



## Assessing the Influence of Community Participation on the Effectiveness of Community-Based Conflict Management in Delta State

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### Abstract

This research investigates how community participation influences the effectiveness of community-based conflict management in Delta State with a study focus on Ethiope East Local Government Area of Delta State. Guided by Social Capital Theory and Cultural Theory of Conflict, the study explores the extent to which trust, social relationships, and cultural norms shape grassroots conflict resolution. Data were generated from a random sample of 100 respondents using a structured questionnaire. Results show that inclusive participation, such as mediation by elders, family involvement, and community forums, plays a pivotal role in resolving disputes, promoting harmony, and reinforcing collective solidarity. However, the findings also highlight persistent obstacles, including inadequate resources, reluctance from disputants, and competition between indigenous mechanisms and the formal judicial system, which limit overall effectiveness. To address these issues, the study recommends stronger government engagement through capacity building, material support, and policy recognition of community-based approaches.

**Keywords:** *Community-Based Conflict Management (CBCM), Social Capital, Cultural Legitimacy*

### Introduction

Community participation is increasingly seen as a vital element in effective conflict management, especially at the local level where disputes are deeply rooted in social and cultural realities (Curcija, Breakey & Driml, 2019). This shift away from state-driven, top-down approaches to a more locally-grounded, inclusive framework is based on the idea that peace is more sustainable when those directly affected by conflict are active participants in shaping the outcomes (Zimmermann et al., 2009; Akudugu & Mahama, 2011). Community-based conflict management (CBCM) approaches are designed to harness this participation by leveraging indigenous practices, collective decision-making, and the moral authority of local actors (Chinwokwu, 2015). The renewed interest in these methods stems from the limitations of formal, state-centric mechanisms, which are often inaccessible, under-resourced, or distrusted by communities (Augusty & Dizon, 2020). A key strength of participatory CBCM is that it fosters ownership, accountability, and long-term peace by enabling affected individuals and groups to voice their concerns and co-create solutions (Akande, Kaye & Rukuni, 2021). Empirical evidence from various global contexts, including Africa and Latin America, shows a direct link between community involvement and the success of peace initiatives (Nwaka, 2020; Ashindorbe, Afatakpak & Owonikoko, 2021). Participation also enhances cultural sensitivity

and inclusivity, as community-led processes reflect shared values and reduce the likelihood of elite capture, thereby broadening the space for marginalized voices like women and youth (Curcija, Breakey & Driml, 2019; Akudugu & Mahama, 2011). Despite the growing recognition of participatory peacebuilding, there is a lack of empirical research on how community participation shapes the effectiveness of CBCM in specific local contexts, particularly in Nigeria (Chinwokwu, 2015; Yimer, 2021). This gap is particularly significant in the Ethiope East Local Government Area of Delta State, where conflicts have historically stemmed from ethnic rivalries and resource disputes, and it remains unclear to what extent broader community participation strengthens or weakens traditional resolution efforts (Akande, Kaye & Rukuni, 2021). While much of the existing research in Nigeria focuses on top-down frameworks, this study aims to fill the gap by systematically assessing the influence of community participation on the effectiveness of CBCM in this specific context (Augusty & Dizon, 2020; Smidt, 2020). The research seeks to provide a practical understanding of how inclusive participation contributes to legitimacy, social trust, and compliance with conflict resolution outcomes in a localized setting.

## **Research Objectives**

The main objective of this study is to assess the influence of community participation on the effectiveness of community-based conflict management in Delta State, Delta State. The specific objectives are to:

- i. identify the forms of community participation in community-based conflict management in Delta State;
- ii. examine the influence of community participation on the effectiveness of community-based conflict management in resolving disputes and fostering peace;
- iii. analyze the limitations affecting community participation in community-based conflict management processes

## **Research Questions**

The main research question guiding this study is: How does community participation influence the effectiveness of community-based conflict management in Delta State? The specific research questions are:

- i. What are the forms of community participation in community-based conflict management in Delta State?
- ii. In what ways does community participation influence the effectiveness of community-based conflict management in resolving disputes?
- iii. What limitations affect community participation in community-based conflict management processes?

## **Significance of the Study**

This study is significant because it fills a crucial gap in understanding how community participation shapes the effectiveness of community-based conflict management (CBCM) in Delta State. While CBCM has been widely acknowledged as a credible alternative to state-centric approaches, little empirical research has examined how the level, quality, and inclusiveness of participation influence outcomes in specific Nigerian contexts. By focusing on Ethiope East, a multi-ethnic area with a history of communal disputes, this study provides context-specific evidence that contributes to both theory and practice in peacebuilding.

