

Administrative relevance of Yakurr tradition in peacebuilding: Examining the matrilineal system in core Yakurr Communities. Cross River State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study examines the administrative significance of Yakurr traditional institutions, particularly the role of matrilineal families in peacebuilding among the core Yakurr communities of Cross River State, Nigeria. The study was motivated by the recurring incidents of misunderstandings, communal conflicts, and violent skirmishes that have negatively affected social cohesion and development within these communities. Given that matrilineal families are found across all core Yakurr settlements, their contribution to conflict resolution and peacebuilding remains indispensable. While government has the formal responsibility of managing conflicts and restoring peace, matrilineal institutions have historically served as effective indigenous mechanisms for mediation, reconciliation, and social integration. The study adopted a qualitative research design and relied on secondary sources of data obtained from books, journal articles, magazines, historical records, and other relevant scholarly materials. The Peacebuilding Theory provided the theoretical framework for the analysis. Findings revealed that matrilineal families have played significant roles in mitigating communal disputes and fostering peaceful coexistence among the Yakurr people. Their extensive kinship networks transcend community boundaries, thereby facilitating dialogue and reconciliation during periods of conflict. The study recommends the expansion of matrilineal ties beyond the core Yakurr communities to neighboring non-Yakurr linguistic groups as a strategy for strengthening intergroup relations, promoting sustainable peace, and enhancing regional development. Given the history of communal conflicts within Yakurr land, the reinforcement of matrilineal connections across all communities in Yakurr Local Government Area remains essential for effective peacebuilding and social stability.

Keywords: Peacebuilding, Communal Conflict, Yakurr Communities, Matrilineal Families, Traditional Administration.

Introduction

Administration plays a vital role in every society because it promotes order, stability, and peaceful coexistence among community members. Effective administration helps to prevent conflicts and social unrest that may undermine communal interests and hinder development. Consequently, the maintenance of peace and social harmony within communities is essential for sustainable development at the local, state, and national levels. In this regard, peacebuilding among the core Yakurr communities is particularly significant because of the area's social and economic contributions to Cross River State and Nigeria as a whole.

Yakurr land is richly endowed with fertile agricultural resources and serves as one of the major food-producing areas in Cross River State. The people are actively engaged in commercial agriculture and supply food products to major urban centres such as Uyo, Benin City, and Lagos. Therefore, peace and stability within the core Yakurr communities are indispensable for economic productivity and regional development. The strategic importance of these communities extends beyond Yakurr Local Government Area, as peace within the area contributes to stability in neighbouring communities, the Central Senatorial District, Cross River State, and Nigeria at large.

The Yakurr people, also known as Yako or Yakaa, inhabit five closely related communities in Cross River State: Ugep, Ekor, Idomi, Nko, and Mkpani (Obono, 2001). Historically, these communities were known as Umor, Ekoli, Ilomi, Nkoibolokom, and Yakurr-be-Ibe respectively. According to Okoi-Uyouyo (2002), the present names emerged as a result of pronunciation difficulties encountered by early European visitors. Despite these changes, the Yakurr people share a common history, ancestry, and cultural heritage rooted in a tradition of overland migration.

Historical accounts indicate that the ancestral homeland of the Yakurr people was Akpa, a shortened form of Lekanakpakpa (Ubi, 1978; Ford, 1964). Migration from Akpa occurred between 1617 and 1677 as a result of conflicts and misunderstandings with neighbouring communities (Ubi, 1978; Ubi, 1986). Around 1660, groups of Yakurr migrants established settlements in present-day Idomi and Ugep. Subsequently, between 1677 and 1707, other

migrants founded Ekor and Nko, while Mkpani was established between 1707 and 1737. These migrations were largely influenced by population growth, competition for land resources, and unresolved disputes. The relocation process was facilitated by patrilineal groups and resulted in a slight correspondence among patrilineal names and a stronger similarity among matrilineal identities across the various Yakurr settlements (Assiga, 2023).

One of the most distinctive features of Yakurr society is its system of double unilineal descent. Similar systems have been documented among the Ashanti, Ga, and Fanti of Ghana (Herskovits, 1937), the LoDagaba (Goody, 1956, 1957), the Nyaro and Tullishi of the Nuba Hills in Sudan (Nadel, 1947, 1950), the Herero of Namibia and Botswana (Schapera, 1945), the Kunama of Eritrea (Nadel, 1950), the Mbembe of Cross River State (Harris, 1963), and the Ohafia of southeastern Nigeria (Forde & Jones, 1950; Uchendu, 1965). However, the Yakurr of South-South Nigeria remain one of the most widely recognized examples of double unilineal descent in anthropological literature (Obono, 2001).

