

Examining the Role Played by Chiefs, Headmans, Sabhuku`S in Consolidating Peace in Zimbabwe

Bhunu Francis Frank F

Aurthor, Snr Researcher

Abstract

The study endeavours to examine the role of chiefs, headmen, and Sabhuku in managing political conflict for national peacebuilding in Zimbabwe. Traditionally, conflicts were resolved by a council of chiefs, Sabhuku, and headmen. Chiefs, Headmen, and Sabhuku have long been active in mediation by balancing the process of mediation and tribal disputes, and in some cases have led in restoring peace and reconciliation endeavors. Traditional leaders have historically played significant roles in Zimbabwean society and their involvement in consolidating peace has been crucial. Traditional leaders in African indigenous tribes especially in Zimbabwe have been involved in dispute resolution for many decades. However, compared to work in the field of formal conflict resolution, their contributions to conflict resolution have not been as well documented. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews. 20 key informants were purposefully sampled using a qualitative approach. A case study approach was employed with the use of interviews. Secondary data sources and desk reviews were also used in the study in order to supplement primary data from interviews. The qualitative method of data analysis called the thematic approach was used in this research. The findings also suggest that traditional leaders settled the majority of the issues by sitting down with the opposing parties and conversing with them to find a resolution to the conflicts. The study's findings indicate traditional leaders' impact on political conflict resolution and peacebuilding procedures. The majority of the participants in this study had experience with local conflicts and have understanding of traditional practices. The study concludes that Chiefs, Headmans, and Sabhukus shape the processes of political conflict resolution and peacebuilding in Zimbabwe.

Keywords: Headman, Chiefs

Introduction

In Zimbabwe, the institution of traditional leadership holds significant historical, cultural, and social importance. Traditional leaders as custodians of Indigenous knowledge and customs play a crucial role in the country`s social fabric. Beyond their traditional responsibilities, they have emerged as influential agents of peace in Zimbabwe`s post-colonial era. This article explores the essential role of traditional leaders in consolidating peace within Zimbabwe and the significance of their contributions to the nation`s progress and harmony. Traditional leaders have historically played significant roles in Zimbabwean society and their involvement in consolidating peace has been crucial. These traditional leaders have deep-rooted connections with local communities and possess extensive knowledge of local customs, traditions,

and conflict-resolution mechanisms. They have contributed to peace consolidation in Zimbabwe through firstly mediation and conflict resolution. Chiefs and headmen have acted as mediators in resolving disputes and conflicts within their communities. They possess the authority and respect necessary to bring conflicting parties together, listen to their concerns, and facilitate dialogue toward peaceful resolutions. Secondly chiefs and headmen have the power to settle minor disputes at the local level, preventing them from escalating into larger conflicts. By addressing issues related to land disputes, inheritance, boundaries, or interpersonal conflicts, they ensure that tensions are resolved promptly and maintain harmony within the community. Thirdly chiefs and headmen play a proactive role in preventing conflicts from arising in the first place. They promote peaceful co-existence, encourage dialogue, and foster community cohesion. Through their leadership, they establish and reinforce norms and values that discourage violence and promote understanding and cooperation. Chiefs and headmen also act as advocates for peace within their communities. They actively promote non-violence, tolerance, and reconciliation, disseminating a message of harmony and unity. They engage in public awareness campaigns, organize peacebuilding initiatives, and encourage community members to participate in activities that foster peace and social cohesion. Lastly, traditional leaders are custodians of cultural heritage and traditions. By preserving and promoting cultural practices, they contribute to a sense of identity and belonging which can be instrumental in preventing conflict based on ethnic, religious, or cultural differences. Their role in maintaining cultural diversity and harmony is crucial for peace consolidation. Particularly in Africa and Asia, traditional leaders have been given significance in dispute settlement, and they are frequently seen as being capable of navigating the procedures. In Zimbabwe, traditional leaders play a significant role in dispute resolution. They are frequently viewed as strong leaders who know how to handle the negotiation process. In African institutions, they are also highly revered and valued as an essential component of African culture. A new constitution for Zimbabwe was enacted in 2013 (Constitution of Zimbabwe), which among other things acknowledges the function of the institution of traditional leadership that coexists with contemporary state structures. This new Constitution firmly limits the behaviour of traditional leaders while enhancing the institution's function and status.

