

Obstacles to Effective Land Conflict Resolution: Traditional Rulers' Perspectives in Osun State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Traditional rulers in developing communities seem to face significant challenges in resolving land conflicts due to unclear land boundaries, erosion of traditional authority, and increasing commercialization of land that disregards customary norms. The study investigated the traditional rulers' perspectives towards obstacles confronting effective land conflict resolution in Ijesa land Osun State, Nigeria. This was with a view to examining political and economic pressures, legal and institutional limitations, erosion of cultural authority and trust, among others. The study employed an exploratory ethnographic research design, while purposive and snowballing sampling procedures were used. The study employed interview guide on 41 Key Informant Interview (KII) and 3 sessions of Focus Group Discussion (FGD), respectively. The responses from KII and FGD sessions were content analysed. The results indicated that land decisions are often shaped by external favours rather than traditional justice or community interest as some traditional rulers cannot say no to politicians who bring them money or contracts. Official land instruments (like Certificates of Occupancy) can override long-standing customary ownership, thereby invalidating traditional resolutions. The lack of accountability has entrenched distrust and apathy toward traditional rulership. Besides, the lack of financial and logistical support weakens the capacity of rulers to carry out investigations, host mediation meetings, or monitor conflicts land effectively. The study concluded that traditional rulers face challenges in the management of land conflicts, especially in the areas of lack of legal authority, interference from external factors, personal interests and bias and involvement in land grabbing.

Keywords: *Traditional rulers, significant challenges, land conflict resolution, Ijesa land, Osun State, Nigeria.*

INTRODUCTION

Traditional leaders in both rich and developing nations bear the crucial responsibility of aiding in the peacebuilding process as well as reducing the negative impacts of insurgencies and conflicts (Joseph, 2025). Their long-lasting impact in certain local areas has enabled them to operate as effective mediators, encouraging dialogue between the parties involved in the conflict, including affected communities, government forces, and insurgents (Akpan & Ajayi, 2020). The traditional rulers typically use their cultural power to advance societal cohesiveness and tolerance by frequently planning gatherings and rituals that encourage healing and reconciliation. Traditional leaders strive to prevent retaliatory violence and promote peaceful coexistence among varied groups by addressing the ethnic and religious divisions that the war has worsened (Bello, 2020). They also back humanitarian efforts, working with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to make sure aid reaches those in need, especially internally displaced people (IDPs), and assisting in community stabilisation by giving access

to necessities like food, shelter, and medical supplies (Sulaimon & Mohammed, 2019; Ishola *et al.*, 2024).

Furthermore, by encouraging local development projects, traditional leaders help address the underlying reasons of the violence, such as unemployment, poverty, and social marginalisation (Hassan & Olarinmoye, 2017). Through these initiatives, they assist in lowering the allure of insurgent organisations and establishing substitute routes for disadvantaged groups and young people. Their partnership with NGOs enhances the effectiveness of peacebuilding initiatives by fusing contemporary peacebuilding techniques with traditional leadership to create culturally relevant solutions for economic recovery and conflict settlement. The restoration of stability and the long-term rebuilding process in Northeast Nigeria are greatly aided by traditional rulers' participation in these multifaceted initiatives (Umar, 2017).

This study supports the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the UN, which are global development imperatives (Akinyooye & Aransi, 2020; Aransi, 2020). By tackling land disputes that threaten livelihoods and worsen poverty, especially in rural areas, it advances SDG 1 (No Poverty). It promotes sustainable land governance methods that increase resilience and inclusivity in local communities, hence supporting SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities). Furthermore, it examines how traditional leaders might serve as mediators to enhance societal stability and justice while promoting institutional accountability and transparency, thereby advancing SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions).

Land-related disputes undermine social fairness and institutional trust, which could make SDG 16 (Peace, fairness, and Strong Institutions) difficult to achieve. For example, there has been frequent violence, mass relocation, and a collapse in social cohesion as a result of the long-standing land dispute between the Ife and Modakeke populations. With the help of federal and state administrations (1997–2000), traditional leaders like the Ooni of Ife and the Ogunsua of Modakeke were instrumental in restoring peace and trust after several outbreaks (Elugbaju, 2016). Conflicts also put sustainable land management, which is essential to SDG 15 (Life on Land), at risk when they lead to unsustainable land use or environmental damage.