The pioneering anthropological studies of Daryll Forde brought international attention to the unique social structure of the Yakurr people. His work established the Yakurr double descent system as a significant subject in anthropological scholarship and highlighted the distinctive kinship organization of the Middle Cross River region (Obono, 2001; Uchendu, 1997). According to Obono (2001), the Yakurr system of double descent organizes social, political, and religious life around principles of kinship and provides a framework for understanding various aspects of social behaviour and community organization.

The Yakurr social structure is organized around two complementary kinship institutions: the dispersed matrilineal (Lebojimo) and the corporate patrilineal (Kepon) (Obono, 2001). While the patrilineal system is largely confined to specific lineage units within individual communities, the matrilineal extends across all core Yakurr settlements. Each patrilineal is headed by an Obol Kepon and is responsible for maintaining peace, order, and development within its lineage group. This study, however, focuses on the matrilineal institution because of its broader influence and its role in fostering peace and unity across community boundaries.

Unlike the patrilineal system, which is localized, the matrilineal system operates throughout the core Yakurr communities of Ugep, Ekor, Idomi, Nko, and Mkpani. The bonds created through matrilineal descent are exceptionally strong, enabling individuals from one community to identify with and receive support from members of the same matrilineal in other Yakurr communities. These enduring kinship ties have historically served as mechanisms for conflict resolution, reconciliation, and social integration. Although the present Yakurr settlements emerged partly as a consequence of migration and communal conflicts, the matrilineal institution has continued to sustain social cohesion and collective identity among the people.

Administratively, matrilineal families play significant roles in maintaining social order, preserving cultural traditions, and supporting indigenous governance structures. Their influence is particularly evident in the institution of traditional leadership. For example, the position of Obol Lapon, the paramount traditional ruler of a Yakurr community, is traditionally associated with the Lebojimo matrilineal. This hereditary arrangement reflects the enduring importance of matrilineal descent in the political and cultural life of the Yakurr people. Other matrilineal families also perform specific ceremonial and administrative functions within the traditional palace system.

The Obol Lapon serves as the head of the community and enjoys considerable recognition and respect from both the people and government authorities. In some cases, the Obol Lapon may also serve as the Paramount Ruler of Yakurr Local Government Area. Through their involvement in leadership succession, cultural preservation, conflict mediation, and social regulation, matrilineal families have remained indispensable custodians of Yakurr traditions and have contributed significantly to peacebuilding, unity, and community development across generations.

Conceptual elucidation

a) *Matrilineal family*

Matrilineal family is a line of descent from a female ancestor to a descendant of female in which the individual in all intervening generations are mothers. In a descent system, individuals belong to the same descent group as their mothers. According to Wikipedia (1948) see matrilineal family as the tracing of kinship through the female line. It may also correlate with a social system in which people identify with their matrilineal, their mother lineage and which can involve inheritance of property and titles. A matrilineal family can be seen as a line of descent from a female

ancestor to a descendant of female in which individuals in all intervening generations are mothers. In a matrilineal descent system, individuals belong to the same descent group as their mother. According to Obono (2001) matrilineal membership in Yakurr communities is dispersed while the patrilineal is corporate, localized and co-residential entity. For Encyclopedia Britannica (2025) a matrilineal society is a group adhering to a kinship system in which ancestral descent is traced through maternal instead of paternal lines. In a matrilineage, individuals are related as kin through the female line of descent. Some 19th century scholars believed that matrilineal societies predated patrilineal ones and represented an earlier evolutionary stage: the Yako people of Nigeria recognizing both patrilineal and matrilineal descent. Matrilineal descent governs the inheritance of transferable wealth, such as livestock. Matrilineal kins are responsible for debts incurred by individuals and have the rights and obligations in payment of compensation for inquires. They also participate in certain rituals associated with a fertility spirit (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2025). For Fivable (2025) matrilineal refers to a system of kinship and inheritance in which lineage, descent and inheritance are traced through the mother's side of family. This structure has significant implications for social organization, gender roles and familial relationships in various culture and influencing how societies view kinship and authority. For Sera and Nathan (2024) defined matrilineal kinship systems where descent is traced through mothers only are present.

b) Peace building

Peace building refers to the efforts to build a sustainable peace by addressing the root causes of conflict and building endogenous capacities for peaceful conflict management and resolution (International Association for Humanitarian Policy and Conflict Research, 2013). The general definition, the concept and practice of peace building are not unique, they have evolved over time, mainly influenced by political changes and the experience of the international community in conflict resolution in various countries (Gamboavesga and Quijano, 2025). Peace building is the process of working with two or more conflicting parties to resolve differences peacefully. Peacemakers help to improves communication between parties to end or prevent violent conflict (Study.com, 2024).

