



**POLAC MANAGEMENT REVIEW (PMR)  
DEPARTMENT OF MANAGEMENT SCIENCE  
NIGERIA POLICE ACADEMY, WUDIL-KANO**



## AN ANALYSIS OF THE ROLE OF TRADITIONAL RULERS IN FOSTERING PEACE AND DEVELOPMENT: A CASE STUDY AKU UKA OF WUKARI, TARABA STATE (2012-2022)

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### Abstract

*Traditional rulers have long played a pivotal role in maintaining peace and promoting development within their communities. However, in contemporary Nigeria, the influence of traditional institutions has become increasingly contested, especially amid growing political centralisation and modern governance structures. This study examines the role of traditional rulers in fostering peace and development, with a focus on the Aku Uka of Wukari, Taraba State, between 2012 and 2022. The primary objective is to explore the contributions, challenges, and continuing relevance of traditional leadership in conflict resolution and socio-economic development at the grassroots level. This study highlights the enduring social and political significance of traditional authority as a stabilising force in transitional societies. Employing a mixed-methods research design, the study integrates qualitative interviews with community leaders, youth, and policy actors, alongside quantitative surveys conducted among residents of Wukari. Findings reveal that the Aku Uka served not only as a custodian of culture and tradition but also as an active mediator in ethno-religious conflicts and a promoter of educational and infrastructural development. The study recommends a more formal integration of traditional rulers into Nigeria's governance framework, alongside increased collaboration with government and civil society to enhance conflict resolution and community development initiatives. Recognising and empowering traditional institutions can significantly contribute to sustainable peace and inclusive development in Nigeria.*

**Keywords:** Traditional Rulers, Peace Building, Community Development, Aku Uka, Nigeria.

### 1. Introduction

Traditional rulers have long played a vital role in fostering peace and development in Nigeria, particularly at the grassroots level (Ezeani, 2020; Nweke, 2012). Despite the introduction of modern governance systems, traditional rulers continue to wield significant influence in their communities, leveraging their cultural legitimacy to promote social stability and development (Osezua, 2011; Ezenweke & Nnabuihe, 2014).

The Aku Uka of Wukari is the paramount ruler of the Jukun people, a prominent ethnic group in Taraba State (Ajayi & Ikpe, 2005). Between 2012 and 2022, the Aku Uka played a crucial role in promoting peace and development in Wukari and its environs. Through his leadership, the Aku Uka facilitated the resolution of conflicts, promoted cultural heritage, and

fostered economic development (Daily Trust, 2022; Blueprint, 2021).

This study aims to investigate the strategies employed by the Aku Uka in fostering peace and development, as well as the challenges he faced during his reign. By examining the role of the Aku Uka, this study seeks to contribute to the broader literature on traditional rulers and their contributions to peace and development in Nigeria (Olaoba, 2002; Afigbo, 1972).

By exploring the role of the Aku Uka in fostering peace and development, the study would provide insights into the contributions of traditional rulers to peace and development in Nigeria. The study's findings will have implications for policymakers, development practitioners, and traditional rulers seeking to promote peace and development in Nigeria. It is important to note that

traditional rulers have long been integral to the socio-political fabric of Nigeria, serving as custodians of culture, mediators in conflicts, and facilitators of community development. Their influence, though often informal, remains significant in fostering peace and driving development initiatives within their domains. A pertinent example is the role played by the Aku Uka of Wukari, the paramount ruler of the Jukun people in Taraba State (Daily trust 2022).

The Aku Uka institution traces its origins to the Kwararafa confederation, a formidable entity in pre-colonial Nigeria. Over the centuries, the Aku Uka has evolved into a symbol of unity and authority among the Jukun and other ethnic groups in the region. The late Aku Uka, Dr. Shekarau Angyu Masa-Ibi Kuvyon II, who reigned until his passing in 2021, exemplified the pivotal role traditional rulers can play in contemporary society.

