

UNDERSTANDING THE NATURE AND CAUSES OF LAND RELATED CONFLICT IN NORTHERN NIGERIA: THE PERSPECTIVES OF TRADITIONAL AUTHORITIES IN KONTAGORA EMIRATE, NIGER STATE, NIGER

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Abstract

Land-related conflicts have become increasingly prevalent across Northern Nigeria, posing significant threats to social cohesion, agricultural productivity, and sustainable development. While numerous studies have examined the legal, environmental, and security dimensions of these conflicts, limited attention has been paid to the perspectives of traditional authorities who remain central actors in customary land governance and dispute resolution. This study examined the nature and causes of land-related conflicts in Northern Nigeria from the perspectives of traditional authorities in Kontagora Emirate, Niger State. The study adopted a qualitative case study design, utilizing in-depth interviews with 25 purposively selected participants comprising Emirate officials, traditional title holders, district and village heads, security personnel, vigilante members, and conflict management experts. Data were analysed thematically alongside documentary evidence obtained from the Emirate Council. The findings revealed a significant increase in reported land disputes between 2014 and 2023 compared with the preceding decade. Inheritance disputes (28.3%) emerged as the most prevalent form of conflict, followed by illegal land sales and land grabbing (20.3%), government acquisition and compensation disputes (14.5%), boundary disputes (13.8%), and farmer–herder conflicts (7.2%). The study identified multiple interacting drivers of land conflicts, including customary tenure complexities, inadequate land documentation, population growth, migration, climate change, land encroachment, indigene–settler tensions, mining activities, corruption, injustice, and weak compliance with established land administration procedures. The findings further showed that traditional authorities resolved approximately 66.7% of reported land disputes through customary mediation, negotiation, and reconciliation, highlighting their continuing relevance in local land governance despite institutional and legal constraints. The study concludes that effective management of land conflicts requires stronger collaboration between statutory land administration agencies and traditional institutions, improved land documentation systems, enhanced transparency in land governance, and climate-responsive land management policies.

Keywords: Land conflict, traditional authorities, customary land tenure, land governance, conflict resolution, Kontagora Emirate, Northern Nigeria.

Background of the Study

Land is a critical economic, social, and political resource that underpins livelihoods, food security, and sustainable development, particularly in developing countries where agriculture remains the dominant source of employment. Beyond its productive function, land embodies cultural identity,

social status, and political power, making its ownership, access, and control highly contested. Consequently, land governance has emerged as a major policy concern globally because weak land administration systems often contribute to tenure insecurity, inequality, social exclusion, and violent conflicts (United Nations, 2023; Food and Agriculture Organization [FAO], 2022). Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 1.4 and SDG Indicator 1.4.2 further emphasize secure land tenure as a prerequisite for poverty reduction, inclusive development, and social stability.

No society is free of conflict as it is an inevitable aspect of human interactions. Conflict is an unavoidable concomitant effect of choices and decisions made or not made by state and non-state actors in a political community (Zartman, 1991). It arises over claims to power, authority, influence and scarce resources, in which the aims of the parties involved are not only to gain the desired advantage over the other, but also to neutralize, injure or eliminate rivals. Such conflicts may bring individuals and collectivities, the state and the citizens at crossed purposes (Adeniji, 2003; Suleiman, Sivamurugan, Razlini, 2019). Conflict takes various forms and dimensions in different societies, which may require diverse approaches for effective resolution across societies. Different societies experience different forms of conflicts depending on the complex dynamics that determines the nature of competition for power, limited resources and influence, between and among individuals, groups and organizations.

Nigeria has experienced a growing incidence of land-related conflicts over the past two decades, particularly in its northern region where customary tenure systems coexist with statutory land administration under the Land Use Act of 1978. Although the Act was enacted to simplify land management and guarantee equitable access to land, scholars have argued that its implementation has produced overlapping institutional mandates, bureaucratic bottlenecks, insecure property rights, and frequent disputes over ownership, inheritance, compensation, and boundaries (Akinola, 2020; World Bank, 2023). The coexistence of statutory and customary tenure systems has created legal pluralism, whereby multiple institutions simultaneously claim authority over land administration, often resulting in conflicting decisions and prolonged disputes (Alden Wily, 2021).

The complexity of land conflicts in Northern Nigeria extends beyond legal and administrative deficiencies. Population growth, climate change, desertification, declining agricultural productivity, rapid urbanization, expansion of cultivation into grazing reserves, and increasing competition over scarce natural resources have intensified disputes among farmers, pastoralists, families, communities, and government agencies (FAO, 2022; United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification [UNCCD], 2022). The National Bureau of Statistics (2023) estimates that agriculture continues to employ over one-third of Nigeria's labour force, underscoring the centrality of land to livelihoods. At the same time, climate-induced resource scarcity has altered traditional patterns of land use, increasing migration and placing additional pressure on available land resources across northern Nigeria.

Empirical evidence suggests that many violent conflicts previously described as farmers-herders' clashes are fundamentally disputes over access to land and other natural resources, exacerbated by weak governance institutions and declining trust in formal conflict resolution mechanisms (International Crisis Group, 2024). These conflicts have resulted in significant human and economic losses, including deaths, displacement of rural populations, destruction of farmlands, reduced agricultural output, food insecurity, and deterioration of social cohesion. Such outcomes have serious implications for national security, rural development, and the attainment of sustainable development objectives.

Within this context, traditional authorities remain indispensable actors in land governance across Northern Nigeria. Emirs, district heads, village heads, and other customary leaders continue to exercise considerable influence over land allocation, boundary demarcation, inheritance matters, and dispute resolution despite the existence of formal government institutions. Their authority derives from historical legitimacy, customary law, and community acceptance, enabling them to resolve disputes through mediation, negotiation, reconciliation, and consensus-building. Recent studies have demonstrated that customary institutions continue to enjoy higher levels of public confidence in many rural communities because they are more accessible, culturally legitimate, less expensive, and generally faster than formal judicial processes (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2021; Alden Wily, 2021).

Kontagora Emirate in Niger State presents an important setting for investigating land conflicts due to its diverse socio-economic structure, comprising farming communities, pastoralists, traders, and rapidly expanding urban settlements. The Emirate has experienced increasing pressure on land arising from agricultural expansion, urban growth, inheritance disputes, boundary disagreements, infrastructure development, and competition between agricultural and pastoral land uses. These pressures have generated recurring disputes that are routinely brought before traditional authorities for mediation and resolution. Consequently, traditional rulers possess extensive knowledge of the forms, causes, and dynamics of land conflicts within their jurisdictions.

Despite the extensive literature on land administration, farmer-herder conflicts, and communal violence in Nigeria, existing studies have largely emphasized security challenges, environmental change, legal reforms, or government responses. Comparatively little empirical attention has been devoted to understanding land conflicts from the perspectives of traditional authorities, who remain the principal custodians of customary land tenure and the first responders to many land disputes. Consequently, there is limited empirical evidence on how traditional institutions perceive the changing nature of land conflicts, the underlying drivers of these disputes, and the effectiveness of indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms in contemporary Northern Nigeria.

This knowledge gap is particularly significant because policies aimed at improving land governance often overlook the practical experiences and institutional capacities of traditional authorities. Without adequately incorporating these perspectives, interventions designed to strengthen land administration may fail to address the local realities that shape land access, tenure security, and dispute resolution. Furthermore, increasing demographic pressure, climate variability, and urban expansion suggest that land conflicts may become more frequent and complex unless governance systems become more responsive and inclusive.

It is against this backdrop that this study seeks to understand the nature and causes of land conflict in Northern Nigeria through the perspectives of traditional authorities in Kontagora Emirate, Niger State.

