

Smallholder Farmers' Perception of Land Conflict: A Case Study of Mara Chiefdom, Bombali District, Sierra Leone

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Abstract:- This research aimed to assess the perceptions of smallholder farmers in Mara chiefdom, Bombali District, regarding land conflicts. It focused on investigating types, causes, impacts, and strategies for mitigating these conflicts. Quantitative and qualitative study was used, with 80 household head farmers from four communities and four (4) focus group Discussions. Data was collected through primary methods, including questionnaires and focus group discussions. Results from the research revealed that the prevailing types of land conflicts are family, individual, and land use conflict. Factors responsible for these conflicts are the weak nature of national and local policies, the increase in population, and gender biases in terms of allocation of land and settling of land disputes. Conflicts impact humans, the environment, and society, and dialogue has effectively addressed these conflicts.

The study suggests the government should collaborate with landowners, raise land policy awareness, engage farmers, cattle rearers, Sun Bird Bio Energy Company, formerly Addax, and establish a local control mechanism. It also recommends community consent for land custodians to avoid misuse. Future research should involve a large-scale study for more reliable findings.

Keywords:- *Smallholder Farmers, Land Conflict.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Probably the most significant resource that humans require for daily survival is the land. At different levels, every human activity and means of subsistence depend either directly or indirectly on land. However, the different usage groups associate land with distinct meanings. For example, the requirements for land for the production and services of builders, manufacturers, fishermen, miners, hunters, and farmers vary (Rashid Adisa, 2012). Because of this, among all user groups, agricultural production likely demonstrates the highest level of sophistication in the use of land. In addition to having to be able to deliver water and nutrients that are unique to a given crop, agricultural land must also meet certain requirements for soil temperature, texture, structure, and pH levels. However, the land is a finite and relatively scarce resource with limitations to

access and use that are both man-made and natural (Tarhule and Lamb, 2003).

Different land uses, and land scarcity have made it necessary for different levels of competition to arise for its usage. Therefore, land rivalry between and among various user groups has always been the misery of humanity. On the one hand, agricultural user groups compete with non-agricultural user organizations. On the other hand, there are different degrees of intra-user group rivalry, which have occasionally led to conflict. Indeed, the struggle for land usage is getting more intense and competitive, mostly as a result of the growing populations of people and animals (Gefu and Kolawole, 2002). There is evidence that the pace of population expansion is still quite high, placing a great deal of strain on the land resources that are available, with different environmental and social consequences (Werhamann, 2008).

These competitions for its use cause conflicts, an according to Shivji (1998) Land conflicts resulted from economic liberalization, who also noted that "land grabbing by persons in positions of power or material wealth and influence" was a contributing factor. These conflicts are a common occurrence that can arise between many stakeholders at any time or location, mostly due to differing expectations on land usage (Torre et al., 2014; Wehrmann, 2008). Because of the ongoing pressures of urbanization and population increase, the world's agricultural land has seen several changes over the 20th century. The requirement for greater infrastructure development projects, particularly in emerging nations, has been highlighted by these variables taken together (Wang et al. (2015); Singhal (2009); Marshall and Shortle (2015).

Particularly in rural regions, owners being ejected from land, water, or woods under duress tend to provoke these kinds of disputes more (Tilt et al., 2009; Ostrom and Nagendra, 2006). The social welfare theory's welfare economic features of land disputes state that "the superposition of lands must not depend upon from one use to another but must be only on its efficient distribution concerning the economic activities" (Cheshire and Vermeulen, 2009). Therefore, Conflicts over land use generally harm the poor or the natural or building environment. They either decrease the quality of life for parts of society or, if they are addressed and ameliorated,

contribute to additional state expenditures and impact the national wealth (Wehrmann, 2008).

Kariuki (2005) emphasized that land conflicts in Kenya have varying effects on various groups, with the impoverished being more significantly impacted than the affluent. However, their effects vary across genders, urban and rural populations, farmers and pastoralists, and marginalized groups including squatters, ethnic minorities, and orphans.

Land conflicts in Sierra Leone lead to a breakdown in communal relationships and the abuse of women and girls, claims Genevieve Talbot (2019). According to Network Movement for Justice and Development, it causes people to lose their livelihoods, violates their human rights, denies them access to food, lacks transparency, and interferes with their ability to educate their children (NMJD, 2013). These confrontations can obstruct societal advancement and are occasionally quite deadly.

In Africa and around the world, land conflicts are a frequent occurrence that negatively affects the majority of smallholder farmers who work in rural regions. This threat does not spare Sierra Leone. The COCORIOKO Newspaper (January 8, 2021) claims that if land conflicts are not resolved right away, they would turn lethal and result in open warfare. The media highlights unethical actions by the Ministry of Land and local government as the main causes of this kind of conflict. It suggests that throughout the war, individuals began utilizing tools like shovels, stones, and cutlasses.

Over the years, there have been many distinct kinds of land conflicts in Sierra Leone. These include the disputes between the people living in the Malen Chiefdom in the south and the Scofin company (Baxer, 2013); the conflict between farmers and miners in Tongo in the east (Kallon, 2015). According to information published by the COCORIOKO Newspaper on January 8, 2020, land dispute also happened in the country's western region, including Freetown.

To lessen the issue, the government, non-governmental groups, the commercial sector, and international organizations have established a number of solutions. Many

underlying variables appear to be responsible for the persistence of this issue in Sierra Leone. These likely vary from the poor documentation (data) of these difficulties, bad management, lack of institutional governance, and the lack of study on the topic. Land conflict is thus a problem that the nation faces yet is unavoidable. As a result, this study will primarily address the issues raised above.

➤ *Objectives of the Study*

- *General Aim*

This study aims to assess smallholder farmers' perception of land conflict in Mara chiefdom, Bombali district, Sierra Leone.

- *Specific Objectives*

The specific objectives include;

- ✓ To understand the types of land conflicts
- ✓ To examine the causes of land conflicts,
- ✓ To assess the impact of land conflicts on smallholder's farmer, and
- ✓ To evaluate the strategies used in mitigating land conflicts

II. STUDY METHODOLOGY

➤ *Research Design*

The methods employed to ascertain the researcher's goals for the study are referred to as the research design. Research design, according to Kothari (2004:31), is the setting up of parameters for data collection and analysis with the intention of combining relevance to the study purpose. The impression of land conflict in the study region was evaluated by smallholder's farmers using a case study research approach. In order for the researcher to analyze the issue material independently, case study was employed. To get data for the study, both qualitative and quantitative research methods were used.

➤ *Study Location*

The study was conducted in Mara chiefdom, Bombali district. Bombali district is located in the north east region of Sierra Leone.