The findings will be valuable for policymakers seeking to strengthen community-driven conflict resolution mechanisms, as they will highlight practical ways of enhancing inclusive participation for sustainable peace. Practitioners and traditional institutions can also draw lessons on how to improve legitimacy, fairness, and acceptance of conflict resolution processes by involving diverse community groups such as women, youth, and minority stakeholders. For scholars, the research adds to the broader body of knowledge on participatory conflict management by offering empirical insights from a local Nigerian setting.

## **Scope of the Study**

The scope of this study is limited to Delta State with special focus on Ethiope East Local Government Area. The research will specifically focus on how community participation influences the effectiveness of community-based conflict management practices within this locality. The study will engage diverse categories of stakeholders, including community members, traditional leaders, elders, youth, women, grassroots organizations, and local authorities, in order to capture the breadth of participation in conflict management processes.

Although the primary focus is on community-driven approaches, in context, the study will also consider the perspectives of institutional actors such as the police and local government officials, to understand the extent of collaboration and support between formal structures and community-led mechanisms.

## **Review of Related Literature**

The review of the literature and the theoretical framework that underpins the study on community-based conflict management approaches. This chapter then further contextualizes the study for the subsequent chapters. In line with this, the chapter will be organized along the following: Conflict Management and Communities, Community Participation, Effectiveness of Community Participation in CBCM. Community Participation and Social Cohesion in Conflict Management and Theoretical Framework

## **Concept of Conflict Management**

### **Conflict Management and Communities**

Conflict is an unavoidable aspect of human interaction, and in most societies, it arises from competition over scarce resources, social differences, political struggles, or competing interests. In African communities, particularly rural and semi-urban areas, conflicts have historically been addressed through locally grounded mechanisms that rely on community members, elders, and traditional institutions rather than on external authorities or formal courts. This process is widely known as community-based conflict management (CBCM). Community-Based Conflict Management (CBCM) is a localized approach to resolving disputes that relies on the active participation of community members, elders, and traditional institutions rather than formal state systems (Curcija, Breakey & Driml, 2019). This method views conflict as a social problem requiring dialogue and reconciliation rather than just legal adjudication (Chinwokwu, 2015). A key strength of CBCM is its participatory nature, which ensures that diverse groups, including women and youth, are involved, fostering collective responsibility and increasing compliance with agreements (Akande, Kaye & Rukuni, 2021; Smidt, 2020). Another strength is its cultural relevance, as it utilizes familiar practices like rituals and storytelling that resonate

with local values, making resolutions more legitimate and binding (Nwaka, 2020; Ashindorbe, Afatakpa & Owonikoko, 2021). Its localized nature also allows for flexible strategies tailored to specific community contexts (Zimmermann et al., 2009).

Despite its strengths, CBCM is not without limitations and is often viewed as a complement to, rather than a replacement for, formal institutions (Akudugu & Mahama, 2011). Traditional processes may reinforce power imbalances by excluding marginalized groups (Akande, Kaye & Rukuni, 2021), and CBCM can be inadequate for large-scale conflicts involving external actors or state-level issues (Yimer, 2021). The lack of formal legal backing can also limit the enforceability of some outcomes (Saleh, 2020). However, recent innovations are addressing these challenges. Communities are now blending traditional practices with modern tools and incorporating technology to enhance transparency and participation (Chinwokwu, 2015; Yimer, 2021). The effectiveness of CBCM is ultimately dependent on the quality of participation—when it is broad and meaningful, resolutions are more likely to be fair, legitimate, and enduring.

### **Community Participation**

Community participation is the cornerstone of community-based conflict management (CBCM), ensuring that individuals and groups are actively involved in problem-solving and decision-making (Bukari, 2023). This engagement gives legitimacy and sustainability to conflict resolution practices because it allows those affected by disputes to have a voice, making outcomes more likely to align with local values (Gilboa & Weiss-Gal, 2022). Without meaningful participation, conflict management risks being imposed from above, lacking the trust and ownership needed for lasting peace. Historically, traditional actors like elders and chiefs have been central to this process, their authority rooted in cultural recognition and a moral role as custodians of tradition (Marchetti & Tocci, 2020; Fisher et al., 2020). However, modern society has seen an evolution in participation to include a broader range of actors, such as civil society groups, women leaders, and youth organizations (Smidt, 2020), blending traditional legitimacy with contemporary inclusiveness.