Theoretical Framework

The study adopts the new institution theory popularly known as governance theory. It is meant to complement the rational conflict theory in understanding the roles of traditional political institutions in the resolution of land related disputes in Kontagora emirate. One of the advocates of the new institution theory is North (2005). According to him, institutions encompass the rules of the game of a society which include formal rules (statute law, common law, regulations), informal constraints (norms of behaviour, conventions and self-imposed codes of conduct), and the ways in which they are enforced.

Institutional theory, as a framework for understanding organizations, emphasizes the importance of institutions, which comprise regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive elements. These elements, in conjunction with associated activities and resources, provide stability and meaning to social life (Scott, 1998). Institutions play a dual role by offering guidelines and resources to enable specific actions while also imposing constraints to prohibit others (Scott, 2008). They are essentially the rules of the game in society, shaping human interactions in political, social, and economic contexts. The new institutionalism emphasizes not only the adoption of formal rules but the integration of informal rules as determinants of social and political interactions.

The new institutionalists focus on why and how institutions evolve, the process of institutional reproduction and more importantly that of institutionalisation (Micheal J. Gorges, 1999:2). Institutionalisation is seen as a process in which social processes, obligations, or actualities takes a rule like status in social thought and action (Meyer and Rower, 1977:341). In institutionalised organisations, practices and structures are taken for granted; they are not questioned or compared with alternatives (Powell, 1991: 1994).

Based on the conviction that conflicts are inevitable in human life, human societies therefore ought to be governed by set of entrenched rules to regulate human life and resolve conflicts. On this account, institutions are regarded generally as the embodiments of rules and regulations that set the standards for human interactions necessary for the peaceful resolution of conflicts for peace, stability and prosperity of human societies. The most striking strength of the new institutional theory is its recognition of informal rules such as norms, conventions, customs and practices as guide for human behavior. To this end, this theory fits perfectly in understanding the nature and causes of land related conflict from the perspectives of the traditional political institutions in the resolution of land related disputes in the study area.

Study Area

Kontagora, located in the northwestern part of present-day Niger State, occupies a historically significant position as a transition zone between the Hausa–Fulani cultural sphere and the Middle Belt ethnolinguistic mosaic. Prior to the nineteenth century, the area was predominantly inhabited by diverse indigenous groups including the Kamuku, Dakarkari (Zuru), Dukkawa, Gwari, and related minority groups.

Kontagora is located in the northwestern part of Niger State, Nigeria. It lies approximately between latitude 10°12' and 10°32' North and longitude 5°24' and 6°05' East (Figures 1 and 2). The town is about 225 km from Minna, the state capital, and strategically positioned along important regional routes linking Niger State with Kebbi, Zamfara, Kaduna, and parts of the Middle Belt. The Local Government Area covers a landmass of about 3,408 square kilometers, making it one of the larger LGAs in northern Niger State. Its central position and accessibility make Kontagora a regional hub for trade, transportation, and administrative activities.

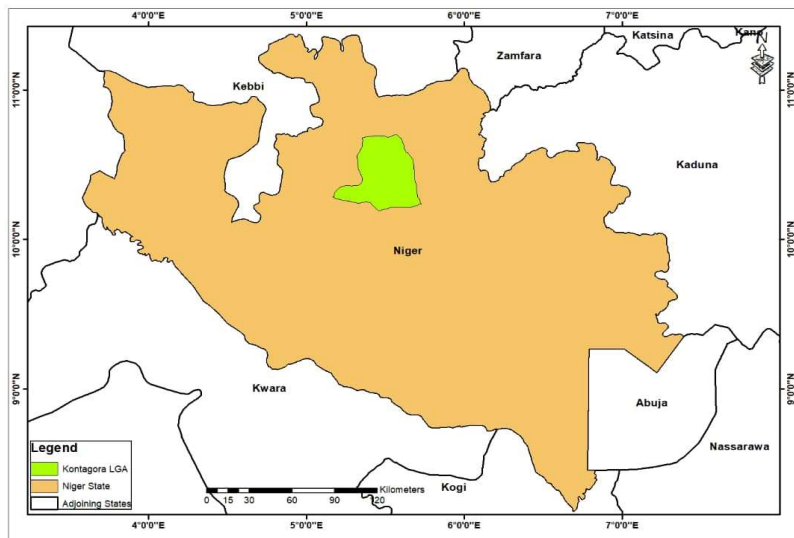


Figure 1 Map of Niger State Showing Kontagora

Kontagora hosts a diverse population consisting of Hausa, Fulani, Gwari, Dakarkari, Kamuku, Yoruba, Igbo, Nupe, and several migrant groups attracted by the region's economic opportunities. Population estimates exceed 250,000 inhabitants (based on LGA projections), with Kontagora town forming the major population concentration.

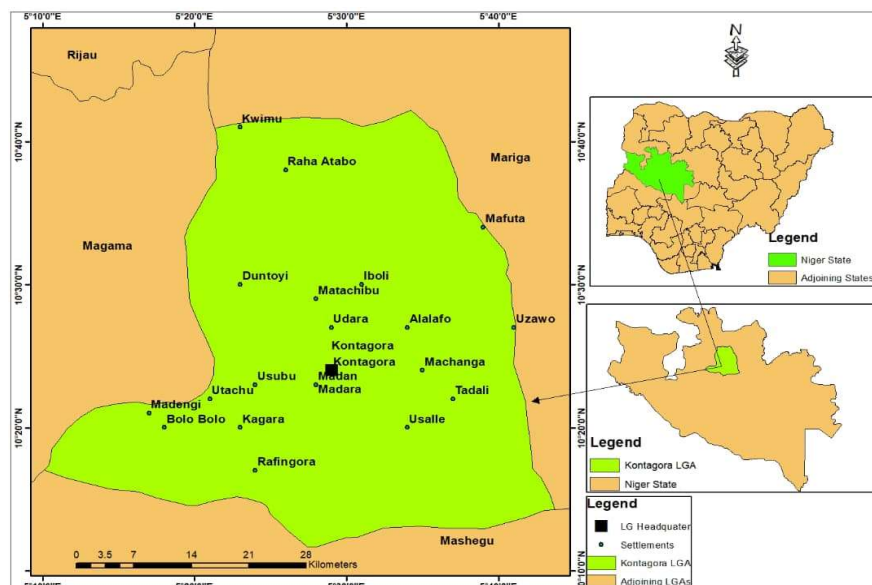


Figure 2 Map of Kontagora

Socio-economic activities in Kontagora are diverse and deeply rooted in the town's strategic position as a commercial, administrative, and agricultural hub in northwestern Niger State. Agriculture remains the dominant livelihood activity, with large segments of the population engaged in farming of crops such as millet, sorghum, maize, groundnuts, rice, and vegetables, supported by favorable soil types and seasonal rivers like the Kontagora River. Livestock rearing—particularly cattle, goats, and sheep—is equally significant, owing to the long-standing Fulani pastoral presence and the availability of grazing corridors.

Research Methodology: Qualitative Approach

This study adopts qualitative approach in the conduct of the research. Qualitative research involves collecting and analyzing non-numerical data to understand concepts, opinions, or experiences. It can be used to gather in-depth insights into a problem or generate new ideas for research. In the case of this study, which focuses on understanding of the nature and causes of land related disputes in Kontagora Emirate: the perspectives of the Traditional Authorities, the unit of analysis constitutes the Kontagora Emirate and the communities under its influence. The rationale behind the choice of qualitative approach is born out of the utility of the approach in understanding and analysing concepts, opinions and experiences in relation to the phenomenon investigated. In this case, the study of the role of traditional political institutions in conflict resolution in Kontagora Emirate can best be situated within the qualitative tradition, as it afforded the researcher the opportunity to interrogate concepts, opinions and experiences of the major stakeholders that include members of the traditional political institutions at various levels in Kontagora Emirate of Niger state.

