
PREVENTING OR ENABLING LAND GRABBING: AN ANALYSIS OF TRADITIONAL RULERS' ROLE IN OSUN STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract: *Traditional leaders in developing societies are not only in position to promote peace but also reduce the negative impacts of insurgency, including land grabbing and communal conflict, respectively. This study assessed the traditional rulers' role in preventing or enabling land grabbing in Ijesa land, Osun state, Nigeria. This was with a view to exploring allegations of involvement in land grabbing, compelling factors, accountable mechanisms 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). The study revealed that the role of traditional rulers in land governance is becoming increasingly contested, shaped and influenced by structural limitations and internal practices, leading to the need for urgent reform and reintegration into systems of governance that is more accountable. Therefore, the study recommended that traditional rulers should institutionalize community-based land governance councils that include youth, women, family heads, and elders. These councils should oversee land allocation, documentation, and conflict resolution to ensure transparency and inclusive participation in decision-making processes among others.*

Keywords: *Traditional rulers, preventing or enabling land grabbing, Ijesa land in Osun State, Nigeria.*

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INTRODUCTION

Land constitutes a fundamental pillar of country's socioeconomic progress, cultural identity, and household livelihoods (Nakayi, 2021; Namateefu & Mugasha, 2025). However, the coexistence of statutory and customary tenure systems, which frequently result in overlapping claims and unresolved disputes, means that land tenure instability persists in many emerging communities (Antonio, Zevenbergen & Gitau, 2021). The sizable section of Nigerians does not own official land titles, they are more susceptible to land grabbing, which is defined as the purchase of land without the free, prior, and informed agreement of the land's legitimate owners or inhabitants (Namateefu & Mugasha, 2025).

In Nigeria's pre-colonial past, traditional institutions' sociocultural norms and values continued to be an essential component of all organised societies. Traditional leaders (village councils) used these standards and ideals as the foundation for their governance, authority, and power over their subordinates (Ebubechineke, 2025). Traditional rulers were essentially the only institution of government that performed significant functions, including upholding customary laws,



managing communal resources and land, serving as guardians and symbols of religious and cultural values, administering justice, upholding contracts, and settling disputes (Ele, 2017).

In both rich and developing nations, traditional leaders bear the crucial responsibility of helping to promote peace while simultaneously reducing the negative impacts of insurgency, including land grabbing and communal conflict (Joseph, 2025). They have been able to effectively mediate conflicts by fostering communication amongst the parties involved, including affected people, government troops, and insurgents, thanks to their long-lasting influence in some local communities (Akpan & Ajayi, 2020). By arranging gatherings and rituals that encourage healing and reconciliation, traditional leaders typically use their cultural power to advance societal cohesiveness and tolerance. Traditional leaders strive to stop retaliatory violence and promote peaceful coexistence among various groups by addressing the ethnic and religious divisions that the war has deepened (Bello, 2020). Furthermore, they assist humanitarian efforts, working with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to guarantee that aid reaches those in need, especially internally displaced people (IDPs), and contributing to community stabilisation by giving access to necessities like food, shelter, and medical supplies (Sulaimon & Mohammed, 2019; Ishola et al., 2024).

Additionally, by supporting local development projects, traditional leaders help address the underlying reasons of the violence, including social marginalisation, unemployment, and poverty (Hassan & Olarinmoye, 2017). By doing so, they assist in lessening the allure of insurgent organisations and provide vulnerable groups and young people with alternate routes. Their cooperation 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. Traditional leaders play an important role in the long-term peacebuilding process and the restoration of stability in Northeast Nigeria by participating in these multifaceted initiatives (Umar, 2017).

Additionally, the study supports the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the UN, which are imperatives for global development (Akinyooye & Aransi, 2020; Aransi, 2020). By tackling land conflicts that threaten livelihoods and worsen poverty, especially in agricultural areas, it advances SDG 1 (No Poverty). By promoting sustainable land governance methods that improve resilience and inclusivity in local communities, it advances SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities). By exploring how traditional leaders might serve as mediators to improve societal stability and justice while encouraging institutional accountability and openness, it also achieves SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions).