The substantial vacuum in the literature on the changing responsibilities of traditional rulers in land disputes (Ajayi & Nwosu, 2020; Obabor, Nelson, Adeshinam & Omotayo, 2022; Ogunleye, 2021; Olayiwola, 2020; Ishola *et al.*, 2024) further supports our study. Many studies have examined land conflicts in Nigeria, but few have examined how traditional rulers might be both a source of conflict and a possible mediator. This study closes this gap by presenting empirical findings from the Ijesa land, offering a sophisticated understanding of the mechanisms at work and advancing scholarly research on conflict resolution and governance. Finally, this study is a useful tool for scholars, traditional institutions, policymakers, and community leaders. Its goal is to improve land governance systems' efficacy and promote sustainable peace and development in Nigeria and elsewhere by providing practical suggestions based on thorough investigation.

Objective of the Study

The study's main objective was to examine the traditional rulers' perspectives towards obstacles to effective land conflict resolution in Ijesa land, Osun state, Nigeria, while specific objectives are to;

- i. investigate the political and economic pressures facing traditional rulers in land conflict resolution in Ijesa land, Osun state, Nigeria;
- ii. examine the legal and institutional limitations facing traditional rulers in land conflict resolution in Ijesa land, Osun state, Nigeria;

- iii. determine the erosion of cultural authority and trust in traditional rulers amid land conflicts in Ijesa land, Osun state, Nigeria;
- iv. assess the impacts of inadequate governmental support on the effectiveness of traditional rulers in resolving land conflicts in Ijesa land, Osun State, Nigeria; and
- v. investigate the cultural expectations and role conflicts facing traditional rulers in Ijesa land, Osun State, Nigeria

Research Questions

The following research questions were raised to guide the study.

- i. What are the political and economic pressures facing traditional rulers in land conflict resolution in Ijesa land, Osun state, Nigeria?
- ii. What are the legal and institutional limitations facing traditional rulers in land conflict resolution in Ijesa land, Osun state, Nigeria?
- iii. What is the erosion of cultural authority and trust in traditional rulers amid land conflicts in Ijesa land, Osun state, Nigeria?
- iv. What are the impacts of inadequate governmental support on the effectiveness of traditional rulers in resolving land conflicts in Ijesa land, Osun State, Nigeria?
- v. What are the cultural expectations and role conflicts facing traditional rulers in Ijesa land, Osun State, Nigeria?

METHODOLOGY

This study used an **exploratory ethnographic research design**. Understanding the social environment and culture of the issue under study is the aim of the ethnographic method. This method combines fieldwork and participatory observation to examine the traditions, values, and behaviours of a certain group or community. Ethnography allows researchers to fully and thoroughly document and portray social reality by focussing cultural description and contextual understanding (Ploder & Hamann, 2021).

The ethnographic research approach is highly relevant to the study of traditional rulers in Ijesa region, Osun State, Nigeria, as either peacemakers or perpetrators, because it allows for a comprehensive analysis of the social dynamics and cultural context that underpin land grabs and disputes. Through community immersion, interviews, and participant observation, ethnography provided profound insights into the perspectives and experiences of community members as well as the roles, behaviours, and intentions of traditional rulers. The power dynamics, cultural norms, and historical legacies that impact conflicts and peacebuilding efforts were revealed by this approach, which shed light on the complex issues at hand.

The researcher, who was also an ethnographer, spent a significant amount of time observing and interacting with traditional rulers in Ijesa land, Osun State, Nigeria, to learn how their roles and behaviours are influenced by the cultural structures and relationships of the community. The researcher also looked at the rulers' roles as either peacemakers or as perpetrators of land grabbing and conflicts. This prolonged involvement enabled the researcher to gain a thorough understanding of the intricate dynamics of power, tradition, and social norms that influence conflict and peacebuilding processes in the study area. It also allowed the researcher to gain a thorough understanding of the complex issues surrounding land grabbing and the roles traditional rulers play in these conflicts.

The **study's population** comprises important traditional players who either directly or indirectly participate in dispute resolution and land governance. These actors include chiefs, *Baales*, and traditional rulers (*Obas*). Other stakeholders include community leaders, young

adults, and landowners; local subsistence farmers who have been impacted by land conflicts or who have taken part in grassroots peace processes; and elders who have a deep understanding of the land crises in the *Ijesa* land. Their participation guarantees that a range of viewpoints and experiences on land disputes and governance procedures are included in the study.

