Ndzah and a neighboring village, the *ngomba* will liaise with that of the neighboring village to bring about a peaceful settlement of the dispute. They also function as village guards and ensure the implementation of traditional laws.

### **The traditional council**

The traditional council is known as '*kumben*.' They oversee the general administration of the village and work in close collaboration with quarter heads and the *ngomba*. Their main role is the maintenance of peace. They monitor the activities of the village and inform the people of whatever or whoever is coming into the village. They handle matters that are above the competence of the quarter heads. They also initiate dialogue between Ndzah and other villages. All resources such as land, water sources, etc. within the village are closely monitored by the traditional council.



### **Quarter Heads**

The quarter heads are known as '*kumteh*.' Their main duty is to maintain peace in their respective quarters and handle problems or disputes within their competence. When a problem is above their competence, they send it to the traditional council. Quarter heads are not members of the traditional councils, but its auxiliaries. They can also meet the *fon* directly with a problem in their quarters in the informal meetings (*njangi*) that they hold with the *fon* periodically.

### **Women's Group**

It is also known as '*temkbeng*', they handle women's issues including disputes that may arise within them.

### **Youth groups**

The youth groups, better known as '*kanwand*', help to protect the village against enemies and by so doing help foster peace and development in the village.

## **SYMBOLS**

### **Pouring of libation**

During the planting season, the *ngomba* cleanses the village by pouring libation using herbs to call on the ancestors to give the village good harvest thereby chasing away hunger and forestalling strife and maintaining peace in the land.

### **The fig tree**

It is known as '*njung*'. It is essentially used to demarcate the boundaries between Ndzah and neighboring villages.



### **The peace plant**

It is known as *nkeng*, and is used to symbolize peace in all village activities and gatherings.

### **The Calabash**

It is known as '*ntemm*.' It is used to transport palm wine from the quarters to the palace and is also used for cleansing and in the pouring of libation. It is used in sacrifices for the cleansing of evil spirits and 'bad visitors' to the village.

### **What an offender does to show remorse and what the community does to show that they have forgiven the offender in return:**

When a complaint is given to the quarter head (*kumteh*), he immediately summons his council and a date is fixed for the hearing of the case. The sanctions passed depend on the gravity of the crime committed. In the case of murder, the murderer is asked to pay the *ngomba* certain items (in sets of seven), as listed below:

- Seven goats
- Seven jugs of palm wine
- Seven baskets of food (*achu*)
- Seven crates of beer
- Seven thousand francs
- Seven trunks of firewood

After the payment of these items, there is the cleansing of the offender at the site of the crime and the person is warned never to repeat their crime again, else he/she is banished from the village. When the matter concerns home burglary, for instance, the offender is thrashed in public by the youths and if he/she has already consumed the stolen item or sold it, they are asked to retribute or repay.

In the case of witchcraft, known as '*zeeg*', there is the taking of an



This is handled at the quarter level by the quarter head; the 'kumteh'. Once a fine or penalty has been paid, the person is forgiven and warned never to repeat the act again; the community too is also warned never to mention the incident again. If the offender commits the same act again, they are banished from the village permanently.

### PROCESS OF TRADITIONAL CONFLICT MANAGEMENT IN COMMUNITIES OF IKWUANO LGA, ABIA STATE-NIGERIA

When there is a dispute within the family, it is first of all reported to the family head, then to the rest of the family including their kindred and then to the community. It can also be taken to the village head to handle depending on its magnitude. Also, the two conflicting parties are required to dance around the village square; this dancing is done with the waist essentially and is known as the *ndi-nkwo-ukwu*. This dancing is considered as a sign of reconciliation between the two conflicting parties. Fowls especially the cock and goats are usually used for sacrifice and if the accused is guilty, the consequences of the oath that was taken through the sacrifice of these animals will be known usually within a period of six months. Every segment of the community causes conflicts including the men, women and youths.

The traditional council on its part and the chief priest are the institutions/persons that are most responsible for conducting cleansing rituals in the community. Also, the churches and the elderly usually play a very important role in conflict management by offering to mediate and offer advice. As for the role of plants in traditional conflict management in Ikwuano, the *ofo*, (symbol of God), the *oji* (the traditional Igbo kola nut) and the *ojikarisi* (complete set of kola-nuts) are the ones most commonly used to welcome people for



peaceful negotiations or to settle all other disputes in the village.

### SYMBOLS

The symbols often used in conflict resolution in communities of Ikwuano Local Government Area are as mentioned above kola nut (*oji*), *ndi-nkwo-ukwu* (waist dance) and the garden egg among other symbols.

The *ofo* (made up of a piece of tree) symbolizes the link between *Chukwu*-the High God and humanity, the living, the dead and those yet to be born (*njaka*). *Ofo* plays a role in prayers, ritual sacrifice, contact of spirit patrons, magical uses, naming ceremonies, determining calendars of events, affirming moral uprightness, sealing covenants, legitimizing states or office, decision-making, settling disputes, taking of oaths of administration and the promulgation and enforcement of laws. *Ofo* is also a symbolic object; it is the sacred symbol of truth, justice, law and authority. It plays a role in sacrificial rituals, prayers, oath-taking, pronouncing judgments, deliberating policy within the family or community and involving blessings or curses.



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**Author:** Jonathan Tim Nshing is a school counselor by training with over twelve years working experience in the North West Region of Cameroon. He is also the Executive Director of the Cameroon Youth Partnership; providing consultancy in youth related issues. He holds a Master's degree in Applied Community Change from Future Generations Graduate School, WV, USA (2015 Class). He is also a Peacebuilding practitioner.

**Co-Author:** Uchenna Rowland Onyeizu is an internationally recognized development professional with over 14 years experience in Social Development work. He has worked as an independent consultant providing services in Health Systems Strengthening, Health Management Information System, Development/Analysis of Policies, M&E, Baseline Studies, Impact Assessment and Partnership Assessments. He is a graduate of Future Generations Graduate School, WV, USA (2014 Class) and also a University lecturer.

For inquiries, contact: [timnshing@yahoo.com](mailto:timnshing@yahoo.com)

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