Research Design: Case Study

The case study design has evolved over the past few years and developed into a valuable quality research with distinctive benefits of depth for generalization. As the name suggests, it is used for studying and explaining an organization or an entity. This type of research design is used within a number of areas like education, social sciences, and other disciplines in humanities. This research thus adopted a case study design, which provided in-depth analysis of the relationship between the traditional political institutions and conflict resolution, particularly land related disputes in Kontagora Emirate of Niger State. It examined the contributions of Kontagora Emirate Council in the resolution conflicts over time.

Sample of the Study

In this case, the critical stakeholders of the research were identified and interviewed. These included the representative of Emir of Kontagora (Sarkin Sudan), all levels of traditional rulers in the hierarchy of the traditional institutions (Ward Heads, Village Heads and District Heads) and other prominent traditional title holders that are central to the administration of the Emirate. The title holders included the Secretary to the Emirate Council, Bunun Kontagora, Sarkin Gobir, Magayakin Kontagora, Kofar Sarkin Sudan, Makaman Kontagora and Zagin Sarkin Sudan. In addition to these categories of respondents, six District Heads, one each from the Six Districts in the Emirate were interviewed. Others are the Village Heads, one each from the six Districts. The officials of the Nigeria Police and the Nigeria Security, Civil Defence Corps and Vigilante official. (Table 1)

Table 1 List of Respondents for IDIs showing the Categories and the number of People

S/No	Category	No. of Participant
1.	Emirate Officials	02
2.	Traditional Title Holders	05
3.	District Heads	06
4.	Village Heads	06
5.	Conventional Security Personnel	03
6.	Vigilante	02
7.	Experts	01

Instruments of Data Collection

In the conduct of this research, the study employed the use of diverse data collection techniques in qualitative research. These techniques guide the researchers to generate both primary and secondary data that are qualitative in nature. While the secondary instruments will be generated from textbooks, journals, memoir and autobiographies, official speeches, the primary instruments used in the collection of qualitative data for this study is In-depth Interviews (IDIs). The instrument was developed, validated and finalized with the help of experts, before their application in the field. The participants for the study were purposively selected. The researcher targeted productive members of the communities, mainly men, as the subject of land disputes and the involvement traditional authority have been largely the affairs of men in traditional societies of Northern Nigeria.

Results and Discussion of Findings

Socio-Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Table 2 presents the demographic data of the respondents that participated in the study: The table shows the demographic data of the informants, their ages range from 34 -70, while majority of the informants interviewed were males, nineteen out of twenty, only 1 informant was female. Stakeholders such as traditional rulers (District and Village Heads, Traditional Title Holders and Administrative Staff in the Kontagora Emirate Council), Police, Civil Defense and informal security outfits (Vigilante and Vanguard) constituted the target respondents of the study. All the informants interviewed were married. Informants were coded R1 to R20. This is necessary in order to keep their identities and the information they provide confidential. This is in line with the suggestions of Creswell (2008), who insisted that confidentiality is a top ethical requirement in qualitative research.

Table 2: Demographic data of the Respondents

Code	Title	Age	Gender	Marital status	Religion
R1	Bunun Kwantagora	70	Male	Married	Muslim
R2	Sarkin Gobir Kwantagora	56	Male	Married	Muslim
R3	Sarkin Zagi Sarkin Sudan na Kontagora	65	Male	Married	Muslim
R4	Hakimin Kawo/ Sarkin Shanun Kontagora	55	Male	Married	Muslim
R5	Magayakin Kontagora	60	Male	Married	Muslim
R6	Dagacin Yamma Kontagora	52	Male	Married	Muslim
R7	Vigilante	40	Male	Married	Muslim
R8	Kudu District Head	57	Male	Married	Muslim
R9	Vigilante Personnel	44	Male	Married	Muslim
R10	Civil Defense Corps Personnel	35	Female	Married	Christian
R11	Makaman Kwantagora	60	Male	Married	Muslim
R12	District Head of Udanga	50	Male	Married	Muslim
R13	Kofar Sarkin Sudan kwantagora	56	Male	Married	Muslim
R14	Hakimin Roby District Head	50	Male	Married	Muslim
R15	Dagachin Udara	45	Male	Married	Muslim
R16	District Head of Federal Low-Cost	53	Male	Married	Muslim
R17	Police	34	Female	Married	Christian
R18	Usobo District Head	50	Male	Married	Muslim
R19	Ibeto District Head	55	Male	Married	Muslim
R20	Police Personnel	40	Male	Married	Muslim

Source: Field work (2025)

Nature of Land Disputes in Kontagora Emirate

The nature and causes of land related disputes in the study area are both complex and multifaceted. Based on the data generated during the fieldwork, particularly the review of some informally documented cases reported to the various levels of traditional institution in the emirate and the interview data from the key respondents, a complex mix of political, economic and socio-cultural factors explained the nature and causes of land disputes in the study area. Table 3 shows the number of cases of land disputes reported from 2003 to 2023 to traditional rulers in each of local government area under the emirate:

Table 3 Cases of Land Disputes in Kontagora Emirate (2003-2023)

Location	Frequency	Percentages
Kontagora	32	23.2
Mashegu	19	13.8
Mariga	21	15.2
Wushishi	18	13.0
Magama	21	15.2
Rijau	27	19.6
Total	138	100

Author's Fieldwork, 2025

Table 3 reveals marked spatial variation in the occurrence of land disputes across the Kontagora Emirate between 2003 and 2023. Kontagora district recorded the highest number of disputes (32 cases, 23.2%), followed by Rijau (27 cases, 19.6%), while Wushishi had the lowest share (18 cases, 13.0%). The relatively high incidence in Kontagora can be attributed to its status as the emirate headquarters and an emerging urban centre. Urban expansion, increasing land value, administrative concentration and population influx tend to intensify competition over land, thereby escalating disputes. Rijau's high frequency may be linked to its extensive agrarian and fertile land as well as its proximity to forest and mineral-rich areas. Conversely, areas such as Wushishi and Mashegu, though predominantly rural, recorded fewer disputes, possibly due to lower population density and slower rates of land commodification. This aligns with the studies which show that land disputes are more frequent in areas experiencing rapid socio-economic transformation and urbanisation (Akinola, 2019; Wehrmann, 2008). Similarly, empirical studies in northern Nigeria revealed that spatial clustering of land conflicts around administrative and economic centres where land demand is always high (Abubakar & Doan, 201).

Table 4 Temporal Trends of Land Disputes

Period	Frequency	Percentages
2003-2013	42	30.4
2014-2023	96	69.6
Total	138	100

Table 4 indicates a significant increase in land disputes from 2014 to 2023, which accounted for 96 cases (69.6%), compared to 42 cases (30.4%) between 2003 and 2013. This sharp rise suggests a worsening land conflict situation in the emirate over time. Several factors may explain this trend. First, population growth has intensified pressure on land for housing, farming and commercial purposes. Second, increasing land commodification has weakened traditional tenure arrangements, making land transactions more contentious. Third, the growing involvement of

government in land acquisition without timely or adequate compensation has exacerbated grievances.

This trend corroborates national-level findings that land-related conflicts in Nigeria have increased significantly since the 2010s due to demographic pressure, environmental stress and institutional weaknesses in land administration.