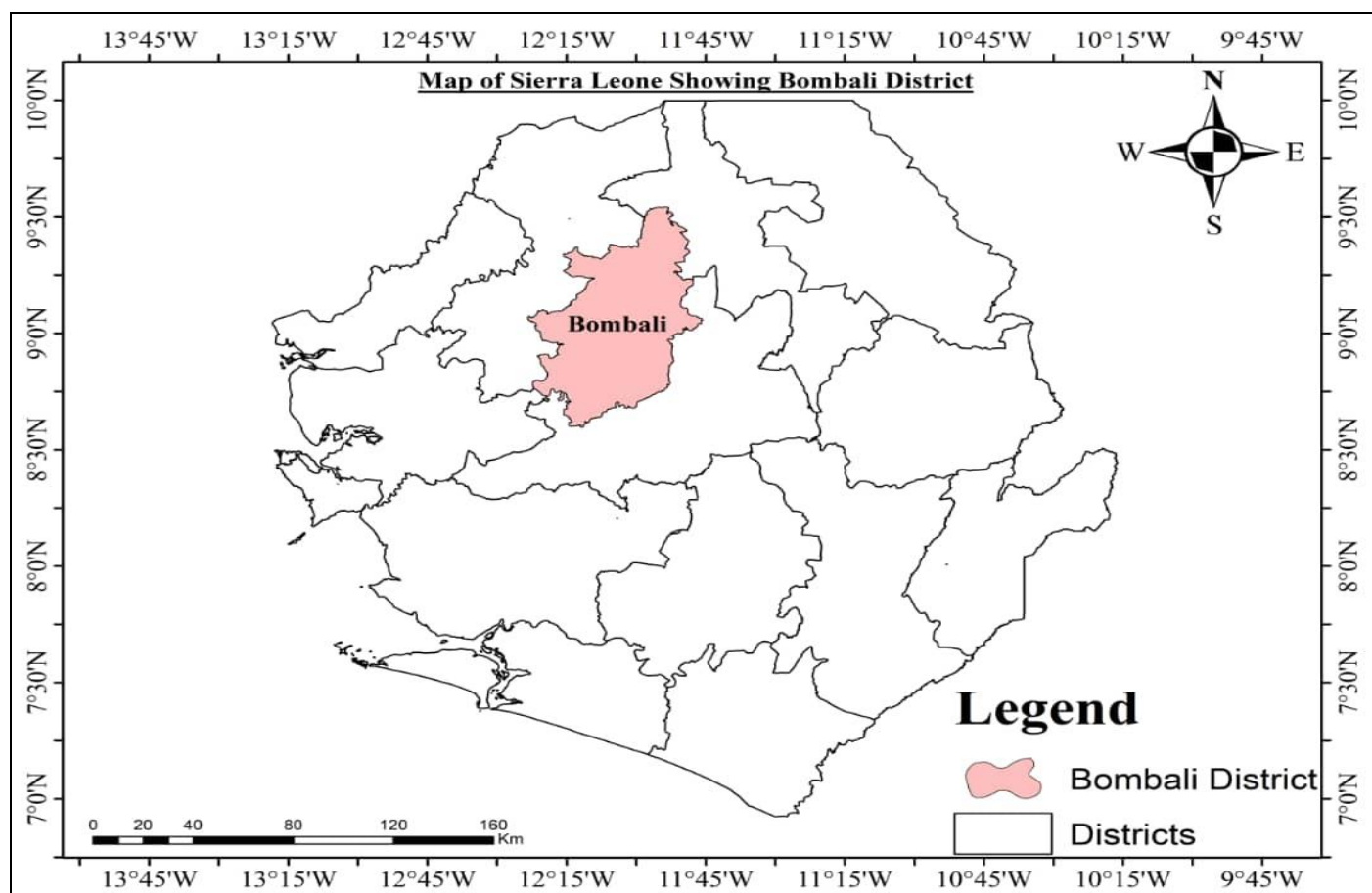


Fig 1 Map of Sierra Leone Showing Bombali District

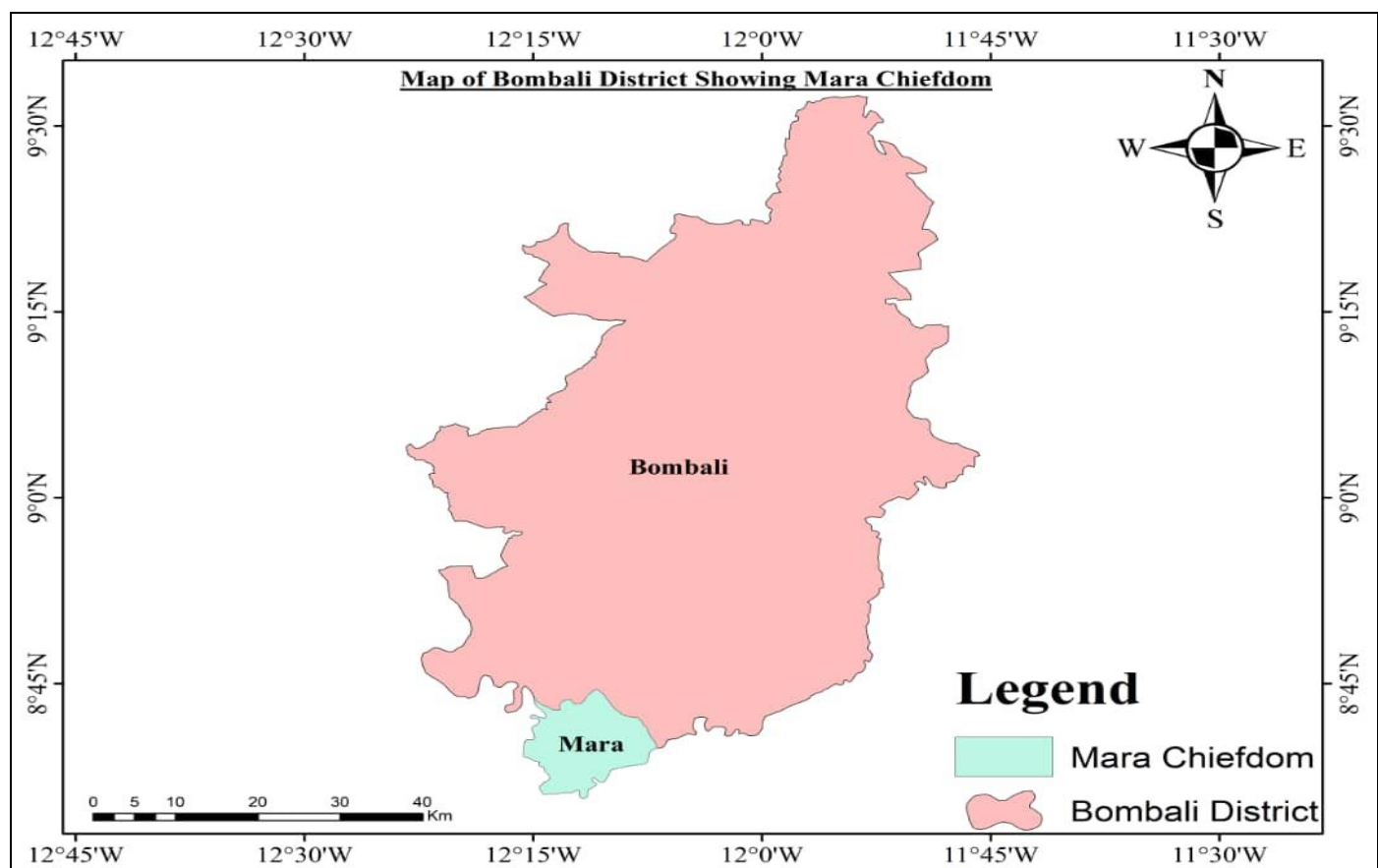


Fig 2 Map of Bombali District showing Mara Chiefdom

➤ Study Population, Sample Frame and Sample Size

For this study, the study population consists of smallholder farmers in selected communities (Tonka, Mara, Kaimpakolo, and Mabalafu) in Mara chiefdom, Bombali district. The sample frame consists of 150 smallholder farming households from the study area. A total of 80 smallholder farmers were interviewed using the semi-structured questionnaires to collect data quantitatively. This is about 53.33% of the sample frame. For the focus group discussion, one focus group was done per community, which sums up to 4 focus groups to collect qualitative data using the FGD field guide that was developed.

➤ Sampling Techniques

The researcher used both probability and non-probability sampling. Purposive non-probability sampling was used to identify the communities in Mara chiefdom and simple random sampling for having smallholder farmers to be interviewed using the semi-structured interview guide for the study at their household level. This was done to give every smallholder farmer a fair chance of being selected for the study.

➤ Data Analysis

For this study, both qualitative and quantitative methods were used and applied in processing the data collected. The qualitative procedure involved factual and logical interpretation of the findings through interviews. The quantitative approach was applied by obtaining the findings

through questionnaires and processing them via statistical packages. Data were edited, coded, classified, and tabulated with a view of reducing it to manageable proportions. SPSS 20.0 and Excell 2017 were employed to analyze data and interpretation to conclude. The data were presented in , charts, and graphs from Excell 2017.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This presents a graphical illustration of the findings obtained from the study. It further gives a background of the different variables and how they were obtained from respondents in the field. Results are arranged under five (5) broad categories according to the objectives of the study. These are the socio-demographic characteristics of respondents, the types of land conflict, the causes of land conflict, the impacts of land conflicts on smallholder farmers, and the strategies to solve the land conflict. These objectives are orderly presented with their variables and are detailed below.

A. Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Socio-demographic characteristics here mean the different variables those makeup respondents'. It covers age, sex, marital status, levels of formal education attained, and household size.

➤ Age

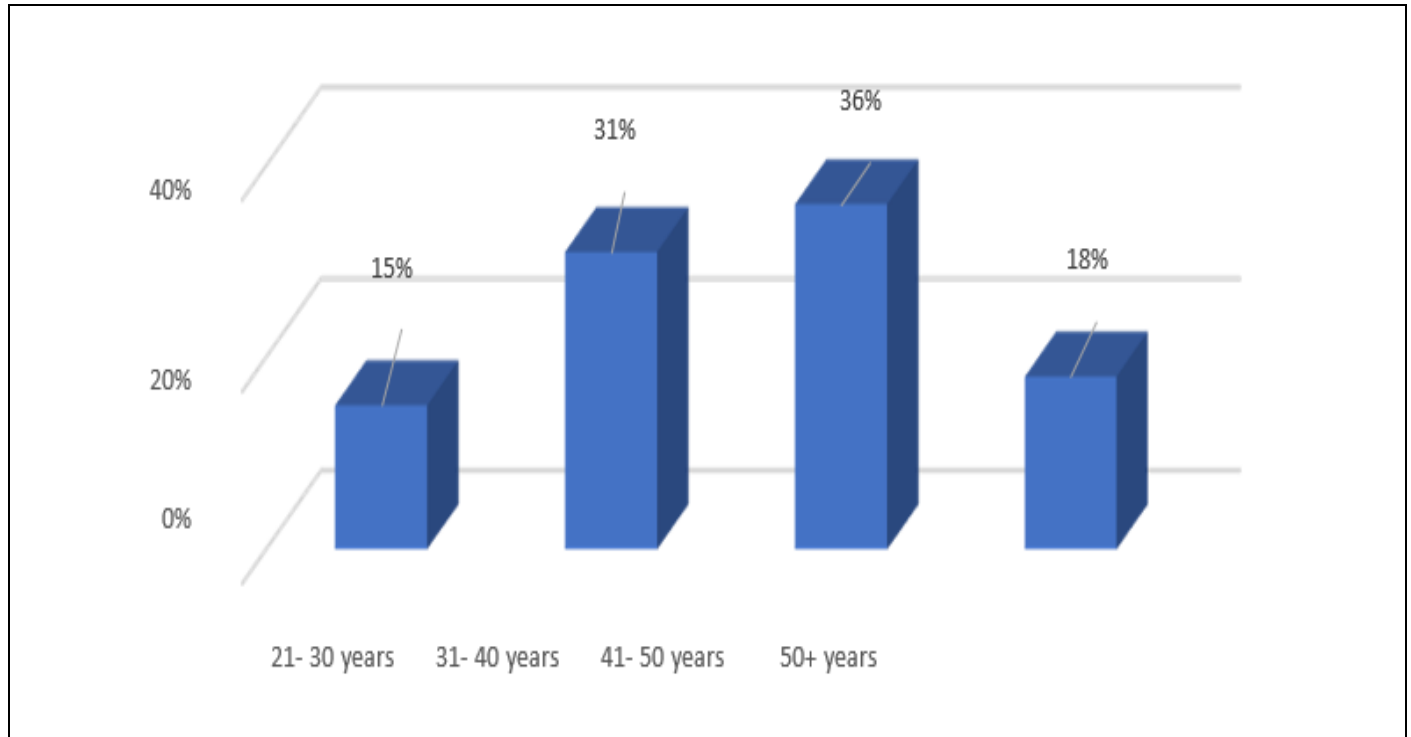


Fig 3: Distribution of Respondents by Age
Field Survey 2021

From figure 3 above, it is revealed 36 percent of respondents are within the age bracket of 41- 50 years. This is closely followed by those within 31–40 years with 31 percent. Fifty and above (18%) and 21-30 years (15%) are

the other age bracket targeted for the study. This indicates that the majorities of respondents have passed their 40 years and are attaining aging status.