Peace building is important to ensure people feel safe in their communities. Peace building allows for economic and social development. The United State Institute of Peace identify seven steps to peace building. They involve acknowledging how damaging long term violence can be. The importance of local involvement in the peace process and the need to revisit and revise peace plans over time. The United Nations was involved in peace building effort in Liberia at the end of its civil war. The United Nations sent military troops and diplomats to ensure the conflicting parties were maintaining their part of the peace plan. Peace building is a process that promotes the resolution of conflicts and provides a means to prevent future conflicts by establishing open communication between conflicting parties to create a lasting peaceful state. (Study. Com, 2024). According to Study. Com (2024) the concept of peace is not as simple as it may seem. Peacemakers must be familiar with various interpretations of peace in order to decide how to best handle each circumstance.

Peace building has undergone series of chances across the globe, most times with special interest on third world countries (Kazeem, 2019). In modern times, peace building came to limelight in 1970 when a Norwegian scholar John Galtung first termed peace building through his campaign for a cooperative system that would build sustainable peace (United Nations Peace Building Support Office, 2012). Peace building is aimed at addressing the root causes of conflict and supporting local capacity for peace management and conflict resolution (Kazeem, 2019). Peace building could be traced to the field of peace studies more than thirty years ago. In 1975, Johan Galtung coined the term in his pioneering work "The Approaches to Peace" peace keeping, peace-making and peace building (Peace Building Initiative History, 2017). Peace building is defined as the process that facilitates the establishment of durable peace and tries to prevent the recurrence of violence by addressing the root causes and effects of conflict through reconciliation, institution building and political as well as economic transformation (Boutros-Ghali, 1992 cited in Peace Building Initiative History, 2017). For United Nations Development Program (2010) noted that peace building entails efforts to support a country's transition from conflict to sustainable peace with a stable political order and institutions in place.

Theoretical framework

Peace Building Theory

This study is anchored on the Peace Building Theory developed by John Paul Lederach (1997). Lederach is widely credited with advancing the theoretical and practical foundations of peacebuilding, building upon the earlier conceptualization of the term by Johan Galtung (Gawerc, 2006). The theory emphasizes the creation and sustenance

of positive peace through the transformation of relationships, institutions, and social structures that contribute to conflict.

According to Sandole (2010), peacebuilding is a dynamic framework that seeks to strengthen positive peace through the involvement of multiple actors performing complementary roles either simultaneously or at different stages of a conflict. Peacebuilding may be reactive, involving interventions after conflicts have occurred, or proactive, where preventive measures are undertaken to forestall the outbreak of violence. Proactive peacebuilding often requires third-party interventions aimed at addressing potential sources of conflict before they escalate into destructive confrontations (Sandole, 2010).

Okechukwu and Samuel (2022) argue that comprehensive peacebuilding extends beyond conflict resolution to encompass conflict prevention, management, transformation, and post-conflict reconstruction. It seeks to address the structural and underlying causes of conflict at local, regional, and global levels. Consequently, peacebuilding is viewed as a multilateral process involving governments, traditional institutions, civil society organizations, community groups, and other stakeholders working collectively toward sustainable peace.

The theory assumes the existence of conflict or the possibility of conflict that necessitates either preventive or remedial intervention. Peacebuilding therefore promotes active civic engagement, dialogue, reconciliation, and social cooperation among affected groups (Okechukwu & Samuel, 2022). Gawerc (2006) further contends that effective peacebuilding must integrate conflict resolution mechanisms with principles of social justice, equity, and inclusion. Similarly, Longpoe (2020) maintains that peacebuilding addresses the root causes of violent conflict in order to reduce the likelihood of future violence and promote long-term stability.

As a contemporary framework for conflict management, peacebuilding operates at different levels of analysis and intervention to de-escalate tensions, restore normalcy, and establish conditions for sustainable peace. It provides both conceptual and operational tools for reconciliation, restorative justice, and social healing, particularly in societies recovering from violent conflict, communal crises, and human rights violations (Okechukwu & Samuel, 2022). Despite the rapid forces of globalization and modernization, traditional institutions such as matrilineal families in Yakurr society continue to play significant roles in peacebuilding and social integration (Grace-Etim & Omini, 2024).

The relevance of Peace Building Theory to this study lies in its emphasis on indigenous mechanisms of conflict prevention and resolution. The study examines the administrative significance of Yakurr traditions in promoting peace through the matrilineal system that cuts across the five core Yakurr communities of Ugep, Ekor, Idomi, Nko, and Mkpani in Yakurr Local Government Area of Cross River State, Nigeria.

Historically, these communities have experienced recurrent communal conflicts and violent confrontations. Ugep, the largest and most politically significant Yakurr community, serves as the headquarters of Yakurr Local Government Area and hosts several federal and state government institutions. Despite its strategic position, Ugep has been involved in communal wars with Idomi and Mkpani and has experienced periodic conflicts with neighbouring Ekor. Similarly, Nko has engaged in a series of violent clashes with Mkpani, resulting in considerable loss of lives and property. Such conflicts have fostered mutual suspicion, weakened social cohesion, and hindered socio-economic development within the area.