Table 5 Nature Land Disputes in Kontagora Emirate (2003-2023)

Nature	Frequency	Percentages
Ambiguous customary land tenure system	6	4.3
Inheritance issues	39	28.3
Farmers-herders conflict	10	7.2
Population pressure and resource scarcity	4	2.9
Illegal land sales and land grabbing	28	20.3
Government acquisition and compensation issues	20	14.5
Indigene-settler disputes	4	2.9
Mining and lumbering issues	8	5.8
Boundary disputes	19	13.8
Total	138	100

Table 5 shows that inheritance issues constitute the most dominant form of land dispute (39 cases, 28.3%). This reflects the centrality of family landholding under customary tenure systems, where unclear succession rules, polygamous family structures and lack of written documentation often led to disputes among heirs. Illegal land sales and land grabbing (28 cases, 20.3%) emerged as the second most prevalent dispute type. This underscores the increasing monetization of land and the exploitation of weak land governance structures by powerful individuals and speculators. Government acquisition and compensation issues (20 cases, 14.5%) further highlight the tensions arising from compulsory acquisition processes that often exclude local participation or fail to provide adequate compensation. Boundary disputes (19 cases, 13.8%) and farmers-herders' conflicts (10 cases, 7.2%) reflect competition over land use and access, particularly in agrarian and pastoral communities. Mining and lumbering issues (5.8%) also indicate emerging conflicts linked to natural resource exploitation. These empirical outcomes are consistent with the earlier studies in northern Nigeria, which identify inheritance disputes, land grabbing, boundary conflicts and government acquisition as the most common causes of land-related conflicts (Yahaya, 2019). Similarly, FAO (2012) observes that weak tenure security and overlapping claims are major drivers of rural land disputes in sub-Saharan Africa. Data obtained and compiled from the various levels of traditional institutions in the study area shows the status of cases reported. The table below provides information on the extent of the resolution of cases reported:

Table 6 Status of cases attended to by the Traditional Authority

Status	Frequency	Percentages
Resolved	92	66.7
Unresolved	28	20.3
Transferred to courts	18	13.0
Total	138	100

Table 6 shows that traditional authorities resolved 92 cases (66.7%), demonstrating their continued relevance and effectiveness in land dispute resolution within the emirate. However, 28 cases (20.3%) remained unresolved, while 18 cases (13.0%) were transferred to formal courts. This high-resolution rate reflects the accessibility and cultural acceptability of traditional institutions, which often rely on customary norms, mediation and reconciliation rather than adversarial processes. Nonetheless, the unresolved and transferred cases suggest limitations, particularly in disputes involving statutory land rights, government acquisition or cases involving influential actors. This corroborates studies by Ubink (2008) and Nwankwo (2015), which argue that while traditional institutions play a critical role in dispute resolution in Africa, their effectiveness is constrained by legal pluralism, lack of enforcement powers and politicization. In Nigeria, traditional mechanisms often complement formal courts but struggle with complex or high-value land disputes (Adeniyi, 2013). By and large, it indicates that land disputes in Kontagora Emirate are spatially distributed but are also of different kinds and that the traditional institutions, though informal are central to their resolution.

Causes of Land Disputes in Kontagora Emirate

There are many factors that account for land disputes in Kontagora emirate. These causes are complex and multidimensional with implications on socio-economic and political development of the emirate.

Nature of Land Ownership in Kontagora Emirate

A sub-theme emerged on nature of land ownership as one of the causes of land disputes in Kontagora Emirate. From the empirical data, the nature of land ownership in the area, which have been largely traditional and based on local customs in the area, contributes to the incidences of land disputes. From the interviews conducted, a respondent revealed that:

The nature of land ownership here is quite complex due to the diverse composition of our emirate. The land is distributed among various chieftaincies including the Kambari, Dakarkari, Hausa-Fulani, and several other groups. Kontagora emirate is a multicultural society with multiple ethnic groups, and we are now seeing increased competition as minority tribes seek greater access to land resources R1.

This pattern of competition, particularly among the various cultural groups in the area has been a source of tension and conflicts between and among individuals and groups in Kontagora emirate. Accordingly, a respondent argued that:

Essentially, everyone is entitled to own land whether they are residents or indigenous to a particular locality. We regularly accommodate migrant Fulani nomads by granting them grazing land since that is their primary occupation. Similarly, we allocate farmland to those engaged in agricultural activities. When either migrants or indigenous people approach us, we grant them land suitable for their livelihood needs. Land ownership also occurs through inheritance whether you are indigenous or immigrant, once land is formally allocated to you, you become the titled owner. Upon the owner's death, their heirs automatically inherit the property. Additional ownership methods include land sales through occupancy transfers and gift arrangements between parties R2.

From the above submission, ownership of land in Kontagora emirate is complex and is guided by loose and informal rules determined by the traditional authority, particularly in the rural areas.

The enforcement of these informal rules is constrained by the informal nature of the arrangements that determined the ownership.

Thus, the nature of land ownership creates scenarios for conflict over land in Kontagora emirate. Because land has been treated as customary property, dictated largely by prevailing customs and traditions in Kontagora emirate, proper documentation hardly exists in the emirate. This makes it difficult for ownership claims to be formally substantiated in the emirate as one of the respondents added:

Part of the reasons that led to land dispute is lack of proper documentation., the reason behind this is that some people may decide to encroach into other people's land. Thus, lack of proper documentation constitutes a major cause of land dispute in Kontagora, which encourages encroachment of people into pieces of land across the emirate (R18).

Accordingly, the nature of land ownership in Kontagora emirate constitutes a major source of conflict in the area. The apparent inadequate formalization of land ownership across different parts of the emirate makes it difficult for claims and counter claims to be effectively verified and resolved between and among disputants. The Kontagora emirate, although very central in the determination of who owns land, how it is owned and the conditions for transfer of land ownership, the emirate cannot be considered as the final authority in land matters. It is evident that the 1978 Land Use Act grants substantial powers on the state government to allocate and ensure development of land of various types and for various reasons. The same act also empowered the state government to confiscate any piece of land for state development as the need arises.

Inheritance

Another sub-theme pointing to the causes of land disputes in Kontagora Emirate is the crisis of inheritance. The people of Kontagora Emirate are predominantly Muslims and there are clear Shariah laws governing inheritance in Islam. Islamic scholars and/or shariah courts in Kontagora emirate preside over administration of inherited lands in close collaboration with village or district heads or even the emirate council where the need arises. However, disputes occasionally occur over what portion of land due to be inherited goes to deserving members of the deceased family. This is a recurring issue in Konatagora emirate as one of the respondents maintained that:

Ownership is primarily determined through inheritance, as the original tribes have occupied these lands since time immemorial. Most currently held lands have been possessed by families for generations, making hereditary transfer the dominant mode of ownership transmission in our emirate, R1.

Admittedly, some of the respondents argued that inheritance disputes arise when family members feel cheated in land distribution. "We regularly handle cases where beneficiaries reject the allocation formula and bring their grievances to the council for resolution" (R19). A respondent stressed that:

In the past, the Emirate was looking for more people to stay in the territory so for that whoever come in, the Emirate would give him land free, through the *Dagaci*. This category of people stays in the land for a long time, get married and give birth to children, this was more or less permanent and could not be revoked. The land is given freely unless when the occupant felt like giving something at will and mostly after they have been given the land and nobody

will revoke the land. Therefore, their families can inherit the land after the demise of the owner. For those who normally come to stay for a short-term, their own was not permanent when they leave, the land could be allocated to someone else R5.

Nonetheless, an informant said that “some people purchase land from the people that inherit the land but the purchase has to undergo series of documentation in order to avoid land dispute in the future” (R18).