➤ *Sex*

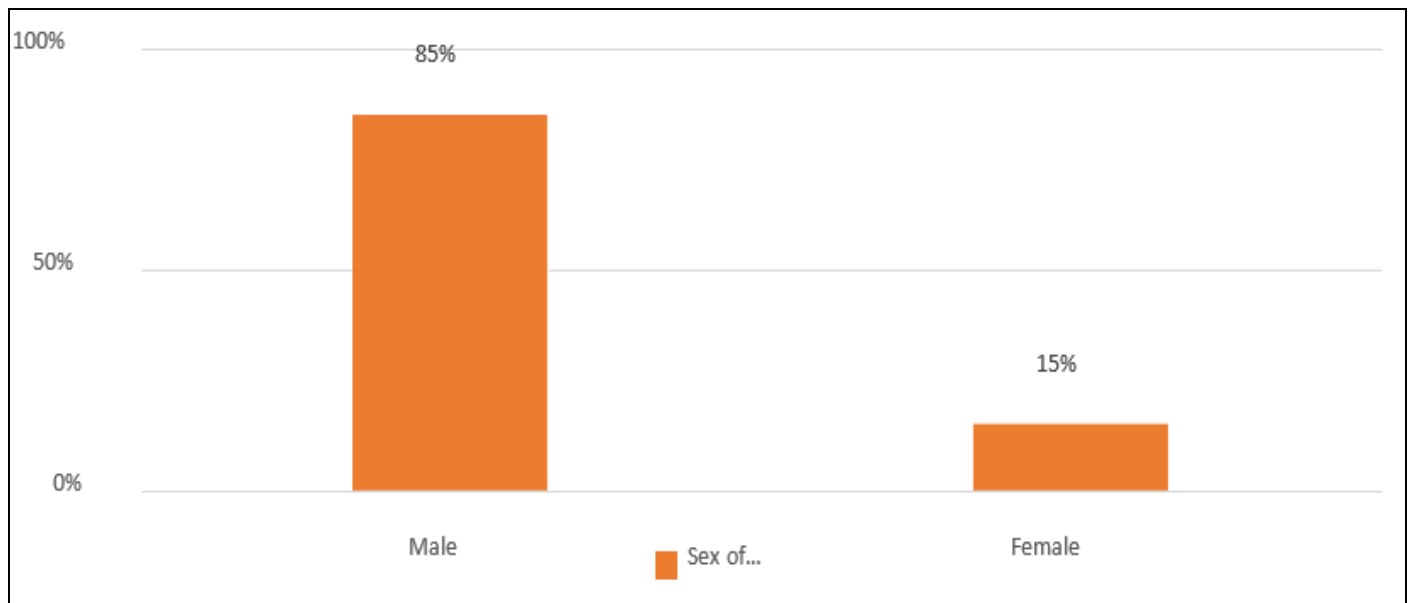


Fig 4 Distribution of Respondents by Sex
Field Survey 2021

Figure 4 above shows that over four-fifths of respondents are male, with 85 percent, and females are in the minority, with only 15 percent. This is because heads of household were interviewed and are usually males in the rural areas.

➤ *Level of Education*

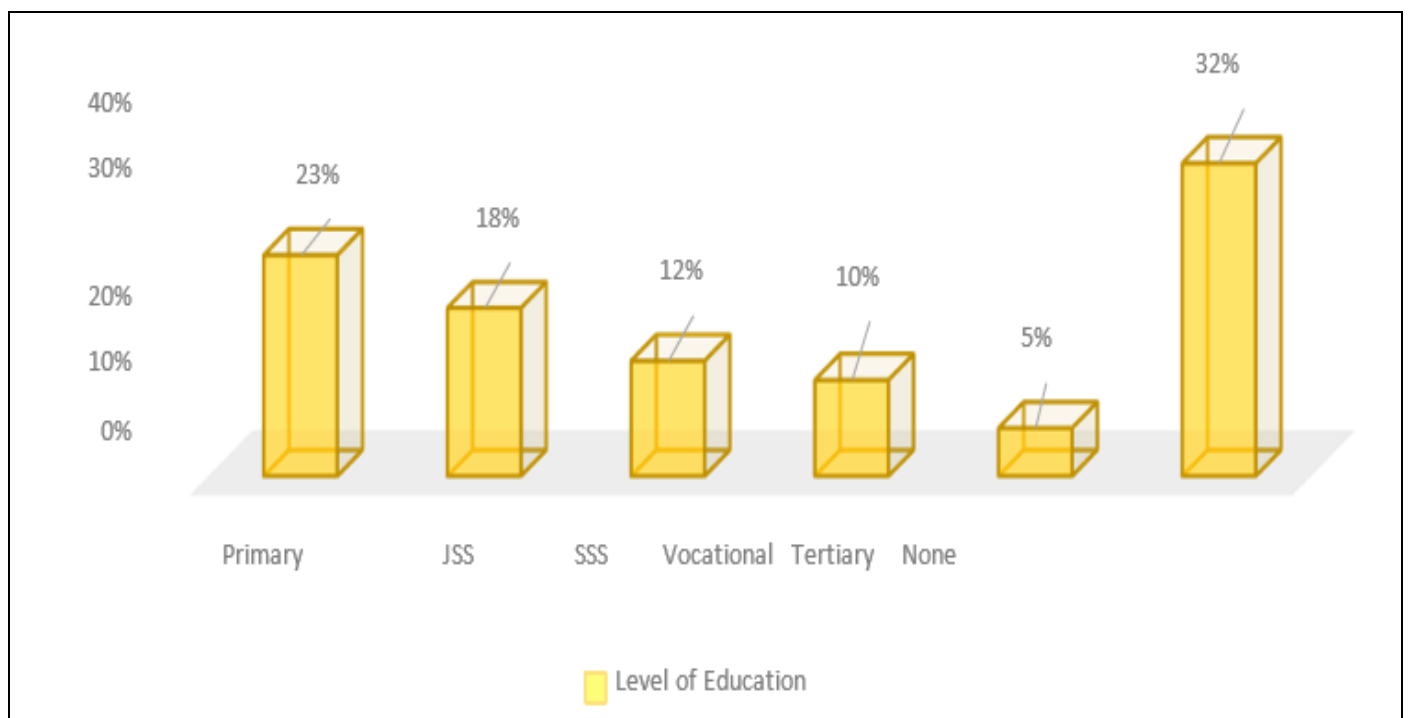


Fig 5 Distribution of Respondents by level of Education
Field Survey 2021

The study in figure 5 above reveals that 32% of respondents did not attend school, with the remaining 23% attending primary school, 18% attending JSS, 12% attending SSS, and 10% attending vocational schools. Tertiary

institutions occupied the lowest level, with only 5% of respondents attending tertiary institutions. This low level of education in rural areas may contribute to land conflict, as seen in a study in Nigeria by Wehrman (2008).

➤ *Household Size*

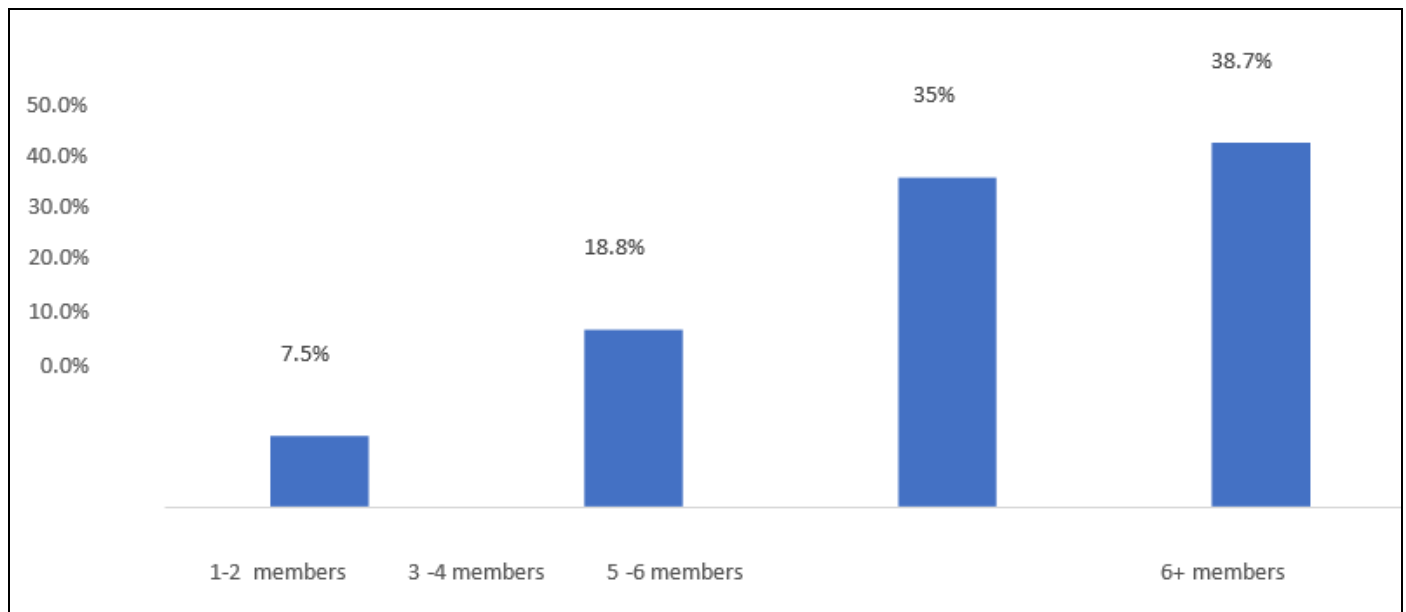


Fig 6 Distribution of Respondents by Household Size
Field Survey 2021

From figure 6 above, it indicates that most (38.7%) of the respondents interviewed have a household size of above 6, 35% are between 5 and 6 members per household, 18.8% are between 3 and 5 members and 7.5% are between 1-2 members per household.

