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## Fight or Flight? Understanding the Nature of Land Conflicts and Stakeholders' Roles in Oyo State, Nigeria.

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### ABSTRACT

#### Context and background

Land conflicts are evident across African countries arising from competing land interests among land conflict stakeholders. Understanding the interests, beliefs, and roles these stakeholders play in protecting their land rights is fundamental to effective land conflict management.

#### Goal and Objectives:

The study investigates the nature of land conflicts in Oyo State, Nigeria, vis-a-vis the roles played by stakeholders, with a view to providing useful information that could enhance effective land conflict management.

#### Methodology:

Using a case study approach and mixed methods of data collection, the study analysed the data through thematic and narrative analysis.

#### Results:

Findings revealed that the interests and beliefs of stakeholders determine the forms, stages, intensity, and resolution of land conflicts in Oyo state. These land conflicts differ between rural and urban areas, with certain forms and stakeholders being common in each. However, urban areas have diverse forms of conflict, and stakeholders play significant roles as actors and resolvers of land conflict. The significance of land as people's identity and generational heritage led people to engage in physical fights, killing and property destruction to defend it. To reduce land conflict, stakeholders' interests and roles need to be considered in land conflict management decision-making. Therefore, involving stakeholders in decision-making and implementing a workable framework is important for land conflict management success in Oyo state.

#### Keywords

Land conflict, Land conflict Forms, Stakeholders, Roles, Land Conflict Management, Interest, Oyo State, Nigeria

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Humanity depends on land from which people's needs are met. It is not out of place to say that land is a major source of income and livelihood for people. Access to land serves as a source of food and provides a supplementary source of livelihood for people in rural areas. In addition, land-based activities contribute to a nation's economic growth and development and reduce poverty. This importance of land to people's existence makes it a valuable economic asset to compete for. Despite the importance of land, its use by various land conflict stakeholders leads to land conflict. Therefore, land conflict is a disagreement over the use and access to land due to stakeholders' increasing demand for land.

In Africa, land seems to be increasingly becoming a source of conflict due to inequality and scarcity among stakeholders, apart from the interests and the roles these stakeholders play. These roles and interests sometimes determine the extent of the land conflict, which influences the management of the conflicts.

In Nigeria, the economic security attached to land shows that land is a major asset that has the potential to be used as collateral for wealth creation, agent of development, and poverty reduction. Apart from these, the origin of man and sovereignty is determined by the land they occupy (Abegunde, 2011; Abegunde *et al.*, 2020). Therefore, land goes beyond being a source of livelihood; but also as security for wealth. As a result of the significance attached to the land and its limited supply, stakeholders compete for access to the available lands, and the effects of the competition are the many land conflicts that are being witnessed.

In Oyo State, Nigeria, land conflicts are growing alarmingly and have been a concern to the government due to the failure to resolve many of the conflicts emerging in formal and informal areas in rural and urban areas. In Oyo state, stakeholders experience various forms of land conflict, such as boundary, ownership, and inheritance. Similarly, the roles of stakeholders in land conflicts and their management in specific regions depend on the forms and interests of the stakeholders, hence the need to involve them in land conflict management decision-making. This involvement would accommodate stakeholders' characteristics and interests and lead to effective conflict management, reducing the adverse effects of land conflicts.

The extent of the effects of conflict is determined by the interests and roles played by the stakeholders; it is important to identify the stakeholders of land conflicts and their roles. This seems to help manage land conflict effectively and provide information that could help in effective land conflict management decision-making, thereby leading to effective land governance.

Therefore, this paper aims to identify the nature of land conflict, of stakeholders and of their roles in Oyo State, Nigeria and divided into six sections. Section one is the introduction, followed by a literature review on the nature of land conflict, stakeholders and their roles. Sections three and four focused on the methodology and results, respectively. Sections five and six focused on the discussion and conclusions.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW: THE NATURE OF LAND CONFLICTS AND STAKEHOLDERS**

This section presents a literature review on land conflicts, their forms and stages, stakeholders and their roles within these conflicts.

## 2.1 Land Conflicts

Conflicts connote different things to different people. Over the years, it has been reported that conflict has different definitions depending on its nature (Coser, 1957; International Alert, 1996). International Alert (1996) defined conflict as an essential feature of human existence, a multi-dimensional social phenomenon. Conflicts are characterised by violence or negativity (Sabogu *et al.*, 2020). Nassè (2019) viewed conflicts as a misunderstanding among people or communities due to misconduct that affects a group or a community. These conflicts arise due to differences in interests among the parties involved (Gyamera *et al.*, 2016; Todorovski, 2016; Usman *et al.*, 2020). Similarly, Locke *et al.* (2021) perceived conflict as the intentional use of physical force against another person or a group that results in injury, death or psychological harm. These definitions have similar perspectives on disagreement among people over opposing beliefs.

According to Wehrmann (2008, 2017), land conflict is a social fact in which at least two groups are involved and whose origins are differences in interests regarding a given piece of land, aggravated by differences in the social position of the parties. Galtung (2009) viewed land conflicts from a tripartite perspective of contradiction, attitude and behaviour. Contradiction shows the conflict's subject matter; attitude reflects the parties' views and feelings about each other, and behaviours of parties are a response to the contradictions. Land conflicts arise due to opposing interests in land ownership, land use, limited access, unclear ownership, and boundary delineation. They can occur within and outside communities, such as boundary conflicts between community members, between communities, or between a community and outsiders.

Considering the importance of land to human existence, competition for land is intensifying due to various factors such as climate change, population growth, migration, urbanisation, and rising food insecurity (Locke *et al.*, 2021). This intensifying competition resulted in conflicts between two or more parties, with the roots of these conflicts stemming from differing interests and beliefs regarding land rights, usage, management, and revenue generation. Land is an essential aspect of human existence, as confirmed by the UN-Habitat (2018), which says that land will likely become an important factor in conflicts in the future. Therefore, land conflict goes beyond the individual to the group, state, and even national levels, which is the approach this research employed to view land conflicts. Moreover, every land conflict is localised, and proper understanding and analysis of each form would reveal the stakeholders, their roles, the causes and effects and how to prevent further escalation. Understanding these would reveal information that could help manage land conflict effectively.

## 2.2 Forms of Land Conflict

Conflicts over land occur in many forms, influenced by economic pressures, stakeholders' beliefs, and roles. It occurs at the intra-personal, intra-societal, and inter-societal levels, ranging from competition over scarce resources to boundary conflicts and ownership of land rights (Nkonya and Markelova, 2009).