The range of community actors involved in conflict resolution is diverse and context-specific. In many communities, traditional leaders rely on custom, while religious leaders use their moral authority to encourage reconciliation (Bodin, Mancilla-García & Robins, 2020; Musavengane & Kloppers, 2020). In places like Ethiope East Local Government Area, this includes a blend of traditional leaders, local government officials, and civil society organizations (Bukari, 2023; Gilboa & Weiss-Gal, 2022). Additionally, institutional actors like the Nigeria

Police may collaborate with community structures, bridging the gap between informal practices and state authority (Väyrynen, 2023; Ibrahim et al., 2022). This multi-layered approach ensures resolutions are not only culturally sensitive but also align with national law. Ultimately, the effectiveness of CBCM depends on the quality of participation—whether it is inclusive and represents diverse groups. When participation is broad and meaningful, resolutions are more likely to be accepted and durable; conversely, when it's narrow or dominated by a few elites, peace is likely to be short-lived (Bukari, 2023).

### **Effectiveness of Community Participation in Community Based Conflict Management**

The effectiveness of Community-Based Conflict Management (CBCM) is directly tied to the level of community participation. CBCM, which utilizes locally defined and culturally embedded approaches to disputes, gains its effectiveness from its accessibility and ability to foster collective ownership (Curcija, Breakey & Driml, 2019). The most critical factor is inclusiveness in participation, as outcomes are more legitimate and durable when a wide range of actors—including women, youth, and religious leaders—are involved (Yimer, 2021). When conflict resolution is monopolized by a few elites, decisions lack legitimacy and may face resistance (Bukari, 2023). Cultural legitimacy is also crucial; people are more likely to accept resolutions that align with their traditions and norms (Akudugu & Mahama, 2011), although this must be balanced with inclusivity to avoid perpetuating inequalities (Nwaka, 2020). The timeliness and accessibility of CBCM, which are often faster than formal legal systems, also contribute to its perceived effectiveness (Smidt, 2020; Gilboa & Weiss-Gal, 2022).

Despite these strengths, the effectiveness of CBCM can be undermined by internal biases and inequalities that affect participation. Traditional structures often privilege men and elders, sidelining marginalized groups whose perspectives are critical for sustainable outcomes (Akande, Kaye & Rukuni, 2021; Marchetti & Tocci, 2020). Additionally, the lack of formal legal backing can limit the enforceability of resolutions, especially in disputes with trans-local dimensions (Saleh, 2020; Adedayo, 2020). However, recent innovations are strengthening CBCM effectiveness. Hybrid models are blending traditional practices with modern participatory frameworks to ensure both cultural relevance and inclusivity (Zimmermann et al., 2009). The use of technology and capacity-building initiatives are also expanding participation and improving transparency, making resolutions more credible and sustainable (Chinwokwu, 2015; Augusty & Dizon, 2020; Yimer, 2021; Demchuk et al., 2024).

## Community Participation and Social Cohesion in Conflict Management

Community participation is crucial for peacebuilding and conflict management, particularly where state institutions are weak. It goes beyond mere inclusion, fostering a sense of collective ownership and accountability (Pretty, 1995; Bukari, 2023). In the context of community-based conflict management (CBCM), participation involves the active engagement of diverse stakeholders, including men, women, youth, elders, and civic groups, in identifying disputes and implementing resolutions (Chambers, 1997; Yimer, 2021). This bottom-up approach is effective because those most affected by conflicts are best suited to articulate their needs and sustain peace agreements (Moyo & Anning, 2020). By fostering social cohesion and building relationships, participatory methods create a sense of shared responsibility that leads to greater legitimacy and voluntary compliance with resolutions (Chan, To & Chan, 2006; Ebubedike et al., 2023). This sense of collective ownership is key to ensuring that outcomes are viewed as products of the community's own input, rather than external impositions, thereby reducing the likelihood of non-compliance (Lamidi, 2021; Gilboa & Weiss-Gal, 2022).

However, there are challenges to effective participation. Tokenism, where participation is superficial without real influence, can lead to disillusionment (Pretty, 1995). Power dynamics can also distort the process, as elders or powerful individuals may dominate discussions, silencing the voices of women, youth, and marginalized groups (Akande, Kaye & Rukuni, 2021; Ibrahim et al., 2022). Additionally, conflict fatigue can lead to apathy, hindering deep engagement in protracted disputes (Väyrynen, 2023). Despite these challenges, modern approaches are evolving. Hybrid models are emerging that combine traditional practices with modern frameworks, ensuring inclusivity and human rights (Zimmermann et al., 2009; Musavengane & Kloppers, 2020). These models, often supported by NGOs, build local capacity for dialogue and negotiation, empowering communities to manage future conflicts and increasing the effectiveness of CBCM initiatives (Curcija, Breakey & Driml, 2019; Demchuk et al., 2024).

## Theoretical Framework

The study is further understood by the social capital theory developed by Pierre Bourdieu and cultural theory of conflict by Mary Douglas. These theories are taken as the framework upon which the study is theorized.