The substantial gap in the literature regarding the changing roles of traditional rulers in land conflicts (Olayiwola, 2020; Ajayi & Nwosu, 2020; Ogunleye, 2021; Obabor, Nelson, Adeshinam & Omotayo, 2022; Ishola et al., 2024) further supports the justification of this study. Although several studies have examined land conflicts in Nigeria, few have examined the dual role of traditional rulers as possible mediators of peace and, occasionally, aggravators of conflict. This study bridges this gap by presenting empirical insights from the Ijesa territory, helping to further academic literature on governance and conflict resolution while offering a deeper understanding of the mechanisms at work. In the end, this study is a useful tool for academics, traditional institutions, community leaders, and legislators. Through practical suggestions based on thorough research, it aims to improve land governance systems' efficacy and promote long-term peace and development in Nigeria and beyond.

Objective of the Study

The study's main objective was to examine the traditional rulers' role in preventing or enabling land grabbing in Ijesa land, Osun state, Nigeria, while specific objectives are to;

- i. explore the influence of traditional rulers in large-scale land transactions in Ijesa land, Osun state, Nigeria;
- ii. investigate the allegations of involvement in land grabbing by traditional rulers in Ijesa land, Osun state, Nigeria;
- iii. examine the compelling factors for traditional rulers' participation in land grabbing in Ijesa land, Osun state, Nigeria;
- iv. examine how traditional rulers resist land grabbing amidst pressure in Ijesa land, Osun state, Nigeria; and
- v. investigate the accountable mechanisms limiting or aiding community members from holding traditional rulers responsible in land governance in Ijesa land, Osun state, Nigeria?

Research Questions

The following research questions were raised to guide the study.

- i. What is the influence of traditional rulers in large-scale land transactions in Ijesa land, Osun state, Nigeria?
- ii. What is the level of allegations of involvement in land grabbing by traditional rulers in Ijesa land, Osun state, Nigeria?
- iii. What are the compelling factors for traditional rulers' participation in land grabbing in Ijesa land, Osun state, Nigeria?
- iv. How do traditional rulers resist land grabbing amidst pressure in Ijesa land, Osun state, Nigeria?
- v. What are the accountable mechanisms limiting or aiding community members from holding traditional rulers responsible in land governance 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 (Luthfiandana, et al., 2024).

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 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 is the influence of traditional rulers in large-scale land transactions in Ijesa land, Osun state, Nigeria?

The phenomena of land grabbing particularly the unauthorized or unjust large-scale acquisition of land by elites or investors has become a major source of friction in rural and peri-urban settlements in the Ijesa area in recent years. Although conventional monarchs should be guardians of community land, there are rising worries about their claimed participation in, or complicity with, land grabs, as reflected by respondents. The data gathered from key informants' interview to a sophisticated reality in which some traditional kings are implicated in land-related wrongdoing while others have aggressively opposed external encroachment.

Influence of Traditional Rulers in Large-Scale Land Transactions

Custodian of ancestral lands, traditional rulers in the Ijesa land have a historically important position at the center of local land governance. But in modern times this custodianship has grown past basic supervision into actual participation in large-scale property deals. Frequently placed as the first contact for outside purchasers, investors, even governmental representatives looking for land for commercial, residential, or infrastructure needs, their power and cultural legitimacy. This power comes from both conventional expectations and actual need. Traditionally, without the awareness or blessing of the traditional leader, no significant land decision especially those concerning communal or family land could proceed. Practically, these leaders usually have the symbolic or procedural power to validate transactions, especially in places where formal documentation is insufficient or patchy. Consequently, even those working under government permits could try to obtain the blessing of the landal monarch to prevent local hostility. Although this powerful position helps to safeguard community interests, it also provides opportunities for dishonesty, prejudice, and covert dealings. In many cases, conventional leaders have been seen to use their power in a manner that gives personal or palace interests over the common good top priority. Some apparently avoid local engagement, secretly sell huge tracts of land, or individually assign property to non-locals. Apart from accountability and transparency, this has also driven land-based conflicts among people.

The testimonies from the respondents illustrate this dynamic clearly:

Respondent 29 (KII R29, 40, Male, Artisan, Oriade) highlighted the centrality of monarchs in land deals: *“No land can be sold in our area without the king’s signature. Even the buyers*

know this, so they come to him first.” This reveals that traditional rulers are not just symbolic figures; they are gatekeepers who effectively control access to land at scale.

Respondent 13 (KII R13, 59, Female, Businesswoman, Ilesa East) emphasised the opacity of many large transactions: *“When the land is large and expensive, it’s usually done quietly between the palace and the buyers. The community may only hear about it later.”* A male participant from the community leaders’ FDG stated that *“Investors know we can clear the road for them. They pay, and the land is theirs even if the people object.”* (FDG 1, community leader, Oriade) This indicates a lack of transparency and participatory governance, especially when high-value land is involved.