The study used **purposive and snowballing sampling procedures**. These procedures were appropriate due to the qualitative and exploratory nature of the research, which required the intentional selection of individuals who possess direct, in-depth knowledge and lived experiences relevant to the research questions. These include traditional rulers (*Obas*), chiefs, *Baales*, community leaders, youths, residents, and elders with firsthand knowledge of land conflicts and governance practices in *Ijesa* land.

The purposive sampling technique allowed the researcher to focus on **key informants** whose roles and social positions within the traditional and administrative hierarchies provided rich insights into the nuanced dynamics of land grabbing, customary authority, and conflict resolution processes. The **snowball sampling** was employed to reach hidden or hard-to-identify participants, particularly in cases involving sensitive or controversial land conflicts where individuals may be reluctant to speak openly. Participants who were initially contacted were asked to refer others who met the study's inclusion criteria, thereby expanding access to insider voices and enabling a deeper exploration of underlying power structures and contestations.

The sample size comprised **41 key informant interviews** and **3 focus group discussions**. This size was considered sufficient for a qualitative study guided by the principle of data saturation the point at which no new themes or relevant information emerge from additional data collection. The richness of the qualitative data, rather than statistical representativeness, was the guiding principle in determining the sample size.

The decision to select participants from **six representative communities** across the six local government areas of *Ijesa* land (*Ilesa East, Ilesa West, Oriade, Obokun, Atakunmosa East, and Atakunmosa West*) was based on both **geographical spread and socio-political relevance**. These communities: **Ilesa, Ijebu-Jesa, Esa-Oke, Iloko-Ijesa, Osu, and Erin-Ijesa** were chosen because they reflect varying degrees of traditional authority involvement in land governance, different histories of land conflicts, and diverse interactions with formal governance institutions.

This study adopts a qualitative method of data collection, relying primarily on **Key Informant Interviews (KIIs)** and **Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)** to explore the complex and sensitive dynamics of traditional rulers' involvement in land grabbing and conflict resolution in *Ijesa* land, *Osun State, Nigeria*. The data collected during fieldwork was analysed using **content analysis**, a qualitative research technique that enables the systematic identification, organization, and interpretation of themes and patterns within textual data.

RESULTS

Research Question 1: What are the political and economic pressures facing traditional rulers in land conflict resolution in *Ijesa* land, *Osun state, Nigeria*?

In the past, traditional rulers in the *Ijesa* land have played a key role in land management, arbitration, and community governance. Their capacity to settle land-related conflicts, though, is now more and more limited by a number of social, political, legal, institutional, and cultural obstacles.

Political and Economic Pressures Facing Traditional Rulers in Land Conflict Resolution

Contemporary land administration finds conventional kings in the Ijesa land in a difficult and usually fragile position. Originally tasked with overseeing community land and resolving land conflicts, these rulers are increasingly entangled in the web of contemporary political and financial constraints. Their objectivity, independence, and moral character have been much compromised by the commodification of land, increased rivalry for land resources, and political meddling. These stresses not only restrict their capacity to negotiate justly but also expose them to allegations of prejudice, duplicity, even corruption.

Political pressure develops when powerful people like lawmakers, local officials, or affluent land purchasers attempt to sway traditional rulers' decisions in their direction. Particularly if rulers rely on political patronage for recognition, legitimacy, or resources, such performers frequently have political influence that can endanger the ruler's power or reputation. Some rulers worry about reprisal, marginalization, or loss of rank if they reject powerful people's will.

Rising land value has turned it into a profitable asset on the economic front, therefore enticing both claimants and rulers to give personal benefit priority above common good. Once regarded as guardians of community welfare, traditional rulers are now often seen with mistrust especially when they are claimed to be profiting from the sale or redistribution of land. Rising economic stakes tied to land have also caused more pressure from family members, youth groups, and local elites expecting the monarch to distribute or sell land in their favour. These overlapping stresses have destroyed the objectivity of conventional institutions and created ever more contentious conflict resolution. The replies from important sources from the six LGAs of Ijesaland clearly demonstrate how political and economic forces skew the functions of conventional leaders:

Respondent 29 (*KII R29, 40, Male, Artisan, Oriade*) remarked that “*some kings cannot say no to politicians who bring them money or contracts,*” suggesting that land decisions are often shaped by external favours rather than traditional justice or community interest.

