

Corruption As Impediment to Effective Resolution of Land-Related Disputes by Traditional Institutions in Northern Nigeria: A Study of Kontagora Emirate, Niger State

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Abstract

This study examined corruption as an impediment to the effective resolution of land-related disputes by traditional institutions in Kontagora Emirate, Niger State, Nigeria. Specifically, it assessed the nature of land-related disputes, the extent of corruption in customary dispute resolution, the effectiveness of traditional institutions, and the effects of corruption on land dispute resolution. The study was anchored on Institutional Theory and adopted a descriptive survey research design. Data were collected from 108 respondents using structured questionnaire and analyzed using descriptive statistics comprising frequencies and percentages. The findings revealed that boundary, inheritance, and land ownership disputes are the most common forms of land-related conflicts in the study area, with traditional institutions serving as the primary mechanism for dispute resolution. The study further established that political interference and the influence of wealth or social status constitute the major forms of corruption affecting traditional institutions. Although traditional institutions were generally perceived as effective in resolving disputes promptly and promoting peaceful coexistence, corruption was found to reduce public confidence, prolong dispute resolution, increase community tensions, encourage recurring disputes, and undermine land tenure security. The study recommends strengthening institutional independence, promoting transparency and accountability, enhancing ethical standards through capacity building, improving customary land documentation, and establishing effective oversight mechanisms to improve the credibility and effectiveness of traditional land dispute resolution.

Keywords: Corruption, Traditional Institutions, Land-related Disputes, Land Governance, Kontagora Emirate, Niger State.

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I. Background

Land remains one of the most valuable natural resources and a critical foundation for livelihood, identity, economic development, and social stability in Nigeria. In Northern Nigeria particularly, land extends beyond its economic value to encompass cultural, religious, and ancestral significance, making ownership and access highly sensitive issues. The increasing demand for land resulting from rapid population growth, urban expansion, agricultural commercialization, mineral exploitation, and infrastructural development has intensified competition over land resources, thereby increasing the incidence of land-related disputes (FAO, 2022; UN-Habitat, 2023). Such disputes often involve boundaries, inheritance, tenancy, communal ownership, grazing rights, and competing claims between individuals, families, communities, and government agencies. When inadequately managed, they can undermine social cohesion, discourage investment, threaten food security, and trigger violent conflicts.

Historically, traditional institutions have played a central role in land administration and dispute resolution across Northern Nigeria. Emirs, district heads, village heads, ward heads, and other customary authorities have long exercised jurisdiction over customary land matters through mediation, arbitration, reconciliation, and consensus-building mechanisms rooted in indigenous norms and Islamic legal traditions. These institutions are widely respected because they possess intimate knowledge of local customs, family histories, lineage relationships, and community boundaries, enabling them to resolve disputes more quickly, inexpensively, and amicably than formal courts (Alden Wily, 2018; Ubink, 2008). Their emphasis on restorative justice and preservation of communal harmony has ensured their continued relevance despite the expansion of statutory legal systems.

Nigeria's dual land governance framework, particularly following the enactment of the Land Use Act of 1978, created an interface between statutory and customary land administration. Although legal authority over land is vested in state governors, customary institutions continue to exercise considerable influence over land allocation, tenure regulation, and dispute settlement, especially in rural communities where customary tenure remains dominant. Consequently, many disputing parties still prefer traditional institutions because of their accessibility, affordability, cultural legitimacy, flexible procedures, and familiarity with local realities (Deininger, 2003; World Bank, 2020). However, this coexistence of statutory and customary systems has also created overlapping jurisdictions and opportunities for abuse of authority, particularly where institutional accountability is weak.

In recent years, concerns have grown regarding the integrity and effectiveness of traditional institutions in resolving land disputes. Among the most significant challenges confronting these institutions is corruption, which has increasingly been identified as a major obstacle to impartial and equitable dispute resolution. Corruption may manifest through bribery, favoritism, nepotism, manipulation of customary rules, political interference, forgery of land records, extortion, selective enforcement of decisions, and undue influence from wealthy individuals or powerful elites. These practices compromise fairness, erode public confidence in customary justice systems, and often prolong conflicts that would otherwise have been resolved peacefully (Transparency International, 2023; UNODC, 2019).

The implications of corruption in land dispute resolution extend beyond individual grievances. Decisions perceived as biased or purchased frequently generate dissatisfaction among litigants, encourage repeated litigation, weaken respect for traditional authority, and may escalate localized disputes into broader communal conflicts. Corruption also undermines tenure security, discourages agricultural investment, delays rural development, and contributes to the proliferation of informal land transactions. In regions already affected by resource competition and insecurity, ineffective land dispute resolution further intensifies social tensions and threatens sustainable peace.

Kontagora Emirate in Niger State represents a particularly important setting for examining these issues. The Emirate possesses a long-established traditional governance structure and continues to exercise considerable influence over customary land administration across its constituent districts and villages. Rapid demographic growth, expanding agricultural activities, urban development, and increasing commercial value of land have contributed to a rise in land-related disputes within the Emirate. While traditional authorities remain the first point of contact for resolving many of these disputes, there are increasing public concerns regarding allegations of undue influence, preferential treatment, unofficial payments, and inconsistencies in dispute resolution processes. Such perceptions have raised questions about the credibility and effectiveness of customary institutions in maintaining justice and social harmony.