Respondent 3 (KII R3, 67, Male, Traditional Healer, Atakunmosa West) critiqued the commercial turn in leadership: *“Some kings are no longer protecting land; they are trading it.”* This points to a fundamental shift from stewardship to profiteering, with significant implications for community trust and cohesion.

Respondent 31 (KII R31, 54, Female, Civil Servant, Ilesa East) described a situation where a ruler sold land without informing the family that historically owned it: *“Land belonging to a lineage was sold by the king without family approval.”* Her account reflects how traditional rulers’ influence can override lineage rights, creating internal conflicts and legal conflicts. *“Sometimes we wake up and hear the land has been sold. No one told us, and no one consulted us.”* (FDG 2, Youth, Atakunmosa East). This quote reflects not only the lack of consultation but also the breach of trust experienced by young people, who feel excluded despite being future land beneficiaries.

Respondent 7 (KII R7, 60, Male, Farmer, Atakunmosa East) confirmed the extent of traditional oversight: *“The buyers don’t go to court or land office first; they come to the palace. That’s where it starts.”* This underscores the de facto power of traditional institutions in initiating and facilitating land transfers, regardless of formal law.

In major property deals, the role of traditional chiefs is both symbolic and structural. It strengthens their central position in local land economies but also exposes them to scrutiny, criticism, and pressure, particularly when they exercise such power without openness or fairness. Their participation, as guardians of public trust, must be balanced by accountability methods, transparent documentation procedures, and community consultation to ensure that land is managed with integrity rather than just with authority.

Research Question 2: What is the level of allegations of involvement in land grabbing by traditional rulers in Ijesa land, Osun state, Nigeria?

Allegations of Involvement in Land Grabbing by Traditional Rulers

Often at the expense of local people, land grabbing the illegal, non-transparent, or coercive acquisition of huge swaths of land has become a serious problem in Ijesa land, especially as land prices rise and urbanization grows. Once considered custodians of community territory, traditional rulers have lately faced criticism for allegedly participating in dubious land transactions inside this context. Many times, these claims revolve on unilateral land sales, a lack of community consultation, manipulation of traditional land rights, and collusion with outside investors or elites. The accusatory tone in many testimonies points to groups of people who believe conventional rulers have abused their power, placing political or personal benefit above community wellbeing. Although direct proof

of misbehaviour might be scarce, the pattern of concealment, exclusion, and resentment in real estate deals including conventional monarchs has generated much alarm. This change from stewardship to exploitation whether actual or imagined has destroyed trust and exacerbated increasing conflicts, particularly in settings where the neighborhood feels alienated from land it regards historically or ancestrally as its own.

Testimonies from the key informants provide firsthand insight into these suspicions:

Respondent 31 (KII R31, 54, Female, Civil Servant, Ilesa East) recounted a personal incident: *“Land belonging to a lineage was sold by the king without family approval. We only knew after bulldozers entered the farmland.”* This reflects a common complaint: unilateral land alienation by traditional rulers, bypassing customary protocols of family or communal consent.

From the traditional rulers and elders' FGD in Obokun LGA, a chief openly admitted:

“Yes, some of our fellow rulers sell lands secretly. It’s hard to deny.” (FDG 3, traditional rulers, Obokun). This candor points to a widely acknowledged problem that transcends community hearsay one that implicates those entrusted with land stewardship.

Respondent 3 (KII R3, 67, Male, Traditional Healer, Atakunmosa West) offered a critical assessment of his peers: *“Some kings are no longer protecting land; they are trading it.”* His statement suggests that certain rulers are seen as having abandoned their protective roles, becoming active players in commodifying communal land.

Respondent 13 (KII R13, 59, Female, Businesswoman, Ilesa East) voiced similar frustration: *“The palace now does private land deals. They say it’s for development, but it’s just politics and money.”* Her response reflects a popular narrative of palace complicity, often masked by claims of progress or modernization.

Respondent 10 (KII R10, 56, Male, Artisan, Ilesa East) shared a disillusioned perspective: *“They say the land is for investors, but we never see the benefit. The king sells and we lose our land forever.”* This quote underscores the disconnect between official rationale and grassroots outcomes with many residents feeling dispossessed rather than developed.

Respondent 19 (KII R19, 51, Female, Farmer, Atakunmosa West) expressed concern over sacred and communal lands: *“They even sell places we used for festivals. That’s how we know it’s about money, not culture.”* Her comment reflects the cultural loss and emotional trauma communities associate with land grabbing, especially when sacred spaces are commodified.