Respondent 3 (*KII R3, 67, Male, Traditional Healer, Atakunmosa West*) emphasised that the increasing commercial value of land tempts rulers to become “*businessmen in royal robes.*” He shared that in some cases, traditional rulers are involved in land sales without the knowledge of other community stakeholders, a practice that erodes their moral authority.

Respondent 13 (*KII R13, 59, Female, Businesswoman, Ilesa East*) noted that “*some traditional rulers now take bribes to settle land cases in favour of the rich,*” adding that this has generated mistrust and hostility between rulers and ordinary citizens, especially poorer families who feel disadvantaged.

Respondent 11 (*KII R11, 52, Female, Trader, Ilesa West*) described a situation where a traditional ruler allegedly awarded conflict land to a politically connected businessman, ignoring the pleas of the local family that had farmed the land for generations. She stressed that “*money talks louder than truth these days,*” highlighting how economic motivations often override justice.

Respondent 8 (*KII R8, 61, Male, Farmer, Oriade*) acknowledged that traditional rulers are “*under pressure to satisfy both political leaders and their subjects,*” which creates moral and operational dilemmas. In attempting to maintain favour with all sides, some rulers adopt ambiguous or indecisive stances that further escalate conflicts.

Respondent 31 (R31, 54, Female, Civil Servant, Ilesa East) expressed concern that political actors manipulate traditional rulers for their own gain, using them to legitimize dubious land acquisitions. She warned that this weakens the integrity of the traditional institution and reduces public trust in conflict mediation outcomes.

Research Question 2: What are the legal and institutional limitations facing traditional rulers in land conflict resolution in Ijesa land, Osun state, Nigeria?

Legal and Institutional Limitations Facing Traditional Rulers in Land Conflict Resolution

Dualism and ambiguity within Nigeria's legal and institutional systems on land administration are among the most urgent issues confronting traditional rulers in the Ijesa area. Though traditional rulers have long served as custodians of community land under customary law, the enactment and enforcement of statutory land laws especially the Land Use Act of 1978 has greatly diminished their influence and created legal ambiguity which challenges their participation in land conflict resolution. Under the Land Use Act, all property in every state is held in trust for the citizens by the governor. This legislative change moved legal authority over land from customary institutions to governmental agencies, therefore sidelining conventional practices and restricting the ability of traditional rulers to make judgements enforceable. Thus, classic governance in land issues exists in a grey area known by communities but often neglected or sabotaged by the official legal system.

Bureaucratic land management procedures, conflicting land records, and the lack of integration between traditional land tenure systems and formal land registry records worsen this institutional disempowerment. As a result, statutory courts frequently reverse or ignore conventional judgments in land conflicts, which irritates traditional leaders and perplexes disputants.

Responses from key informants highlight the depth of this problem:

Respondent 31 (*KII R31, 54, Female, Civil Servant, Ilesa East*) articulated the disconnect between customary and statutory authority, stating: “*We settle land conflicts through our chiefs, but once the matter gets to court, they ignore our decisions and follow the paper documents even if the documents are forged.*” Her observation underscores how official land instruments (like Certificates of Occupancy) can override long-standing customary ownership, thereby invalidating traditional resolutions.

Respondent 5 (*KII R5, 64, Male, Traditional Ruler, Obokun*) reflected on the loss of legal standing, noting that “*palace decisions are no longer binding once the matter goes to government authorities or police.*” He added that, in some cases, local government officers allocate or resell community land without consulting traditional rulers, further diminishing their authority.

Respondent 10 (*KII R10, 56, Male, Artisan, Ilesa East*) emphasised that “*the law now favours those with lawyers, not those with land history,*” a sentiment echoed by other respondents who perceive that legal institutions tend to prioritize formal documentation over oral traditions and communal memory, making the legal system inaccessible or biased against local people.