➤ *Marital Status*

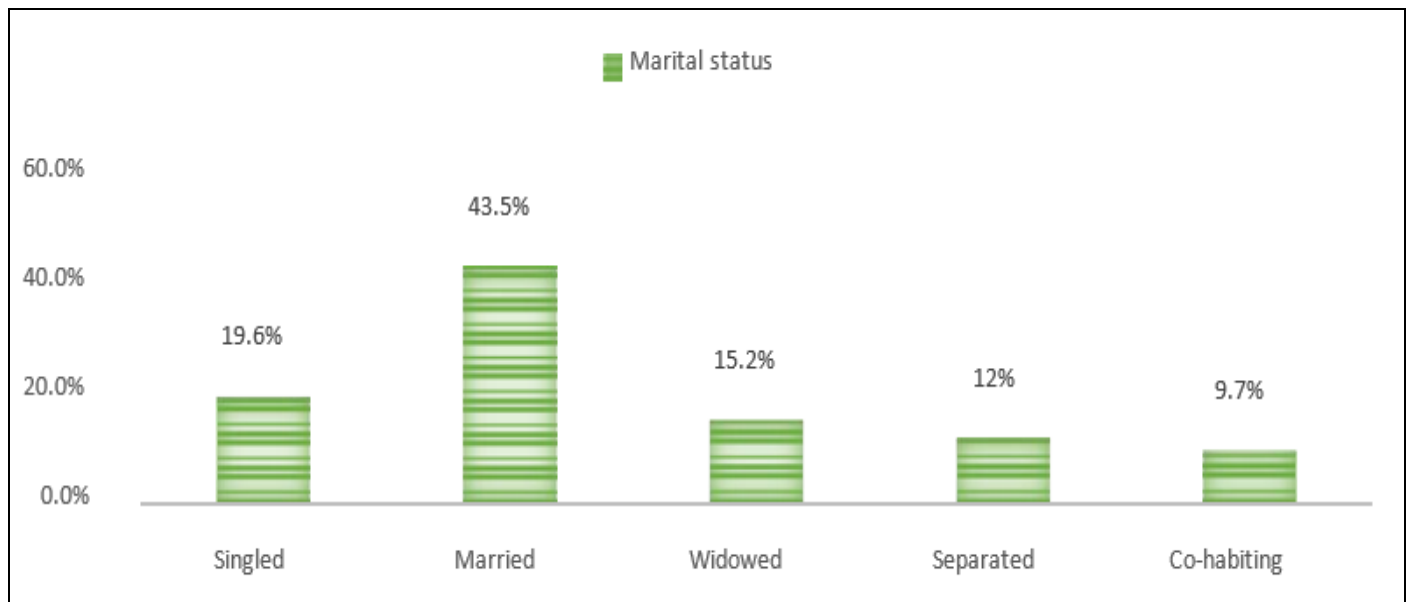


Fig 7 Distribution of Respondents by Marital Status
Field Survey 2021

The study reveals that (43.5%) of the respondents are married with only 9.7% cohabiting, while the majority are single (19.6%), widowed (15%), separated (12%), and separated (12%), indicating a diverse marital status.

B. Types of Land Conflicts

In this section, the different types of land conflicts that occurred in the study communities are discussed. To better understand this, the research investigates the other categories of land ownership and the different uses of land among the communities. Then, it covers the various conflicts and the frequency of occurrence of these conflicts.

➤ *Category of Land Ownership*

Forms of land ownership here mean the possession or ownership of land by an individual, state, or community.

Therefore, respondents were asked to state the ownership of land in these communities, and their views are presented below.

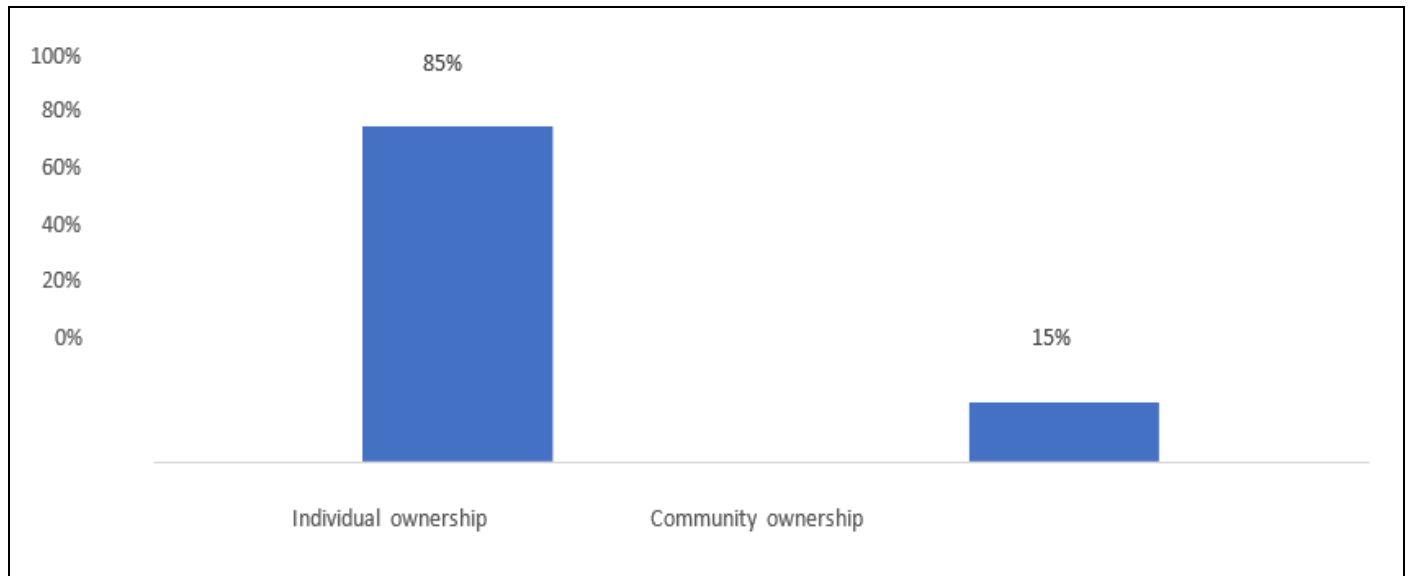


Fig 8 Category of Land Ownership in the Study Communities
Field Survey 2021

It is revealed from figure 8 that individual (including families) and the community-owned land in the study communities and that majority (85%) of the land belongs to individuals, while the remaining (15%) is under community control. Among the individual ownership, some stated that the land was initially owned by the family but have divided it among individual units. In terms of the land they currently occupy or work on, the majority said it belongs to them, and some of the members are occupying or working on community land with minimal fees being paid for it.

From the focus group discussion (FGD) also, it was evident that land in the community is mainly owned either by individuals or the community. However, there are portions of land that the communities have the right to. They

further explained that there are landowning families in the community that sell or distribute land among inhabitants. These people, according to their explanation, are descendants of the founders of the villages. However, for community land, they were told to be owned by the entire community, though the community stakeholders sometimes influence decisions on land use.

➤ *Types of Land use in the Study Area*

Types of land use here mean the different ways land is being used or the various works that are being performed on land. From respondents' views, land in the communities is used for a range of activities and includes herding, farming, dwelling, mining, and company uses. This is shown below.

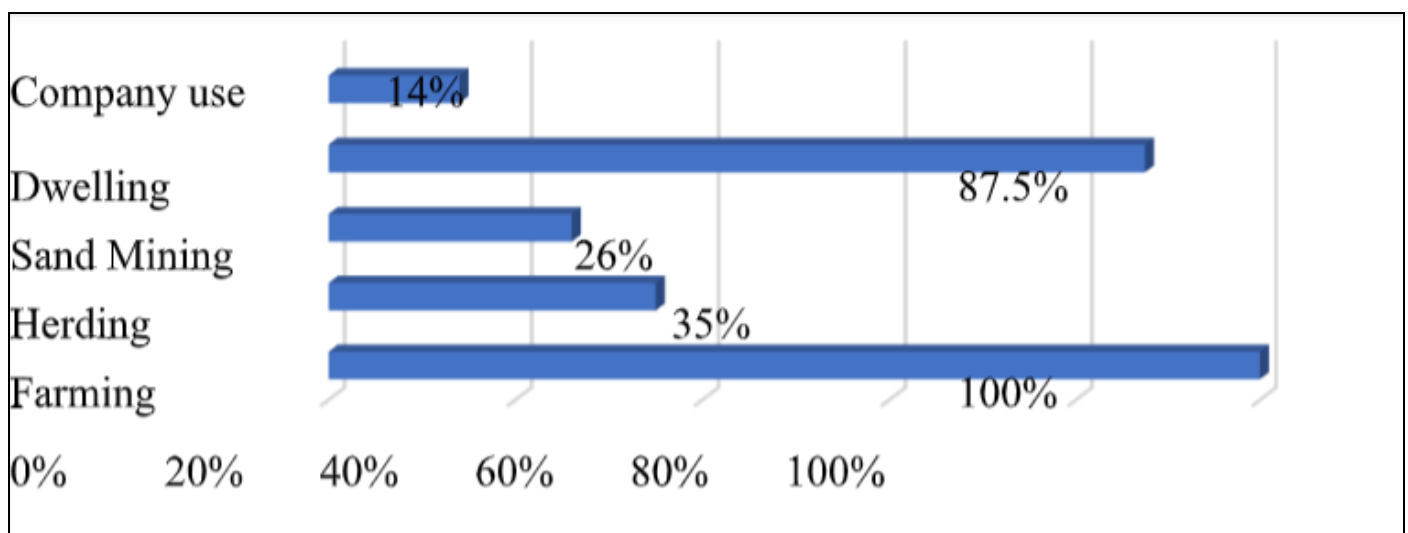


Fig 9 Types of Land use in the Study Communities
Field Survey Data 2021

In terms of the usage by respondents of the study communities, all (100%) stated that they use their land for farming purposes. This is followed by a dwelling (87.5%) and herding (35%). Sand mining (26%) and company use (14%) are the other land-use types in the study communities. Similar views were also revealed by Mwangira (2003) that in most rural areas, land could be used for residential/dwelling and agriculture (farming and cattle rearing).

The focus group discussion is also not in disagreement with the findings of the individual interview. They said personal land is determined by individual preference, while community or public land is used for public purposes such

as a mosque, church, clinic, football field, markets, etc. FGD 1, for instance, *in the Kaimpakolo community*, quoted the following: “*Wetin fine for mi, na in ar go do na mi land.*” This, when translated, means “*What will be good for me will be what I will do on my land.*”

➤ Types of Land Conflict in the Study Area

These include the different disputes or conflicts that arise from the different land use in the study area. During this study, respondents were asked to state the different land conflicts within their communities and their frequency of occurrence. The types of disputes in the study communities are expressed in the figure below.