Previous studies identified ownership conflicts, multiple sales of private property, illegal lease and sale (Wehrmann, 2008, 2017), land acquisition (Lombard, 2016; Obala and Mattingly, 2014), and

boundary conflict (Nkonya and Markelova, 2009; Okorji, 2021), as various forms of land conflict. Evidence of these forms depends on the beliefs and stakeholders' roles.

Wehrmann (2017) categorises land conflicts into four groups: land conflicts on all or several types of property, land conflicts on private property, land conflicts on common and collectively owned property, and land conflicts on state property. She further sub-divided the group into 36 different types and 50 sub-types. These include boundary conflicts, ownership conflicts linked to inheritance, multiple sales, and conflicts over the use of land. Other types include sales of someone else's property, illegal/ improper use of private land, illegal sale of state land and land grabbing, among others. The study affirmed that all these types occur in rural and urban areas. Among these forms, inheritance, ownership and boundary conflicts are common in urban, peri-urban and rural areas (Wehrmann 2008, 2017).

Reflecting on Nigeria, there has been a proliferation of community-based land conflicts sandwiched between religion and ethnicity. This includes Boko-Haram and farmer-herders conflicts in the Northern part of Nigeria (Salau *et al.*, 2020), Niger-Delta militancy in the Southern part, and communal land and farmer-herders conflicts in the western part (Boudreaux *et al.*, 2017). In the rural-urban continuum of Nigeria, several land conflicts are appearing in the form of ethnic and communal conflicts (Abati, 2021), which are increasing daily (Adebayo, 2020). The root of Ife-Modakeke, Offa-Erinle, Irawo-Ile-Irawo-Owode, Oyo-Osun, Oyo-Ogun boundary conflicts and Northern-Southern Kaduna conflicts is land, and these series of land-related crises have claimed many lives and properties and displacement of residents. Most of these crises centred on land ownership and accessibility (Ojo, 2016; Oyelude, 2021). The results of these conflicts are evident in the roles played by the stakeholders, which are the displacement of people, loss of lives and properties and many litigations in court.

In Oyo State, the case study area, the literature indicates that 67% of the local government areas have boundary conflicts which still need to be resolved (InsideOyo, 2021). In the Oyo zone, Adebayo (2017) identified boundary conflicts between Afijio and Oyo East Local Government Areas as the prominent forms in the area. Similarly, the Ibadan zone has been experiencing boundary conflict, issues with land acquisition, conflicts between the government and individuals and among individuals (Olaitan, 2021; Oluwalana, 2018; Vanguard, 2018). These conflicts forced 50,000 residents out of their land (Ajayi, 2020). Despite enacting the Real Properties Protection Law in 2016 to curb land grabbing in the state, some individuals still carry out land-grabbing exercises (Okogba, 2022; Olaniyi, 2022). Hanafi (2019) and Olapade and Aluko (2022) described these land grabbers as warlords, touts and Ajagun-gbale. The activities of these land grabbers are a concern to both government and citizens in the state.

Likewise, in the Oke-Ogun and Ibarapa zones of Oyo State, the prominent forms of land conflict are farmer-header and boundary conflicts among local government areas. These conflicts have resulted in mutual killings, the burning of houses and the loss of animals (Ojo, 2016; Oyewale, 2021). The rise and reoccurrence of these conflicts in Oyo State and Nigeria depend on stakeholders' roles. Therefore, the study identifies the land conflicts in Oyo state.

### 2.3 Stages of Land Conflicts

The stages of land conflict depend on the stakeholders' forms and roles, which also determine the conflict resolution (Wehrmann, 2017). Land conflict passes through many stages, from latent to post-conflict peacebuilding. Gyamera *et al.* (2016) identified latent as the first stage and reconciliation as the last stage of land conflict. If the conflict is well managed, it may not reach the next stage, but if otherwise, it may start from the latent stage and reach the reconciliation stage.

Wehrmann (2008, 2017) described stages of land conflict as the changes in tension and violence over time, from the first moments of tension to their resolution stage. Fisher *et al.* (2000), cited in (Wehrmann 2008, 2017), identify five stages of land conflicts: Pre-conflict, Confrontation, Crisis, Outcome and Post-conflict. The pre-conflict stage involves two or more parties with incompatibility goals that lead to open conflict. Conflicts are hidden in this stage, and parties avoid each other. During the confrontation, polarisation between the parties increases, and parties get involved in low-level violence and sometimes fighting. The crisis stage is the peak of the conflict and usually gets out of control, leading to war. The outcome may be win-win, win-lose or lose-lose. At this stage, the parties may agree to negotiate, and the crises decrease, but the conflict is not yet over. The last stage, post-conflict, is when conflicts have been reduced, and the relationship between the parties has become normal. At this stage, the conflicts must be managed very well to avoid reoccurrence of all stages.

No matter the intensity of land conflicts, the consequences always adversely affect individuals and society (Wehrmann 2008, 2017). Therefore, there is a need to identify the roles of land conflict stakeholders at every stage of conflict to prevent further escalation. This study examines Oyo State land conflict stages from the perspectives of Gyamera *et al.* (2016) and Wehrmann (2017)

## 2.4 Land Conflict Stakeholders and their Roles

This sub-section is divided into two parts: land conflict stakeholders and their roles.

### 2.4.1 Land Conflict Stakeholders

Land conflict involves many stakeholders with opposing interests. These individuals or groups participate in the conflict and, in their management, whose interests are positively or negatively affected by decisions or results. Understanding stakeholders' diverse viewpoints on conflicts and roles is important to land conflict management's success. (John *et al.*, 2018 and; Mannetti *et al.*, 2019).

FAO (2005) identified land administrators, policymakers, local leaders, traditional rulers, community leaders, family heads, and government agencies as stakeholders in the land conflict. Zwan (2011) identified government organisations, landowners, customary chiefs, NGOs, local administrative bodies, civil society, and the private sector. These stakeholders are categorised into primary and secondary stakeholders based on their roles. The interests and roles of stakeholders are considered to be a determining factor in the success of land policy reform.

Moreover, Fienitz *et al.* (2021) and Salman *et al.* (2018) identified community leaders, NGOs, and governments as the actors in land resource conflicts. In the meantime, other stakeholders include hunter associations and watch groups (Lar, 2017); land grabbers (Fearnside, 2008); subsistence farmers, natural resource users, development practitioners, policymakers, planners and administrators in government, commercial bodies or NGOs (Grimble, 1998).