### Social Capital Theory

Social capital theory offers a valuable framework for understanding how community participation influences the effectiveness of community-based conflict management (CBCM). Rooted in the works

of Pierre Bourdieu (1986), James Coleman (1988), and Robert Putnam (1993), the theory highlights how networks, trust, and norms serve as valuable assets for both individuals and communities (Gannon & Roberts, 2020). The strength of social ties, whether bonding (within groups), bridging (across groups), or linking (with institutions), directly impacts a community's ability to manage conflict (Lang & Hornburg, 1998; Perkins, Hughey & Speer, 2002). In places like Ethiope East Local Government Area (LGA), the density of these networks and the embedded trust are crucial for negotiating and resolving disputes, as trust itself reduces negotiation costs and enhances cooperation (Falk & Kilpatrick, 2000).

The theory also clarifies that participation in CBCM is not just about presence but about the quality of involvement, inclusivity, and ownership over outcomes (Zimmermann et al., 2009). While strong bonding capital can foster solidarity, it can also entrench divisions, making bridging capital essential for multi-ethnic communities to facilitate dialogue across diverse groups (Akudugu & Mahama, 2011; Yimer, 2021). Linking capital, or connections with external institutions like government agencies, further enhances CBCM by providing support for enforcement and access to resources (Adedayo, 2020; Bukari, 2023). However, the theory also warns that social capital can be unequally distributed, reinforcing power imbalances and potentially undermining inclusivity and sustainability (Marchetti & Tocci, 2020; Ibrahim et al., 2022). Therefore, cultivating balanced social capital—nurturing bonding, bridging, and linking ties—is crucial for ensuring that CBCM processes are just, legitimate, and resilient (Musavengane & Kloppers, 2020).

### Cultural Theory of Conflict

The cultural theory of conflict, drawing on anthropology and sociology, argues that cultural norms and values significantly influence how conflicts emerge and are resolved. According to this framework, developed by scholars such as Clifford Geertz (1973) and Mary Douglas (MacDonald, 2009), disputes are never value-neutral but are instead shaped by culturally specific ideas of justice, order, and relationships. Edward T. Hall and Kevin Avruch further posited that conflict dynamics are inseparable from their cultural context, as culture dictates how grievances are framed and how reconciliation is pursued (Avruch & Black, 1987; Ross, 1986). Different cultures have distinct understandings of what constitutes a conflict, who has the authority to resolve it, and what a satisfactory resolution entails (Gibson & McDaniel, 2010). This theory highlights that the effectiveness of conflict resolution depends on its alignment with culturally defined notions of legitimacy and justice.

When applied to community-based conflict management (CBCM), the cultural theory reveals

that culture acts as a gatekeeper of participation. Cultural norms determine who can speak and mediate disputes, often privileging elders and chiefs while marginalizing women and youth (Chinwokwu, 2015). The theory also underscores the importance of cultural symbols and rituals in fostering trust and embedding resolutions within the community's moral fabric, transforming agreements into socially binding commitments (Avruch & Black, 1987). However, it also points to the risks of cultural exclusivity, where norms can reinforce inequalities and silence marginalized voices, potentially undermining the long-term effectiveness of resolutions (Nwaka, 2020; Ibrahim et al., 2022). In multi-ethnic societies, cultural pluralism can complicate conflict resolution when groups hold divergent notions of justice, necessitating culturally inclusive and adaptable approaches (Zimmermann et al., 2009; Demchuk et al., 2024). Ultimately, the theory emphasizes that meaningful participation and lasting conflict resolution require a deep understanding of the cultural context.

## Methodology

### Research Design

The study adopts a quantitative research design with a survey approach. This design is considered appropriate because it allows for the collection of standardized data from a relatively large sample of respondents, thereby enabling statistical analysis and interpretation.

## Study Area

The study is conducted in Delta State comprised of three (3) senatorial Districts (Delta North, Delta Central, and Delta South) but the focus is on Delta Central which is made up of eight (8) local government authorities of which the special focus is on Ethiope East Local Government Area of the State, Nigeria, situated in the southern part of the country within the Niger Delta region. The LGA covers an approximate landmass of 283 square kilometers, with Isiokolo serving as the administrative headquarters. Geographically, Ethiope East is bordered by Ukwani LGA to the north, Ethiope West LGA to the west, and Ughelli North LGA to the east. Its location makes it a strategic administrative and cultural corridor connecting several communities across Delta State.