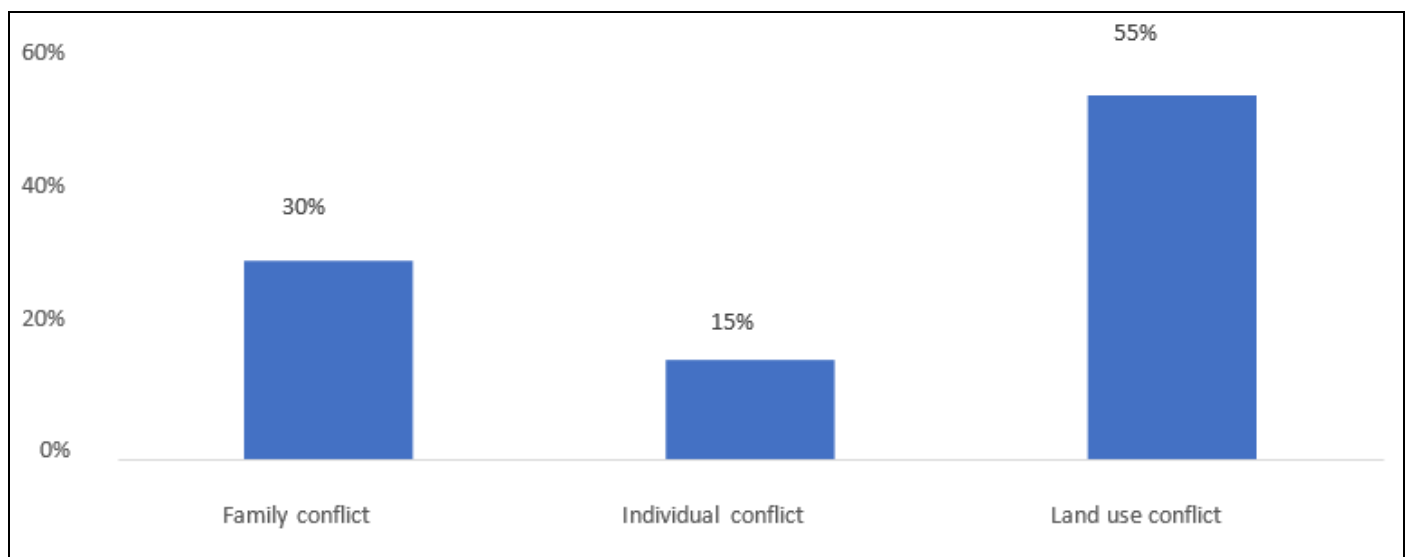


Fig 10 Types of Land Conflict in the Study Communities
Field Survey Data 2021

From figure 10 above, different types of land conflicts occurred in the study communities. However, the most common form of these conflicts is land use conflict (55%). These are conflicts that typically arise over land use, for example, between farmers and herdsman, sand miners, or between the community people and the company, etc. Next to it is a family conflict with 30%. This arises when members of the family clash over ownership of a piece of family land. The minor type identified by respondents is individual conflict (15%). This occurs when a dispute arises over land use by individuals either because of sales of land or an illegal claim.

Summaries from the FGD also revealed the land mentioned above conflicts within the communities. These conflicts, according to them, mostly arise due to the illegal possession of land by individuals or lack of fulfillment of promises by Sunbird Bioenergy Limited, formerly Addax Bioenergy, or due to destruction of farms by goats, sheep, and/or cows. The frequency of occurrence of these conflicts according to the FGD depends on the types of conflict. For example, the conflict between farmers and herders occurs

every year. The ones within the company and landowners had happened within the last 1-3 years moderately. These findings align with Wit (2013) that land conflicts are classified into different types ranging from farmers and pastoralists, investors and community residents, etc.

C. Causes of Land Conflicts in the Study Area

The causes of land conflicts in this study are the various reasons or factors that contribute to land conflicts in the study areas. Key aspects looked into in this study are the availability or presence of strong land policies, population pressure, and the committee that implements or handles issues related to land.

➤ The Nature of National and Local Land Policies

This refers to the availability of policies that seek to preserve the peaceful and good use of land. Among these are ownership policies, demarcation of land, terms of conditions on a lease, national and local land acts, etc. Among these, respondents were asked to indicate whether these policies are strong or weak in their communities, and their views are presented in the chart below.

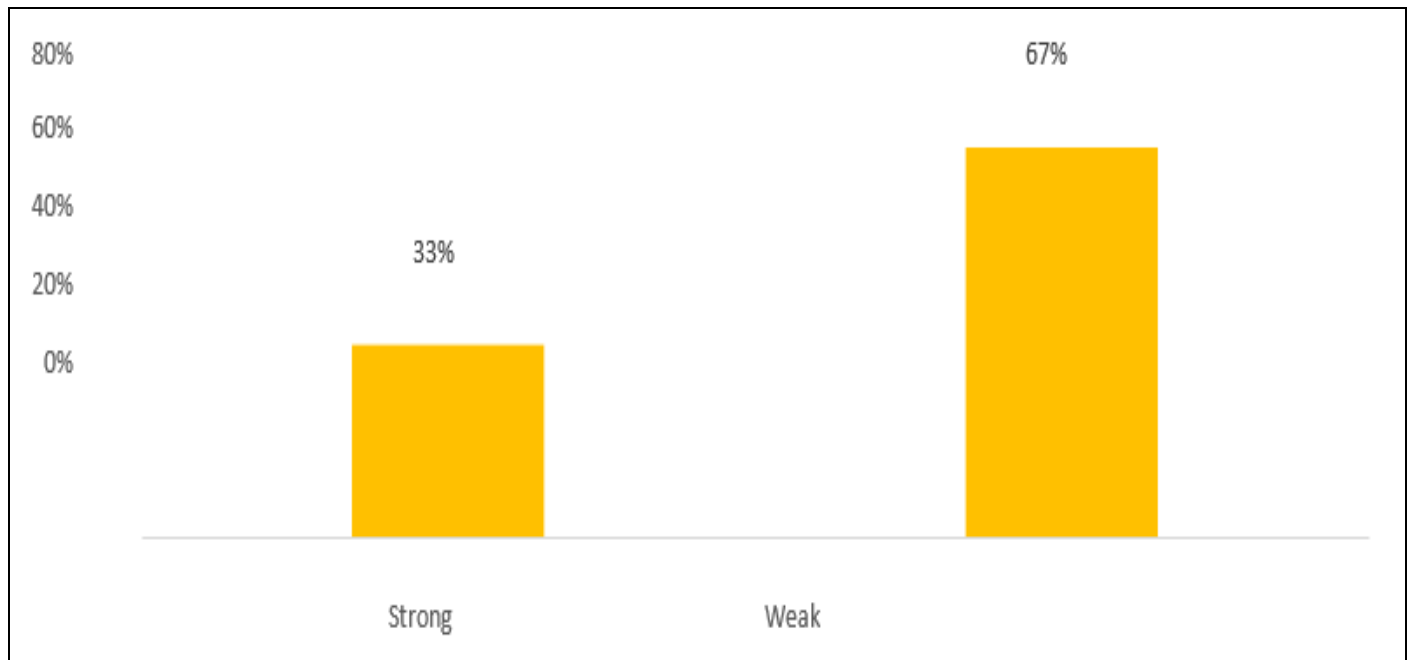


Fig 11 The Nature of National and Local Land Policies
Field Survey Data 2021

From figure 11 above, it is evident, according to respondents, that these policies are weak in many ways within the study area because the majority (67%) of the study population reported that. As a result, land conflicts are bound to occur at any given time. Similarly, Derby (2002) argued that many countries of the developing world have weak policies to facilitate land issues and are likely to contribute to land conflict.

According to the FGD, the weakness of the policies is among the leading factors contributing to land conflicts in the study area. They stated that some of these policies are in existence but lack full enforcement. For example, they explained that the compensation policy between Sunbird

Bioenergy Limited and landowners formerly was not carried out appropriately. They further revealed that most community members are ignorant of the policies and therefore make enforcement so difficult. Similar findings were also revealed by HAKIARDHI (2013) that lack of public awareness on land laws has resulted in land violations in most rural communities.

➤ Population Pressure

Population pressure means the burden posed by an increase in population over the fixed or available land. Therefore, respondents were asked to indicate the rate at which the population has been increasing within the study area. Their responses are shown in the figure below.

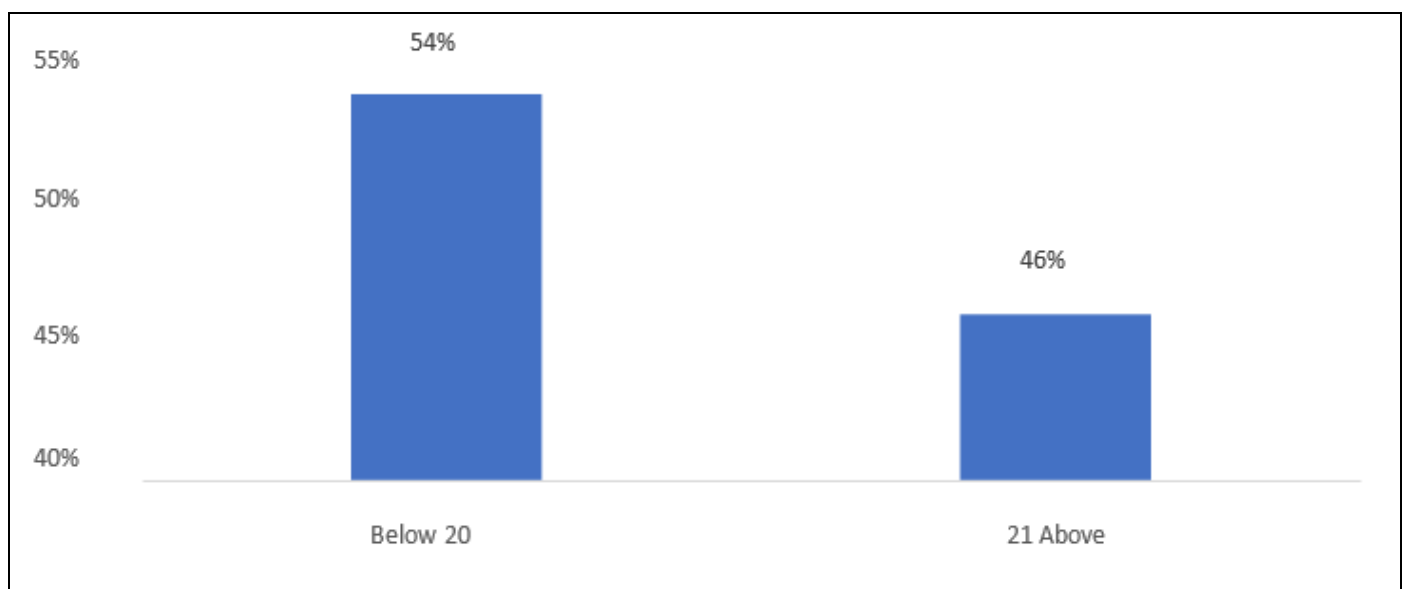


Fig 12 Perceptions on Population Growth Rate
Field Survey Data 2021

From figure 12 above, the population growth rate had been gradually increasing over the years. According to the majority (54%) of the respondents, the growth rate per annum is below 20 per community, while the remaining revealed that it is within 21-50 (46%) per community. Therefore, the gradual increase in population could likely be a result of the presence of the Sunbird Bioenergy Company, formerly Addax, and has the possibility to result in conflict when certain demands are not fulfilled for the use of land. These findings agree with Dang (2006) that population pressures cause land conflict.