Additionally, John *et al.* (2018) classified the stakeholders into conflicting parties (plaintiff and defendant), conflict resolvers (elders) and the crowd (witnesses). The study recognised the

importance of their roles in managing land conflicts. Similarly, Songo (2014) identified advocacy group(s) as one of the land conflict stakeholders. These groups inform and educate the populace about the effects of land conflicts and help in resolving land conflicts.

Therefore, land conflict stakeholders can be summarised to include individuals, government, traditional rulers, community leaders, family heads, NGOs, government agencies, land users, landowners, the private sector, and law enforcement agents. So, land conflict management depends on the interests and the roles these stakeholders play. Thus, it is imperative to know that overlooking stakeholders' interests and roles may cause further polarisation and escalation of the conflict. Depending on the stakeholders' roles, they can be conflict parties or conflict resolvers. Identifying stakeholders and their roles would help in land conflict management decision-making and reducing land conflict. This study interviewed conflicting parties and resolvers based on the classification of governmental and non-governmental stakeholders.

#### 2.4.2 Roles of Land Conflict Stakeholders

Understanding the roles of the land conflict stakeholders helps to identify the forms, the stakeholders, their interests, and how to manage land conflict effectively. Stakeholders are the drivers of land conflicts and are involved in resolving land conflicts (Onguny and Gillies, 2019).

Meanwhile, FAO (2005) and Songo (2014) recognise advisory roles, policy implementation, partnership with other actors and sensitisation on the effects of land conflicts as the roles being played by the stakeholders. Mannetti *et al.* (2019), Zhuang *et al.* (2019), Zikargae *et al.* (2022), and Zwan (2011) acknowledge the influence and contributions of stakeholders in decision-making. The studies discovered that stakeholders played crucial roles in coordination, facilitation, management, and policy implementation.

Wang and Aenis, 2019 submitted that stakeholders' interests and roles are factors in improving the problem situation. These stakeholders are involved in land conflict management and look for effective ways of managing the conflicts. The study posits that involving stakeholders in land conflict decision-making helps reduce conflicts. Meanwhile, in their separate studies, Fearnside (2008) and John *et al.* (2018) believed that stakeholders defend their land rights against invasion or being used by other people. This is to protect their land rights against others.

Similarly, stakeholders protect their rights on land and present evidence of land ownership during land conflict management (Bryant, 1995; Salau *et al.*, 2020). This set of stakeholders could be individuals or government officials. Therefore, the roles of land conflict stakeholders in land conflict determine the intensity of the land conflict and how the land conflict can be managed effectively. So, land conflict management would be most successful if different stakeholders' interests and roles were considered in decision-making. This would thereby reduce the land conflict in the society. Understanding the roles of land conflict stakeholders is important in land conflict management, as land resource claims seem to be tied to people's sense of security, livelihood, culture, pride, and identity. This section of the literature review has provided a basis for the next section, i.e., methodology, which elaborates on how the study was carried out among the stakeholders.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

The qualitative methodology using a case study approach was appropriate for this research because it investigates social, community-based problems and a contemporary phenomenon in a real-life

context (Burge, 2015; Yin, 2003, 2013). A mixed method of data collection (Qualitative and Quantitative methods) was adopted to collect information from the stakeholders in the state. This method forms a source for triangulation and assessing information from different perspectives, thereby improving the reliability of the data collected (Arko-Adjei, 2011; Bowen, 2009; Yin, 2003).

### 3.1 The Study Area: Oyo State, Nigeria

The study was conducted in Oyo State, Nigeria, due to the prevalence of land conflicts in the state, the diverse nature of the land conflicts, the failure to resolve several conflicts in the state, several land conflict matters in the court and inappropriate government efforts to resolve various land conflicts (Adebayo, 2017; InsideOyo, 2021; Oluwalana, 2018). Oyo State covers approximately an area of 28,454 square kilometres, with a population of 5,591,589 (NPC, 2006). It is ranked 14th by land size in Nigeria. The State is divided into seven administrative zones. These zones are geographically diverse and comprise many rural areas, and the major occupation of the residents is farming. The study took place in four (4) out of seven (7) zones in Oyo State, and only four interviews were conducted in the fifth zone, having discovered that the saturation point was reached.

### 3.2 Data Collection

Through the case study approach, the researcher obtained information via key informant interviews (KII) and focus group discussions (FGD) with the land conflict stakeholders. KII were used to elicit primary information from the stakeholders in Oyo State to explain their perspectives on the nature of land conflict, stakeholders and their roles.

Purposive sampling techniques were used at each selected zone to select two (2) traditional rulers to interview. Snowball sampling techniques were used to select three (3) heads of landholding families, one (1) community leader, one (1) Seriki-Fulani (Herder) and the chairperson of the Community Development Women Association (CDWA) in each selected zone to interview as key informants. These stakeholders had relevant experience, knowledge and a high level of involvement in land conflicts. To complement the information gathered from the non-governmental land conflict stakeholders, KII was conducted with one (1) director at each of the State Ministries (Lands, Justice, Surveyor General, and Housing), one (1) director at the national boundary commission Abuja; and the Chief judge of Oyo State. Likewise, one (1) focus group discussion (FGD) was conducted with heads of landholding families in each of four (4) selected zones and another focus group discussion (FGD) with the Community Development Women Association (CDWA) in one (1) zone out of the four (4) selected zones. Women were included to accommodate their opinions and perspectives about land conflicts. The number of participants in each FGD averaged 10. This corresponds with Nara's (2021) recommendation that the number of people in a focus group should be between 8 and 12.

Like other research, the study faced skepticism from some non-governmental stakeholders who suspected that the research was a ploy by their rivals to gather information for malicious purposes. To overcome these drawbacks, they were convinced, with the support of some of their children, who are educated, that the exercise was for research purposes, and this was supported by the letter indicating the exercise was for research purposes, and they exercised no fear to speak. Also, ethical advice and clearance from the ITC Ethics Committee of the University of Twente was obtained to ensure ethical compliance, and the consent of all the respondents was obtained before they participated in the study.

However, due to communal conflicts between herders and communities, interviews with Seriki-Fulani could not be conducted in the Ibadan and Ibarapa zones. In addition, four interviews were conducted in the fifth zone with one community leader and three family heads before reaching saturation level. Overall, 40 interviews and 5 FGD were conducted, which seems a good base for the study. Also, reports of the previous commissions of enquiry set up by the Oyo state government on land conflicts served as secondary data. The reports confirmed some of the findings from the primary data collected, though there were some contradictions with the interviews conducted. The information from those reports was used to complement the interviews conducted and used for this study.