These allegations, though sometimes anecdotal, paint a picture of growing public unease. They also highlight the power imbalance between traditional institutions and ordinary citizens, where accountability mechanisms are weak or absent, and community dissent is often ignored or suppressed.

Research Question 3: What are the compelling factors for traditional rulers’ participation in land grabbing in Ijesa land, Osun state, Nigeria?



Compelling factors for traditional rulers' participation in land grabbing

Although traditional rulers in the Ijesa land are ideally expected to serve as guardians of communal land, the truth of their involvement whether passive or active in land grabbing often results from a confluence of systemic pressures, individual weaknesses, and institutional voids. Understanding why some conventional rulers seize land calls for investigation of the strong economic, political, and structural conditions that drive such activity. Several major elements emerged from the responses of the participants, which clarify this conduct not just as moral failing but rather as a response to complicated realities affecting traditional institutions:

Financial constraints and institutional neglect

One of the most frequently cited reasons is the lack of financial support from the government. Traditional rulers are often expected to perform public functions maintaining palaces, organizing festivals, resolving conflicts without regular subventions or salaries. This creates an incentive to monetize land, which is one of the few assets they control.

Respondent 10 (KII R10, 56, Male, Artisan, Ilesa East) commented: *“Many kings are broke. They use land to raise money to maintain the palace or fulfil promises.”* This suggests that land becomes a revenue-generating fallback, especially when state institutions fail to support traditional governance financially.

A male youth from Ilesa West said: *“they say there's no money in the palace. So, when someone brings millions, it's hard for them to resist.”* (FDG 2, Youth, Ilesa West)

A woman in the women's FGD in Ilesa East added: *“Many rulers fear they will lose out if they don't agree with politicians or rich men.”* (FDG 1, community leader, Ilesa East). These sentiments reveal how economic vulnerability and elite manipulation drive the misuse of land authority.

Political Pressure and Patronage Expectations

Traditional rulers often operate within a highly politicized environment. Those who ascended the throne through political backing or elite sponsorship may feel indebted to their patrons and are expected to reward loyalty frequently through land allocations.

Respondent 11 (KII R11, 52, Female, Trader, Ilesa West) observed: *“Some of them sell land as compensation to loyal chiefs or politicians who helped them ascend the throne.”* This implies that traditional leaders are sometimes caught in patronage networks, where land serves as political currency.

Pressure from extended royal families and chiefs

Even when the ruler may wish to act ethically, internal palace dynamics and family demands often compel land sales. Chiefs, royal family members, and other palace stakeholders may pressure the monarch to raise money for their needs or demand a share of proceeds.

Respondent 5 (KII R5, 64, Male, Traditional Ruler, Obokun) reflected: *“Sometimes it's not the king alone. His council or family members push him to sell land to share the money.”* This reflects a collective dynamic of pressure and complicity, making it difficult for even well-intentioned rulers to resist.



Weak legal framework and lack of oversight

The absence of formal checks and balances on traditional land authority allows for abuses to go largely unpunished. Rulers can exploit legal ambiguities in land ownership and customary titles without facing consequences.

Respondent 13 (KII R13, 59, Female, Businesswoman, Ilesa East) noted: *"They know nobody will challenge them. The court is far, and people fear going against the palace."* This lack of accountability emboldens unethical land practices, especially in rural areas where civic engagement is low.

Land value boom and urban encroachment

The rapid appreciation of land value due to urban expansion and investor interest makes land a highly liquid and tempting asset. Traditional rulers, seeing the potential for quick profit, may engage in land grabbing to capitalize on these opportunities.

Respondent 6 (KII R6, 60, Male, Farmer, Obokun) stated: *"When people come with millions, it is hard for the king to say no especially if the land is idle."* The sheer economic lure of large transactions can override ethical concerns or communal protocols.

The involvement of some conventional kings in land grabbing is propelled by a convergence of political, institutional, family, and economic factors rather than merely personal avarice. These forces produce circumstances where land becomes a means of survival, control, and gratification. Traditional kings might continue to misuse land often at their people's expense absent strong supervisory systems, open government frameworks, and sufficient government backing. Dealing with these underlying pressures is vital for reviving responsibility, protecting communal land rights, and guaranteeing that traditional leaders serve as custodians instead than sellers of community assets.

Research Question 4: How do traditional rulers resist land grabbing amidst pressure in Ijesa land, Osun state, Nigeria?