This was also found to be true during the FGD. This, according to them, is not constant. For instance, the high growth (21 above) was mainly due to the company's establishment. They stated that the normal growth rate per annum is below 20. It was investigated how the increasing growth rate is contributing to land conflict. They revealed that land is mainly owned by indigenes but has been divided

(landholding families) and might be difficult to be easily acquired by strangers. Some of the lands that were given to the strangers long ago and now have been quarreled over as the strangers too are claiming to own the land.

➤ *Composition of the Land Committee*

These are mostly stakeholders involved in matters related to land, i.e., resolving conflicts, selling land, etc. Since every study community professed such a committee, the study emphasizes the composition of these committees. Respondents stated that they are mainly local authorities, including heads of land-owning families, chiefdom authorities, and some judiciary members. In terms of the gender composition, it was revealed that most (73%) of these committees comprise males. Few (23%) stated that it sometimes includes both males and females, and none of the committees was reported to be composed only by females. This is shown below.

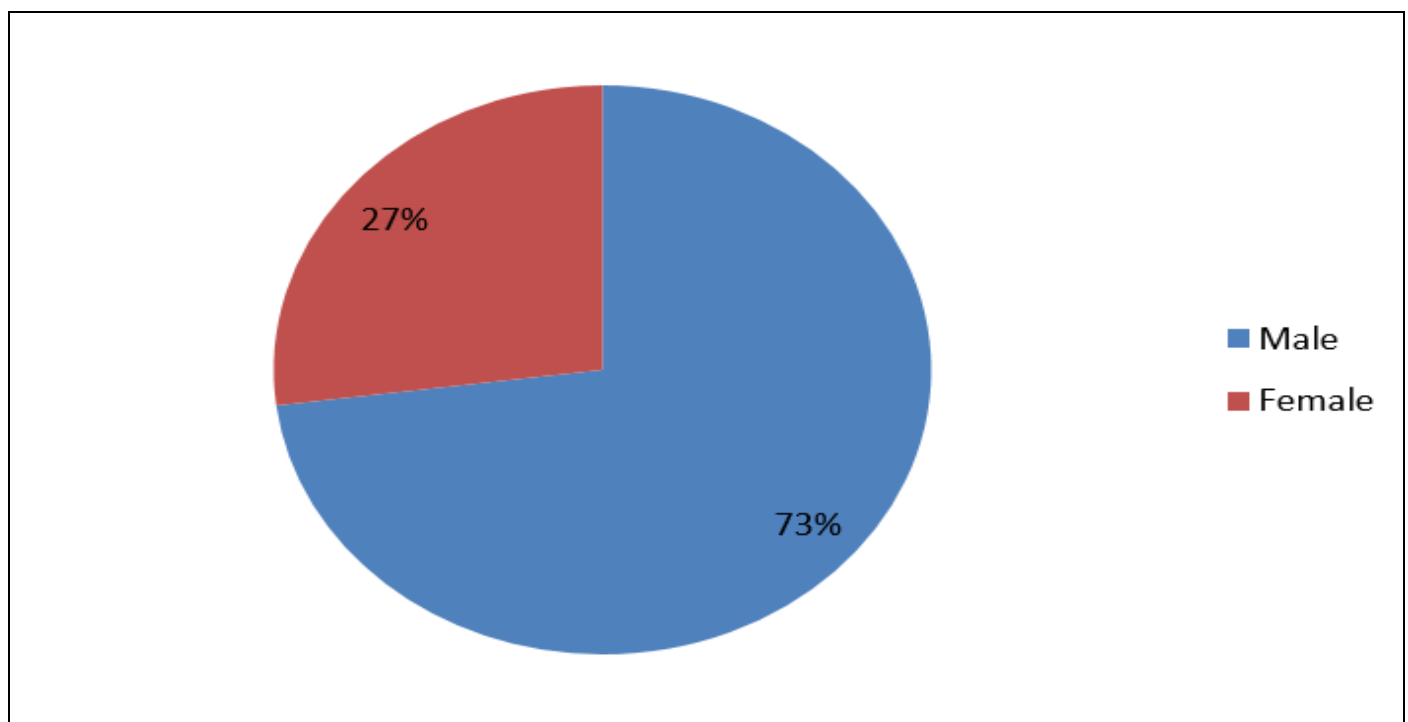


Fig 12 Gender Composition of the Land Handling Committee
Field Survey Data 2021

In the FGD as well, the same findings were revealed. Therefore, this result in conflicts, as males has mostly been favored over their female counterparts in terms of land issues. According to them, descendants of a female child from the same parents are deprived of their grandparents' land in favor of descendants of the male child, and this, on too many occasions, leads to conflicts. This, according to them, is because the male child is considered the legitimate child and holds the lineage of their family. Further, it was expressed by members of the FGD that members of this committee sometimes addressed issues or conflicts to their advantages, and this does not please the community people.

D. Impacts of Land Conflicts in the Study Area

The impact here relates to the consequences that arise as a result of land conflict in the study communities. This includes impact on man, effects on the environment, impact on the community, and the categories of the population affected most.

➤ *Impacts on Man*

The effects of land conflicts on man here mean the direct consequences on the man that arise from a land dispute. The following data collected during the research, as illustrated in the diagram, was revealed.

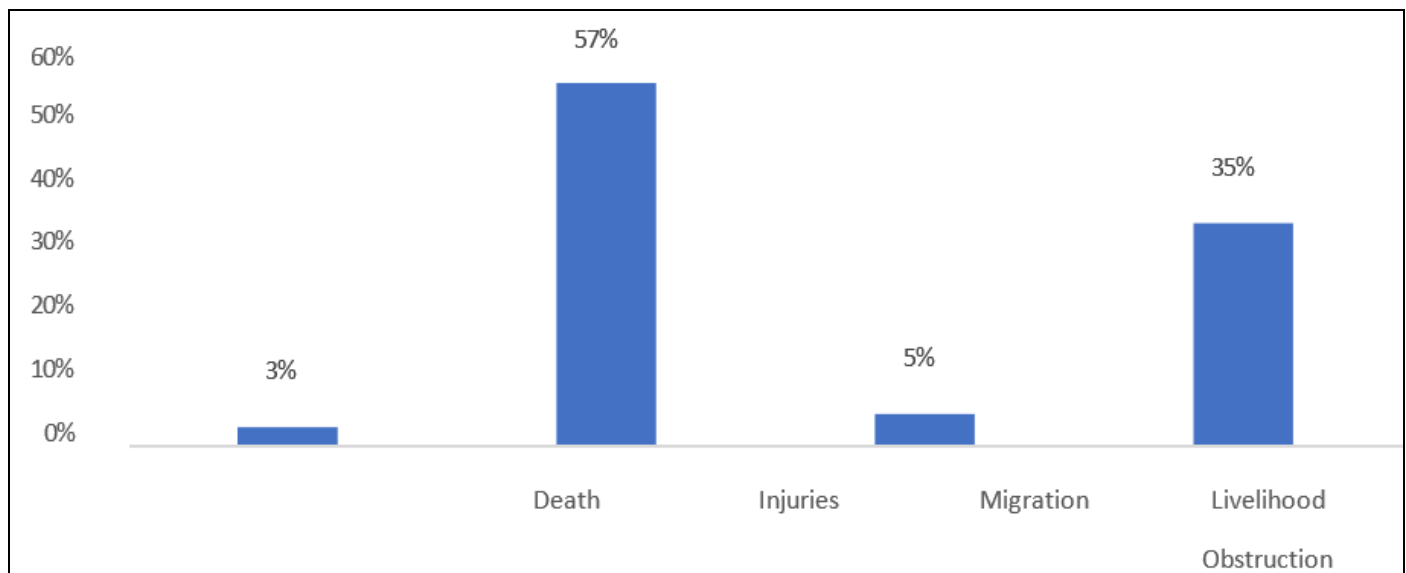


Fig 13 Effects of Land Conflict on Man
Field Survey Data 2021

From the figure above, it is evident that various direct consequences occur to man due to land conflict. These include death, injuries, migration, and destruction of livelihoods. In terms of severity, injuries (including wounds, fractures, physical impairment, etc.) are the expected consequences on a man, with 57 percent of the total respondents stating it. This is followed by obstruction to livelihoods with 35 percent. Death (3%) and migration (5%) are the other consequences but rarely occur, particularly in severe cases.

In the FGD, the consequences are also numerous. In addition to those highlighted in the interview, there are also mental disorders and sickness. This, according to them, sometimes occurs when conflicts occur between two or more parties and one decides to use traditional means like

going to the herbalist to inflict sickness on the other. It was further stressed that it affects people's livelihood in different ways whenever these conflicts occur, thereby making life difficult.

➤ *Impacts on the Environment*

This is when land conflict results in negatively altering the condition of the environment in a particular area. From the survey, the only environmental effects of land conflict are pollution and lack of use. The lack of service is when a "conflicted land" is bound to be used by the parties involved in the conflict. On the other hand, pollution arises when a particular party decides to do or release some harmful substance into the environment during the conflict. It is usually done through the burning of houses, crops or using tear gases, etc.

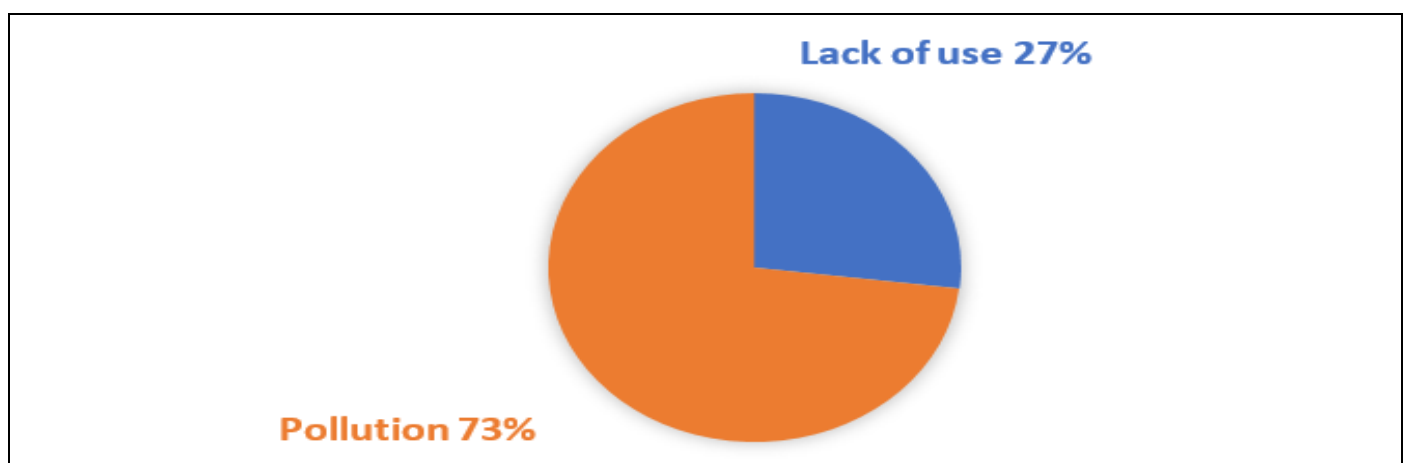


Fig 14 Effects of Land Conflict on the Environment
Field Survey Data 2021

It is revealed in figure 14 above that pollution (73%) is the most common among the two environmental effects in the study area. This is because whenever there is a land conflict; an amount of substance is used that causes land,

air, water, and/or noise pollution. The other (lack of use with 27%) rarely occurs, and most happen when there is no way to resolve the conflict after confrontations. These findings

conform to USAID's (2010) report that land conflict resulted in pollution and lack of land use for a long time.