Several empirical studies have examined land governance and dispute resolution in Nigeria. Deininger (2003) emphasized that weak land governance institutions create opportunities for corruption and tenure insecurity. Ubink (2008) demonstrated how accountability deficits within customary land administration can facilitate elite capture and inequitable land allocation. Alden Wily (2018) highlighted the continuing importance of customary institutions in Africa while noting the governance challenges affecting their legitimacy. The World Bank (2020) identified corruption and institutional weaknesses as major constraints to effective land administration across developing countries. In Nigeria, studies by Akinola (2020), Bello and Adebayo (2021), and Musa and Abdullahi (2023) have examined customary land administration, land governance, and conflict management in different parts of the country, revealing persistent challenges relating to transparency, accountability, and institutional capacity.

Despite these contributions, existing studies have largely concentrated on statutory land administration, land tenure reforms, customary land rights, or the general causes of land conflicts. Comparatively limited scholarly attention has been devoted to understanding how corruption specifically affects the ability of traditional institutions to resolve land-related disputes effectively in Northern Nigeria. More importantly, few studies have focused on the experiences of traditional authorities themselves or provided detailed empirical evidence from Kontagora Emirate, where customary institutions continue to perform significant land governance functions. This creates an important knowledge gap regarding the forms, drivers, and consequences of corruption within traditional dispute resolution processes and the institutional reforms necessary to enhance transparency, accountability, and public trust.

It is against this background that this study investigates Corruption as an Impediment to Effective Resolution of Land-related Disputes by Traditional Institutions in Northern Nigeria: A Study of Kontagora Emirate, Niger State. The study seeks to examine the manifestations and drivers of corruption within traditional dispute resolution mechanisms, assess its effects on the effectiveness, legitimacy, and public acceptance of traditional institutions, and propose practical strategies for strengthening integrity, accountability, and efficiency in customary land dispute resolution. The findings are expected to contribute to the literature on land governance, customary justice, and conflict management while providing evidence-based recommendations for policymakers,

traditional institutions, and other stakeholders working towards sustainable land administration and peaceful conflict resolution in Northern Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Institutional Theory, originally developed by Philip Selznick (1949, 1957) and further advanced by Meyer and Rowan (1977) and DiMaggio and Powell (1983). Institutional Theory posits that organizations and institutions function within a framework of formal rules, informal norms, values, traditions, and social expectations that shape their behavior, legitimacy, and effectiveness. Institutions derive their authority not merely from legal mandates but from the confidence, trust, and acceptance they enjoy within society. Consequently, when institutional norms are upheld, organizations are more likely to perform their functions effectively; conversely, when these norms are weakened by unethical practices such as corruption, institutional performance and legitimacy are significantly compromised.

Within the context of land governance in Northern Nigeria, traditional institutions constitute long-established customary governance systems responsible for mediating and resolving land-related disputes. Their legitimacy is rooted in indigenous customs, cultural values, Islamic principles, and community acceptance rather than solely in statutory law. Historically, Emirs, District Heads, Village Heads, and other traditional authorities have resolved disputes through mediation, arbitration, reconciliation, and consensus-building, thereby promoting peaceful coexistence and social harmony.

Institutional Theory argues that the effectiveness of these institutions depends on adherence to established rules, transparency, accountability, fairness, and impartiality. Where traditional authorities discharge their responsibilities in accordance with customary norms and ethical standards, public confidence is strengthened, dispute outcomes are accepted, and social stability is enhanced. However, when corruption manifests through bribery, favoritism, nepotism, political interference, abuse of authority, or unofficial payments, institutional integrity is eroded. Such practices violate the formal and informal rules governing traditional institutions, diminish their legitimacy, reduce public trust, encourage repeated disputes, and weaken the effectiveness of customary land dispute resolution.

The theory further suggests that institutions require effective governance mechanisms, accountability structures, and ethical leadership to maintain their legitimacy. In the absence of these mechanisms, institutional decay becomes more likely, resulting in poor service delivery, increased conflict, and diminished public confidence. Therefore, strengthening transparency, accountability, and oversight within traditional institutions is essential for restoring institutional credibility and improving the resolution of land-related disputes. Institutional Theory is particularly relevant to this study because it provides a framework for examining how institutional weaknesses and corrupt practices impede the ability of traditional institutions in Kontagora Emirate to resolve land disputes effectively. It enables the study to assess the relationship between institutional integrity and dispute resolution outcomes while identifying reforms capable of enhancing accountability, public trust, and institutional effectiveness.

The theory is relevant because it:

- i. Explains how institutional rules, norms, and values influence the performance of traditional institutions in resolving land disputes, demonstrates how corruption weakens institutional legitimacy, credibility, and public confidence, provides a basis for examining the relationship between institutional integrity and the effectiveness of land dispute resolution, Supports the need for transparency, accountability, ethical leadership, and oversight as prerequisites for effective customary land governance and guides the formulation of policy recommendations aimed at strengthening traditional institutions and improving land dispute resolution in Kontagora Emirate and Northern Nigeria.

II. Methodology

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.