The crisis of inheritance has been a longstanding source of land disputes in the study area. Family members often disagree among themselves on how inherited pieces of land are to be shared. This disagreement may also spill over to none family members who purchase contested inherited land. Accordingly, disputes within family members may become extended disputes in the community or even beyond. This is a function of whether or not the dispute within the family has been effectively resolved, Where the dispute is effectively resolved at family level, the tendency to deescalate is high. In instances where land disputes within the family are not effectively resolved, the risk of escalation becomes high. A good number of land disputes across communities are linked to the crisis of unresolved inheritance cases.

Land Encroachment

The activities of property agents instigate land disputes such as encroachment. According to a respondent, “land encroachment represents a serious problem” (R8). Another informant put it that “Most often, land agents are those that causes dispute over land because they mostly create conflict over land boundaries as well as ownership in many areas” (R16). Encroachment into boundaries of land could both be deliberate and unplanned. The encroachment into people’s land has been a recurring phenomenon in Kontagora and has characterized the nature of land disputes in the area. Aside from the activities of land agents, lack of proper demarcation of land, particularly farmlands in the rural areas constitute one of the main sources of disputes among land owners. Traditional signposts such as trees and stones sometimes could not settle amicably the dispute over land boundaries.

Some claims and counter claims of encroachment are usually referred to the traditional authorities, who have long memory of the traditional boundaries of farmlands in their communities. As a result of documentation of land records that include sales, transfers, gifts and inheritance with the traditional authorities, it is much easier to determine and resolve land disputes that are based on encroachment claims. Many of such claims have been made by various people and groups across the emirate to the different levels of traditional authorities for dialogue and possible resolution. Large number of such cases have been amicably resolved because of the expertise of the traditional authorities and confidence reposed on them by the local communities in their areas of jurisdiction.

Migration

Migration is another sub-theme developed as the data shows that frequent migration into the different areas of Kontagora emirate has been identified by multiple respondents as one of the major causes of land disputes in the area. One of the respondents argued thus:

Migration patterns significantly influence ownership dynamics, often creating competitive situations. When people relocate to already occupied areas, it naturally leads to competition for resources, which sometimes escalates into conflicts. In rare instances, land may be acquired through gifting or economic

power, but only when such transfers do not contradict established traditions and institutional frameworks R1.

One of the most regular patterns of migration in the area has been the movement of nomads, who are in constant move in search for a greener pasture. Their movement is both seasonal and regular. Sometimes the nomads could migrate and stay in a place for a long period of time. They are usually offered land by the traditional authority to settle with their families and herds. They often move to other places and return after a long period of time. This constitutes a regular source of conflict of land ownership. A respondent argued that:

Nomadic groups typically require extensive grazing lands due to their occupation. When new nomadic groups arrive, we direct them to join existing settlements. However, original settlers often resist accommodating newcomers or provide insufficient land, leading to conflicts over grazing space allocations R2.

Competition for access to land by nomads and farmers, the former largely migrants constitute a major source of land disputes in the area. According to one of the key respondents, the immigrants are a great source of land disputes in Kontagora emirate, even though this pattern of dispute is not as frequent as other sources of disputes over land. He explained that: "Well, such cases do occur, but in my personal experience, I have not directly encountered or had to mediate such a situation, so I cannot speak to exactly how these particular cases are resolved" (R14). To further clarify the matter, a respondent submitted that:

Fulani herders often relocate here because of bandit attacks in their home regions. However, sometimes people migrate to other places and later return to reclaim their land from earlier settlement. Disputes arise because others might have occupied it in their absence. Additionally, Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) sometimes rent land but later may refuse to return it, leading to further conflicts R4.

Evidently, migration is considered as one of the major factors that instigates land related disputes in Kontagora emirate.

Population pressure

Population growth is another cause of land dispute in Kontagora emirate. Population growth is a common trend in Nigeria. Many factors account for the rapid growth of population in Nigeria. Factors such as illiteracy, poverty, ignorance, traditional polygamous family system and inadequate access to reproductive health among other factors contribute to rapid population growth in Nigeria. Kontagora emirate is no exception. As such, the area experiences common patterns of population growth as other parts of Nigeria. A respondent argued that:

Population growth intensifies competition because our finite land resources cannot satisfy everyone's needs. This competition becomes particularly acute given our region's fertile soil, which attracts numerous settlers seeking agricultural opportunities R1.

Significantly, other participants said that "While population growth could theoretically contribute to land disputes as land becomes scarce with more people needing space, this has not been a significant issue in our specific region" (R3). However, an informant added that:

Population pressure contributes to the high demand for land, especially farmlands in the area. Presently, we have scarcity of farmlands because of the

increase in population. This is one of the reasons the emirate council gave instructions that traditional leaders are not given permission to sell farm under the control of the emirate council rather we can only give it to people in form of rent. This is because of the high demand from people. People migrate on a daily basis from other villages and neighboring areas to Kwantagora emirate and high demand of houses, farms and land is always increasing that is why we adopted this method to accommodate most demands of the migrants(R19).

Similarly, another participant stressed that “when the population increases there is high demand for land for accommodation and other economic activities arise” (R20). Population pressure thus contributes significantly to land disputes in the study area, as existing are being redistributed through inheritance, sales gift and other means of transfer to the growing population in the area,.

Indigene-Settler Dichotomy

Indigene-settler dichotomy is another sub-theme developed from the empirical data. It is regarded as one of the major causes of land related disputes in Kontagora emirate. This factor is similar in context to the phenomenon of migration. Whereas migration is regarded as a seasonal occurrence, the issue of indigenes-settlers dichotomy is an endemic intergroup relation that defined the nature of co-existence between two groups of people within communities that are distinguished on the basis of longevity of settlement. The indigenes are regarded as the original inhabitants while settlers are described as ‘newcomers’, migrants or settlers. The empirical data has shown that relations between these two groups of people in different parts of Kontagora emirate instigate land disputes. Indigenes always claim to be the original owners of land, inherited from their ancestors who founded the communities and live for a long period of time. On the other hand, settlers or migrants might have also acquired land through purchase, gift or allocation by the authorities. Competition between these two groups for access to land for economic use heightens tension in different parts of the emirate. One of the respondents argued thus:

The indigene-settler divide represents a major policy challenge that requires careful attention. This dichotomy actively fuels conflicts as settlers strive to acquire land for habitation and farming, while indigenous groups naturally seek to protect their ancestral claims. This tension creates an ongoing cycle of competition and periodic conflicts R10.

Similarly, another informant opined that:

Yes, for instance, particularly with the *Udawa* - migratory herders who move with sheep and cattle during dry seasons to graze on post-harvest fields and returns home when rain falls, also compete for land resources with inhabitants. However, many now remain permanently, creating significant problems. Just recently, the local government chairman convened a meeting about evacuating them before serious conflicts arise. When voluntary departure failed, we had to involve security personnel and vigilantes to enforce their return R7.

Empirical data also shows that the indigenes-settlers conflict represent one of the major causes of land related disputes. This viewpoint is reaffirmed thus:

This is currently one of our biggest challenges. We accommodate migrants who come to farm, sometimes for a year or longer. Some have stayed for over a decade, and their children who were very young when they arrived now claim inheritance rights to the land. The parents often fail to clarify that the land was

only leased, not owned. When asked to leave, these migrants argue they have nowhere else to go, creating tension R4.