Responses from the FGD also revealed the above scenario. It was concluded that when land conflicts sometimes occur, people use harmful substances, and these substances will adversely affect the environment. *FGD 3 of the Tonka community said, "When aggrieved youth felt negative about the land used by the company, not in line with the agreed agreement, the plantation of the company was set ablaze by an unknown person, and this caused a negative impact on the environment, including the air. The*

nearby stream is also polluted." The researcher transcribed this.

➤ Impacts on Society

These are the general consequences that land conflict costs society as a whole. Those respondents in the study communities mentioned a lack of unity or cohesion, instability, and low productivity. In terms of their severity, lack of unity (82.5%) was frequently mentioned, followed by instability (45%), and finally low productivity (32%). The chart below presents the findings.

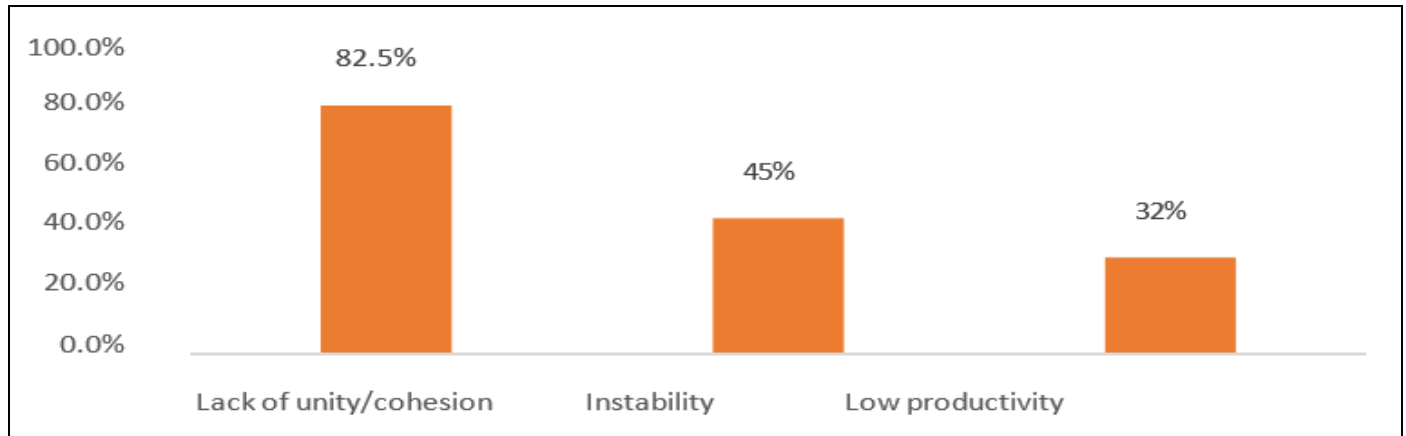


Fig 15 Effects of Land Conflict on the Society
Field Survey Data 2021

The figure above indicates whenever land conflict occurs, there is bound to be fragmentation of the community population, as some will be favoring one party and some the other. This will create disunity and hence deter development. The community will also be unstable due to the violent nature of conflict, which prevents peace from reigning. Finally, low productivity will arise because some of the lands will be bound from use and hence produce nothing at the end of the day. It can therefore be concluded that land conflict is a barrier to community or societal progress. This was in line with summaries of the FGD. Similar findings were also suggested by Wehrmann (2008)

that land conflict will result in cohesion, instability, and low productivity.

➤ Category of the Population been affected most.

In this study, the category of population affected most includes men, women, and children. From the data collected, the men are mostly affected because they are most times directly involved in the conflict. This is because about 62.5 percent of the total respondents mentioned that. This is followed by the children (25%) because they inherit their parent's properties and their lack of self-protection, and women (12.5%) are the least affected by these conflicts. This is shown below.

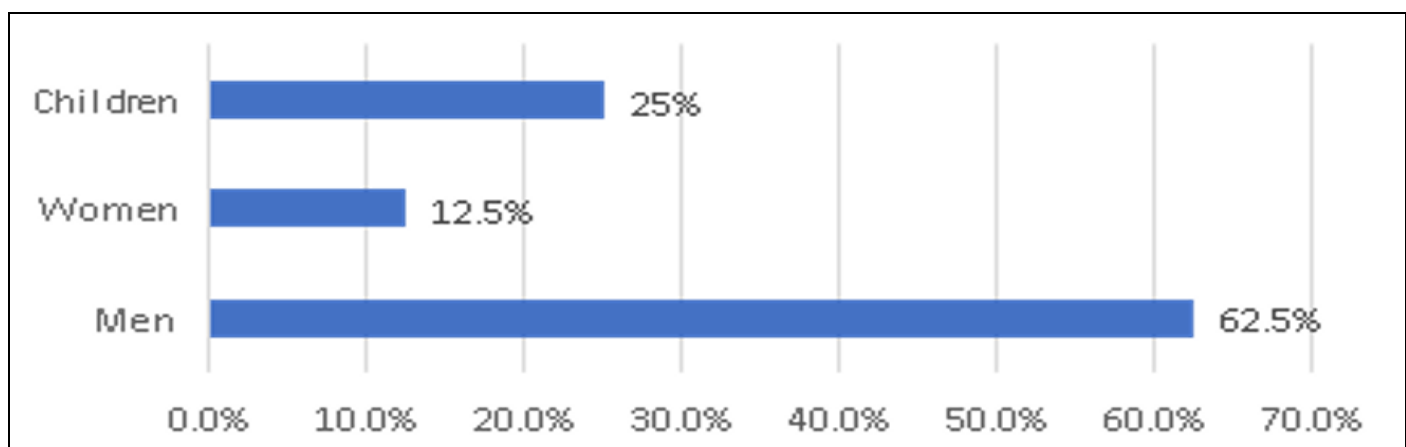


Fig 16 Category of the Population affected the Most
Field Survey Data 2021

Figure 16 denotes that land conflict of any nature leaves behind some consequences for the men, women, or children. While some of these consequences may be less severe, others might be seriously severe and result in long-lasting impacts like physical impairment, fracture, bleeding, etc. This finding suggested that the reasons why most men were found to be highly affected by land conflict were likely because more men were interviewed than their counterparts. This is true in the report produced by Msindi (2009).

The summary from the FGD on this section, however, provided a wider explanation. In addition to the category of the population, it also encompasses the types of land users. It was revealed that farmers are the major land users to suffer from land conflicts because it does not only destroy their produce but also prevent them from undertaking their livelihood activities for survival. In a broader perspective, as

identified, women are more at a disadvantage because most of them are engaged in farming activities only for survival.

E. Strategies to Mitigate Land Conflict in the Study Area

This part of this chapter presents and discusses the different mitigation strategies that had been adopted in addressing land disputes in the study communities. It covers the following areas: ways of addressing land conflicts, ways of preventing land conflicts, and punishment for lawbreakers in regard to land.

➤ Ways of Addressing Land Conflict

These are the various means by which conflicts relating to land are resolved. From the survey, three main ways were identified. They are through family dialogue by local authorities at the local court or at the police station. The bar chart below presents their responses.

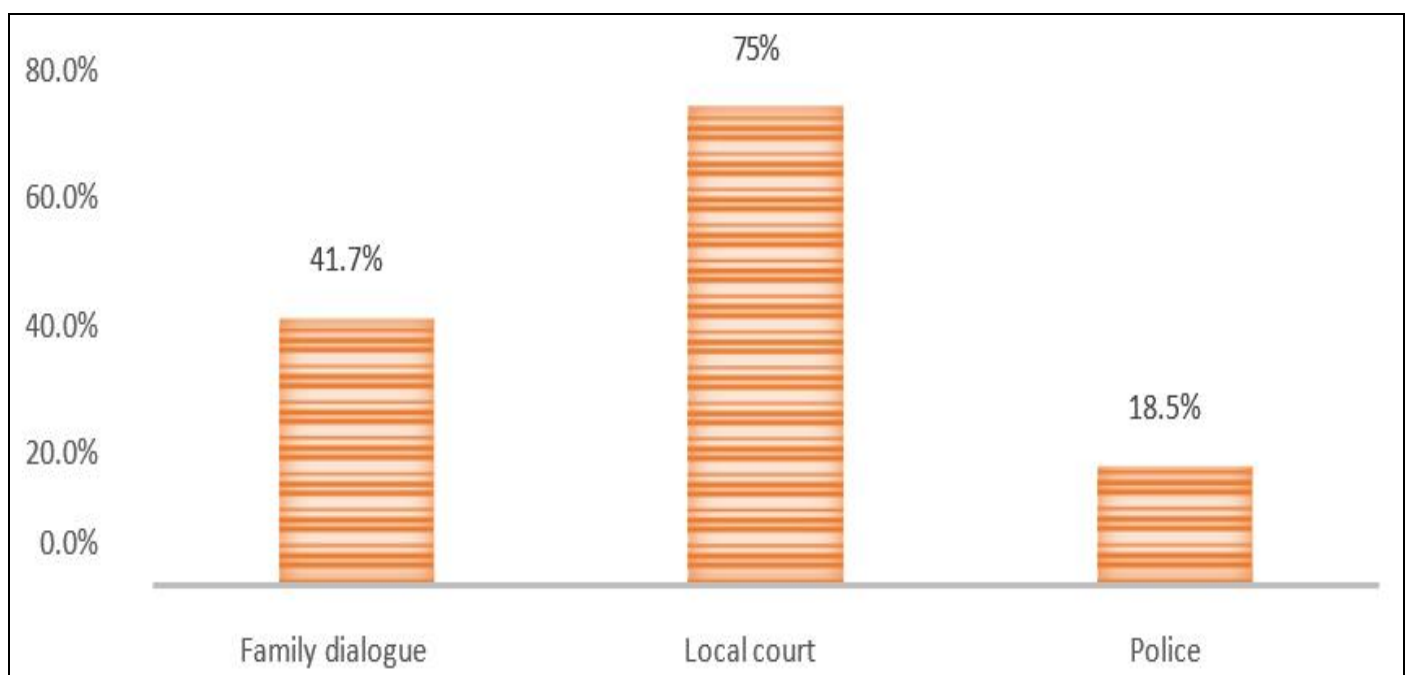


Fig 17 Ways of Addressing Land Conflict
Field Survey Data 2021

From the chart above, it is proven that the intervention of local authorities to address cases at the local court (75%) said this is the most effective way of handling conflict in the study area. This was followed by the issues resolved through family dialogue (41.7%), and cases at the police station (18.5%) often occur when violence is beyond control.