### 3.3 Data Analysis

Thematic and narrative analysis were employed for data analysis. This identifies, analyses, and reports themes within data in rich detail (Braun and Clarke, 2006) and provides an in-depth interpretation of data based on identifying themes consistent with the research questions and other issues ensuing from the data (Agboola, 2015). The KII and FGD data recorded in English were transcribed verbatim, and the other KII and FGD conducted in Yoruba and Fulani languages were translated into English and transcribed. The transcripts of the KII, FGD, field notes, and secondary documents were analysed using the ATLAS.ti version 22 software with open coding.

The interviews conducted were assigned codes to identify the responses of participants. Family heads were renamed FH1 to FH15, Traditional rulers, TR1 to TR7. Community Women, CW1 to CW3, Community Leaders, CL1 to CL5, while Seriki Fulani (Herders) SRK1 to SRK2, government officials as GOF1 to GOF7 and Participants for FGD were named P1, P2, P3, P4...P12. The quotations provide answers to the study's research questions.

## 4. RESULT: THE NATURE OF LAND CONFLICTS AND STAKEHOLDERS IN OYO STATE

This section presents fieldwork results conducted in Oyo State, Nigeria, on land conflicts, their forms and stages, stakeholders and their roles.

### 4.1 Land Conflicts in Oyo State, Nigeria

KII, FGD, and personal observation indicate that each zone has some peculiarities of land conflict. However, some land conflict forms are common to all the zones in Oyo State due to the significance attached to land as a livelihood. Likewise, land conflict stakeholders' perceptions and beliefs vary on land. Stakeholders in Oyo state believed their land is their heritage and identity, and it needed to be protected. This aligns with Wehrmann (2017), who says land conflicts occur due to different beliefs and interests on land. Some of the responses of the stakeholders in Oyo state are indicated below.

*"Our land is our identity; we cannot allow anybody to take our land away. No..no..no"*

*"Land is wealth; we need to keep it for our children's use; if I allow people to take my land from me, I am finished."*

### 4.2 Forms of Land Conflict

Stakeholders described the land conflict forms they are experiencing, as discussed below.

#### 4.2.1 Ownership Land Conflict

KII and FGD indicated that almost all the zones are experiencing ownership land conflict. In this situation, two or more individuals or families claim a legal right to control and use of the land. However, this is easily resolved in rural areas compared to peri-urban and urban areas. In Ibadan,

for example, many ownership land conflicts arise after the death of one Mogaji (Head of a family). New Mogaji usually sells the parcel of land that the deceased Mogaji has sold and sometimes resells the undeveloped land that has been sold. Many pending litigations on land ownership are in court awaiting a decision.

#### 4.2.2 Boundary Conflict

Evidence from the KII and FGD shows different forms of boundary conflict in the Oyo state. This form is common in all the zones in Oyo state due to the lack of definite boundary delineation, especially in the rural areas where customary land tenure is practised, and natural features are still used for boundary delineation. It is easily resolved among families, but it usually leads to loss of lives and property among communities. Here follows a comment from one key informant interview.

*"Government needs to take urgent action in carrying out the mapping of Oyo, where the boundary of each local government area would be delineated; if not, the rate at which people would be killing themselves on the boundary will keep on increasing."*

#### 4.2.3 Conflict over the Use of Land

According to the KII and FGD conducted, the results show that conflict over the use of land occurs most in rural areas, especially in Oke-Ogun, Ibarapa and Ogbomoso. These are agrarian communities where farming is their primary occupation. This conflict occurs mostly between the farmers and herders due to the herders' overgrazing of cattle on farm crops and acts of encroaching on water holes and cattle paths by the farmers. This act usually results in competition for the use of the land and leads to conflict.

#### 4.2.4 Inheritance Land Conflict

Inheritance land conflict is common in all the zones and among the clans. The conflict is quickly resolved with quick intervention from the other family and community members. Suppose there is no immediate intervention from either the community or government; it escalates to the extent of some members of the family destroying each other's properties, killing each other and attacking each other spiritually.

#### 4.2.5 Multiple Sales of Common Land / Unauthorized/Illegal Sales of Family Land

Through KII and FGD, multiple sales of common land were discovered as another form of land conflict, and it occurs when the same parcel of land is sold to multiple persons or a family member unilaterally sells family land without the consent of the family head and principal members. There are many instances of this form in Ibadan (Urban area), and it is due to an increase in the value of the land.

#### 4.2.6 Land Grabbing Conflict (Ajagun-Gbale)

Land grabbing is another form of land conflict experienced by stakeholders. It is a situation whereby a person or group of people wage war to acquire land they do not have legal rights to. Findings show that it is predominant in peri-urban and urban areas of the state; KII conducted with some stakeholders attested that there are recent traces of it in rural areas but not as evident as in urban areas of the state. Some individuals have become land grabbers and positioned themselves to be hired by people who need their services as Ajagun-gbale. These Ajagun-gbale forcefully take over the

land that does not belong to them or the person who hired them. According to Hanafi (2019) and Olapade and Aluko (2022), these Ajagun-gbale, as they are being called in the Yoruba language, are warlords and touts. An excerpt from one of the key informant's interviews is stated below.

*“Land grabbing has become the order of the day in Oyo state, especially in Ibadan. People do not have a conscience again; they want to get money by all means. Government needs to do something. All these young boys who are not ready to work but want to have money have now become Ajagun-gbale; it is now rampant.”*

#### 4.2.7 Land conflict due to abandonment of acquired land for many years

Through KII and FGD, land conflict due to the abandonment of acquired land is another form discovered. This occurs mostly in rural areas when some families have donated their land to the government for free without compensation from the government. This was in anticipation of the government's development of their areas, but the government abandoned the land without any development after carrying out the necessary documentation. After the government abandoned the land, the families started selling it, believing that the government had not fulfilled the promise to develop their area, which made them donate their land freely. This action often results in conflict between the government and the families.

The other forms of land conflicts in the state are lack of recognition of commonly owned land, encroachment and sales of government land. The occurrence of these land conflicts depends on whether the zone is an urban, peri-urban or rural area. Table I indicates the overview of land conflicts in each zone.