Climate Change

Climate change is another cause of land dispute in Kontagora emirate as shown by the empirical data. Climate change is a reality that affects the availability and utility of land resources across the globe. It is a long-term change in the average weather patterns that defines earth's local, regional and global climates. Because it is considered as the periodic modification of earth's climate as a result of changes in the atmosphere as well as interaction between the atmosphere and various other geologic, chemical, biological and geographic factors within the earth system, land resources and their quality become the most affected aspect of earth by climate change. The obvious consequences of climate change have been flooding as a result of excessive rainfall, drought as a result of inadequate rainfall as well as the shrinking of lakes, rivers, dams and other water bodies. The reality of Climate change forces mass movement of people from one disadvantaged location to a more favorable location for agricultural activities. A respondent was very clear about the connection between climate change and land disputes in Kontagora emirate. He argued thus:

Climate change is certainly a contributing factor in land disputes, particularly through its impact on pastoralists' movement. Herders traditionally follow green pastures and water sources, and changing climate patterns have altered these movements, creating new friction points with farming communities. This has become one of our most pressing contemporary challenges in Kontagora emirate R11.

This viewpoint has been buttressed by many respondents during the fieldwork. The issue of climate change featured repeatedly in the responses of many stakeholders interviewed. One of the respondents argued thus:

Climate change significantly affects land dynamics. My district is fortunate to have more fertile land than neighboring areas, attracting farmers from other districts. However, deforestation and environmental degradation elsewhere have created desertification, pushing more people towards our fertile lands. This migration creates pressure and if we allow extensive farming sites, we risk repeating the deforestation cycle that damaged other areas R12.

Corroborating this standpoint, a respondent lamented on how climate change consequences instigated unregulated migration into agriculturally friendly areas such as Kontagora emirate. He stressed that:

Climate change plays a major role. For example, when farmers plant crops after the first rains, droughts can destroy their harvests. I know a farmer who planted groundnuts early, only for drought to ruin his crop. Groundnuts are less drought-resistant than crops like millet. Such climate-related losses sometimes lead to disputes over land use and compensation (R4).

Reflecting on the causes of climate change that are linked to human activities within communities, respondents are quick to cite environmentally unfriendly practices such as deforestation that are very common among the people as their major source of cheap energy and as source income. A respondent vividly captured this assertion as follows:

well, we don't have much of climate change challenges here except the desertification caused by human factors like indiscriminate cutting down of trees for the purpose of obtaining timber, charcoal and firewood for energy and as a reliable source of income. The vegetation cover of our environment has changed drastically with limited forest resources, which affects the quality of land and other natural resources such as water (R5).

From the quantum of the empirical data collected and analysed, it is evident that climate change contributes enormously to irregular migration pattern that attracts large influx of people into the various parts of Kontagora emirate. The consequences of climate change constitute a double edge sword that forced people into the landed resources in the study area and also contributes to the loss of land resources through erosion, drought and flood. The challenges posed by climate change has for a long time contributes to land related disputes in Kontagora emirate.

Poor Formal Documentation of Land Ownership

Many disputes related to land and landed property are caused by inappropriate or lack of documentation. This is even more perennial in rural communities where formal documentation of land and landed property are hardly obtained. Rural communities largely rely on traditional demarcations of trees, stones and other physical features. Most of these features confirming land ownership in rural communities are preserved largely by the memory of community leadership and elders. Even in urban settlements, multiple, fake and inappropriate documentation of land have been at the center of land disputes. The challenge of proper and formal documentation of land has made it difficult for formal courts to entertain and resolve land disputes, particularly in Northern Nigeria. It is largely on this ground that most cases of land disputes are referred to the traditional authorities, who have a long memory of ownership status of land and landed property across communities. The Kontagora emirate is no exception. Many of the cases of land disputes are aggravated by the challenge of inappropriate or lack of formal documentation. This perspective has been validated by the empirical data obtained in the field. Emphasizing on this challenge, a respondent argued thus:

This is indeed a significant issue. Many residents have occupied lands for decades - sometimes over twenty years - without proper documentation. When new claimants later emerge, it inevitably leads to crisis requiring the Emirate Council's intervention to resolve these complex conflict situations (R13).

Another respondent elaborated as follows:

You see, even at the state level, the government cannot issue a Certificate of Occupancy without confirmation from the district head. Our verification process involves multiple steps: First, the ward head (Mai Unguwa) must stamp and sign documents confirming your land allocation. Then the district head must also stamp and sign. Finally, the village head completes this chain of verification with their signature and stamp. Only with all these authentications can the government grant official Rights of Occupancy R2.

The rigorous process and multiple layers of verification involved in the process of obtaining certificate of ownership for land and other landed property also constitute a huge challenge, particularly for rural dwellers to properly obtain documentation for their land. More often they rely on local witnesses and traditional signposts, which fades over time and generates fresh claims and counterclaims over land. This viewpoint is emphasized by a respondent as argued thus:

The primary issue stems from the history of limited documentation. In the past, ward heads would verbally allocate land without proper records. However, we have significantly reduced conflicts by implementing strict documentation procedures in recent years. This systematic approach has made land disputes less frequent compared to previous times R7.

Thus, in the absence of formal documentation of land, land disputes become frequent and means to resolve them are largely limited to the traditional disputes' resolution mechanisms, mainly by the different layers of traditional authorities. This structural constraint makes land disputes in the study area common and widespread.

Ethnicity, Tribal and Religious Influence

Ethnicity, tribal and religious issues constitute another challenge for land ownership in Kontagora emirate. The issue of identity just as the question of settler-indigene dichotomy has been a pronounced factor that determines the nature of inter-group relations in the multicultural setup of Kontagora emirate. Ethnic, tribal and religious identities play significant roles in socio-economic and political relations among the inhabitants. In terms of land ownership, some settlements are demographically defined by ethnic and tribal identities. Whereas religion play insignificant role because of the uneven spread across Muslim and Christian population in the area. It is also seen as a factor that determine ownership of land and a source of dispute over land in the study area. A respondent revealed:

Ethnic factor isn't particularly pronounced here. While diversity exists, it minimally affects land matters with very low percentage. Many residents successfully maintain farms across different areas like Falka, Mashego, and Rijau without ethnic-related issues R11.

In the same vein, the empirical data shows that Kontagora emirate is diverse in its population and the diversity sometimes influence disputes over land resources. Accordingly, there are many such cases of land disputes in Kontagora Emirate, as reported by a respondent "there was an incidence in which involved the sitting Judge of Sharia Court, Kontagora, had a dispute of land with the community in Dadin kowa, where he claimed ownership of the land to the main road and Timber Shed Association objected his claim and reported to the Kontagora Emirate Council. The matter was resolved in favor of the community and Timber Association even though the membership of the community and the association are predominantly non-natives. Most of them are Yorubas and Igbos. The Judge also accepted our resolution". This was stressed by another respondent thus:

Yes, these factors do play a role. In my district, inhabitants include *Kambari*, *Dakarkari*, *Hausa*, and *Fulani* communities, though the original inhabitants are *Kambari and Basa*. Just last week, I mediated a case where a *Kambari* settler was given land by a former village head that actually belonged to an indigenous family. As the family grew, they demanded the land back, even questioning the settler's right to be there in the first place R10.

A senior title holder in Kontagora emirate council, however refuted the claims of ethnic and/or religious conflict over land in the area. He submitted that:

Honestly, in my 32 years of service at the palace, we have never had ethnic conflicts. Our community maintains peaceful coexistence among all groups. The *Dakarkari*, *Nupe*, *Hausa*, *Barebari* and *Fulanis*. Even with the *Fulani* people in the bush, we have good relationships R13.