This article seeks to untangle the role of chiefs and headmen in managing political conflict for peacebuilding in Zimbabwe. The article is organized as follows. The first part of the article identifies the many methods of handling political conflicts. This is followed by an evaluation of the ability of traditional leaders to carry out their responsibilities in times of political strife. The third part explores the extent of traditional leaders' impact during political dispute resolution and peace-building procedures. The last part seeks to conclude the main themes covered in the study and offers some recommendations for areas requiring additional research and action. A theoretical perspective on traditional structures and political-related issues is also discussed in this article since political disputes, particularly during elections, are a frequent occurrence in both rural and urban populations in Zimbabwe. The management of these politically motivated and ethnically motivated disputes in Zimbabwe under a traditional form of leadership is still not well understood. Therefore, methods of resolving such disputes among residents who hold opposing opinions and belong to different political parties within the same chiefdom must be researched. Traditional authorities in rural areas are crucial in resolving disputes of this nature. To demonstrate its applicability, the relationship between political conflict, peacebuilding, and the function of traditional leaders in managing political conflicts at the national level must be untangled. Few researches have been conducted to determine if traditional institutions are less effective than alternative institutions at protecting people from exploitation and granting them rights in order to consolidate peace and harmony in

Zimbabwe. For instance, in Liberia, women who are in conflict with men are more likely to choose the legal system if they have access to it because they are satisfied with the outcomes of their cases. Similar to this, women in Papua New Guinea are more likely than males to choose to use community police as a dispute resolution alternative, and they are also more likely to do so when given the chance. Establishing gender-inclusive village development communities transforms individuals' perceptions of women's political participation as compared to areas where they don't exist. The majority of the studies considered suggest that traditional governance systems are less effective at resolving conflicts for excluded groups, especially women, than progressive institutions. However, it should be noted that in other situations, it has been demonstrated that customary institutions perform better than the alternatives now available in terms of resolving disputes and establishing the rule of law as opposed to rule by law. As evidence, Rwandans exhibit more support for women's rights in conflict settlement issues in villages with robust traditional consultative councils. Rwandese expect customary councils to perform better than elected councils in eradicating social divisions and promoting reconciliation, which is another example of this. This suggests that in some circumstances, traditional institutions may perform better than alternatives in establishing the rule of law. The limitations of theories that assume established institutions always perform worse than alternatives in terms of upholding individuals' rights in conflict resolution are highlighted by these most recent studies. The quality of conventional leaders' own and alternative systems will determine how well they function in comparison. Traditional systems of government and power are not always inferior, and neither are contemporary ones. The primary goal of this inquiry was to examine the functions traditional leaders perform in Zimbabwean indigenous groups' attempts to resolve disputes.

11. Methodology

The methodology that formed the basis of this paper was largely qualitative. Village leaders, senior citizens, protocol employees, and traditional chieftain officials were among the group that were targeted in the study that was conducted. However, in order to take feasibility and practicality into account, a purposive technique was used. The case study research design, which served as the study's main framework, was exclusively qualitative in nature. This was unquestionably brought about by the study's major emphasis on traditional leaders, chiefs, and Sabhukus, foremost among them foremost Musarurwa of the Varozvi in Zimbabwe's Chiomba District, Mashonaland East Province, and Chief Mutasa of Manicaland Province. 20 participants were chosen as a sample. Furthermore, to collect the data, semi-structured interview schedules were employed. To guarantee the accuracy and dependability of the data gathered, a pilot study was conducted. In order to evaluate and improve the instruments—an interview guide and a Dictaphone effectiveness testing—five participants were selected for the pilot. The study's primary data were gathered through semi-structured interviews. It should be highlighted that the interviews in this study were beneficial since they enabled the researcher to obtain more information from participants—something that a questionnaire does not—than a questionnaire could. In this study, both primary and secondary data were used. To establish relationships between the study's findings and the review of written materials or contents, the gathered data was examined. As a result, the researcher used content data analysis to unearth important findings and support the study's claims and conclusions. Due to the nature of this research, purposeful sampling was adopted by the researcher because it was not theoretical to analyse the complete population. Additionally, descriptive statistics were used to examine the gathered data, largely using Excel and by hand. Last but not least, a contrast analysis is provided by