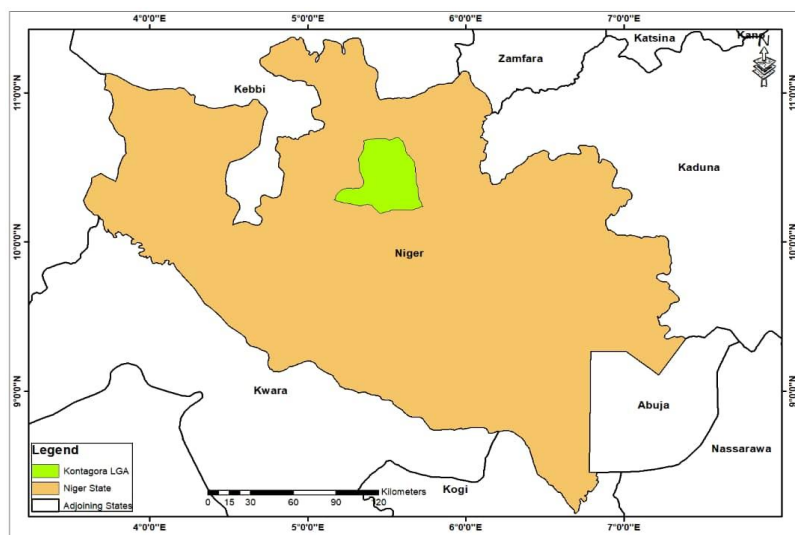


Figure 1 Map of Niger State Showing Kontagora

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.

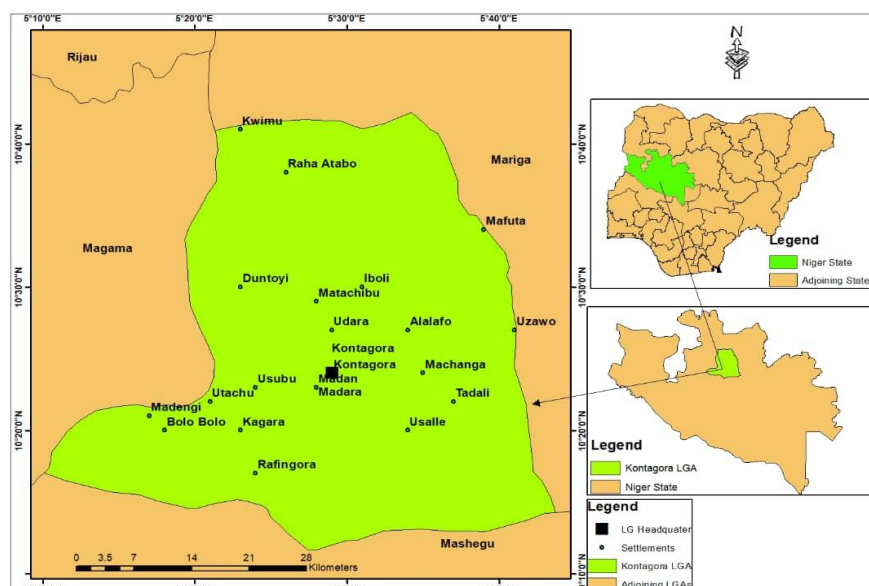


Figure 2 Map of Kontagora

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.

III. Methods

The study adopted a survey research design, relying on quantitative data collected through the administration of a structured questionnaire to the respondents. The questionnaire comprised two sections (A and B). Section A, elicited information on the respondents' socio-economic characteristics, while Section B focused on issues relating to infrastructural inequality and its effects on residents' well-being.

A combination of purposive and snowball sampling techniques was adopted for selecting the respondents. Purposive sampling was employed because the study specifically targeted respondents who had

experienced land disputes, as well as traditional authorities responsible for handling land-related conflicts. The snowball sampling technique was used to identify and recruit additional respondents through individuals who were aware of others' involvement in land conflicts within the study area. This approach increased the sample size and enhanced respondents' willingness to participate, as they were introduced to the researcher by people they knew and trusted.

A total of 108 respondents were selected from the five districts under study (Figure 2). Descriptive statistics, including frequency tables and percentages, were used to analyse the data. In addition, a four-point Likert scale was employed to gauge respondents' perceptions of infrastructural inequality and its effects on residents' well-being.

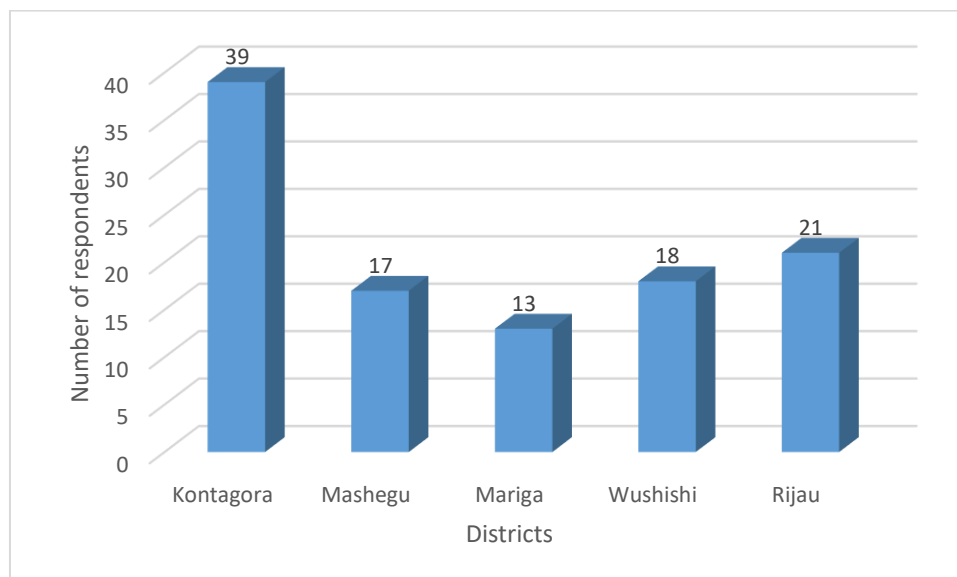


Figure 2 Distribution of Respondents across Districts in the Study Area

IV. Results and Discussion

This section presents the results of the findings obtained from the administration of structured questionnaire to 108 respondents across 5 wards districts the made up the Kontagora Emirate.