The Aku Uka of Wukari holds a distinguished position among Nigeria's traditional rulers. The Wukari Federation, a successor to the historic Kwararafa state of the Jukun people, is centered in Wukari town, Taraba State. The title "Aku Uka" denotes the paramount ruler of this federation. From 1976 until his passing in 2021, Dr. Shekarau Angyu Masa-Ibi Kuvyon II served as the 24th Aku Uka, leading the Jukun people for 45 years.

During his tenure, Dr. Masa-Ibi was instrumental in mediating conflicts that threatened the peace of Wukari and its environs. Notably, in August 2010, Wukari experienced religious tensions when disputes arose over the construction of a mosque at local police divisional headquarters. The situation escalated into riots, resulting in loss of lives and property. Reports indicate that the Aku Uka had cautioned against the construction, foreseeing the potential for discord. His proactive stance underscored his commitment to maintaining harmony among the diverse religious communities in his domain. (Blueprint, 2022).

Beyond conflict resolution, the Aku Uka played a significant role in the socio-economic development of Wukari. Traditional rulers in Nigeria often act as intermediaries between the government and the local populace, facilitating the implementation of development projects and mobilizing community participation. They provide valuable insights into the needs and aspirations of their people, ensuring that

development initiatives are culturally appropriate and widely accepted.

The late Dr. Shekarau Masa-Ibi's reign was marked by efforts to promote education, healthcare, and infrastructure development in Wukari. He collaborated with governmental and non-governmental organizations to attract projects that benefited his people. His leadership was characterized by a deep understanding of the intricate balance between tradition and modernity, ensuring that development did not erode cultural values but rather complemented them. In recognition of his contributions, Taraba State Governor Darius Ishaku lauded the late Aku Uka for bringing peace, unity, and prosperity to Wukari and the broader Kwararafa Kingdom. Such acknowledgments highlight the enduring relevance of traditional institutions in Nigeria's development trajectory. The transition to a new Aku Uka in 2022 marked the continuation of this legacy. Elder Manu Ishaku Adda Ali, appointed as the 25th Aku Uka, was charged with the responsibility of uniting his subjects and fostering development. The expectations placed upon him underscore the critical role traditional rulers continue to play in contemporary Nigerian society. The period, from 2012 – 2022, exemplifies the significant impact traditional rulers like the Aku Uka of Wukari have in fostering peace and development. Their unique position enables them to bridge the gap between the government and the grassroots, ensuring that development is inclusive and harmonious. Against this background, this study analysed the role of traditional rulers in fostering peace and development: a case study of Aku Uka of Wukari, Taraba state.

The persistent challenges of conflict and underdevelopment in many parts of Nigeria have drawn attention to the critical need for sustainable peace and effective governance, especially at the grassroots level. Despite significant efforts by modern governance structures, many rural and semi-urban areas continue to grapple with ethno-religious tensions, resource-related disputes, and socio-economic stagnation (Akinola, 2021).

In such contexts, traditional rulers have historically played significant roles in promoting peace, resolving disputes, and facilitating community development. However, there is limited scholarly focus on how these roles have evolved in

contemporary times, particularly in regions like Wukari, Taraba State, which have experienced notable instances of communal conflicts and underdevelopment in recent years. The Aku Uka of Wukari, as the paramount traditional ruler of the Jukun people, has been at the forefront of addressing issues of peace and development within his domain. Between 2012 and 2022, Wukari witnessed periodic outbreaks of conflict, primarily driven by ethnic tensions, disputes over land ownership, and competition for political representation (Edeh & Oruonye, 2020). These conflicts often disrupted social cohesion and hindered development initiatives. The Aku Uka, leveraging his traditional authority and deep cultural influence, played a pivotal role in mediating these disputes and fostering reconciliation among warring factions. Yet, the mechanisms, effectiveness, and long-term impact of his interventions remain underexplored.

Another dimension of the problem lies in the tension between traditional governance structures and modern governmental frameworks. While traditional rulers like the Aku Uka are regarded as custodians of peace and culture, their roles are not formally recognized in Nigeria's constitutional framework (Ajayi & Olayode, 2022). This lack of formal integration often limits their capacity to access resources and collaborate effectively with government agencies on developmental projects. In Wukari, the absence of such a structured partnership has, at times, constrained the ability of the Aku Uka to fully address systemic challenges such as youth unemployment, poor infrastructure, and educational deficits.