The different views from the FGD also proved that the local authorities are most crucial in addressing land conflict. Some stated that they are the custodians of the land and know everything about the land under their hegemony. Some stated that it is because people in rural areas are

always satisfied or agree with decisions made at the local court.

➤ Ways of Preventing Land Conflict

These are the mechanisms through which citizens are informed, aware, or encouraged to desist from conflicts in their communities. It usually involves training, workshops, sensitizations, etc. In this study, however, only land plans and sensitization were mentioned by respondents. This indicates that there are minimal strategies or methods applied in addressing land conflict in the study communities. This is presented below.

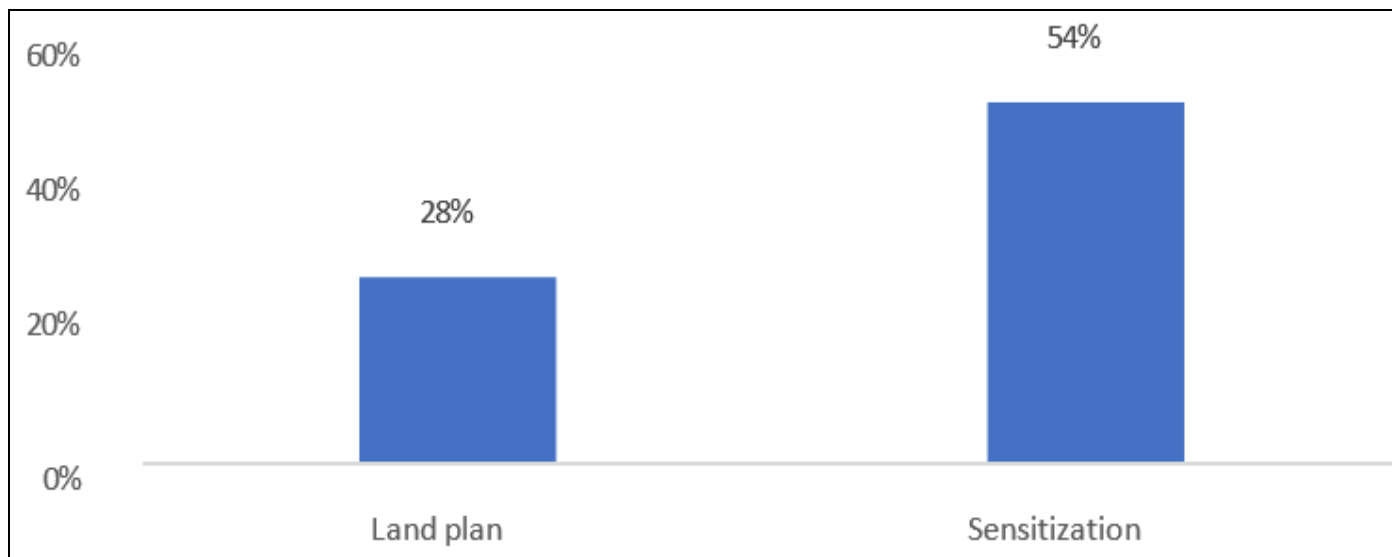


Fig 18 Strategies Adopted to Prevent Land Conflict
Field Survey Data 2021

From figure 18 above, it is clear that not all the respondents demonstrated knowledge on the preventive measures to land conflict. While some manifested some amount of knowledge, some manifested none. However, 54 percent of the respondents stated that sensitization had been ongoing, and about 28 percent said they used land plans.

Though some members of the FGD claimed to be aware of some of these mechanisms, they also cannot correctly explain them in detail. They stated that they mostly hear the messages through community meetings, family meetings, and radios. However, only some of the key stakeholders and custodians of the chiefdom mentioned that

they have only seen the chiefdom land plan through previous engagement with Sunbird Bioenergy Limited, formerly Addax, and chiefdom stakeholders of Mara Chiefdom, Bombali District formerly.

➤ *Punishment of Offenders*

These are punishments or sanctions levied on those who perpetuate land conflict in the study communities. From the study, two penalties are mentioned. These include fines and police custody. However, fine is most common due to the nature of crimes committed about land, and members are only handed to the police if the situation is beyond control. This is shown below.

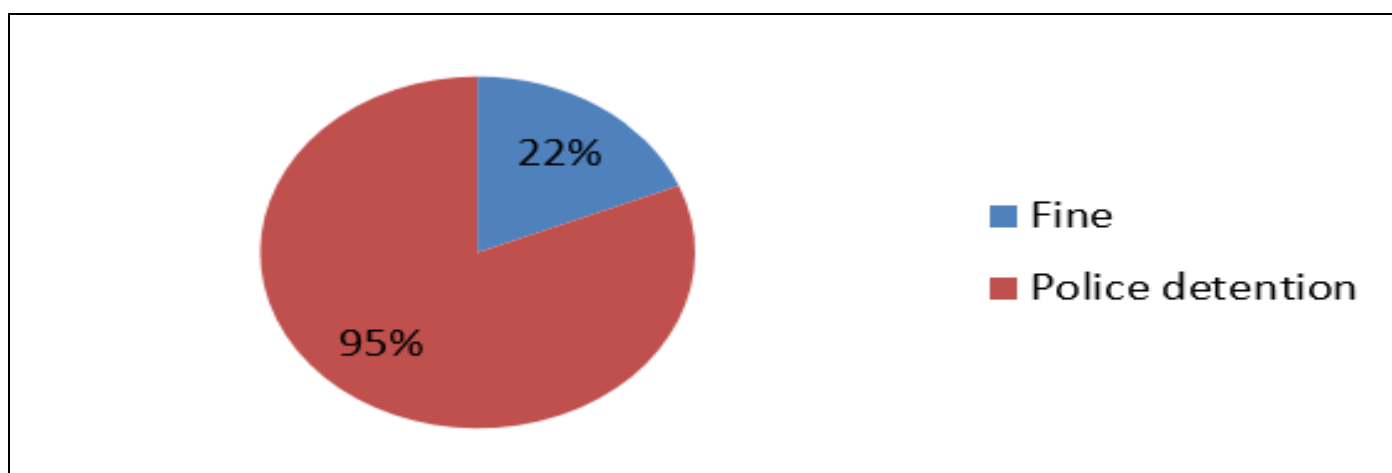


Fig 19 Punishment of Offenders on Land Conflict
Field Survey Data 2021

From figure 19 above, it is clear that there are mechanisms in place that seem to provide justice to land in the study area. The perpetrator usually pays fines to both the local authorities and the landowner as part of compensation for his/her land; Wit (2013) also revealed this. About 95% of the respondents agreed to this, and 22% also said police detention had also been effective in punishing violators.

According to the FGD, both parties involved in the land conflict will be punished depending on the nature of the conflict. If the conflict is too severe and cannot be handled by local stakeholders, the police will be called into action to address it, and those responsible will be detained. The local court may also fine both in case any of the local laws were violated in the process of the conflict. This finding agrees

with Werharmann (2008) that strategies of conflict resolution depend on the degree of the conflict.

IV. CONCLUSION

This work was conducted to assess smallholder farmers' perception on land conflict in Mara chiefdom, Bombali district, Sierra Leone.

➤ *Based on the Findings, the Following Conclusions were made,*

In respect to the first objective, the study aimed at investigating the types of land conflict in the study area. The findings from the research revealed that individuals mostly own land in the study communities and the main use of land is for farming and company use for sugar plantation. However, herding and dwelling were significantly mentioned as well. In connection to this background, the most frequent types of land conflict occurred between family members.

About the causes of conflicts, it was found out that the absence of strong nature of national and local policy contributes to the situation. However, this was backed up by an increase in population, the existence of the company, and the gender biases in terms of and committee and issues (i.e., male or mostly favor over their female counterpart).

Based on the impacts of land conflicts, injuries obtained during conflicts were mentioned as the main consequences. Pollution is also an environmental consequence, and lack of unity is the major societal problem resulting from these conflicts. Men were also stated as the primary victims of these conflicts because it's mostly involved them.

In the fourth objective, the study aimed to evaluate strategies to mitigate land conflict in the study area. The finding showed that several efforts were done in the chiefdom and community level to minimize land conflicts. Those efforts include family dialogue by local authorities at the local court or the police station. Sensitization is key towards preventing disputes, and the punishments usually levied are; fines and police detention.

RECOMMENDATION

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made for practical action and future research.

➤ *Recommendation for Practical Action*

- The Government works closely with land-owning families and chiefdom stakeholders to apportion areas for farm activities, company use, and grazing. This will enable to reduce of the types of land conflicts within chiefdoms and the country at large.
- The Government should raise awareness on land policy to the through the provision of leaflets on land policy and the rights of people on land and back up with regular meetings at all levels (District, Chiefdom, and

community) so that people's problems can be solved before the problems get worse.

- There should be engagements between farmers, companies, and pastoralists (Cattle rearers) to reduce the When fear is removed among the community members, they will be able to produce more, unity, stability and bring development.
- Establishment of local control mechanisms and the introduction of consents to community members for custodians of the land not to misuse their authority by irregularly allocating land for their own profit.

➤ *Recommendation for Future Research*

Future research should be carried on because;

- This study is not representative of the whole country. Any area of Sierra Leone could be studied and produce the same or contradictory results. Therefore, it is recommended that for a more reliable generalization of findings, a similar study can be carried on a large scale; involving a large sample of such an approach will give more representative results.

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