Resistance to Land Grabbing by Traditional Rulers: Upholding Integrity Amidst Pressure

While there are repeated accusations of land grabbing by traditional rulers throughout the Ijesa land, there is also an important story of resistance and responsibility leading up to the war. Many conventional monarchs have constantly followed their ancestral obligation as guardians of land, choosing to protect communal resources rather than misuse them for personal advantage despite financial difficulties, political pressure, and societal division. This opposition demonstrates a profound respect for cultural ideals, intergenerational equity, and the well-being of their people. In several instances, indigenous kings who have fought land grabs have done so by demanding community consultation before any land deal takes place. Rejecting the notion of treating shared land as private property, they instead welcome their historical responsibility as enablers of group decision-making. Respondent 2 (KII R2, 58, Male, Theologian/Health Technologist, Atakunmosa West) emphasised this consultative approach: *"He [the king] calls community elders before making any land decision. That's how it should be."* His comment affirms the traditional structure in which elders, lineage heads, and chiefs serve as co-managers of land, reinforcing a participatory model of governance.



Resistance to land grabbing is also visible in cases where traditional rulers have rejected lucrative offers from developers or politically connected elites. Respondent 7 (KII R7, 60, Male, Farmer, Atakunmosa East) shared a poignant example: *“Our king refused to approve the sale of a sacred grove despite huge offers from a real estate company.”* Such decisions, though economically disadvantageous, reinforce the sacredness of cultural sites and underscore the spiritual responsibilities of traditional rulers. These acts also send a strong message to outsiders that certain communal lands are non-negotiable and beyond commodification.

Participants in the elders' FGD in Ilesa East further linked land grabbing to chieftaincy rivalries and palace politics. Competing factions within ruling houses sometimes sell land to finance power struggles, which further complicates the governance structure.

An elderly male noted: *“When two chiefs fight for power, they sell land to fund their supporters. The land becomes their weapon.”* (FDG 3, Elder, Ilesa East)

Beyond preserving sacred spaces, traditional rulers have also resisted land grabbing by responding to grassroots mobilization and protest. Respondent 31 (KII R31, 54, Female, Civil Servant, Ilesa East) recounted that her *“king halted a development project near a shrine after women in the community objected”*. This incident shows not just the ruler's integrity but also the importance of being responsive to community sentiment, especially where gendered cultural roles intersect with land use.

Moreover, some rulers have taken proactive steps to prevent land exploitation by promoting land literacy and proper documentation. This includes delineating communal boundaries, recording family holdings, and advocating for clarity in land ownership to avoid manipulation by outsiders. Respondent 29 (KII R29, 40, Male, Artisan, Oriade) explained: *“Our king is always saying: ‘Let us document our land well so nobody cheats us tomorrow.’”* Such foresight protects the community from opportunistic actors and strengthens the institutional capacity of traditional leadership.

These examples demonstrate that although conventional monarchs are surely susceptible to the numerous stresses of modern land politics, they are not powerless. Many have taken principled stands to safeguard community land, sometimes at significant political or personal cost. Their opposition to land grabbing provides a strong counter-narrative demonstrating that traditional authority, when applied with integrity, can yet offer a strong protection against land dispossession. These acts of resistance point out a road forward for land management in the Ijesa land. Ethical traditional rulers can keep a main hand in protecting communal land by reinforcing conventional advisory procedures, protecting holy sites, and advancing land documentation. Providing legal protection, capacity building, and policy acknowledgment will be vital in reviving confidence in the institution of traditional leadership and reversing the trend of land grabbing.

Research Question 5: What are the accountable mechanisms limiting or aiding community members from holding traditional rulers responsible in land governance in Ijesa land, Osun state, Nigeria?

Mechanisms of Accountability: Limitations in Holding Traditional Rulers Responsible in Land Governance

Acting as cultural custodians and intermediaries in both traditional and, increasingly, formal land dealings, traditional rulers have a strong and powerful role in the terrain of land administration in the Ijesa land. But with this power comes a crucial issue: Who holds conventional rulers



responsible when their deeds compromise community interest, especially in the case of illicit land sales or land grabbing?