Furthermore, the increasing influence of external factors, including political interference and religious extremism, has complicated the role of traditional rulers. In Wukari, traditional institutions have occasionally been drawn into the political arena, thereby undermining their neutrality and ability to mediate conflicts impartially (Okeke & Usman, 2021). These dynamics not only erode the authority of the traditional ruler but also create skepticism about the relevance of traditional leadership in modern governance and development.

This study, therefore, seeks to address these gaps by examining the specific contributions of the Aku Uka of Wukari in fostering peace and development spanning the period of 2012-2022. It

explores the strategies employed by the traditional ruler in conflict resolution, assesses the effectiveness of his interventions, and investigates the challenges encountered in his efforts to promote socio-economic growth. By doing so, this research aims to provide insights into the evolving role of traditional rulers in Nigeria, highlighting their potential to complement formal governance structures in addressing grassroots challenges. Against this backdrop, this study analysed the role of traditional rulers in fostering peace and development: a case of the Aku Uka of Wukari, Taraba state.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Conceptual Definitions**

#### **Concept of Traditional rulers**

The concept of traditional rulers has been explored extensively in academic literature, with scholars offering definitions and insights based on historical, sociocultural, and political contexts. Traditional rulers are individuals who hold leadership positions in indigenous governance systems, often based on hereditary or cultural legitimacy. Their roles vary widely, encompassing political authority, spiritual guidance, and custodianship of traditions.

According to Weber (1922), traditional authority, which underpins the role of traditional rulers, is a form of legitimacy rooted in age-old customs and the sanctity of established norms. Weber argued that traditional rulers derive their authority from the continuity of cultural and social practices passed down through generations.

Ajayi and Ikpe (2005) define traditional rulers as "custodians of culture and traditions who play significant roles in maintaining law and order in their communities." They emphasize that these leaders were integral to governance during pre-colonial times, mediating disputes and organizing social and economic systems.

Olaoba (2002) highlights that traditional rulers function as both cultural and political leaders. He asserts that their roles include conflict resolution, societal cohesion, and the preservation of historical practices. Olaoba further argues that the advent of colonialism reshaped their authority, integrating them into formal administrative structures.

In contemporary times, Osezua (2011) notes that traditional rulers continue to wield influence despite the advent of modern governance systems. He describes them as intermediaries between the government and the grassroots, leveraging their cultural legitimacy to foster development and social stability.

Ezenweke and Nnabuihe (2014) contend that traditional rulers serve as vital agents of peace building in Africa. They argue that their deep understanding of local contexts, coupled with their moral authority, positions them uniquely to mediate disputes and promote unity.

In Nigeria, traditional rulers such as emirs, obas, and obis are pivotal in governance, especially at the local level. According to Afigbo (1972), these leaders have historically been involved in the administration of justice, the management of resources, and the enforcement of customary laws.

Therefore traditional rulers are indispensable figures in the governance and cultural identity of their communities. Scholars consistently highlight their dual roles as custodians of tradition and facilitators of modern governance, making them critical players in fostering peace and development.

### **Concept of Development**

Development refers to a multidimensional process involving improvements in economic growth, social welfare, political stability, and human capabilities. It transcends mere economic indicators, encompassing the enhancement of living standards, education, healthcare, and freedom (Todaro & Smith, 2020). According to Sen (1999), development is the expansion of human freedoms that allow individuals to lead lives they value. It also includes structural transformations in institutions and social relations (Peet & Hartwick, 2015). Thus, development is both a goal and a process aimed at creating equitable and sustainable progress for individuals and societies.

Traditionally, development was primarily associated with economic growth. In the 1950s and 1960s, it was largely referred to as economic growth, emphasizing quantitative changes in economic performance. However, scholars have since expanded this view to encompass broader social, political, and environmental dimensions. Seidman (2005) defines

economic development as "a process of creating and utilizing physical, human, financial, and social assets to generate improved and broadly shared economic well-being and quality of life for a community or region". This definition underscores the importance of equitable distribution of resources and the enhancement of quality of life.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in 1997 defined development as increasing people's choices, highlighting four key factors: empowerment, equity, productivity, and sustainability. This perspective emphasizes the expansion of human capabilities and opportunities, moving beyond mere economic indicators.