Table 1 presents the socio-economic characteristics of the respondents selected for the study on Corruption as an Impediment to Effective Resolution of Land-related Disputes by Traditional Institutions in Kontagora Emirate, Niger State. The variables analyzed include sex, age, marital status, educational background, occupation, district/community, and the institution where land-related disputes were resolved.

The gender distribution indicates that 89% of the respondents were male, while 11% were female. This distribution suggests that men constitute the dominant participants in land ownership, management, and customary land dispute resolution within the study area. The higher male participation reflects the traditional land tenure system in Northern Nigeria, where men are more actively involved in matters relating to land administration and inheritance.

Table 1 Socio-Economic Characteristics of the Respondents

Variable	Response	Frequency	Percentages
Sex	Male	96	89
	Female	12	11
	Total	108	100
Age	Less than 20	08	07
	21-30	21	19
	31-40	26	25
	41-50	37	34
	Above 50	16	15
	Total	108	100
Marital Status	Single	21	19
	Married	62	58
	Divorced	11	10
	Widowed	14	13
	Total	108	100
Educational Background	Islamic	34	31
	Primary	24	22
	Secondary	33	31

	Tertiary	17	16
	Total	108	100
Occupation	Farming	53	49
	Civil Servant	24	22
	Business/ Petty Trading	16	15
	Artisan	09	08
	Housewife	06	06
	No specific Occupation	-	0
	Total	108	100
District/ Community	Kontagora	39	36
	Mashegu	17	16
	Mariga	13	12
	Wushishi	18	17
	Rijau	21	19
	Total	108	100
Where was the Dispute Resolved	Traditional Institution	75	69
	Court	13	12
	Local Government	11	10
	Police/Civil Defence etc	04	04
	Community Mediation	05	05
	Total	108	100

Source: Authors' Field Survey 2026

The age distribution shows that 34% of the respondents were between 41 and 50 years, representing the largest age group. This was followed by 25% aged between 31 and 40 years, 19% aged between 21 and 30 years, and 15% who were above 50 years, while only 7% were below 20 years. The predominance of respondents within the economically active age groups indicates that the study captured the views of individuals who are more likely to have direct experience with land ownership and land-related disputes.

Regarding marital status, 58% of the respondents were married, 19% were single, 13% were widowed, and 10% were divorced. The dominance of married respondents suggests that they are more likely to be involved in issues relating to family land ownership, inheritance, and property management, making them well positioned to provide informed opinions on land dispute resolution.

The educational background of the respondents reveals that 31% had Islamic education, while another 31% had secondary education. Respondents with primary education accounted for 22%, whereas 16% had tertiary education. This distribution demonstrates that respondents possessed varying educational backgrounds, allowing the study to capture perceptions from individuals with different levels of formal and informal education.

In terms of occupation, 49% of the respondents were farmers, making farming the predominant occupation within the study area. This was followed by 22% who were civil servants, 15% engaged in business or petty trading, 8% who were artisans, and 6% who were housewives. The predominance of farming reflects the agrarian nature of Kontagora Emirate, where access to and control of land are central to livelihoods and economic activities.

The geographical distribution of respondents indicates that 36% were from Kontagora District, 19% from Rijau, 17% from Wushishi, 16% from Mashegu, and 12% from Mariga. The distribution across the selected districts provides broad geographical coverage of the Emirate and ensures that the study reflects diverse community experiences regarding land dispute resolution.

Concerning where land-related disputes were resolved, 69% of the respondents indicated that their disputes were handled by traditional institutions, 12% resolved disputes through the courts, 10% through the Local Government, 5% through community mediation, and 4% through the Police or Civil Defence. The predominance of traditional institutions demonstrates their continued relevance and acceptance as the principal mechanism for resolving land-related disputes in the study area. This finding reinforces the importance of examining how corruption within these institutions may affect the fairness, credibility, and effectiveness of customary land dispute resolution.

Nature of Land Related Disputes

Table 2 presents respondents' perceptions of the nature of land-related disputes in Kontagora Emirate, Niger State. The findings indicate that boundary disputes, inheritance conflicts, land ownership disputes, farmer–herder conflicts, and the role of traditional institutions constitute the major features of land dispute dynamics within the study area.

Table 2 Nature of Land Related Disputes

Statement	Strongly Agree F (%)	Agree F (%)	Disagree F (%)	Strongly Disagree F (%)	Total F (%)
Boundary disputes are common in my community.	34 (31)	45 (41)	11 (10)	18 (16)	108 (100%)
Family inheritance disputes frequently occur.	56 (51)	34 (31)	10 (09)	08 (07)	108 (100%)
Land ownership disputes are increasing in my community.	65 (60)	31 (28)	08 (07)	04 (03)	108 (100%)
Farmer–herder conflicts are often related to land ownership or use.	21 (19)	40 (37)	27 (25)	20 (18)	108 (100%)
Traditional institutions are the first point of call in resolving land disputes.	53 (49)	41 (38)	10 (09)	04 (03)	108 (100%)

Source: Authors' Field Survey 2026

The results show that 31% of the respondents strongly agreed and 41% agreed that boundary disputes are common in their communities, while 10% disagreed and 16% strongly disagreed. This implies that a substantial majority (72%) acknowledged boundary disputes as a frequent occurrence. The prevalence of such disputes suggests persistent challenges associated with unclear land demarcation, overlapping claims, and encroachment on adjoining properties. These disputes are likely to arise from the absence of clearly defined boundaries, population pressure on available land, and reliance on customary methods of land allocation.