The area is characterized by a blend of tropical rainforest and riverine ecology, with the River Ethiope serving as its most prominent natural feature. The River Ethiope, one of the cleanest inland waters in Africa, originates from Umuaja in Ukwani and flows through Abraka, where it forms a major ecological and tourism attraction. The river sustains local fishing, irrigation, and eco-tourism activities, while also playing an important role in the social and cultural life of the people. The area experiences a humid tropical climate, marked by two distinct

seasons: the rainy season (April to October) and the dry season (November to March), with an annual rainfall of about 2,000mm and an average temperature ranging between 25°C and 32°C. These climatic conditions support the rich agricultural productivity of the area. In terms of demography, Ethiope East had a recorded population of about 112,000 people in the 2006 national census, with projections indicating significant growth over the past two decades. The population is largely composed of the Urhobo ethnic group, who are the indigenous inhabitants of the area. However, due to the presence of Delta State University in Abraka and other economic opportunities in towns like Eku and Okpara, there is also a visible population of non-indigenous residents, including Igbo, Yoruba, and Hausa migrants who contribute to local commerce and service industries.

The population structure reflects a high proportion of young people, which has implications for both development opportunities and conflict dynamics, particularly in relation to youth unemployment and social unrest. Economically, Ethiope East thrives predominantly on agriculture, trading, and education. The fertile soil and favorable climatic conditions support large-scale farming of cassava, yam, maize, and plantain, while oil palm and rubber plantations provide important cash crops. Towns like Okpara and Ovu are agrarian centers, contributing significantly to food production and local trade. Abraka stands out as the commercial and educational hub of the LGA, hosting Delta State University, which attracts thousands of students and academic staff from across Nigeria. This has stimulated small and medium-scale businesses, hospitality services, and transportation networks in the town. Eku, another significant town, is renowned for the historic Eku Baptist Hospital, which for decades served as one of the foremost missionary hospitals in Nigeria and continues to function as a regional healthcare center.

The cultural life of Ethiope East is rich and diverse, largely shaped by the traditions of the Urhobo people. The area is known for colorful festivals such as the annual Ohworu festival in Abraka and the Iyerin festival in Okpara, both of which are rooted in communal spirituality, identity, and social cohesion. Music, dance, folklore, and traditional cuisines also form integral aspects of community life.

Importantly, traditional institutions such as the Ovie (traditional ruler), council of chiefs, and village elders play pivotal roles in governance, dispute resolution, and the preservation of cultural heritage. These institutions remain central to conflict management, as they embody authority, legitimacy, and continuity in the eyes of the people. In terms of governance, Ethiope East operates as one of the 25 LGAs in Delta State, with an elected chairman and councilors constituting the local government council. The council is responsible for providing basic services such as primary education, healthcare,

sanitation, and local security in collaboration with state and federal agencies. However, like many LGAs in Nigeria, Ethiope East faces challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, limited access to quality healthcare in rural areas, and persistent unemployment among young people. These socio-economic challenges contribute to periodic conflicts within communities, including land disputes, chieftaincy tussles, youth restiveness, and inter-communal disagreements.

### Study Population

The study population comprises the estimated 112,000 residents of Ethiope East LGA, as recorded in the 2006 census. However, the focus is not on the general population but on stakeholders who are directly or indirectly involved in community-based conflict management. These include community leaders, traditional rulers, youth leaders, women leaders, local authorities, community members, and representatives of security institutions such as the Nigeria Police. This diverse group of participants is targeted to ensure a comprehensive understanding of how community participation shapes the effectiveness of conflict management strategies.

### Sampling Technique and Sample Size

A simple random sampling technique is employed to ensure fairness in the selection of respondents and to reduce bias. The sampling frame is derived from population data obtained from the LGA secretariat at Isiokolo. Randomization allows each member of the target population an equal chance of being included in the study. The sample size was determined using Taro Yamane's formula:  $n=N/(1+N(e)^2)$ , where  $N$  signifies the population being studied,  $e = \text{significant error margin}$  while  $1 = \text{Constant}$ , and  $n$  as the sample size. Given the values are known where,  $N=112,000$  and  $e= 0.5$ , the procedure can be calculated as follows;

$$n= 112,000/1+112,000 (0.5)^2$$

$$n= 112,000/1+112,000 \times 0.0025$$

$$n= 112,000/1+280$$

$$n= 112,000/281$$

$$n= \mathbf{398.5765}$$

However, given the cost implication of absorbing a sample of this size into the study, a  $\frac{1}{4}$  of ' $n$ ' will be taken to lessen the cost burden. Hence

$$n = \frac{1}{4} * 398.5765$$

$$n = 99.64$$

$$n = \mathbf{100} \text{ (Rounded Off)}$$

Then adopting a simple random sampling, the list of names were shuffled and with an interval of 1110, a total of 100 respondents were respondents were arrived at.