the values produced from the data analyses described here. Thus, by focusing on traditional leaders' contributions to managing political strife and establishing peace in Zimbabwe.

111.Ethical Considerations

The researcher was highly conscious of the need to uphold ethics. The researcher obtained informed consent from the participants orally. Information papers explaining the specifics of the study were distributed to participants in advance. The information as well as the identity of the participants was regarded as very confidential. Some interviewees agreed to participate in this study under the condition of anonymity; this could be because disclosing their true identities could have serious repercussions. The researcher did not share the information obtained for any other purposes other than for this research only. The study's purpose and justification for being carried out were explained to the traditional authorities. No one was ever compelled to engage in this research, as the researcher assured all compliance and participation was voluntary. At any time during the study, participants were able to leave. Additionally, the researcher did not provide incentives to motivate participants because doing so might have jeopardized the validity of the study. Data falsification and manipulation were strictly prohibited, and the researcher made sure that the research's conclusions were correctly communicated to prevent data breaches that would have resulted in retaliation against the research's respondents and participants.

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Nation-building is a complex process that involves various stakeholders and institutions working together to foster unity, stability, and development within a country. Participants indicated that in Zimbabwe one crucial institution that plays a significant role in conflict management and nation-building is the traditional leadership system particularly the chiefs, headmen, and the Sabhukus. Chiefs, Headmen, and Sabhukus have long been an integral part of Zimbabwean society acting as custodians of tradition, culture, and governance. Their influence and authority derive from both customary and statutory law making them key players in local governance structures. Chiefs in Zimbabwe have traditionally served as mediators, arbitrators, and custodians of justice. They possess the knowledge, experience, and influence to resolve disputes within their communities. Their primary objective is to maintain harmony and social cohesion which are essential for nation building. Additionally, the majority of participants showed knowledge of the numerous methods for resolving disputes among neighbours. 83% of study participants said they were aware of the methods for resolving disputes among neighbours. Traditional leaders have the power to reconcile conflicting parties, promote dialogue, and enforce customary law to address grievances. Customary law forms the foundation of the chief's authority in conflict management. It is a system of rules, norms, and principles that regulate social behaviour and resolve disputes. Chiefs as custodians of customary law apply these principles to settle conflicts and maintain order within their jurisdictions. They ensure that justice is served and decisions are made in accordance with cultural traditions and values. Chiefs also collaborate with formal institutions such as the judiciary and local government to enhance conflict resolution and nation-building. Through partnerships and dialogue, they bridge the gap between customary and statutory legal systems, fostering a more inclusive and holistic approach to conflict management. This collaboration helps to ensure that the interests of local communities are represented and addressed effectively. While chiefs play a crucial role in conflict management there are challenges and limitations they face. Some of these include limited resources, inadequate training in conflict resolution techniques, and political interference. The traditional authority's responsibility included a