Sen (1999), in his seminal work, "Development as Freedom" (1999), posited that development should be viewed as a process of expanding the real freedoms that people enjoy. He argues that economic growth is merely one aspect of development and that true progress involves the removal of major sources of freedom, such as poverty, tyranny, and social deprivation.

Accordingly, the concept of development has evolved from a narrow focus on economic growth to a more comprehensive understanding that includes social, political, and environmental dimensions. Contemporary definitions emphasize the importance of expanding human capabilities, ensuring equitable resource distribution, and promoting sustainable practices to improve the overall quality of life.

### **Concept of Peace Building**

Peace building is a multifaceted concept that has been defined and interpreted by various scholars over time, each emphasizing different aspects of the processes and goals involved.

Galtung (1969), a pioneering figure in peace studies, introduced the concept of peace building in the 1970s. He advocated for the establishment of structures that promote sustainable peace by addressing the root causes of violent conflict and supporting comprehensive mechanisms for conflict resolution. Galtung emphasized the importance of creating systems that not only resolve immediate disputes but also prevent future conflicts by transforming the underlying social, economic, and political conditions that lead to violence.

Doyle and Sambanis (2000) offered a theoretical and quantitative analysis of international peace building efforts. They defined peace building as actions undertaken by international or national actors to institutionalize peace, understood as the absence of armed conflict and a modicum of participatory politics. Their work highlights the role of external interventions in establishing conditions conducive to lasting peace, particularly in post-conflict societies.

Paffenholz (2021) a prominent scholar in the field, has contributed extensively to the understanding of peace building. In her 2021 article "Perpetual Peace building: A New Paradigm to move beyond the Linearity of Liberal Peace building," Paffenholz critiques traditional linear approaches to peace building and advocates for more adaptive, context-specific strategies. She emphasizes the need for inclusive processes that engage local populations and address the complexities of contemporary conflicts.

Ginty (2011) introduced the concept of "hybrid peace building," recognizing the interplay between international peace building interventions and local traditions. He argues that peace building is a hybrid process that involves a combination of top-down and bottom-up approaches, where external actors and local communities collaboratively shape the peace building agenda. This perspective underscores the importance of local ownership and cultural sensitivity in peace building initiatives.

Richmond (2011) proposed the idea of a "post-liberal peace," suggesting that traditional liberal peace building models often fail to account for the diverse needs and perspectives of local populations. He advocates for approaches that move beyond the imposition of external models, emphasizing the creation of peace building frameworks that are responsive to the specific contexts and aspirations of affected communities.

Peace building encompasses a range of activities aimed at establishing sustainable peace by addressing the root causes of conflict and fostering conditions that prevent the recurrence of violence. Scholars have highlighted the importance of inclusive, adaptive, and context-specific approaches that balance external support with local ownership, ensuring that peace building efforts are both effective and culturally relevant.

### 3. Methodology

This study will employ a mixed-methods research design, combining both qualitative and quantitative approaches. The qualitative approach will involve in-depth interviews and focus group discussions to gather detailed information on the role of the Aku Uka of Wukari in fostering peace and development. The quantitative approach will involve a survey questionnaires to collect data on the perceptions of the local community on the effectiveness of the Aku Uka's peace-building initiatives.

The population of the study will consist of: the Aku Uka of Wukari and his council of chiefs, Local government officials in Wukari Local Government Area, Community leaders and elders in Wukari and residents of Wukari town and surrounding villages. A sample size of 200 respondents will be selected using a combination of purposive and random sampling techniques. Purposive sampling will be used to select the Aku Uka, his council of chiefs, local government officials, and community leaders. Random sampling will be used to select residents of Wukari town and surrounding villages.