Regarding family inheritance disputes, 51% strongly agreed and 31% agreed that inheritance-related conflicts occur frequently, whereas 9% disagreed and 7% strongly disagreed. Overall, 82% of the respondents affirmed the frequent occurrence of inheritance disputes. This finding indicates that succession to family land remains a significant source of conflict within the Emirate. Differences in the interpretation of customary inheritance practices, competing claims among family members, and disputes over the distribution of inherited property appear to contribute substantially to land-related disagreements.

On whether land ownership disputes are increasing in the community, 60% strongly agreed and 28% agreed, while 7% disagreed and 3% strongly disagreed. The combined agreement of 88% demonstrates a strong perception that disputes over land ownership are becoming more prevalent. This trend may reflect increasing pressure on land resulting from population growth, agricultural expansion, urban development, and the rising economic value of land. It also suggests that competing ownership claims have become more common, thereby increasing the workload of institutions responsible for resolving such disputes.

The findings further reveal that 19% strongly agreed and 37% agreed that farmer–herder conflicts are often related to land ownership or land use, whereas 25% disagreed and 18% strongly disagreed. Although opinions were more varied on this issue, a combined 56% agreed that land remains a major factor in farmer–herder conflicts. This suggests that competition over access to farmland, grazing routes, and water resources contributes significantly to tensions between farming and pastoral communities. The relatively high level of disagreement indicates that some respondents may attribute these conflicts to other factors beyond land, such as security concerns or the destruction of crops and livestock.

The table also shows that 49% strongly agreed and 38% agreed that traditional institutions are the first point of call in resolving land disputes, while 9% disagreed and 3% strongly disagreed. With a combined agreement of 87%, the findings clearly demonstrate that traditional institutions remain the most preferred avenue for resolving land-related disputes in Kontagora Emirate. This preference underscores the continued relevance of Emirs, District Heads, Village Heads, and other customary authorities in the administration of justice at the community level. Their accessibility, familiarity with customary land tenure systems, affordability, and emphasis on reconciliation make them the primary institutions relied upon by community members.

In a nutshell, the findings indicate that land-related disputes in Kontagora Emirate are predominantly characterized by boundary disagreements, inheritance conflicts, increasing ownership disputes, and, to a lesser extent, farmer–herder conflicts linked to land use. The overwhelming reliance on traditional institutions for dispute resolution highlights their strategic importance in maintaining peace and social cohesion. However, because these institutions handle the majority of land disputes, any weaknesses in their operations particularly those arising from corruption, bias, or lack of accountability will have far-reaching consequences for the fairness, effectiveness, and public credibility of customary land dispute resolution within the Emirate.

Corruption in Traditional Land Dispute Resolution

Table 3 presents respondents' perceptions of the extent to which corruption affects the resolution of land-related disputes by traditional institutions in Kontagora Emirate, Niger State. The statements examine various dimensions of corruption, including bribery, wealth and social influence, political interference, unofficial payments, and public confidence in traditional institutions.

Table 3 Corruption in Traditional Land Dispute Resolution

Statement	Strongly Agree F (%)	Agree F (%)	Disagree F (%)	Strongly Disagree F (%)	Total F (%)
Bribery influences decisions made by traditional authorities.	11 (10)	34 (31)	41 (38)	22 (20)	108 (100%)
Wealth or social status affects the outcome of land disputes.	18 (16)	41(38)	39 (36)	10 (09)	108 (100%)
Political interference affects the impartiality of traditional institutions.	61 (56)	37(34)	06 (05)	04 (03)	108 (100%)
Unofficial payments are sometimes demanded before disputes are resolved.	15(14)	26 (24)	37 (34)	30 (27)	108 (100%)
Corruption reduces public confidence in traditional institutions.	69 (64)	33 (30)	06 (05)	00 (00)	108 (100%)

Source: Authors' Field Survey 2026

The responses on whether bribery influences decisions made by traditional authorities reveal mixed opinions among respondents. While 10% strongly agreed and 31% agreed, 38% disagreed and 20% strongly disagreed. Overall, 58% of the respondents disagreed, compared to 41% who agreed, indicating that the majority did not perceive bribery as a widespread factor influencing decisions made by traditional authorities. This finding suggests that although allegations of bribery exist, respondents generally believe that such practices are not the predominant determinant of decision-making in customary land dispute resolution.

With regard to whether wealth or social status affects the outcome of land disputes, 16% strongly agreed and 38% agreed, whereas 36% disagreed and 9% strongly disagreed. A combined 54% agreement indicates that more than half of the respondents believe that individuals with greater wealth or higher social standing are more likely to receive favourable outcomes during land dispute resolution. This perception points to the existence of social inequality in customary justice processes, where influential individuals may enjoy advantages that undermine the principle of equal treatment before traditional authorities.

The findings further reveal a strong consensus on political interference in traditional land dispute resolution. Fifty-six percent strongly agreed and 34% agreed that political interference affects the impartiality of traditional institutions, while only 5% disagreed and 3% strongly disagreed. The combined agreement of 90% demonstrates that political influence is widely perceived as one of the most significant challenges confronting traditional institutions. This suggests that external pressures from political actors may compromise the independence of traditional authorities, thereby affecting the fairness and credibility of their decisions.