**Table I: Forms of Land Conflicts experienced in Oyo State**

| Zones    | Classifications  | Land Conflict Forms           |                               |               |                                            |              |                          |             |          |           |                            |                                           |                                |
|----------|------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------|--------------------------------------------|--------------|--------------------------|-------------|----------|-----------|----------------------------|-------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
|          |                  | Multiple Sales of Common Land | Illegal Sales of Private Land | Land Grabbing | Lack of Recognition of Commonly Owned Land | Encroachment | Sales of Government Land | Inheritance | Boundary | Ownership | Sales of Someone Else Land | Land Conflicts Due to Abandonment of Land | Conflicts over the Use of Land |
| Oke-Ogun | Rural/Peri-Urban |                               |                               |               |                                            |              |                          | X           | X        | X         |                            | X                                         | X                              |
| Ibadan   | Urban            | X                             | X                             | X             | X                                          | X            | X                        | X           | X        | X         | X                          |                                           |                                |
| Ibarapa  | Rura             |                               |                               |               |                                            |              |                          | X           | X        |           |                            | X                                         | X                              |
| Ogbomoso | Peri-Urban       |                               |                               | X             | X                                          |              |                          | X           | X        | X         |                            |                                           | X                              |

Source: Fieldwork, 2022

As discussed above, ownership, boundary, and inheritance conflicts are the most common forms of land conflict in all the zones. This conforms with the findings of Wehrmann (2017) that these conflicts occur in urban, peri-urban and rural areas.

#### 4.3 Stages of Land Conflict

KII and FGD indicated that most stakeholders had experienced one stage of conflict or the other. Most intra-conflicts were sometimes resolved at the pre-conflict stage. The case is different in inter-communal or state land conflict. It results in loss of lives and properties as no party is ready to lose their land. The stakeholders believe their land is their identity and heritage and worth dying for. Excerpts of interviews with some stakeholders are below.

*"We are family members; we could not be killing ourselves on our collective land; the elders in the family usually intervene; they would not even allow us to go to court; as you know, we do not come back from the court as friends."*

*"How would somebody come from another community to claim our land in my presence? No way, let me tell you I was born here, and I am almost 70 years old now, so I do not need to be afraid of death; I would rather die fighting for our rights than allowing them to take our land."*

#### 4.4 Land Conflict Stakeholders in Oyo State, Nigeria

Depending on the zone in Oyo State, FGD and KII show the existence of land conflict stakeholders. These individuals or organisations participate in conflict and are involved in land administration, land transactions, land law implementation, and managed land conflict in Oyo state. These are individuals, family heads, community leaders, herders, government agencies, NGOs, private organisations, and local and state governments. Others are the judiciary, traditional rulers, Ajagun-gbale (land grabbers), land speculators, government officials, law enforcement agents, property developers and advocacy groups.

They are of three categories: conflicting parties, conflict resolvers and advocacy groups. Conflicting parties are the people or organisations participating directly or indirectly in land conflicts and managing land in Oyo State. John *et al.* (2018) refer to them as plaintiffs or defendants of land conflict. Conflicting parties are the individuals, government officials and organisations involved in land conflict management processes. They are called conflict resolvers (John *et al.*, 2018). Advocacy groups educate the public on the effects of land conflicts and appeal to the conflicting parties' conscience during land conflicts. They are non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and engage in land conflict management. Table II depicts the land conflict stakeholders per zone and their classification. Some of the comments of the stakeholders during KII identifying the stakeholders are as follows:

*"Most traditional rulers are jobless and thought they would get money when they get to the throne. They are land grabber. However, they have now discovered that there is no free money, so they sell people's land all in the name of being a traditional ruler and believing Oba lo ni ile (King owns the land)."*

*"Whenever land conflicts occur in a community among kings, families, communities and even governments as government officials, we go there to calm them down unless they would continue killing themselves. When they see us, they withdraw because they believe we are the government."*

#### 4.5 Roles of Land Conflict Stakeholders in Oyo State, Nigeria

FGD and KII reveal that stakeholders play various roles during land conflicts. These roles determine the extent of the stage and depend on the types of stakeholders, their beliefs and interests. The

individuals referred to as Omo-Onile (land owners) defend their land against being used by other people or against being sold out by the Ajagun-gbale (Land Grabbers). The Omo-Onile engages in physical and spiritual attacks to protect their family heritage (their land). Ditto for the Ajagun-gbale to claim the land that does not belong to them or that they do not have legal rights on, to sustain their livelihoods. The results corroborate the study of Fearnside (2008) and John *et al.* (2018), who say land conflict occurs among parties for them to sustain their livelihood.

Similarly, some stakeholders act as witnesses in resolving land conflicts by presenting evidence of land ownership for adequate settlement. Others are involved in peacebuilding, allocating government land to the interested buyers upon payment of the prescribed fees, and formulating and implementing laws and rules regarding land administration policies in the state. Some stakeholders also competed for the available land for their use, which is common among the clans, to participate in decision-making and restore normalcy to conflict areas. These findings corroborate the previous studies of Zhuang *et al.*, 2019; and Zikargae *et al.*, 2022 on the roles of stakeholders.

Furthermore, stakeholders play advocacy roles. They sensitise and enlighten the public on the effects of land conflicts and engage in land conflict settlement. They are knowledgeable people to whom people complain and report the cases of land conflicts, and they help in settlement. So Dabe (is it good?) and Ibadan Compound Initiatives (Land Matters) are examples in Ibadan. The results corroborate FAO's (2005) and Songo's (2014) findings.

Therefore, stakeholders determine the extent of the conflict and how it is resolved. So, the success and failure of land conflict management are determined by the land conflict stakeholders. The excerpts on the roles of the stakeholders are as follows:

*"I cannot be looking and allow somebody to take our land away from us; no way, I would rather die in the process of defending our land."*

*"it is our responsibility as government representatives to maintain peace when there is conflict among individuals or communities; we should not allow it to escalate to the extent of loss of lives and properties."*

The roles stakeholders play are illustrated in Table II, and it is evident that stakeholders in peri-urban and urban areas play more roles than those in rural areas. This could be a result of the existence of many land conflicts in the areas (see Table I).