Data will be collected using the following methods: in-depth interviews with the Aku Uka, his council of chiefs, local government officials, and community leaders. Focus group discussions with residents of Wukari town and surrounding villages. Survey questionnaires administered to a random sample of residents. Data will be analyzed using both qualitative and quantitative methods. Qualitative data from in-depth interviews and focus group discussions will be analyzed using thematic analysis while Quantitative data from the survey will be analyzed using descriptive statistics and inferential statistics (e.g., chi-square test, ANOVA). Data will be triangulated to ensure validity and reliability. The study will be conducted in accordance with ethical standards, ensuring. Informed consent from all participants. Confidentiality and anonymity of participants. Respect for the cultural and traditional practices of the Aku Uka and his community.

### 4. Results and Discussion

The data presentation and analysis focus on examining the role of the Aku Uka of Wukari in fostering peace

and development in Taraba State. It involves interpreting qualitative and quantitative findings, highlighting his contributions to conflict resolution, cultural preservation, and community development from, while addressing challenges faced in maintaining harmony and progress.

### **Conflict resolution strategies employed by the Aku Uka of Wukari in promoting peace and reconciliation among diverse groups in Wukari, Taraba State, from 2012 to 2022.**

Question: What primary strategy did the Aku Uka of Wukari use to promote peace among conflicting groups in Wukari?

**Table 1: Variable frequency percentage**

|                        |     |       |
|------------------------|-----|-------|
| Military intervention  | 5   | 2.5%  |
| Mediation and dialogue | 170 | 85%   |
| Political alliances    | 4   | 2.5%  |
| Economic sanctions     | 21  | 10.5% |
| Total                  | 200 | 100%  |

Source: Field work 2025

### **The contributions of the Aku Uka to socio-economic development initiatives in Wukari, including infrastructure, education, and youth empowerment, within the same period.**

Question: How did Aku Uka contribute to the Socio-economic Development in Wukari?

**Table 2: Variable Frequency percentage**

|                                        |     |      |
|----------------------------------------|-----|------|
| Promoting cultural awareness and unity | 30  | 15%  |
| Enforcing strict traditional laws      | 10  | 5%   |
| Isolating conflicting communities      | 20  | 10%  |
| Avoiding involvement in disputes       | 140 | 70%  |
| Total                                  | 200 | 100% |

Source: Field Work 2025

### **Aku Uka conflict Resolution efforts**

Question: Which approach best reflects the Aku Uka's Conflict resolution efforts in fostering reconciliation?

**Table 3: Variable Frequency percentage**

|                                        |     |     |
|----------------------------------------|-----|-----|
| Promoting cultural awareness and unity | 30  | 15% |
| Enforcing strict traditional laws      | 4   | 2%  |
| Isolating conflicting communities      | 6   | 3%  |
| Avoiding involvement in disputes       | 160 | 80% |
| Total                                  | 200 | 100 |

Source: Field work 2025

### **Contributions of the Aku Uka to Socio-economic development initiatives in Wukari, including infrastructure, education, and youth empowerment, within the same period.**

Question: Which area of socio-economic development did the Aku Uka prioritize in Wukari during his reign?

**Table 4: Variable Frequency Percentage**

|                                      |     |       |
|--------------------------------------|-----|-------|
| Expansion of trade routes            | 20  | 10%   |
| Improvement of education and schools | 25  | 12.5% |
| Establishment of private businesses  | 140 | 70%   |
| Promotion of foreign investments     | 15  | 7.5%  |
| Total                                | 200 | 100%  |

Source: Field Work 2025

**Initiatives by the Aku Uka to empower youth in Wukari**

Question: What key initiative was led by the Aku Uka to empower youth in Wukari?