Respondent 19 (*KII R19, 51, Female, Farmer, Atakunmosa West*) shared a case where her family lost land in court despite having farmed it for generations. She blamed the failure on their inability to produce modern land documents. “*We don't have papers, we have witnesses and ancestors,*” she said, highlighting the institutional gap between formal legal expectations and customary realities.

Respondent 7 (KII R7, 60, Male, Farmer, Atakunmosa East) lamented that traditional rulers are not consulted during the formal acquisition of land by developers. *“They collect C of O from government and start building without our knowledge,”* he stated, describing how such actions sow seeds of conflict when local families react to what they see as illegal encroachment.

Furthermore, some of the respondents observed that conventional organizations lack legal enforcement processes. Even when conventional kings solve conflicts peacefully, they usually need community consensus for execution. A court, a police order, or an administrative directive can swiftly overturn conventional settlements in circumstances when one party opposes or seeks legal remedies. These institutional sidelining fuels a rising disillusionment among groups who view traditional conflict resolution systems as inadequate, symbolic, or vulnerable to external interference. It also lowers the confidence traditional monarchs have in their capacity to keep order and safeguard community interests.

Research Question 3: What is the erosion of cultural authority and trust in traditional rulers amid land conflicts in Ijesa land, Osun state, Nigeria?

Erosion of Cultural Authority and Trust in Traditional Rulers Amid Land Conflicts

Traditionally regarded as the stewards of land, justice, and communal harmony in the Ijesa country, traditional rulers were Their decisions bore ethical and spiritual significance, and their words served as law. But the contemporary dynamics of land conflicts, especially those involving riches, politics, and contested ownership, have steadily eroded the cultural power and trust usually granted to these leaders. A mix of seen corruption, prejudiced decisions, generational value changes, and community disillusionment is to blame for this loss of credibility and respect. Many community members think certain traditional rulers have abandoned their hereditary obligations in favour of self-interest or foreign influence as land becomes commodified and economically valuable. This has harmed the society's faith in their fairness and neutrality as well as their moral high ground. Some repeated response shows the loss of trust:

Respondent 13 (KII R13, 59, Female, Businesswoman, Ilesa East) observed: *“Some rulers now sell land in secret and claim it was community decision. When people find out, they no longer respect them or obey palace rulings.”* This highlights how a lack of transparency fuels suspicion and weakens the legitimacy of the traditional institution.

Respondent 2 (KII R2, 58, Male, Theologian/Health Technologist, Atakunmosa West) noted a spiritual and moral decay, saying, *“Kings no longer stand as fathers; they stand as businessmen. Once people start thinking that way, how can they trust their decisions?”* His statement reflects a wider sentiment that the revered image of traditional rulers is fading due to contemporary behaviour inconsistent with cultural values.

Respondent 5 (KII R5, 64, Male, Traditional Ruler, Obokun) admitted that *“some of our colleagues have brought shame to the throne by supporting the highest bidder.”* He lamented that even when a ruler tries to do the right thing, the public assumes foul play, which creates tension and undermines peacekeeping efforts.

Respondent 11 (KII R11, 52, Female, Trader, Ilesa West) shared that palace rulings are now frequently challenged or ignored by community members. *“If they don’t agree with what the king says, they go straight to court. That never used to happen before,”* she said. This indicates the growing preference for formal legal systems over customary institutions, especially when the latter are seen as compromised.

Respondent 10 (KII R10, 56, Male, Artisan, Ilesa East) commented that younger people *“don’t even fear or revere the oba anymore. They call them ‘dealers in agbada’ because of how they sell community land.”* This generational disconnect reveals a loss of cultural continuity and a shift in how traditional leadership is perceived, particularly among youth.

Respondent 31 (KII R31, 54, Female, Civil Servant, Ilesa East) argued that *“when kings are accused of land racketeering and nothing happens to them, people feel helpless.”* This lack of accountability has further entrenched distrust and apathy toward traditional rulership.

Despite these challenges, some respondents still hold out hope for the restoration of trust. Respondent 7 (R7, 60, Male, Farmer, Atakunmosa East) emphasised that *“if a king is transparent, fair, and consults elders before decisions, people will respect him no matter what.”* This highlights that trust can still be earned or restored through inclusive and ethical leadership.

Research Question 4: What are the impacts of inadequate governmental support on the effectiveness of traditional rulers in resolving land conflicts in Ijesa land, Osun State, Nigeria?