Respondents expressed differing views regarding whether unofficial payments are sometimes demanded before disputes are resolved. While 14% strongly agreed and 24% agreed, 34% disagreed and 27% strongly disagreed. Overall, 61% of the respondents disagreed, compared with 38% who agreed. This indicates that the majority of respondents do not consider unofficial payments to be a common practice during the resolution of land disputes. Nevertheless, the proportion of respondents who acknowledged the existence of such payments suggests that the practice may occur in some instances, even if it is not perceived as widespread.

The final statement examined whether corruption reduces public confidence in traditional institutions. The responses show overwhelming agreement, with 64% strongly agreeing and 30% agreeing, while only 5% disagreed, and none strongly disagreed. The combined agreement of 94% indicates a near-unanimous perception that corruption has a detrimental effect on public trust in traditional institutions. This finding underscores the importance of integrity and accountability in sustaining the legitimacy of customary dispute resolution mechanisms. Public confidence is fundamental to the acceptance and implementation of decisions made by traditional authorities, and any perception of corruption is likely to weaken their effectiveness and authority.

This findings reveal that respondents perceive political interference and the erosion of public confidence as the most critical corruption-related challenges affecting traditional land dispute resolution in Kontagora Emirate. Although respondents generally did not regard bribery and unofficial payments as widespread practices, there is evidence that wealth and social status can influence dispute outcomes. These perceptions suggest that corruption within traditional institutions extends beyond direct financial inducements to include broader issues of external influence, unequal treatment, and compromised institutional independence. Such conditions have the potential to undermine fairness, diminish the legitimacy of traditional institutions, and reduce their effectiveness in resolving land-related disputes.

Effectiveness of Traditional Institution

Table 4 presents respondents' perceptions of the effectiveness of traditional institutions in resolving land-related disputes in Kontagora Emirate, Niger State. The statements assess the timeliness of dispute resolution, fairness and impartiality, promotion of peaceful coexistence, acceptance of decisions, and the overall effectiveness of traditional institutions.

Table 4 Effectiveness of Traditional Institutions

Statement	Strongly Agree F (%)	Agree F (%)	Disagree F (%)	Strongly Disagree F (%)	Total F (%)
Traditional institutions resolve land disputes promptly.	61 (56)	42 (38)	05 (04)	00 (00)	108 (100%)
Traditional leaders are fair and impartial in resolving disputes.	31 (28)	65 (60)	06 (05)	06 (05)	108 (100%)
Traditional institutions promote peaceful coexistence after disputes are resolved.	65(60)	39 (36)	04 (03)	00 (00)	108 (100%)
Decisions made by traditional institutions are widely accepted by disputing parties.	21 (19)	44 (40)	31 (28)	13 (12)	108 (100%)
Traditional institutions effectively resolve most land-related disputes.	34 (31)	55 (51)	11 (10)	08 (07)	108 (100%)

Source: Authors' Field Survey 2026

The findings indicate that 56% of the respondents strongly agreed and 38% agreed that traditional institutions resolve land disputes promptly, while 4% disagreed and none strongly disagreed. The combined agreement of 94% suggests that traditional institutions are widely perceived as efficient in handling land disputes within a relatively short period. This perception may be attributed to the informal nature of customary dispute resolution, which is generally less bureaucratic and more accessible than formal judicial processes. Prompt resolution helps prevent disputes from escalating and contributes to maintaining peace and stability within communities.

On the issue of fairness and impartiality, 28% strongly agreed and 60% agreed that traditional leaders are fair and impartial in resolving land disputes, whereas 5% disagreed and another 5% strongly disagreed. With an overall agreement of 88%, the findings indicate that the majority of respondents have confidence in the ability of traditional leaders to adjudicate disputes objectively. This level of confidence reflects the respect accorded to traditional authorities and suggests that they are generally perceived as capable of balancing the interests of disputing parties in accordance with customary norms and established procedures.

The responses further show that 60% strongly agreed and 36% agreed that traditional institutions promote peaceful coexistence after disputes are resolved, while only 3% disagreed and none strongly disagreed. The combined agreement of 96% demonstrates overwhelming confidence in the reconciliatory role of traditional institutions. Beyond determining the outcome of disputes, customary mechanisms appear to emphasize reconciliation, restoration of relationships, and social harmony, thereby reducing the likelihood of recurring conflicts and strengthening community cohesion.

Regarding the acceptance of decisions made by traditional institutions, 19% strongly agreed and 40% agreed, while 28% disagreed and 12% strongly disagreed. Although a combined 59% agreed that traditional decisions are widely accepted, a notable 40% expressed disagreement. This finding suggests that while a majority of respondents recognize the legitimacy of traditional decisions, a considerable proportion remains dissatisfied with or reluctant to accept some outcomes. Such reservations may arise from perceptions of bias, dissatisfaction with specific decisions, or concerns regarding the influence of external factors on the dispute resolution process. This level of disagreement indicates that acceptance of decisions is an area requiring further improvement to strengthen the legitimacy of traditional institutions.

Finally, 31% strongly agreed and 51% agreed that traditional institutions effectively resolve most land-related disputes, whereas 10% disagreed and 7% strongly disagreed. The combined agreement of 82% indicates that respondents generally perceive traditional institutions as effective mechanisms for addressing land disputes within the Emirate. Their effectiveness may be attributed to their accessibility, familiarity with customary land tenure systems, cultural legitimacy, and emphasis on consensus and reconciliation rather than adversarial litigation.