**Table 5: Variable Frequency Percentage**

|                                               |     |      |
|-----------------------------------------------|-----|------|
| Creation of skill acquisition programs        | 140 | 70%  |
| Introduction of tax exemptions for businesses | 15  | 7.5% |
| Formation of political youth councils         | 5   | 2.5% |
| Sponsorship of international scholarships     | 40  | 20%  |
| Total                                         | 200 | 100  |

Source: Field work 2025

**4.1 Discussion of Results**

The findings from the study on the role of the Aku Uka of Wukari in fostering peace and development between 2012 and 2022 revealed significant contributions to conflict resolution and socio-economic progress. These findings align with related literature on the importance of traditional rulers in promoting harmony and development in African societies. Traditional rulers are widely recognized as custodians of culture and mediators in conflict situations. According to Shils (1975), traditional authority plays a critical role in maintaining societal stability by fostering unity and mediating disputes. This perspective aligns with the Aku Uka's active involvement in addressing communal conflicts, particularly the recurring disputes between the Jukun and Tiv ethnic groups in Wukari. Through dialogue and mediation, the Aku Uka facilitated negotiations that reduced tensions and promoted coexistence. This finding supports Mazrui's (1986) argument that traditional rulers act as bridges between diverse groups, leveraging their legitimacy to promote peace. Furthermore, the Aku Uka's contributions to development, particularly in education and infrastructure, resonate with studies highlighting the

socio-economic role of traditional rulers. For instance, Ayodele (2000) emphasizes that traditional leaders can mobilize grassroots support for community-based initiatives. In Wukari, the Aku Uka spearheaded projects to improve educational facilities, increase access to healthcare, and support youth empowerment programs. His role in fostering partnerships with government and non-governmental organizations underscores the collaborative potential of traditional leadership in achieving development goals. However, findings also reveal challenges faced by the Aku Uka in fulfilling his role. Critics such as Mamdani (1996) caution against the overreliance on traditional rulers, noting potential issues like partiality or lack of accountability. Similarly, in the Wukari context, some community members expressed concerns about perceived biases in conflict resolution efforts. These challenges highlight the complexity of balancing traditional authority with modern governance demands.

The findings reinforce the critical role of traditional rulers in fostering peace and development. The Aku Uka of Wukari exemplified this through conflict resolution, cultural preservation, and socio-economic initiatives. These contributions align with scholarly perspectives on traditional leadership as an

essential complement to formal governance structures. Nonetheless, addressing challenges such as neutrality and accountability remains crucial to optimizing the role of traditional rulers in contemporary societies. The case of the Aku Uka demonstrates the enduring relevance of traditional authority in promoting stability and progress in diverse and dynamic contexts like Wukari, Taraba State.

## 5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The study of the role of the Aku Uka of Wukari underscores the significant contributions of traditional rulers in fostering peace and development. As the custodian of Jukun cultural heritage and a mediator in conflicts, the Aku Uka played a pivotal role in addressing recurring interethnic disputes, particularly between the Jukun and Tiv communities. His emphasis on dialogue, mediation, and reconciliation demonstrated the enduring relevance of traditional rulers in promoting social harmony and conflict resolution in diverse societies.

Additionally, the Aku Uka's contributions to socio-economic development through initiatives in education, youth empowerment, and infrastructure improvement highlighted the developmental potential of traditional leadership. By leveraging his legitimacy and influence, he facilitated partnerships with government and non-governmental actors, ensuring community-driven progress in Wukari. However, challenges such as perceptions of bias and the complexity of integrating traditional authority into

modern governance frameworks reveal the limitations of this role. To fully harness the potential of traditional rulers, greater attention must be given to fostering neutrality, accountability, and collaboration with contemporary institutions.

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

i The conflict resolution strategies employed by the Aku Uka, particularly his use of dialogue and mediation, should be institutionalized. Traditional rulers in Wukari and other regions can collaborate with government agencies to establish formal community peace councils. These councils, led by traditional authorities, should focus on fostering dialogue, mediating disputes, and promoting reconciliation among diverse groups. This approach will ensure sustainable peace and reduce the recurrence of ethnic conflicts.

ii Building on the Aku Uka's contributions to socio-economic development, particularly in education and youth empowerment, there is a need for greater collaboration between traditional institutions and local governments. Joint efforts should prioritize funding for education, skill acquisition centers, and infrastructure projects. Additionally, the establishment of mentorship and entrepreneurship programs under traditional leadership can further empower youth, ensuring long-term development and reducing socio-economic disparities in Wukari.

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