In this context, matrilineal families constitute an important indigenous peacebuilding institution. Their networks extend across all core Yakurr communities, creating enduring bonds of kinship that transcend community boundaries. Following communal conflicts, members of matrilineal families often convene meetings, perform traditional reconciliation rites, and engage in conflict mediation activities rooted in ancestral customs and values. These practices contribute significantly to restoring trust, promoting reconciliation, and rebuilding social relationships among previously hostile groups.

Furthermore, matrilineal families provide social support systems that foster solidarity and collective advancement. Through regular interactions, mutual assistance, and shared cultural obligations, they encourage cooperation among members and reduce the likelihood of persistent hostility. In many instances, conflicts that prove difficult for government authorities or traditional rulers to resolve due to distrust and entrenched grievances are more effectively addressed through the intervention of matrilineal networks because of the strong kinship ties and legitimacy they command among community members.

Therefore, the Peace Building Theory provides an appropriate framework for understanding how matrilineal institutions contribute to conflict resolution, reconciliation, and social cohesion within Yakurr society. The study argues that the administrative functions of matrilineal families have played a crucial role in promoting peace, unity, and sustainable development in the core Yakurr communities, thereby contributing to the broader stability and development of Cross River State and Nigeria as a whole.

Methodology

This study is qualitative research that was anchored on secondary sources of data which was obtained from the study of literature in the form of journals, books, magazines and other works that provide scientific and related information relevant to the study. The research is characterized with content analysis for proper explanation and understanding.

Some communal conflicts in Core Yakurr communities

According to Omini and Friday (2021) communal conflict has been very common in African societies and the result of these conflicts is bloody calamity in the aspect of destruction of lives, properties, livelihood and hindrance to economic development. While Oji, Eme and Nwoba (2014) explained that conflicts constitute one of the major recurring problems affecting the socio-political landscape of Africa. Communal conflicts are experienced on yearly basis despite government efforts to promote peace in Nigeria. In Nigeria there are communities that have engulfed in protracted communal conflicts for three decades without resolution despite series of efforts from the government. This section of communal conflicts is limited to core Yakurr communities in Yakurr Local Government Area of Cross River State. Communal conflicts in Yakurr communities are largely and mainly driven by disputes over land, particularly farmland, with a history of violence and destruction. These conflicts frequently involve neighboring communities and can escalate leading to loss of lives, displacement of people living in affected communities and destruction of property. The conflict also has socio-economic impacts on food security and other business activities (Ubi, 1994). Communal conflicts have deepened hatred and acrimony in core Yakurr communities. Only the matrilineal family can resolve and bring the required love following the deity and ties of the Chief priests of the various matrilineal families.

Some of the communal conflicts in core Yakurr communities

1. Mkpani and Nko communal crises

Generally, among Yakurr communities, Mkpani and Nko present important social dichotomy in the aspect of their geographical and population size (Oka, 1999). According to Okoi (2018) Mkpani is the third and Nko the fourth largest Yakurr communities from a spatial and socio-economic point of view. The two communities occupying Northwest of Yakurr Local Government Area and share common land boundary. The Mkpani and Nko boundary conflict in the old upper Cross River Region can be traced to two major reasons which are grouped into two categories. The first which was the killings of a kinsman called Ukpen from Mkpani community by an Nko man over ownership of a portion of farmland (Efoli, 2006). Historically, in any Yakurr community, if a kinsman is killed this is an invitation for war by the community of the man killed. To confirm the invitation of war of any community Ibiang and Ajeh (2020) posit that historically, among the Yakurr people, it is evident that killing a kinsman in any community in Yakurr bring instant war until reparations were made.

The second cause of the Mkpani and Nko war according to Enang (2009) was triggered as the fallout of a land dispute between Nko, a community in the present day Yakurr and Adun community in Obubra Local Government Area. He further maintained that, the second conflict erupted from a protracted land case in the 1930s in which Mkpani stood in as witness to Adun against their kits and kins in Nko community (Enang, 2009). The case was unfavorable to Nko community and this turned out that Nko lost a large portion of their farmlands to Adun community (Efoli, 2006). This singular witness of the Mkpani Community against Nko Community angered the entire core Yakurr communities. Base on this, the Nko people secured the backing of the Yakurr people to start a land problem with Mkpani community that started precisely in 1949 and spanned beyond five decades to the 20th century and ended in 1992 and reoccurred in 2016 (Ibiang and Ajeh, 2020). This crisis heightened the hatred of the people of Nko and Mkpani of same ethnic group and historical migration.