In general, the findings demonstrate that traditional institutions are widely regarded as effective in resolving land-related disputes in Kontagora Emirate. Respondents expressed particularly strong confidence in their ability to resolve disputes promptly, promote peaceful coexistence, and ensure fairness in the dispute resolution process. Although the acceptance of decisions by disputing parties received comparatively lower levels of agreement, the overall perception remains positive. These findings highlight the continued importance of traditional institutions in customary land governance and underscore the need to strengthen their transparency, accountability, and integrity to sustain public confidence and enhance the effectiveness of land dispute resolution.

Effects of Corruption on Land Dispute Resolution

Table 5 presents respondents' perceptions of the effects of corruption on the resolution of land-related disputes in Kontagora Emirate, Niger State. The findings examine how corruption influences the timeliness of dispute

resolution, community peace, public trust in traditional institutions, recurrence of disputes, and land tenure security.

Table 5 Effects of Corruption on Land Dispute Resolution

Statement	Strongly Agree F (%)	Agree F (%)	Disagree F (%)	Strongly Disagree F (%)	Total F (%)
Corruption prolongs the resolution of land disputes.	64 (59)	31 (28)	11 (10)	02 (01)	108 (100%)
Corruption increases conflicts and tensions within communities.	69 (63)	32 (29)	05 (4)	02 (01)	108 (100%)
Corruption discourages trust in traditional institutions.	78 (72)	30 (27)	00 (00)	00 (00)	108 (100%)
Corruption contributes to repeated land disputes.	75 (69)	31 (28)	02 (01)	00 (00)	108 (100%)
Corruption undermines land tenure security.	21 (19)	56 (52)	26 (24)	06 (05)	108 (100%)

Source: Authors' Field Survey 2026

The results indicate that 59% of the respondents strongly agreed and 28% agreed that corruption prolongs the resolution of land disputes, while 10% disagreed and 1% strongly disagreed. The combined agreement of 87% demonstrates that respondents perceive corruption as a major factor responsible for delays in resolving land disputes. Such delays may arise when decisions are influenced by personal interests, undue interference, or unethical practices that obstruct timely and impartial adjudication. Prolonged disputes may also increase the financial and emotional burden on the parties involved and heighten the risk of conflict escalation.

On whether corruption increases conflicts and tensions within communities, 63% strongly agreed and 29% agreed, whereas 4% disagreed and 1% strongly disagreed. The overwhelming 92% agreement suggests that respondents believe corruption contributes significantly to social tension and conflict. When disputing parties perceive that decisions are influenced by bias or unfair practices, dissatisfaction is likely to increase, thereby creating resentment, weakening social cohesion, and encouraging the persistence or escalation of disputes within communities.

The findings further reveal an overwhelming consensus that corruption discourages trust in traditional institutions. Seventy-two percent strongly agreed and 27% agreed, while no respondent disagreed with the statement. The combined agreement of 99% indicates that corruption is perceived as one of the greatest threats to the credibility and legitimacy of traditional institutions. Public trust is fundamental to the effectiveness of customary dispute resolution because compliance with decisions largely depends on the confidence that disputing parties and the wider community have in the integrity and impartiality of traditional authorities. Any perception of corruption therefore has the potential to undermine institutional legitimacy and reduce voluntary compliance with decisions.

Similarly, 69% strongly agreed and 28% agreed that corruption contributes to repeated land disputes, while only 1% disagreed and none strongly disagreed. The overall 97% agreement suggests that corruption prevents the sustainable resolution of land conflicts. Decisions perceived as unfair or influenced by corrupt practices are less likely to be accepted by disputing parties, increasing the likelihood that disputes will re-emerge or be transferred to other dispute resolution forums. This recurring cycle of disputes undermines the objective of achieving lasting peace and stability within communities.

Regarding whether corruption undermines land tenure security, 19% strongly agreed and 52% agreed, while 24% disagreed and 5% strongly disagreed. Although opinions were relatively more divided than for the other statements, a combined 71% agreement indicates that the majority of respondents believe corruption weakens the security of land ownership and tenure. Corruption may create uncertainty over land rights, encourage competing ownership claims, and reduce confidence in the fairness and reliability of land administration processes. Such conditions can discourage investment in land development and adversely affect agricultural productivity and socio-economic development.

This findings demonstrate that respondents perceive corruption as having profound negative consequences for the resolution of land-related disputes in Kontagora Emirate. Corruption is viewed as a major cause of delays in dispute resolution, increased community conflict, diminished public trust in traditional institutions, repeated land disputes, and weakened land tenure security. These findings suggest that the effectiveness and legitimacy of traditional institutions depend not only on their customary authority but also on their ability to operate transparently, impartially, and free from corrupt practices. Addressing corruption within traditional land dispute resolution mechanisms is therefore essential for strengthening public confidence, ensuring equitable outcomes, and promoting sustainable peace and secure land governance within the Emirate.

