

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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(TETF/DESS/UNI/SOKOTO/ARJ/01)

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.