Occupation of Inhabitants

The people of Kontagora emirate are predominantly farmers. Sizable number of the people are involved in seasonal farming as their economic mainstay. A variety of crops are produced in the area. These crops include maize, guinea corn, millet, groundnut, cassava, rice, vegetables among others. A portion of the population is also engaged in large scale animal rearing across different parts of the emirate. Other economic activities common in the area include local and commercial mining, lumbering and fishing activities. There is through a small size of educated working class in both the public and private sector, this category of people are also involved in agriculture and mining. Evidently, the nature of economic activities of the people, particularly their occupations is linked to land resources. This therefore intensifies the competition for access to land, which instigates land related disputes in the area. The empirical data also shows that the occupation of inhabitants influence land disputes in Kontagora emirate as a respondent argued that:

The preponderance of land disputes in Kontagora emirate is partly caused by the nature of occupations of the people. Although, the severity and frequency of the dispute depends entirely on the specific area and its residents' characteristics, as communities vary in their acceptance of newcomers, who compete for land resources. Effective leadership therefore plays a crucial role in preventing conflicts. Where strong leadership exists, occupational differences rarely cause disputes R12.

The issue of occupation thus plays a major role as a determinant of dispute related to land in the study area. Farming, grazing and mining are major economic activities requiring the ownership of land. Of recent, the discovery of solid mineral resources in the area has increased the risk of land dispute in the study area. According to a respondent:

Mining certainly complicates relations among the people. When miners discover valuable minerals, they negotiate directly with landowners for access in exchange for share of profits. However, they are supposed to obtain the permission of traditional rulers before even applying for mining licenses. Proper procedure helps prevent conflicts R2.

Thus, mining activities have in recent times contributes to heightened tension over land ownership in Kontagora emirate. Many local communities and land owners are contacted directly over negotiation for lease of their land, albeit without documentation with the traditional authorities and clearance from the relevant formal authorities. This trend influences different forms of land disputes among the community members and even between the communities and miners. However, where traditional rulers are involved in the negotiation for the lease of land, unnecessary disputes are avoided.

In a similar context, farming populations in the area, which constitute the majority of the inhabitants, are also faced with the challenge of limited land for the expansion of their farming activities. Most times they also compete with herders who graze around the farmlands. A respondent argued that:

Initially, there was enough land for herders such as the Fulani herders, but now, space is limited. Farmers often clash with herders when cattle graze on crops. Investigations reveal that even the farmers lack full ownership rights. Mining also causes problems in the sense that people illegally mine on land they don't own. The local council now requires permits to prevent unauthorized mining R4.

Besides, a participant also revealed that “As I am talking to you now, I am in need of land to farm. I am a District Head, yet I don’t have land for farming. This is because, today, the only reliable means of livelihood is farming and land has become scarce” (R8).

In terms of increased pressure on land resources for farming and other economic activities such as farming, grazing and mining, respondents argued that many people are reverting to farming because of the harsh realities of the economy. Commercial agriculture has also taken over some large portion of land hitherto available for local farmers. This viewpoint has been expounded by a respondent as follows:

Economically, people prosper when they engage in farming. Due to the current economic situation, we find ourselves in, even those who previously are not involved in farming are now searching for land to cultivate. Meanwhile, some traders who used to hoard goods are now spending huge amount of money to buy agricultural commodities. Instead of continuing like that, they are now seeking large hectares of land to farm. This intensified competition for land, which increases the risk of land disputes (R8).

Accordingly, the empirical data shows a pattern of conflict around land ownership between big and small farmers. A respondent argued thus:

This growing demand for farmland, especially by those with financial means, has led to widespread land acquisition. As a consequence, many people particularly the less privileged are losing access to land for farming, as nearly every available piece of land is being taken over R15.

Without a doubt, the empirical data emphasized that “Most people of Kontagora are not farmers. The majority of our farmers come from elsewhere mainly from Sokoto and the Niger Republic” (R16). Similarly, the issue of migrant farmers has added to the narrative of stiff competition for land resources in Kontagora emirate. In particular, another informant put it that:

Some of our local inhabitants who engage in farming are from the Kambari and Dukkawa ethnic groups. However, compared to the people coming from Sokoto and the Niger Republic, the indigenous people of Kontagora do not farm as much. Interestingly, when these external farmers harvest their crops, they often take the produce back to their own communities, rather than selling it in the communities where the farming was done R17.

This has also generated series of conflicts over land ownership between migrant farmers and inhabitants. Thus, a respondent argued that “When I assumed office as District Head, the first issue I addressed was land management. There were several problems in my area that prompted me to call the Village Head, and together we worked until we found a lasting solution” (R18). This dimension of land dispute is largely caused by lack of adherence to the existing local protocols and regulations governing land ownership, lease and transfers. This argument corroborates with a respondent who observed thus:

What causes this problem is lack of adherence to the regulations governing land ownership and management. As a stranger if you want to acquire a farm, house or a land you are expected to first of all approach the traditional leader of that area for him to know about what you intend to do and to guide on how to do it based on the exiting order. The protocols show that before a land is sold, the

village head must be informed for approval followed by district head and up to the emirate council (R19).

From the data analyzed, the nature of people's occupations in Kontagora emirate is regarded as one of the sources of land disputes in the area. As majority of the people are agriculturalists, involved in farming, fishing and grazing, the competition for land resources influences disputes over ownership, terms and conditions of lease and transfers. The large number of migrant farmers and the increasing number of miners also increases the risk for persistent land disputes in the area. The intervention of traditional rulers in the management of land related disputes contribute immensely to the peace and stability in the area.

Injustice

One of the issues that featured prominently across respondents during the fieldwork is the weak justice system as one of the causes of land disputes in Kontagora emirate. It is one of the sub-themes that emerged from the raw data analyzed. Weak justice system or injustice as it is referred here suggests that the existing framework and mechanisms of resolving land disputes in the study area appears to be inadequate and hardly inclusive. The informality of the process itself, which is almost entirely managed by traditional authorities at various levels make it weak and ineffective in the principles of universal justice system. The traditional authorities rely largely on existing traditions, customs and practices to facilitate land dispute resolution. These traditional sources of dispute resolution rely on testimonies and physical landmarks in the determination of cases brought before the traditional authorities. Even though the traditional authorities are vast in their knowledge of the traditions that govern relations among the people, particularly in conflict situations, the informal process can easily be manipulated to favor undeserved parties in land disputes. The injustice in the determination of land disputes has over the years been responsible for small and large scale community violence in rural communities of Northern Nigeria. A respondent argued that "Injustice is a major factor. The rich sometimes take advantage of their influence to seize land from the poor, especially inherited property" (R4). Another respondent added that "The first cause of land disputes is injustice and failure to punish culprits" R7. This viewpoint is also captured vividly by a respondent in the following words:

The issue of injustice and corruption served as one of the major causes of land dispute in Kontagora emirate. This is because even among the traditional leaders the issue of injustice and corruption exist especially when it comes to the issue of decision on land disputes that involve their people. Sometimes they give verdicts that favor others unfairly because of what they have received as inducement from one of the parties involved in the disputes. They also may favor others because of ethnic, tribal or religious inclinations of the parties. (R15).

Corruption is seen as a major factor that undermine the credibility of traditional conflict resolution process, particularly at local level. Even though the traditional justice system is less cumbersome and less costly, there are concerns about a few among traditional rulers, particularly at the lowest level that are being accused of corruption. This limitation encourages rampant cases of land disputes across the area because of manipulation of facts and witnesses through inducements, bribery and favoritism of various sorts.