**Table II: Stakeholders and their roles in Oyo State**

| Zones    | Land Conflict Stakeholders   | Roles                   |                    |          |                             |                 |
|----------|------------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------|----------|-----------------------------|-----------------|
|          |                              | Conflict Parties/Actors | Conflict Resolvers | Advocacy | Implementations of Policies | Decision-Making |
| Oke-Ogun | <b>Individual</b>            | <b>X</b>                | <b>X</b>           |          |                             |                 |
|          | Family Head                  | X                       | X                  |          |                             |                 |
|          | Communities Leaders          | X                       | X                  |          |                             |                 |
|          | Traditional Rulers           | X                       | X                  |          |                             |                 |
|          | Herders                      | X                       | X                  |          |                             |                 |
|          | Law enforcement agents       |                         | X                  |          | X                           | X               |
|          | <b>Individual</b>            | <b>X</b>                | <b>X</b>           |          |                             |                 |
| Ibadan   | Family Head                  | X                       | X                  |          |                             |                 |
|          | Communities Leaders          | X                       | X                  |          |                             |                 |
|          | Traditional Rulers           | X                       | X                  |          |                             |                 |
|          | Ajagun-Gbale (Land grabbers) | X                       |                    |          |                             |                 |
|          | Land Speculators             | X                       |                    |          |                             |                 |
|          | Judiciary                    |                         | X                  |          |                             |                 |

|                 |                                               |          |          |   |   |   |
|-----------------|-----------------------------------------------|----------|----------|---|---|---|
| <b>Ibarapa</b>  | Private Organisations                         | X        |          |   |   |   |
|                 | Law enforcement agents                        |          | X        |   | X | X |
|                 | NGOs                                          |          | X        | X |   |   |
|                 | Private Developers                            | X        |          |   |   |   |
|                 | <b>Individual</b>                             | <b>X</b> | <b>X</b> |   |   |   |
|                 | Family Head                                   | X        | X        |   |   |   |
|                 | Communities Leaders                           | X        | X        |   |   |   |
|                 | Traditional Rulers                            | X        | X        |   |   |   |
|                 | Law Enforcement Agents                        |          | X        |   | X | X |
|                 | <b>Individual</b>                             | <b>X</b> | <b>X</b> |   |   |   |
| <b>Ogbomoso</b> | Family Head                                   | X        | X        |   |   |   |
|                 | Communities Leaders                           | X        | X        |   |   |   |
|                 | Traditional Rulers                            | X        | X        |   |   |   |
|                 | Ajagun-Gbale (Land grabbers)                  | X        |          |   |   |   |
|                 | Herders                                       | X        |          |   |   |   |
|                 | Law Enforcement Agents                        |          | X        |   | X | X |
|                 | Government, Government Officials and Agencies | X        | X        | X | X | X |
|                 |                                               |          |          |   |   |   |
|                 |                                               |          |          |   |   |   |
|                 |                                               |          |          |   |   |   |

Source: Fieldwork, 2022

## 5. DISCUSSION: THE NATURE OF LAND CONFLICTS AND STAKEHOLDERS IN OYO STATE

This section focuses on the discussions on the results of land conflicts, their forms and stages, stakeholders and their roles.

### 5.1 Land Conflicts in Oyo State

The various forms of conflict experienced make Oyo state different from other states in Nigeria, possibly due to rapidly increasing land value. The reaction to an action or inaction of other parties involved in the land conflict could be why land conflict thrives in the state.

Apart from stakeholder interests (Gyamera *et al.*, 2016; Todorovski, 2016; Usman *et al.*, 2020), the cultural beliefs of the stakeholders on land in terms of identity, sovereignty and proof of wealth could contribute to the conflict in the state (Locke *et al.*, 2021). This means that stakeholders' interest in land contributes to conflict, and the extent of the conflict and the success of its management depends on the stakeholders' role. In line with the study of the UN-Habitat (2018), the land will be an important factor of conflict, and it will be more evident in our society in the coming decades if the interest and the roles of the land conflict stakeholders are not considered in decision-making. Considering stakeholders' interests and roles in land conflict management decision-making would reduce the conflict in the state and enhance a good land administration system.

### 5.2 Forms of Land Conflict in Oyo State

Ownership, boundary and inheritance conflicts are the most common land conflicts applicable to all zones. This finding confirms the study of Wehrmann (2017), who says that boundary and ownership conflict occur in urban, peri-urban and rural areas. It could be a result of the fact that land is synonymous with the identity of people, which people try to protect but sometimes lead to conflict. Abandonment of land by the government in most of the state's rural areas for a longer period is an invitation to land grabbers and reclaiming of the family land by the members of the family that initially donated the land. The fact that the land was donated without paying compensation should have encouraged the government to use the land for the purpose for which it was acquired. Government would have adopted the principle of fit-for-purpose on land acquired instead of abandoning land, which could have reduced land conflict in the state.

The conflict over the use of land by farmers and herders could result from the sustenance of the parties' livelihoods, and an attempt to block peoples' means of their livelihood could lead to land conflict. Contrary to expectations, the Ibadan zone is experiencing various forms of land conflict. Ibadan, an urban area in the state, most individuals, organisations, and the government had carried out the cadastral survey of most of the parcels of land in the zone, and one would have expected that conflict would have been reduced to a minimal level but on the high side.

Interestingly, despite the enactment of real properties protection law, land grabbing and multiple sales of common land are evident all over the Ibadan zone. This could be attributed to urbanisation, increase in population, demand for land and land value in the zone. The result is not unexpected as the findings of Hanafi (2019), Okogba (2022), Olaniyi (2022), and Olapade and Aluko (2022) attested to it that the enactment of law does stop land grabbing.

Similarly, Ibadan is characterised by the activities of land grabbers (Ajagun-gbale). This could be due to the poor state land administration system and stakeholders' attempt to sustain their livelihood, which made them grab land and sell it to multiple buyers. An act which has made land grabbers (Ajagun-gbale) become a land conflict stakeholder in the state.

Therefore, more pragmatic measures need to be implemented by the government to prevent land conflict, and stakeholders' involvement in enacting, implementing, and enforcing land-related laws would help reduce conflict. Also, there is a need to provide an awareness on the implications of land-grabbing activities and multiple sales of land in the state to reduce land conflicts to a minimal level. The result suggests that forms of land conflict differ from rural to urban areas, depending on the stakeholders' roles.

### 5.3 Stages of Land Conflict in Oyo State

Non-proper management of inter-communal land conflict could have caused stakeholders to pass through all the stages of conflict. The finding is in line with the study of Gyamera *et al.* (2016), which says that if the conflict is not well managed, it may reach all the stages, and there is a probability of reoccurrence. Resolving intra-conflicts at the pre-conflict stage is not unexpected; the stakeholders value family ties and that one does not return from the court as a friend. The stage of land conflict then depends on the land conflict forms and stakeholders' roles.