Inadequate Governmental Support for Traditional Rulers in Land Conflict Resolution

Lack of enough government backing is one of the main obstacles to the efficiency of traditional leaders in land management and conflict resolution in the Ijesa land. Although conventional monarchs continue to be respected and serve as grassroots leaders, their positions are frequently unofficial and unknown inside legal land administration systems. This disconnect deprives them of legal authority, administrative resources, and technical support that would enable them to properly resolve land conflicts or govern land use practices. Though they serve as bridges between communities and the state, traditional rulers are not officially incorporated into local government organizations addressing land matters. Consequently, decisions about land distribution, registration, and enforcement leave them on the sidelines. Many participants in the Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) stressed that this marginalization damages their performance, limits their capacity to carry out judgments, and aggravates public anger against them.

From the replies from the six LGAs of Ijesa land, a persistent theme emerged: governmental organizations seldom seek or support traditional institutions in managing land-related conflicts unless it fits political agendas.

Respondent 11 (KII R11, 52, Female, Trader, Ilesa West) bluntly stated: *“Government only remembers the king when they need him during elections. When there is a land crisis, they handle it like we don’t exist.”* Her account highlights the performative nature of government engagement, which often lacks substance or sustainability.

Respondent 5 (KII R5, 64, Male, Traditional Ruler, Obokun) confirmed this institutional neglect, noting that *“we are the first point of contact for land issues, but we are not given legal tools or recognition to act decisively.”* He emphasised that while traditional rulers are closest to the people, their authority is often bypassed or overruled by statutory bodies, especially when influential parties are involved.

Respondent 10 (KII R10, 56, Male, Artisan, Ilesa East) shared that traditional rulers often have to *“fund conflict settlements from their personal pockets” because there is no budgetary allocation or structural support for community-based mediation.* This lack of financial and logistical support weakens the capacity of rulers to carry out investigations, host mediation meetings, or monitor conflicts land effectively.

Respondent 7 (KII R7, 60, Male, Farmer, Atakunmosa East) recalled a situation in which land was being resold to an investor without his knowledge. *“The local government sold it, and I only heard after bulldozers arrived. What kind of respect is that for the stool?”* His account reveals a deeper issue: traditional rulers are excluded from formal land transactions, even when those transactions involve land under their customary jurisdiction.

Respondent 31 (KII R31, 54, Female, Civil Servant, Ilesa East) described the lack of technical collaboration, saying, *“How can the palace verify land boundaries without access to surveyors, maps, or land officers? Meanwhile, government just issues papers.”* Her observation illustrates the mismatch between community needs and government procedures, where traditional authorities are expected to resolve conflicts without institutional tools.

Moreover, traditional rulership is not financially autonomous, making it difficult for them to resist external pressures or corruption. Respondent 29 (KII R29, 40, Male, Artisan, Oriade) pointed out that *“when government does not support the monarchy structurally or financially, rulers are left vulnerable and may seek financial assistance from interested parties, creating bias in decision-making”*. The cumulative effect of this neglect is a weakened traditional institution one that is often blamed by the community for unresolved conflicts, yet lacks the legal authority or institutional support to act effectively. This creates a credibility gap, erodes public trust, and pushes disputants to abandon customary conflict resolution mechanisms in favor of courts or police.

Research Question 5: What are the cultural expectations and role conflicts facing traditional rulers in Ijesa land, Osun State, Nigeria?

Cultural expectations and role conflicts facing traditional rulers in land conflict resolution

As custodians of territory, customs, and harmony, traditional rulers in the Ijesa land hold a respected position in cultural memory (Ukpe, 2024). They are supposed to preserve ancestral legacies, advance community unity, and uphold justice. These cultural standards, meanwhile, frequently clash with the difficult facts of contemporary land management especially in a setting where land has become a highly monetized and political asset. Traditional kings, therefore, find themselves increasingly torn between their conventional duties and the demands of modern economic and political dynamics, which causes role conflicts and lower success in settling land claims. Communities still want ancient kings to be fair mediators, spiritual leaders, and guardians of land inheritance. Still, the requirement to negotiate external demands from government, developers, and inside pressure from large family networks or palace friends often conflicts these expectations. Particularly when cultural values are not in line with contemporary legal or economic systems, these opposing demands present moral, practical, and political difficulties for monarchs (Ukpe, 2012).