variety of duties that were all centered on meeting the requirements of the society they were responsible for governing. Most of the participants, including the key informants, emphasized during the interviews that who plays what role in a conflict resolution process depends on the social organization of the Zimbabwean communities. Although traditional leaders are the main topic of this article, certain disagreements are resolved at the family level and can only be referred to the chiefs' council if a peaceful and agreeable resolution cannot be found. Additionally, the patriarchal nature of traditional leadership can sometimes limit the representation of marginalized groups and hinder inclusive decision-making processes. Effective conflict management contributes to nation-building by creating an environment conducive to peace, stability, and development. When conflicts are resolved peacefully social cohesion is strengthened and communities can focus on collective progress. Traditional leaders as key actors in conflict management, contribute to the overall process of nation-building by fostering reconciliation, promoting justice, and preserving cultural heritage. The chief is the highest level of tribal leadership who steps in to resolve disputes and serves as the village's overall leader. Family disputes can be brought before the Chief by disgruntled parties. The majority of people are happy with traditional leaders since they work with government officials to bring development to their villages, it was added during discussions with key informants. Just because the traditional leader places a higher premium on the welfare of the community members, many communities in Zimbabwe still respect the institution of traditional leadership. Traditional authority continues to exert a sizable social, cultural, and political force, especially in indigenous populations. It was concluded from the semi-structured interviews with community members that the traditional leader aids growth in the community while discussing the significance and role performed by traditional leaders in dispute resolution. Participants in the interview drew attention to the fact that in contrast to formal courts, the complainants and accused in these Zimbabwean communities' indigenous conflict proceedings do not have formal counsel. Participants, especially the key informants, emphasized that bargaining and mediation were the most often employed dispute resolution techniques. The majority of participants claimed that traditional courts were the primary dispute-resolution methods used by indigenous people in their communities. Participants described how arguments can occasionally become more serious and then reach the level of regular courts, particularly when they are of a familial nature. The parties involved in such situations may desire the assistance of chiefs or headmen. In order to mediate such a situation, the victim reports the incident to the chief or headmen, who then calls the other party in for a hearing. Generally speaking, reported issues are resolved behind closed doors (depending on how delicate the situation is). The only decision-makers in delicate situations are the chief and the headmen. Additionally, both parties present their arguments, after which the jury considers the evidence and renders a decision. Another participant clarified that land conflicts are the most common usage of this procedure. In such a case, parties are given the opportunity to present their reasons before the mediator (Chief) permits them to agree on how to resolve the conflict within a specific timeframe. Participants reported that traditional leaders use conflict resolution techniques that emphasize finding solutions rather than pointing fingers, and the mediator facilitating this process provides guidance based on traditional norms and beliefs. Despite the fact that their function is crucial, as participants have described it, there are difficulties. A few community members mentioned that they were unaware of the presence and function of traditional leaders, which means that they might not be able to use these leaders effectively in the event of a dispute. Despite the fact that these actors and mechanisms do exist, interviews with participants in these processes of conflict resolution have shown that the majority of them are undertrained. The total effectiveness of traditional authorities in indigenous communities is diminished by a lack of knowledge. Some participants

view the integration of indigenous knowledge into traditional leadership roles as an antiquated custom from the past. However, despite the fact that some participants consider indigenous dispute resolution techniques to be archaic, particularly when it comes to their reliance on traditional leaders, many indigenous people still desire to use them. Even while their importance in dispute resolution has been acknowledged, some community members, particularly young people, disregard the decisions made at the tribal office. The youngsters choose only the contemporary or formal methods of resolving disputes, such as the police, courts, and/or legal systems, and see traditional knowledge of conflict resolution as problematic. This is due to the teenagers' perception that the indigenous methods are archaic. Additionally, because young people do not view decisions taken at the level of traditional authorities as binding, the traditional council occasionally finds itself forced to refer parties in dispute to court. Respect for traditional leaders among community members undermines this institution's legitimacy and stature. A second hindrance to the efficient resolution of conflicts was found to be the lack of necessary staff and resources, including chairs, tables, computers, and personnel. Some participants believe that conventional leaders are prejudiced and corrupt and that they frequently favour some participants over others when making decisions. This lack of respect for the institution tends to hinder the authorities' ability to function effectively, which slows the pace at which the indigenous communities of Zimbabwe can find effective answers.