### Method of Data Collection

Data for this study were collected through the use of a structured questionnaire, which served as the main research instrument. The first section, Section A, focused on demographic information. Here, questions were included to gather data on the age, gender, educational attainment, occupation, and length of residency of respondents in Ethiope East. The second section, Section B, was developed to address the first research objective, which sought to identify the forms of community participation in community-based conflict management within the study area. Section C corresponded to the second research objective, which was to examine the influence of community participation on the effectiveness of community-based conflict management. To measure the strength of these perceptions, a five-point Likert scale was employed, ranging from "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree." The fourth section, Section D, was tailored to the third research objective, which aimed to analyze the limitations affecting community participation in community-based conflict management processes. This section contained questions that addressed potential barriers.

### Method of Data Analysis

Data analysis employs descriptive statistics, including tables, frequency counts, and percentages, to summarize and interpret the survey responses. Results are presented thematically, aligning with the research objectives and findings from the descriptive statistics. This thematic presentation helps in organizing the data into coherent categories for further analysis. The discussion then connects these findings to existing literature and the theoretical framework guiding the study. By linking the results back to relevant theories and prior research, the analysis aims to provide a well-rounded understanding of community participation and conflict resolution in East Local Government.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Data Presentation, Analysis and Interpretation

This section focuses on the analysis of data gathered from field, interpretation and presentation of results.

**Table 4.1 Analysis of Socio-Demographics**

Item	Options	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)	Mean Score
Sex	Male	52	52%	0.52
	Female	48	48%	0.48
Age Group	Below 20	12	12%	0.12
	20-29	28	28%	0.28

	30–39	26	26%	0.26
	40–49	18	18%	0.18
	50 and above	16	16%	0.16
Occupation	Farmer	18	18%	0.18
	Trader	32	32%	0.32
	Civil Servant	20	20%	0.20
	Artisan	14	14%	0.14
	Other	16	16%	0.16
Educational Level	No Formal Education	8	8%	0.08
	Primary	22	22%	0.22
	Secondary	38	38%	0.38
	Tertiary	32	32%	0.32
Residency	Urban	58	58%	0.58
	Rural	42	42%	0.42
<b>Total</b>		100	100%	1.00

Source: Researcher's compilation, 2025

Gender distribution shows a relatively balanced sample, with males making up 52 percent and females 48 percent. This balance is significant for the study since both genders contribute differently to conflict management processes: men often dominate formal and traditional leadership roles, while women play critical roles in grassroots mobilization, peace advocacy, and informal dispute resolution. The age distribution indicates that the most represented group is between 20–29 years (28 percent), followed closely by the 30–39 group (26 percent). Together, these categories make up more than half of the respondents, emphasizing the central role of youth and middle-aged adults in conflict dynamics. Younger respondents (below 20 years, 12 percent) reflect emerging participation, often as witnesses or indirect actors, while older respondents aged 50 and above (16 percent) remain important custodians of traditions, providing wisdom and legitimacy in conflict resolution. Occupationally, traders dominate with 32 percent, followed by civil servants (20 percent) and farmers (18 percent). This suggests that economic activities tied to commerce and agriculture are central to community stability, as disputes often arise around market interactions, land, and resource

use. Artisans (14 percent) and those in other occupations (16 percent) bring additional perspectives, highlighting the breadth of community involvement across different economic sectors. Educational levels show that the majority of respondents have secondary education (38 percent), followed by tertiary education (32 percent). This indicates that most participants have sufficient literacy to engage in structured dialogue, documentation, and organized conflict resolution processes. However, the 30 percent combined share of respondents with only primary or no formal education underscores the persistence of informal and oral mechanisms in conflict resolution, ensuring accessibility to all members regardless of literacy level. Residency patterns reveal that 58 percent of respondents live in urban centers such as Abraka and Eku, while 42 percent reside in rural areas like Okpara and Ovu. This distribution reflects the duality of Ethiope East, where urban dwellers may be exposed to formal conflict management systems, while rural dwellers rely more on traditional institutions and communal values. This blend offers a holistic understanding of how community participation is influenced by location and exposure.

**Table 4.2 Forms of Community Participation in Conflict Management**

Item	Options	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)	Mean Score
Awareness of community participation in conflict management	Yes	88	88%	0.88
	No	12	12%	0.12
<b>Total</b>		100	100%	1.00
Forms of participation observed	Elders/Chiefs mediation	62	62%	0.62
	Youth group involvement	55	55%	0.55
	Women's associations	48	48%	0.48
	Religious leaders	42	42%	0.42
	Vigilante groups	36	36%	0.36
	Local government/police	28	28%	0.28

	support			
<b>Total</b>		100	100%	1.00
Frequency of community involvement	Rarely	12	12%	0.12
	Occasionally	34	34%	0.34
	Often	38	38%	0.38
	Always	16	16%	0.16
<b>Total</b>		100	100%	1.00
Are cultural norms/customs considered in participation?	Yes	87	87%	0.87
	No	13	13%	0.13
<b>Total</b>		100	100%	1.00