Responses from the Key Informants across Atakunmosa East, Atakunmosa West, Ilesa East, Ilesa West, Obokun, and Oriade LGAs clearly illustrate these challenges:

Respondent 8 (KII R8, 61, Male, Farmer, Oriade) captured the tension vividly: *“People expect us to resolve every land matter fairly, but we are under pressure from politicians, family, and sometimes the youth. You cannot please everyone.”* His comment reflects the daily balancing act traditional rulers must perform attempting to satisfy cultural duties while managing competing interests.

Respondent 13 (KII R13, 59, Female, Businesswoman, Ilesa East) noted that when traditional rulers make unpopular land decisions, *“the people say the king has failed culturally even if he followed due process.”* This reveals the emotional and symbolic burden that comes with leadership in a context where tradition still holds strong sentimental value.

Respondent 5 (KII R5, 64, Male, Traditional Ruler, Obokun) admitted that modern expectations often exceed what tradition can manage: *“In those days, land matters were spiritual now they are political. People want fast decisions, legal documents, and money. They no longer have patience for traditional processes.”* He noted that this cultural shift often places rulers in uncomfortable positions where they must act as both cultural leaders and quasi-bureaucrats.

Respondent 31 (KII R31, 54, Female, Civil Servant, Ilesa East) emphasised the contradiction between community ideals and social reality: *“Everyone says the king should protect the land, but the same people bring strangers to him and beg him to sell community land to raise money.”* Her account reflects the internal contradictions in community behaviour where expectations of cultural guardianship coexist with pressures for monetization.

Respondent 6 (KII R6, 60, Male, Farmer, Obokun) mentioned that *“people don’t understand the weight on the king’s shoulders. When land is sold, they blame him. When it is preserved, they complain that there’s no development.”* This double-bind creates a no-win situation, making it difficult for rulers to satisfy either side fully.

Particularly sharp is the conflict when conventional inheritance roles, community participation, and ancestral borders clash with contemporary legal instruments like Certificates of Occupancy (C of O), construction licenses, or land surveys. In such circumstances, statutory bodies may overturn even a ruler who adheres to accepted procedures, therefore upsetting both him and the society. Role confusion is exacerbated by the rising commercialization of chieftaincy structures. The moral power and cultural purity of the palace come under suspicion when conventional titles and positions are seen as monetized or affected by outside interests. This makes it more difficult for traditional rulers to negotiate openly and undercuts the trust needed for calm conflict resolution.

DISCUSSION

The findings showed the challenges faced by traditional rulers in the management of land conflicts include the supremacy of the law courts and modern laws above the authorities of traditional rulers, lack of enforcement power to back up the rules of traditional rulers, personal bias and selfish interests of the traditional rulers, disrespect and lack of trust from community members, as well as the interference from external agencies such as government and private individuals. This finding is consistent with the findings of Ajayi and Ikuporukpo (2005) where it was found that traditional rulers are affected by legal pluralism, while they at the same time lack institutional structure and power for the implementation of their decisions. However, Berry (2001) provided a robust optimistic view that blending system where traditional rulers are blended into formal framework of government can help in upholding traditional authorities in conflict managements on lands and other matters.

CONCLUSION

Traditional rulers face challenges in the management of land conflicts, especially in the areas of lack of legal authority, interference from external factors, personal interests and bias and

involvement in land grabbing. While some traditional rulers are also involved in land grabbing, others resist such and put the interests of their communities at best.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are raised.

- i. The government, in collaboration with customary institutions, should develop legal guidelines that clearly define the role, limits, and responsibilities of traditional rulers in land governance. There must also be sanctions and enforcement mechanisms for misuse of authority, including legal prosecution or deposition in cases of misconduct or land grabbing.
- ii. Periodic training should be provided for traditional rulers and their aides on: Land laws and regulations, conflict resolution and mediation, community engagement techniques. This would enhance their capacity to manage land affairs effectively in line with both statutory and customary principles
- iii. Traditional rulers should work closely with local government land authorities, land use planning agencies, and the judiciary to harmonize customary practices with formal land administration systems. This partnership would help avoid duplication of authority and reduce conflict arising from overlapping jurisdictions.

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