Policy Implications of the Findings

The findings of this study have important implications for land governance, customary justice administration, and conflict management in Kontagora Emirate and Northern Nigeria. Although traditional institutions remain the most preferred and effective mechanism for resolving land-related disputes, the study reveals that corruption—particularly political interference, unequal treatment based on wealth or social status, and declining public confidence—poses a significant threat to their effectiveness and legitimacy. Consequently, the following policy implications emerge from the findings:

- i. **Strengthening Institutional Independence:** The high perception of political interference in traditional land dispute resolution highlights the need for policies that protect traditional institutions from undue influence by political office holders and other powerful interests. Clear legal and administrative guidelines should define the autonomy of traditional authorities in handling customary land disputes.
- ii. **Institutionalizing Transparency and Accountability:** Since corruption was found to undermine public confidence and contribute to delays and repeated disputes, transparent procedures should be established for receiving complaints, conducting hearings, recording evidence, and communicating decisions. Standardized procedures will reduce opportunities for arbitrary decision-making and enhance fairness.
- iii. **Development of a Customary Land Dispute Resolution Framework:** State governments, in collaboration with traditional councils, should develop comprehensive operational guidelines or codes of practice for customary land dispute resolution. Such frameworks should outline ethical standards, dispute resolution procedures, documentation requirements, and sanctions for misconduct by traditional officials.
- iv. **Capacity Building for Traditional Authorities:** Continuous training should be organized for Emirs, District Heads, Village Heads, and other customary authorities on ethics, mediation techniques, customary land law, conflict management, human rights principles, and anti-corruption practices. This will improve professionalism, consistency, and the quality of decisions.
- v. **Strengthening Oversight and Monitoring Mechanisms:** Independent oversight committees comprising representatives of traditional institutions, local government authorities, community leaders, legal practitioners, and civil society organizations should periodically monitor the activities of customary dispute resolution bodies. Such oversight will enhance accountability and discourage corrupt practices.
- vi. **Improved Documentation and Record Keeping:** The prevalence of land ownership and boundary disputes underscores the need for systematic documentation of customary land allocations and dispute resolutions. Proper land records, maps, and registers should be maintained at district and village levels to minimize multiple claims and facilitate evidence-based decision-making.
- vii. **Integration of Customary and Statutory Land Administration:** The findings suggest the need for stronger collaboration between traditional institutions and statutory agencies responsible for land administration. Improved coordination will reduce jurisdictional conflicts, harmonize land records, and enhance the enforcement of dispute resolution outcomes.
- viii. **Promotion of Ethical Leadership and Integrity:** Traditional councils should establish internal disciplinary mechanisms to investigate allegations of corruption, favoritism, and abuse of authority. Officials found guilty of unethical conduct should face appropriate sanctions to restore public confidence and preserve institutional credibility.
- ix. **Community Awareness on Land Rights and Dispute Resolution:** Public education campaigns should be implemented to improve citizens' understanding of customary land rights, inheritance procedures, boundary demarcation, and available dispute resolution mechanisms. Increased awareness can reduce avoidable conflicts and encourage lawful resolution of disputes.
- x. **Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) Enhancement:** Given the confidence reposed in traditional institutions, government should strengthen community-based Alternative Dispute Resolution mechanisms that complement customary institutions. Encouraging mediation, negotiation, and reconciliation will help reduce prolonged disputes and improve social harmony.
- xi. **Strengthening Land Tenure Security:** Policies aimed at improving customary land registration, boundary demarcation, and recognition of legitimate land rights should be implemented to reduce uncertainty in land ownership. Secure land tenure will minimize disputes and encourage agricultural investment and sustainable rural development.
- xii. **Regular Performance Assessment of Traditional Institutions:** Government and traditional councils should institute periodic evaluations of the effectiveness, transparency, and integrity of customary dispute resolution institutions. Feedback from community members should be incorporated into policy reforms to ensure that traditional institutions continue to meet the expectations of the people they serve.

The above findings suggest that improving transparency, accountability, ethical conduct, and institutional capacity within traditional institutions will not only reduce corruption but also enhance the effectiveness of customary land dispute resolution. Implementing these policy measures will strengthen public trust, improve access to justice,

promote secure land tenure, and contribute to sustainable peace and socio-economic development in Kontagora Emirate and Northern Nigeria as a whole.

V. Conclusion

This study assessed corruption as an impediment to the effective resolution of land-related disputes by traditional institutions in Kontagora Emirate, Niger State. The findings demonstrate that land disputes in the study area are predominantly associated with boundary disagreements, family inheritance, land ownership, and conflicts arising from land use. The results further reveal that traditional institutions remain the most preferred and widely utilized mechanism for resolving such disputes because they are accessible, culturally legitimate, and capable of providing timely and community-based solutions.

Despite the continued relevance and overall effectiveness of traditional institutions, the study establishes that corruption poses a significant challenge to their ability to deliver fair, transparent, and credible dispute resolution. Political interference emerged as the most prominent manifestation of corruption, while wealth and social status were also perceived to influence dispute outcomes. Although respondents generally did not consider bribery and unofficial payments to be widespread, they overwhelmingly agreed that corruption erodes public confidence in traditional institutions, prolongs dispute resolution, contributes to recurring conflicts, increases community tensions, and weakens land tenure security.

The study concludes that the effectiveness of traditional institutions depends not only on their historical legitimacy and customary authority but also on the integrity, impartiality, and accountability with which they discharge their responsibilities. Sustaining public confidence in customary land dispute resolution therefore requires institutional reforms that promote transparency, ethical leadership, proper documentation of customary land transactions, and protection of traditional authorities from undue political and external influence.

Ultimately, strengthening the governance capacity of traditional institutions will enhance their ability to resolve land-related disputes fairly and efficiently, promote peaceful coexistence, improve land tenure security, and contribute to sustainable land governance and rural development in Kontagora Emirate and Northern Nigeria at large.

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