Mechanisms of accountability are the systems, processes, and community structures (or should be present) used to monitor, control, and correct the activities of conventional leaders. Ideally, these means would guarantee that all land transactions approved or promoted by traditional rulers are transparent, inclusive, and advantageous to the whole society. Conventional council oversight, community consultations, legal redress, or administrative involvement from local government authorities are among such mechanisms. Nevertheless, responses from important informants spanning the six municipal districts of Ijesa land indicate that these accountability methods are either poor, casual, or entirely non-existent. Several traditional rulers' function in situations of unrestrained power, where palace rulings are made without scrutiny and community members are either too frightened, too powerless, or too marginalized to question dubious behaviour.

Most of the time, the palace is the ultimate referee of land-related decisions, therefore limiting opportunities for community protest or remedy. The absence of legal clarity over the limits of traditional rulers' land rights and the limited willingness or ability of local government agencies to mediate conflicts aggravate this dynamic. Moreover, seeking formal legal action inaccessible to average residents, especially in rural areas, land conflicts are frequently expensive and time-consuming to pursue in court. These systematic flaws have produced an environment in which certain conventional monarchs may behave with impunity, hence enabling land grabbing or unfair land allocation free of repercussions. Although traditional checks do exist in some areas such as the impact of chiefs, elders, or town unions, internal palace politics, political interference, or a general breakdown of customary accountability norms often undermine these.

The testimonies of several respondents reinforce this view:

Respondent 19 (KII R19, 51, Female, Farmer, Atakunmosa West) shared her frustration: *“Even when we suspect foul play, it’s hard to challenge the king. The palace is powerful, and many people fear retaliation.”* This illustrates the climate of fear and silence that often accompanies land governance issues.

Respondent 6 (KII R6, 60, Male, Farmer, Obokun) emphasised the limitations of community resistance: *“Without strong community unity or legal backing, the king can do as he pleases.”* His comment reflects the lack of institutional or collective structures that could hold the ruler to account.

Respondent 13 (R13, 59, Female, Businesswoman, Ilesa East) added a legal perspective: *“The court is too slow and expensive. Before anything is done, the land is already gone.”* This speaks to the ineffectiveness of formal legal recourse as a viable accountability tool in land conflicts involving traditional leaders.

Across all demographic groups, land grabbing by traditional rulers was described as deeply corrosive to public trust, especially among youth and women, who feel particularly disempowered by non-inclusive land governance.

A young artisan in Ilesa East lamented: *“How can we respect someone who sells our land without telling us? They treat us like we don’t matter.”* (FDG 2, Youth Ilesa East)



A woman from the female FGD in Atakunmosa West observed: *“Once people know the Oba is selling land for his gain, they stop listening to him.”* (FDG 3, Woman, Atakunmosa West)

Collectively, these responses reveal that the absence of formal and community-based accountability frameworks allows traditional rulers to operate without adequate oversight. This gap not only fuels resentment and distrust among community members but also undermines the legitimacy of traditional institutions, especially when land decisions appear to favour elites or outsiders.

DISCUSSION

The results showed that some traditional rulers get involved in land grabbing through direct involvement and illegal land transaction as well as the economic pressures and the needs of the traditional rulers pushing them into such acts. These results are in line with that of Ubink and Amanor (2008) who opined that traditional ruler often use their positions for personal economic benefits. This is connected with the desire to maintain their lifestyles or meet their financial demands. Also, results showed that some of the preventive measures of traditional rulers in land grabbing include direct resistance and protection of community land and the facilitation of legitimate transactions of lands. This result is in line with the findings of Logan (2013) who discovered that some traditional leaders still serve to defend the interests of their communities in land and other matters.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study concludes that the role of traditional rulers in land governance is becoming increasingly contested, shaped and influenced by structural limitations and internal practices, leading to the need for urgent reform and reintegration into systems of governance that is more accountable. Hence, the following recommendations are made:

- i. Traditional rulers should institutionalize community-based land governance councils that include youth, women, family heads, and elders. These councils should oversee land allocation, documentation, and conflict resolution to ensure transparency and inclusive participation in decision-making processes.
- ii. Public campaign, awareness and sensitization should be conducted in order to enlighten and educate members of the communities on land rights, legal processes and procedures and traditional and modern institutions' roles in land governance. This will help in facilitating smooth land transactions and conflict resolutions.
- iii. Government and civil society organizations should invest in public sensitization campaigns to educate community members especially in rural areas on land rights, the risks of undocumented land purchases, and avenues for seeking redress. Such campaigns should be conducted using culturally appropriate media, such as town criers, community radio, and religious platforms.
- iv. Intentional efforts should be made to incorporate youth and women into land governance structures. Their perspectives and interests must be reflected in land decisions, particularly because they are often directly impacted by land conflicts and exclusion.

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