Source: Author's Field Survey, 2024

The findings reveal that community participation in conflict management is a widely recognized practice in Ethiope East, with 88 percent of respondents (mean = 0.88) acknowledging its existence. Only 12 percent reported being unaware of such practices, underscoring the embedded nature of participatory conflict management in the area. Among the forms of participation, elders and chiefs play the most dominant role, as reported by 62 percent of respondents (mean = 0.62). This reflects their traditional authority and legitimacy in resolving disputes, often through dialogue and mediation. Youth groups were also widely acknowledged (55 percent, mean = 0.55), highlighting their role in either preventing violence or mobilizing collective responses to conflicts. Women's associations (48 percent, mean = 0.48) emerged as vital actors, especially in promoting reconciliation and advocating non-violent approaches to dispute resolution. Religious leaders (42 percent, mean = 0.42) were recognized as trusted mediators, often leveraging moral authority to influence disputing parties. Vigilante groups (36 percent, mean = 0.36) were reported to play a complementary role,

particularly in maintaining order and preventing escalation into violence. Meanwhile, formal institutions such as the police and local government representatives were mentioned by 28 percent (mean = 0.28), suggesting that although present, their roles are less dominant compared to indigenous mechanisms. In terms of frequency, 38 percent of respondents indicated that community participation occurs often, while 34 percent said it happens occasionally. A smaller proportion, 16 percent, reported that these practices are always employed, while 12 percent described them as rare. This distribution suggests that although community involvement is widespread, its intensity varies depending on the nature and scale of disputes. Finally, 87 percent of respondents (mean = 0.87) affirmed that cultural norms and customs are considered during conflict management processes. This reflects the reliance on indigenous values, communal identity, and customary laws as the foundation for resolving disputes. Only 13 percent reported otherwise, which may reflect the growing influence of formal, statutory mechanisms in some areas.

**Table 4.3 Analysis of the Influence of Community Participation on Effectiveness**

Item	Options	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)	Mean Score
How effective is community participation in resolving disputes?	Not Effective	8	8%	0.08
	Moderately Effective	32	32%	0.32
	Highly Effective	60	60%	0.60
<b>Total</b>		100	100%	1.00
Outcomes achieved through participation	Reduction of recurring disputes	68	68%	0.68
	Fairness in resolution process	55	55%	0.55
	Satisfaction with outcomes	50	50%	0.50
	Restoration of peace	72	72%	0.72
<b>Total</b>		100	100%	1.00

Do you believe community participation makes conflict resolution sustainable?	Yes	83	83%	0.83
	No	17	17%	0.17
<b>Total</b>		100	100%	1.00
Level of community trust in participatory methods	Low	12	12%	0.12
	Moderate	38	38%	0.38
	High	50	50%	0.50
<b>Total</b>		100	100%	1.00

Source: Author's Field Survey, 2024

The results indicate that community participation is widely perceived as enhancing the effectiveness of conflict management in Ethiope East. A majority of respondents (60%, mean = 0.60) rated participation as highly effective, while 32% considered it moderately effective, and only 8% viewed it as ineffective. Regarding outcomes, the most reported benefit of community participation was the restoration of peace (72%, mean = 0.72), followed closely by the reduction of recurring disputes (68%, mean = 0.68). Fairness in the resolution process (55%, mean = 0.55) and satisfaction with outcomes (50%, mean = 0.50) were also acknowledged, showing that participatory approaches not only

resolve conflicts but also build legitimacy and acceptance of resolutions. On sustainability, 83% of respondents (mean = 0.83) agreed that community involvement makes conflict management more enduring, while 17% expressed doubt. This suggests strong confidence in participatory mechanisms as long-term solutions. Finally, levels of trust in participatory methods were rated high by half of the respondents (50%, mean = 0.50), moderate by 38%, and low by 12%. This demonstrates that while confidence in participation is generally strong, some reservations remain, likely reflecting occasional disputes over fairness or inclusivity.

### Limitations Affecting Community Participation in Conflict Management

Source: Author's Field Survey, 2024

Item	Options	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)	Mean Score
What challenges hinder participation in conflict management?	Inadequate resources	65	65%	0.65
	Political interference	52	52%	0.52
	Weak institutional support	48	48%	0.48
	Exclusion of women and youth	35	35%	0.35
	Cultural biases	28	28%	0.28
	Lack of trust in formal institutions	22	22%	0.22
<b>Total</b>		100	100%	1.00
Do you think younger generations actively support these methods?	Yes	55	55%	0.55
	No	45	45%	0.45
<b>Total</b>		100	100%	1.00
How can these challenges be addressed?	Greater government support	62	62%	0.62
	Capacity building for community actors	50	50%	0.50
	Inclusion of women and youth	40	40%	0.40
	Awareness campaigns	30	30%	0.30
<b>Total</b>		100	100%	1.00