Ugep and Idomi Communal War of 1992

In February 1992, Ugep and Idomi went to war, these are neighboring communities of same ethnicity located in the South-South region of Nigeria and precisely in the middle Cross River Geographical Zone known as Yakurr Local Government Area of Cross River State. According to Ubi (2001) narrated that in 1992, Idomi people kidnapped

Ugep men, Obala Ebri and Onun Ebali, but the people of Idomi denied the kidnapped. But these persons have not been found till date while the Idomi people maintained that the 1992 conflict between them and Ugep was the aftermath of a boundary dispute (Ubi, 2001).

Theoretically, the Ugep/Idomi conflict can be classified along the lines suggested by Edward Azar as a local socio-economic conflict (Azar, 1990). The war was characterized by large scale of human suffering, atrocity, threats to human rights, threat to stability, massive destruction of property and human lives and prolong nature of tension (1992-1997) causing disaffection and discord (Ubi, 2001). This war also promoted hatred between Ugep and Idomi people.

Mkpani and Ugep Communal War Of 1986

The Mkpani and Ugep war of 1986 happened to be the communal clash between both communities of same ethnicity and migration history. The conflict is said to stemmed from a land dispute, a recurring issue in many Nigerian communities. The war resulted in the loss of lives and properties, the conflict brought hatred between the two communities.

Ugep and Ekorì skemishes

Ugep and Ekorì has a common boundary and had never gone into full scale and open communal conflict, but there have been skirmishes where lives were lost and this promoted hatred and fragile peace between the communities. Above were some of the conflicts that took place in core Yakurr communities that triggered hatred among the people of same ethnicity and migration history. Some of the conflicts became protracted that government machineries were unable to resolve the conflicts and restore lasting peace. The people have to go the traditional way by involving the maternal families whose love cannot be betrayed because of their deities. Matrilineal families in Yakurr nation are characterized with love, peace, unity and kindness to one another.

Impacts of communal conflicts in Yakurr communities

Communal conflicts among core Yakurr communities have negative impact on the socio-economic development of where crisis is affected. For instance, in 1992, the Cross River State government started a huge road construction linking Idomi and Ugep and other adjoining communities. The Ugep and Idomi road was to advance economic and social development of both communities. Unfortunately, the aftermath of the war impacted negatively on the road construction as the contractors could not work due to the communal war and the Cross River State government that is the major sponsor had to abandon the construction of the road, even many years after the war. The road later became an abandon project and the bad state of the road brought a downward trend towards economic activities of the entire Yakurr Local Government and Cross River State in general. The people of Idomi who were supposed to come to Ugep to buy sophisticated goods, building materials on cheaper transportation were unable to transact such venture for fear of being killed or bad state of the road. Ugep is the largest major town and the headquarters of Yakurr Local Government and link to Abi and Biase Local Government Areas. Thus, investors invest much in Ugep because of its strategic location and population which make it a comfortable market for business owners. Communal crisis can make people who would have contributed to development to relocate to a more peaceful environment. The escalation of young Africans migrating to Europe and other continents where merit system and peace are enhanced with all resentful alacrity (Omini and Umahi, 2024) The importance of rural areas in the development of Nigeria and the world cannot be overemphasized (Omini and Ekpo, 2021)

On the other hand, Ugep market women who until the war can easily travelled to Idomi to buy products much cheaper from farmers were unable to do that. They rather had to pay high transport fare to Biase and Obubra Local Governments to buy their products. This brought about high costs of products to the consumer. Health wise, Idomi people with critical health condition could not access the Cross River State owned General Hospital located in Ugep for fear of being attacked.

The impact of the communal war between Ugep and Mkpani in 1986 brought both communities backward in terms of economic growth and development. The pathway leading Mkpani to Ugep which is the shortest distance between both communities using bicycles and motorcycles was no longer safe for the people of both communities. It affected traders in Ugep who normally used the route to buy cheaper farm produce or to visit relatives during New Yam Festival. The people of Ugep and Mkpani are closely related, it was a little misunderstanding that made the Mkpani people to leave Ugep and base in its current location. On the other hand, Mkpani people were unable to access the Cross River State owned General Hospital located in Ugep. It affected the health state of Mkpani people who

needed medical attention. In fact, lives of young and prominent people were lost in the course of the war. The hatred among members of the community extended beyond the Yakurr Local Government.

For the impact between Nko and Mkpani communities, the war was fought series of times which resulted in the death of many young people. The series of war affected farming activities which triggered food insecurity and high cost of prices of foodstuffs in Yakurr Local Government Area and Cross River State in general. The war heightened hatred and suspicion many years after the war. Any time there is conflict in core Yakurr communities, the people suffer untold hardship and dwindles the fortunes of any development. Communal crisis in Yakurr made the government to abandon projects that would enhance socio-economic development in Yakurr Local Government Area. Beside core Yakurr Communities being affected by conflicts, other villages like Agoi Mbami, Agoi Ekpo, Assiga Inyima and Kepeti that are part of Yakurr Local Government Area are affected negatively. People from these villages cannot travel to war torn communities and civil servants who work with the local government headquarters cannot go to work to avoid being trapped in the war.