### 5.4 Land Conflicts Stakeholders in Oyo State

Oyo state has various land conflict stakeholders, some acting for themselves, some for their families or communities, and others acting on the government's behalf. The most common land conflict stakeholders in all the zones in the state are 1. traditional rulers, 2. individuals, 3. community leaders, 4. government, and 5. family heads. The results are in line with the findings of the previous studies of FAO (2005), Fienitz *et al.* (2021), Salman *et al.* (2018), and Zwan (2011) that identified similar stakeholders. The different interests of the identified stakeholders seem to contribute to the persistent land conflict in the state.

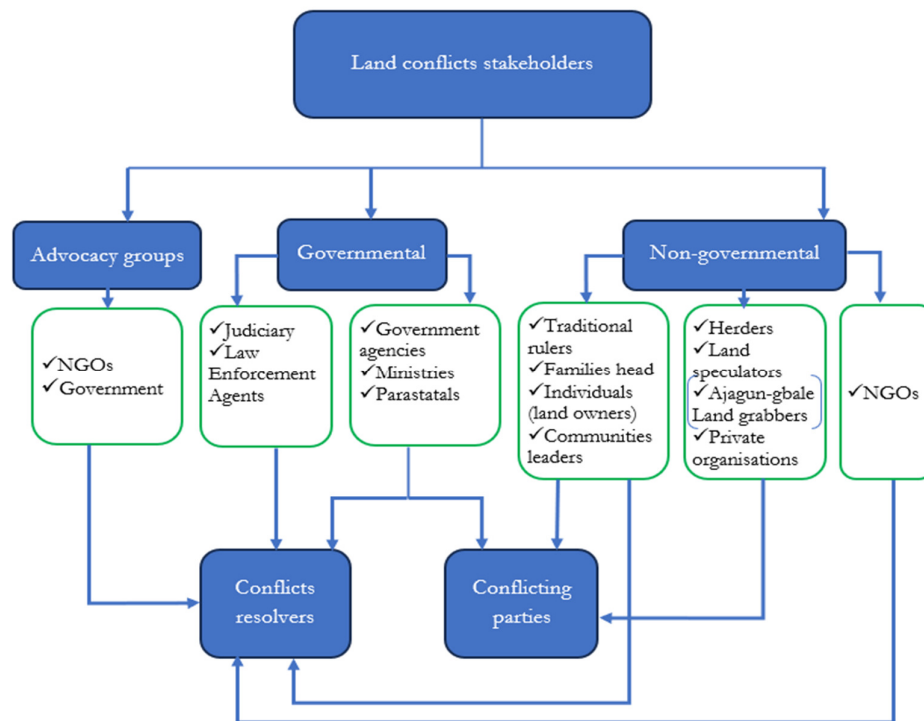
Surprisingly, Ajagun-gbale (Land Grabbers) in the peri-urban and urban areas seem to contribute to land conflicts in the Oyo State. It shows the poor land administration system in the state and the need for the government to intensify efforts to implement an anti-land grabbing law (Okogba, 2022; Olaniyi, 2022; OYSG, 2016) in the state and back it up with the political will. Also, involving stakeholders such as traditional rulers and community leaders in land conflict management and

decision-making would reduce Ajagun-gbale's (land grabbers) activities, as they know the landowners in their territory. Likewise, land speculators are increasing due to rapid development in Ibadan, which in turn is increasing demand for land for various uses and increasing land value. The government needs pragmatic measures to curb land speculations.

The presence of advocacy groups in urban areas of Oyo state confirms the study of Songo (2014), which says land conflict stakeholders rendered advocacy services. However, there is a need for more advocacy groups in all the zones to educate people on the effects of land conflict, which could reduce land conflict to a minimal level.

Therefore, land conflict stakeholders in Oyo state can then be categorised into governmental and non-governmental stakeholders, see John *et al.*, (2018). So, involving both categories in land conflict management and decision-making could reduce land conflict in society. Figure 1 depicts the authors' concept of land conflict stakeholders.

Figure 1: Classification of Land Conflicts Stakeholders



Source: Authors' Concept

### 5.5 Roles of Land Conflict Stakeholders in Oyo State

Identifying the roles of land conflict stakeholders helps to know their interests and, in turn, determine the mechanism to manage land conflict. One interesting finding in Oyo state was that stakeholders physically fight to protect their land rights and livelihood. The belief that their land belongs not to them alone but to their ancestors and unborn generations seems to contribute to land conflict. The belief that they would be accountable to their ancestors makes stakeholders engage in physical fights to protect their land against being grabbed. This suggests stakeholders believe it is a determining factor in land conflict in the Oyo state.

The involvement of governmental stakeholders mostly and few non-governmental stakeholders in resolving land conflict in Oyo state suggests why land conflict thrives in the state as the studies of Zhuang *et al.* (2019) and Zikargae *et al.* (2022) indicated that the involvement of governmental and non-governmental land conflict stakeholders in the formulation, and implementation of land policies and decision making on land matters, seems to reduce land conflict. It means the government needs to involve these stakeholders in land conflict management, formulation and implementation of the law that will enhance a good land administration system, thereby reducing land conflict and enhancing good land governance.

Advocacy roles played by stakeholders in the state could be due to rising land grabbing and attempts to reduce it. Therefore, government and private organisations need to play more advocacy roles in all the zones in the state to sensitise, enlighten and educate people on the menace of land conflicts ( Songo (2014) and FAO (2005) ). Also, land speculation flourishing could be to sustain livelihoods and maximise profits. Likewise, the prevalent land grabbing in the state appears to be due to the government's inability to implement laws and lack of a good land administration system.

Therefore, land conflict stakeholders' roles revolve around participating in the conflict, serving as a conflict resolver and providing advocacy services. This seems important to the success or failure of the management of land conflicts as the stakeholder's role and involvement can mitigate land conflicts in the state. Stakeholders' roles in rural, peri-urban and urban areas are summarised in Table III below.