The findings indicate that community participation in conflict management faces significant constraints in Ethiope East. The most pressing challenge identified was inadequate resources (65%, mean = 0.65), followed by political interference (52%, mean = 0.52) and

weak institutional support (48%, mean = 0.48). Social issues such as exclusion of women and youth (35%) and cultural biases (28%) were also reported as barriers, while 22% of respondents cited lack of trust in formal institutions as an additional limitation. Regarding generational

attitudes, a slight majority (55%, mean = 0.55) agreed that younger generations support community-based methods, but 45% felt otherwise, suggesting intergenerational differences in perceptions of traditional approaches. Proposed solutions to address these limitations centered on stronger government support (62%), capacity building for community actors (50%), and deliberate inclusion of women and youth (40%). Awareness campaigns (30%) were also highlighted as a strategy for strengthening acceptance and participation.

### **Discussion of Findings**

The results suggest that community participation in conflict management is both widespread and diverse, involving community leaders, family or clan representatives, and traditional councils, with processes often guided by local customs and norms. This supports the cultural theory of conflict, which emphasizes that dispute resolution is most effective when rooted in culturally accepted practices. It also affirms the social capital perspective, as these practices rely on trust, reciprocity, and close social networks. The involvement of multiple actors indicates that conflict resolution in Ethiope East is not an isolated effort but rather a collective responsibility, reinforcing the argument that participation is central to the legitimacy and sustainability of local peace initiatives.

Community participation was found to enhance both the outcomes and the credibility of conflict management. Disputes resolved through traditional structures not only achieve settlements but also strengthen social ties and reinforce a sense of community belonging. This finding aligns with social capital theory, which links active participation and trust-building to cooperative outcomes. It also resonates with the cultural theory of conflict, as the reliance on customs ensures that solutions are perceived as fair and legitimate. Taken together, these insights indicate that when communities actively participate in conflict resolution, the process is more likely to foster peace, reduce recurrence, and promote long-term cohesion.

Despite these strengths, participation is constrained by challenges such as inadequate resources, political interference, exclusion of certain groups, and declining influence of traditional authority. These limitations complicate the ideal picture painted by social capital theory, showing that trust and cooperation can be unevenly distributed, with some groups more included than others. Similarly, cultural theory helps explain both the strengths and weaknesses of community-based conflict management: while cultural traditions legitimize the process, they also reinforce biases

that marginalize women, youth, and dissenting voices. The findings therefore highlight that participation, though effective, is not without vulnerabilities, and addressing these requires institutional support, inclusivity, and adaptation to changing social contexts.

### **Summary, Conclusion and Recommendations**

#### **Summary**

This study assessed the influence of community participation on the effectiveness of community-based conflict management (CBCM) in Ethiope East Local Government Area. The findings revealed that participation is expressed through various community structures, including traditional councils, elders, women's associations, and youth groups. These practices are rooted in local customs and norms, relying on culturally sanctioned mediation and arbitration to settle disputes. The reliance on local traditions ensures that conflict resolution is not just a social necessity but also a continuation of cultural heritage.

The study also found that community participation significantly enhances the effectiveness of conflict management. Active involvement leads to peaceful settlements, restores relationships, and strengthens community ties. Participation fosters fairness by directly involving community members in shaping resolutions, which reduces perceptions of bias. The sustainability of these outcomes is affirmed by the community's trust in these traditional methods. However, the study identified several limitations, including inadequate resources, political interference, and cultural biases that restrict the involvement of women and youth. Despite these challenges, the findings suggest that CBCM can remain relevant through continued support and adaptation.

#### **Conclusion**

This study has shown that community participation is central to the effectiveness of conflict management in Ethiope East. Traditional actors such as elders, family representatives, and local councils provide culturally grounded mechanisms that ensure fairness, legitimacy, and sustainability in resolving disputes. Active participation not only reduces recurring conflicts but also strengthens social cohesion and peace within the community. However, limitations such as inadequate resources, political interference, and exclusion of certain groups remain significant barriers. Addressing these challenges through institutional support and inclusivity is crucial for enhancing the long-term effectiveness of community-based conflict management.

#### **Recommendations**

Given the findings from this study then, the following recommendations are provided:

- i. To strengthen the forms of community participation, there should be deliberate inclusion of women, youth, and marginalized groups in conflict management processes to broaden representation and legitimacy.
- ii. To improve the effectiveness of community-based conflict management, local authorities and civil society should provide structured support, such as training and resources, for traditional actors to enhance fairness and sustainability in dispute resolution.
- iii. To address limitations to participation, stronger collaboration between community institutions and formal governance structures is needed, with clear policies to reduce political interference and reinforce trust in traditional mechanisms.

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