Communal conflicts in Yakurr is a source of concern considering the fact that communal wars were fought up to 21st century among Yakurr communities. Communal conflict is an invitation for retrogression, unemployment, underdevelopment, backwardness and poverty. The role of the matrilineal families' intervention towards peace building cannot be overemphasized. The maternal families in Yakurr cut across the entire core Yakurr communities and as such become an instrument for initiation of reconciliation and peace building to strongly avoid further war.

Matrilineal families in core Yakurr Communities

According to Okoi (2023) there are ninety one (91) matrilineal families in core Yakurr communities and each family has their Ase (Singular, Yose). Ase are fertility spirits associated with particular matriclans or matrilineal (Ajimo) and are at the center of the religious organization of fertility among the Yakurr people (Obono, 2001).

Table 1: Ajimo (Matricland) and Ase of Ugep

Number	Ajimo (Matrilineal)	Ase
1	Yabol	Odjokobi
2	Yakunkunebol	Odjokobi
3	Yakpolo	Odjokobi
4	Yabaye	Otalikumo
5	Yabono	Otalikumo
6	Yanali	Otalikumo
7	Yakamafe	Ntanakotan
8	Yayali	Atewa
9	Yatoyomo	Atewa
10	Yakankang	Atewa
11	Yabolete	Esukpa
12	Yatebo	Esukpa
13	Yaseniboil	Okalefon
14	Yakoibol	Kukpatu
15	Yakpambol	Obol Ene
16	Yawambol	Obol Ene
17	Yajeni	Obol Ene
18	Yapuni	Otabelusana
19	Yajokpolo	Otabe Lusana
20	Yabong	Osenawekakong
21	Yakumiko	Osenawekekong
22	Yanyor	Obete Edet

Source: (Obono, 2023)

The discrepancy between the number of matriclans recorded in Forde is 23, but the one stated by Obono are 22. According to Obono (2001) the discrepancy between the number of matrilineal is not problematic, but reflects ritual and political changes over time. The number of matrilineal families in Ugep during Forde's time has reduced through fusion, a process that took place even back then. Following the rapid emergence of outlying hamlets, spatial and political reconfigurations occur frequently. Since Forde's research, the Yakunkunebol have carved themselves out as a distinct matrilineal unit, although they are still affiliated to Yose Odjokobi (Obono, 2001). It is through the priesthood that this matrilineal can produce the Ina of Odjokobi, who automatically become the Obol Lupon (Leader of the

Town) regarded as “Primus Inter pares” among the Priest-Chiefs, but in reality much more powerful (Obono, 2001). Unlike other Ase, Odjokobi is seen as the common Yose of the entire town. It is said to be “the first shrine that the Yakurr possessed” (Ubi, 1981) and to have been brought by them from Akpa, the ancestral settlement from which the Yakurr migrated to their present location (Obono, 2000).

Table 2: Ajimo (Matriclans) in Ekori

Number	Ajimo (matrilineal)
1	Lebojimo
2	Yawanboi
3	Yateba
4	Yatiyomo
5	Yapuni
6	Yayam
7	Yabayen
8	Yajokpoli
9	Yatakonga
10	Yayoo
11	Yabangboi
12	Yakoiboi
13	Yaplang
14	Yatatangabol
15	Yakpolo
16	Yajeni

Source: Okoi (2023)

Table 3: Ajimo (Matriclans) in Nko

Number	Agimo (Matriclan)
1	Yawanbol
2	Ypakoibol
3	Yapuni
4	Yatiyomo
5	Yayoo
6	Yakei
7	Yajokpoli
8	Yakaboli
9	Yasanga
10	Yafilkoi
11	Yakamakama
12	Yakpokponga
13	Yatebe
14	Yaplang
15	Yakamafe

Source: Okoi (2023)

Matriclans in Nko have their Yose name after them

Table 4: Matriclans of Idomi : Ajimo (Matriclans)

Number	Agimo (Matriclans)
1	Lebojima
2	Yabong
3	Yapali
4	Yabongo
5	Yatatangobol
6	Yabayen
7	Yakapan
8	Yapuni
9	Yatiomo
10	Yayoo
11	Yakoibol
12	Yanali

13	Yajokopli
14	Yawambol
15	Yalasi
16	Yakunkunebol
17	Yakumiko
18	Yabolete
19	Yaakangang
20	Yakpolo
21	Yatebe
22	Yakpali

Source: Okoi (2023)