Conclusion

The role of chiefs in managing conflict is vital for nation-building in Zimbabwe. Their historical authority, rooted in customary law, gives them the trust and respect needed to resolve disputes. By collaborating with formal institutions traditional leaders can bridge the gap between traditional and modern governance systems. However, addressing the challenges, they face and ensuring inclusivity in decision-making processes will be essential for their continued effectiveness. Recognizing the contributions of traditional leaders in conflict management is crucial for fostering unity, stability, and sustainable development in Zimbabwe. Traditional leaders in Zimbabwe are vital actors in consolidating peace and stability within the nation. Their historical significance, deep knowledge of local contexts, and community influence enable them to mediate conflicts, promote peacebuilding initiatives, advocate for social justice, and preserve cultural heritage. Recognizing the critical role of traditional leaders and collaborating with them is essential for fostering sustainable peace, social cohesion, and development in Zimbabwe. By harnessing their wisdom and leadership, Zimbabwe can continue on its path towards a peaceful and prosperous future. In Zimbabwe, the institution of traditional leadership holds significant historical, cultural, and social importance. Traditional leaders as custodians of indigenous knowledge and customs play a crucial role in the country's social fabric. Beyond their traditional responsibilities, they have emerged as influential agents of peace and stability in Zimbabwe's post-colonial era. Chiefs and Headmen have historically played a significant role in Zimbabwean society and their involvement in consolidating peace has been crucial. These traditional leaders have deep-rooted connections with local communities and possess extensive knowledge of local customs, traditions, and conflict-resolution mechanisms. The results suggest that the institution of traditional leaders and the techniques they employ for resolving disputes are comprehensive and consensus-based, and frequently involve all parties to the dispute as well as the entire community. As a consequence, opinions from participants support the claim that traditional leaders' contributions to conflict resolution in Zimbabwe are still crucial. The different role actors were explored as well as the causes of conflict, which included disagreements over beliefs. The implementation of dispute

resolution techniques by traditional leaders at the forefront, such as negotiation and mediation, was studied. Traditional institutions and authorities still have the potential and capacity to effectively uphold law and order, carry out security duties, and promote social cohesion in such tiny communities, despite the difficulties. Moral principles and belief systems that have been passed down from one generation to the next served as guidance for traditional leaders. In order to bring about peace, these authorities employed procedures like arbitration and mediation. These traditional leaders have, however, occasionally encountered contempt from neighbours. The majority of the participants in this study had experience with local conflicts and had an understanding of traditional practices. The study also explored the shortcomings of traditional authority institutions as they carried out their roles in peace-building

Recommendations

Despite opposition, the majority of participants believed that the traditional leaders' level of knowledge and abilities for resolving disputes and fostering peace were sufficient. However, given the difficulties, more powerful methods for resolving disputes shouldn't be disregarded.

- Parties to the settlement processes should receive training in diverse dispute-resolution techniques in order to reduce the ineffectiveness of traditional authorities in indigenous conflict resolution. They should be made aware of issues pertaining to ethics, etiquette, and cultural norms. In workshops and conferences hosted within these communities, this can be accomplished with the help of recognized expert individuals from each community. If implemented, these recommendations may lessen the issue of disrespect during conflict resolution procedures and lessen the degree of bias while making judgments. The significance of the traditional leaders' role in conflict resolution will be enhanced and afterward reclaimed for younger and future generations if these above-explained alternatives demonstrate their viability.
- In order to reduce the traditional authority' incompetence in resolving indigenous conflicts, parties to the resolution Policymakers and service providers must to consider the best ways to evaluate native conflict resolution systems. The creation of new indigenous-specific dispute resolution methods by indigenous people should be respected and supported by mainstream policymakers. Government dispute discussions should include traditional leadership, and they should be given a role. The fact that government has encroached on the indigenous system necessitates that government train traditional leaders about indigenous conflict-management in a very sensitive manner.
- To assist local conflict resolution efforts, a nationwide network for indigenous conflict resolution should be established. Such a network might do research on optimal practices and disseminate that information, encourage information sharing between traditional leaders and indigenous practitioners, and give traditional authorities knowledge for enhancing conflict resolution outcomes. Additionally, the perception among younger generations that indigenous knowledge is out-of-date would decline if it were taught in schools at both the primary and secondary levels.

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