**Table III: Roles Played by Land Conflict Stakeholders**

| Classification | Stakeholders                 | Roles                      |                     |          |
|----------------|------------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------|----------|
|                |                              | Participating in Conflicts | Resolving Conflicts | Advocacy |
| Urban          | Individuals                  | X                          | X                   |          |
|                | Family Head                  | X                          | X                   |          |
|                | Communities Leaders          | X                          | X                   |          |
|                | Traditional Rulers           | X                          | X                   |          |
|                | Ajagun-gbale (Land grabbers) | X                          |                     |          |
|                | Land Speculators             | X                          | X                   |          |
|                | Judiciary                    |                            | X                   |          |
|                | Private Organisations        | X                          | X                   |          |
|                | Law enforcement agents       |                            | X                   |          |
|                | NGOs                         |                            | X                   | x        |
|                | Private developers           | X                          |                     |          |
|                | Government                   | X                          | X                   | x        |
| Peri-Urban     | Individuals                  | X                          | X                   |          |
|                | Family Head                  | X                          | X                   |          |
|                | Communities Leaders          | X                          | X                   |          |
|                | Traditional Rulers           | X                          | X                   |          |
|                | Ajagun-gbale (Land grabbers) | X                          |                     |          |
|                | Law enforcement agents       |                            | X                   |          |
|                | Individuals                  | X                          | X                   |          |
|                | Family Head                  | X                          | X                   |          |
|                | Communities Leaders          | X                          | X                   |          |

|              |                              |   |   |
|--------------|------------------------------|---|---|
| <b>Rural</b> | Traditional Rulers           | X | X |
|              | Ajagun-gbale (Land grabbers) | X |   |
|              | Law enforcement agents       |   | x |

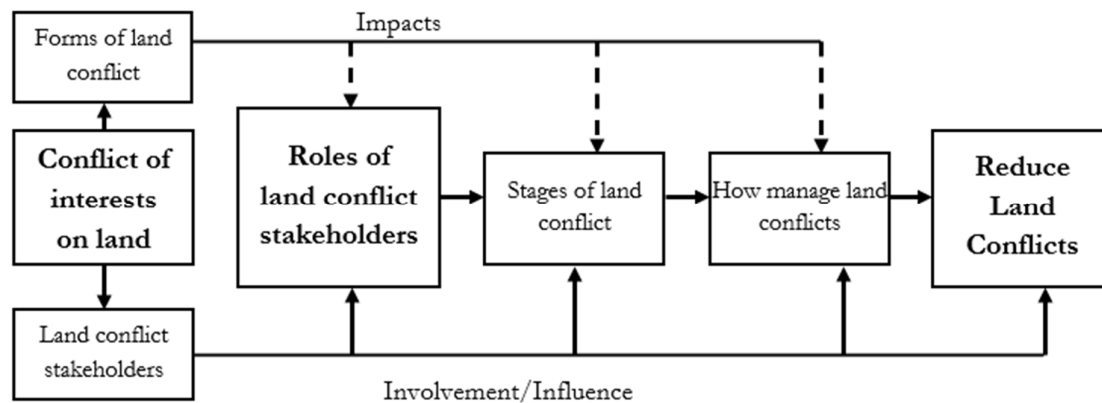
Source: Fieldwork, 2022

### 5.6 Land Conflict in Oyo State: Fight or flight?

The significance attached to land by land conflict stakeholders in Oyo state, especially non-governmental stakeholders, is so important that they engage in physical fights to protect their land, making it a fight. The believe that their land does not belong to them alone but also to their ancestors and the unborn generations prompts them to defend their land, even to the point of death. Also, the belief that their land is their identity, heritage, and source of livelihood made stakeholders engage in physical attacks that sometimes lead to the loss of lives and properties. This suggests why many people died and were wounded, and a lot of properties and crop products are being destroyed in the process of defending their land. To the land owners (Omo-Onile), land conflict is a fight to exclude others from using their land. To others who do not have rights on the land, it is a flight.

Therefore, there is a need for a framework to manage land conflict effectively. This could be done by engaging governmental and non-governmental stakeholders in the formulation and implementation of policies on land. This would indirectly reduce land conflicts in the state, as the findings have shown that stakeholders play important roles in conflict management. Figure 2 depicts the impacts of land conflict stakeholders on the forms, stages, mechanisms and how it reduces land conflict.

**Figure 2: Impacts of land conflict stakeholders**



Source: Authors' Concept

## 6. CONCLUSION

Understanding the interests and roles land conflict stakeholders play helps to reduce conflict. The forms of land conflict and stakeholders' roles determine the intensity of conflict and the success or failure of land conflict management.

The paper examines the nature of land conflict and the roles of land conflict stakeholders in Oyo state, Nigeria. The study found that ownership, boundary, and inheritance conflicts are the state's most common forms of land conflict. Notable among the other forms of land conflict in the state are land grabbing, multiple sales of common land, illegal sale of someone's land and conflict due to abandonment of acquired land for many years. This suggests the weak land governance framework in the state. Therefore, there is a need to review the present framework and put in place good land

governance by enacting and implementing laws that could guide land transactions. Adopting fit-for-purpose land administration could also reduce land conflict in Oyo state. Stakeholders have experienced all the stages of land conflict. Therefore, mechanisms to manage social relationships among land conflict stakeholders have to be put in place to reduce the intensity of the conflict and the stage the conflict will reach.

The study further found that stakeholders such as traditional rulers, community leaders, family heads, Ajagun-gbale (land grabbers), land speculators, government officials, and herders were involved in the land conflict and its management. Some of them are the drivers of conflict in the state. Their interests and roles determine the intensity of conflict and the success and failure of land conflict management. However, the identification of Ajagun-gbale (land grabbers) as one of the land conflict stakeholders in the state and the thriving of their activities further suggests a lack of a good land administration system. Therefore, a law criminalising the activities of Ajagun-gbale (land grabbers) has to be put in place with full implementation. This will improve tenure security and reduce land conflict in the state,

Similarly, land conflicts are similar globally but simultaneously different in context and localised. So, the effective management of land conflict has to be approached from a local perspective, bearing in mind that conflict is localised and the forms of land conflict, the interest and the roles played by the stakeholders are pivotal to the success or failure of the management. So, stakeholders engage in physical and spiritual attacks to defend their land, serve as conflict resolvers and play advocacy roles. The last two roles suggest how important they are, and involving them in land conflict management would reduce conflict.

Therefore, the study recommends the importance of the interests and roles of land conflict stakeholders towards land conflict management. There should be a way to monitor land conflict stakeholders' activities on land transactions, especially in rural and peri-urban areas where the customary system is practised. Incorporating the customary land tenure system into the statutory system by overseeing the land conflict stakeholders' activities and encouraging documentation of all land transactions would reduce land conflict in the state. Overall, the study has contributed to the body of knowledge by identifying the impacts of land conflict stakeholders' roles towards increasing or reducing land conflict in society.

## **7. ACKNOWLEDGMENT**

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## **9. AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS**

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## KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

**Stakeholders:** Individuals or organisations participating in land conflicts, land transactions, land conflict management, and land administration processes.

**Roles:** Activities of stakeholders that positively or negatively affect land conflicts.