In Idomi, the matriclans do not have their Yose named after them

Table 5: Matriclans of Mkpani

Number	Matriclan(Agimo)
1	Yabolete
2	Yabangbol
3	Yawanbol
4	Yatiyomo
5	Yayam
6	Yanali
7	Yakamafe
8	Yabanyen
9	Yabanyen
10	Yapuni
11	Yajokpoli
12	Yatebebol
13	Yakpele
14	Yayoo
15	Yajemi
16	Yakpon

Source: Okoi (2023)

In Yakurr, collectively called Ben Ba Banka, have their Yose located in Ekor. This is an indication of how close core Yakurr communities are connected matrilineally. All these matriclans or matrilineal families have their fertility shrine known as Yose. However, there are instances where some matriclans or matrilineal families have fertility shrine or Yose with the same names. For example the Yabol, Yakunkunebol and Yakpelebol (Lebojimo) have the same fertility shrine or Yose by name Ojokobi (Okoi, 2023).

How matrilineal families operate administratively among Yakurr communities

The matrilineal families in core Yakurr communities operate in significant ways that have positive impacts on members and the communities. The matrilineal families have extension in core Yakurr communities. The matriclan families serve critical social, economic and religious functions and providing a parallel structure to the patrilineal families. Each maternal family is headed by a priest whose main responsibility is to maintain the fertility shrine and religious activities. This is usually done when ritual is performed to appease the ancestors and gods on behalf of the members. The matrilineal families offer a safety net for individuals particularly in times of conflict or when a person is marginalized by their paternal family. The contribution of matrilineal families towards peace building can be likened to development administration which is a departure from the traditional public administration that is limited to following laid down rules and regulations without innovation (Omini, Opue & Etowa, 2025).

In the aspect of social identity, the matrilineal families define an individual's membership in a wider kinship network (matriclan) that spans across different villages and communities in Yakurr, thereby reinforcing cultural, historical and traditional bonds. The matriclan families play key role in conflict resolution. This is the reason why despite the many community wars in core Yakurr communities, the Yakurr people are still united. The matrilineal families are platform for peaceful resolutions in core Yakurr communities following interventions of Chief Priests of

the various matrilineal families. While paternal kin (Patrilineal) have authority over land and residence, the matrilineal kin often provide necessary social support and mediation in disputes. The matrilineal families are instrumental to the government of their communities. For Angulu (1975) maintain that the apex of the machinery of government in Yakurr traditional system vested in the council of Yabol, which term to be ritual and religious authority of the entire community and the political and administrative jury for ritual offences and major disputes.

The council of Yabol (Chief) individual paternal families are represented and gives the maternal families sense of belonging. For instance, the Obol Lupon (Head of the Town) belongs to the Leboljimo (Royal Family) maternal family hence the opportunity to ascend the throne as the head of town is traditional. In core Yakurr communities' maternal family inheritance and succession under the Yakurr people are matrilineally driven (Okoi, 2023). While marriage among people or descendants from the same maternal kinship is allowed or permitted in Yakurr custom and tradition but forbidden among people of same paternal kinship (Okoi, 2023). Marriage among maternal families are encouraged to maintain bloodline and expansion in population. The matrilineal family is key in the administrative development of core Yakurr communities. The current political dispensation since 1999 has seen maternal families across core Yakurr communities influencing members to be appointed into higher political offices. Assisting members of same maternal family usually encourage the younger ones in the maternal families to secure both government jobs and jobs in the private sector. Members in position of authority can make huge financial contribution for their maternal families. Similarly, in the aspect where a member who reside in a particular unit by virtue of marriage or another situation and he is denied farmland. Such member can inform the head of the maternal family. The head of the maternal family will draw the attention of the enlarge family on the said matter. On this note, members of the family that have available farmland would assist the members in need of farmland. Maternal families in core Yakurr communities bring bonding to the area. This bond can date back to more than a century. The family promotes unity, care and love among members and the community.

The contribution of matrilineal families in conflict resolution and peace building in core Yakurr communities

In core Yakurr communities, matrilineal families and societies contribute significantly to conflict resolution and peace building by leveraging on the traditional roles and ancestral link which is the central authority in the family, community and social organization. The matrilineal family or matrilineal kinship serves as a key pillar for conflict resolution, balancing the patrilineal system through dispersed lineage membership. Just like the developed countries of the world keep sustaining whatever will make their youths have scientific breakthroughs and make global records and prepare them for international markets (Omini and Ofem, 2023). Core Yakurr communities are strategically important considering the fact that raw materials for industrial growth and food consumed in urban centers come from rural areas, thus, the development of the areas in terms of promotion of peace cannot be undermined (Omini and Ofere, 2021). The maternal family provides moral authority, mediate disputes and also maintain cultural continuity with other families and acting as a refuge that helps resolve familial and community conflicts. The following are the ways maternal families contribute to peace building and conflict resolution