Lack of Adherence to Rules and Regulations

The Emirate Council as the highest traditional authority in Kontagora has some laid down rules and regulations that govern the administration of land disputes in the area. These rules and regulations constitute the guiding principles for the operations of traditional rulers at different

levels for the resolution of land disputes in the area. The issue of land lease to migrant people as against sales of land is one of the striking examples of the general principle governing land administration in Kontagora emirate. Some people in the area, however do not adhere to this well-known principle, which generates rampant cases of land disputes in the area. Adherence to rules and regulations therefore is considered as another issue that causes land disputes in Kontagora emirate. An informant observed thus:

The next issue I tackled was the lack of adherence to regulations in land transactions. Even the Local Government do not pay attention to who buys land. I wrote a memo to the Local Government, advising that they could generate revenue by formalizing land transactions. I suggested the creation of a uniform receipt system for people buying or selling land R8.

The respondent further elaborated on the steps taken to formalize land transaction as a mechanism for controlling rampant cases of land disputes in the area. He argued thus:

Thankfully, my proposal was accepted. The Local Government established a committee under the leadership of the Council Chairman. They summoned all land brokers operating in Kontagora Local Government Area and formed a union to regulate their activities. We ensured the union was fully registered, and we set strict rules for those involved in land buying and selling R8.

In the efforts to ensure strict adherence to the rules and regulations governing land transactions in Kontagora, land brokers and dealers are registered in order to regulate their activities. This viewpoint is stressed by a respondent thus:

We have successfully registered about thirty, or possibly more, brokers. We also designed a form to document every land or farmland sale. This form must be signed by the Village Head, Ward Head, and District Head, as well as witnesses to the transaction. After this, the document is submitted to the Local Government, where the Desk Officer signs and keeps it on record (R11).

As a result of the rampant cases of land disputes arising largely from improper documentation and lack of adherence to existing rules and regulations on land transactions, the seeming formalization of land transactions contribute in controlling the process of land transaction, which also enhances the security of many communities, who could be at risk of having parts of their land sold to criminals.

In addition to the consensus on various rules and regulations governing land transactions in Kontagora emirate, largely by traditional authorities, the political leaders are also involved in the determination of the most acceptable rules that guide the populace on land transactions.

Therefore, lack of adherence to existing rules and regulations on land transaction has been identified as one of the major causes of rampant and frequent land disputes in the various parts of Kontagora emirate. Whereas there are established principles in various localities on how to conduct land related transactions, most of the land related disputes are caused by lack of adherence to those principles and rules set by the traditional authorities. In addition to the existing customary principles guiding land transactions in the area, the community at the Emirate council level has taken further steps to strengthen the practice of land transactions in the area. The registration of Land Brokers with the help of local government authorities and political leaders contributed immensely in the standardization of land transaction in the area. Thus, where

disputes arise, the arbitrators usually make reference to the existing rules and regulations as mechanism for the resolution of the disputes.

In general, land related disputes are caused by a blend of complex and multifaceted factors in Kontagora emirate. Factors such as climate change, indigenes-settlers dichotomy, migration, inheritance, population pressure, occupations of the inhabitants, the manipulation ethnic, tribal and religious identities, injustice and corruption, the predominant method of farming (shifting cultivation), lack of formal documentation of land ownership, limited adherence to rules and regulations and incessant land encroachment have been highlighted by respondents as determinants of land disputes in the area. These factors are considered empirically valid as the major causes of land disputes across different parts of Kontagora emirate. The weights of the issues raised by respondents have been determined by the frequencies, as referred to and explained the participants during the fieldwork. The emphasis made by respondents also contribute to our understanding of the level of influence of each of the factors mentioned and how they resonate across various categories of the respondents in their responses to the questions posed to them during the interview sessions. Evidently, the factors that influence land disputes in Kontagora emirate can be categorized into environmental, economic, political, attitudinal and socio-cultural. Thus, climate change and migration are classified as environmental factors that influences land disputes, whereas competition for access to land, nature of people's occupation are largely considered as economic factors that contribute to land disputes in the area. On the other hand, corruption and injustice are largely explained within the context of the political interests that defined competition for land resources in the area. Lack of adherence to rules and regulations, lack of formal documentation and land encroachment are largely attitudinal in nature. The socio-cultural factors include indigenes-settlers dichotomy, ethnic, tribal and religious identities, inheritance, nature of land ownership and the method of farming (shifting cultivation), which in their different weights influence the nature of land disputes in the study area.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study examined the nature and causes of land-related conflicts in Northern Nigeria from the perspectives of traditional authorities with particular reference to Kontagora Emirate, Niger State. The findings reveal that land conflicts within the Emirate are multidimensional and have become increasingly frequent over the past two decades as a result of growing demographic, socio-economic, environmental, and institutional pressures. The study established that inheritance disputes constitute the most prevalent form of land conflict, followed by illegal land sales and land grabbing, government land acquisition and compensation disputes, boundary disagreements, and farmer–herder conflicts. The increasing commercialization of land, rapid urban expansion, and growing demand for agricultural land have further intensified competition over limited land resources.

The study also found that the causes of land conflicts extend beyond mere competition for land. They include weak customary and statutory land administration systems, inadequate documentation of land ownership, migration, population growth, climate change, land encroachment, indigene–settler tensions, mining activities, corruption, injustice, and poor compliance with established land administration procedures. These factors interact to create overlapping claims to land ownership and increase the complexity of dispute resolution.

A major contribution of this study is its demonstration that traditional authorities continue to occupy a central position in land governance within Kontagora Emirate. The empirical evidence indicates that traditional institutions successfully resolved approximately two-thirds of reported land disputes through customary mechanisms based on mediation, dialogue, reconciliation, and

consensus building. Their effectiveness stems from their historical legitimacy, intimate knowledge of customary land rights, accessibility, and the confidence reposed in them by local communities. Nevertheless, the study also found that traditional institutions face significant limitations, particularly in disputes involving statutory land rights, government acquisitions, influential individuals, and cases requiring legal enforcement. Allegations of corruption, favoritism, and inconsistencies in decision-making at some levels of the traditional institution further undermine public confidence in customary dispute resolution.

In a nutshell, the study concludes that sustainable management of land conflicts in Northern Nigeria requires an integrated land governance framework that recognizes the complementary roles of traditional institutions and formal government agencies. Strengthening collaboration between customary and statutory land administration systems, improving land documentation, promoting transparency and accountability, and addressing the broader socio-economic and environmental drivers of land conflicts are essential for enhancing tenure security, preventing violent conflicts, and promoting sustainable development in Kontagora Emirate and similar traditional societies across Northern Nigeria.

Recommendations

- i. **Strengthen collaboration between traditional and statutory land administration institutions.** The Niger State Government should establish formal frameworks that integrate traditional authorities into land governance and dispute resolution processes while clearly defining their roles alongside statutory institutions to improve coordination and reduce institutional conflicts.
- ii. **Improve land documentation and registration systems.** Government, in partnership with the Kontagora Emirate Council, should simplify and decentralize land registration, promote proper documentation of land transactions, and develop a reliable digital database of customary land ownership to minimize overlapping claims and fraudulent transactions.
- iii. **Enhance the capacity, transparency, and accountability of traditional institutions.** Traditional rulers should receive regular training in land administration, mediation, alternative dispute resolution, and ethical governance, while transparent procedures and monitoring mechanisms should be introduced to curb corruption, favoritism, and inconsistent decision-making.
- iv. **Address the underlying socio-economic and environmental drivers of land conflicts.** Government should implement policies that mitigate climate change impacts, regulate mining activities, preserve grazing corridors, promote sustainable land use planning, and strengthen farmer–herder dialogue to reduce competition over scarce land resources.
- v. **Promote public awareness and compliance with land administration procedures.** Continuous community sensitization should be undertaken to educate landowners, farmers, pastoralists, land brokers, and other stakeholders on customary and statutory land rights, inheritance practices, documentation requirements, and approved procedures for land acquisition and transfer.

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