1. **Matrilineal structure and moral authority:** Yakurr society is partrifocal, the double unilateral descent system grants significant influence to the matriclan. The structure disperses kinship beyond the village, therefore providing a broader, less localized authority that can mediate disputes between different patrilineal groups. Following the spread of matrilineal families in all, core Yakurr communities play key role in promoting peace building and conflict resolution. The communal crisis between Mkpani and Ugep in 1986, all the maternal families were key in resolving the conflict. After the communal war there was palpable fear among the people of both communities to trade or carry out farm activities and even visit during Leboku festival. But the matrilineal families whose role is significant during festivities had to invite families and friends from both communities. This help to resolve the dispute and build peace. Same with Nko and Mkpani. The bond among members of various matrilineal families is uncommon.
2. **Socialization and moral audience:** The maternal family members play key role in inculcating societal values, morality, honesty and tolerance on members and their children by nurturing them with moral values and seeing it as a way of life. The nurturing of these moral values in the maternal family help in preventing conflict among siblings, land disputes among communities and other minor settlements. This aim to build peace and promote love among the core Yakurr communities. The strategy not only promotes engagement and problem-solving skills but also fosters positive attitudes and accommodates diverse promotion for peace (Ekpenyong et al, 2025)

3. ***Mediation and dispute settlement:*** The matrilineal family is a platform for conflict resolution mechanism for person, family and community disputes. Maternal family leaders and elders play significant roles in mediating tensions before they escalate where lives and properties can be involved. The maternal families create conducive atmosphere for peace among warring communities. Peaceful environment brings stability in the macroeconomic of such environment (Umoru et al,2023)
4. ***Dispersed Lineage influence and control:*** The matrilineal being dispersed among core Yakurr communities often serves as a neutral ground, helping to reconciled conflicts that involve inter-communal issues. This promotes peace. The neutrality of matrilineal family promotes peace, unity and love in core Yakurr communities. This is the reason why the five core Yakurr communities have been living in peace despite the series of crises and communal war in the past and skirmishes in the present. The matrilineal family support for one another is the reason for the present peace in Yakurr.

Conclusion

This study examined the significance of matrilineal institutions in promoting peacebuilding among the core Yakurr communities of Yakurr Local Government Area, Cross River State. Findings revealed that beyond their cultural, social, and religious functions, matrilineal families serve as important instruments for fostering peace, unity, and social cohesion among the Yakurr people. Despite their shared ancestry and longstanding relationships, the core Yakurr communities have experienced recurrent communal conflicts, particularly over land ownership and boundary disputes. These conflicts have often resulted in the loss of lives and property, disrupted social interactions, and hindered economic development. Ordinarily, prolonged communal conflicts would weaken inter-community relationships by disrupting marriages, cultural exchanges, religious activities, and other forms of social interaction. However, the dispersed nature of Yakurr matrilineal families has provided enduring channels of communication, mediation, and reconciliation across community boundaries. Through these kinship networks, matrilineal families have continued to sustain bonds of brotherhood, mutual understanding, and peaceful coexistence among the Yakurr people. The study further established that communal conflicts impose significant economic and social costs on both government and local communities. Governments are often compelled to commit substantial unplanned resources to peacekeeping and conflict management, while affected populations suffer economic hardship, displacement, and social instability. In this regard, the peacebuilding role of matrilineal families represents a valuable indigenous mechanism for conflict prevention and resolution. Their contributions remain critical to the sustainable development of Yakurr communities and the broader socio-economic progress of Cross River State.

Recommendations

- i. Matrilineal families in the core Yakurr communities should explore avenues for strengthening social and cultural ties with neighboring non-Yakurr linguistic communities. Such expanded kinship relationships could serve as effective platforms for promoting inter-community understanding, cooperation, and sustainable peace across Yakurr Local Government Area.
- ii. Matrilineal families should continue to uphold and transmit the cultural values, norms, and traditions that have sustained their relevance over generations. The preservation of these indigenous institutions will strengthen their capacity to foster social harmony, mediate conflicts, and maintain peace within and across communities.
- iii. The Cross River State Ministry of Culture, in collaboration with the Yakurr Local Government Council, should establish strategic partnerships with matrilineal family groups and traditional institutions. Such collaboration should focus on conflict prevention, peace education, cultural preservation, and community development initiatives aimed at sustaining peace and stability in Yakurr land and its neighboring communities.
- iv. Government agencies and community leaders should formally recognize and integrate matrilineal family structures into local peacebuilding and conflict-resolution frameworks. This will enhance the effectiveness of grassroots approaches to peacebuilding and promote community ownership of peace processes.
- v. Scholars, cultural organizations, and community stakeholders should document the peacebuilding practices of Yakurr matrilineal families for future generations. Such efforts will preserve indigenous knowledge

systems and provide valuable models for conflict management and social integration in other multicultural societies.

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