

Transforming Traditional Justice in Northeastern Nigeria with GH's Records Keeping System

The non-formal sector in Nigeria resolves more than 70% of all disputes each year. Despite the existence of numerous judicial redress systems, many people, particularly the oppressed, still turn to the Traditional Justice System (TJS) for their legal needs. Consequently, TJS plays an important role in the delivery of justice in the country. Traditional rulers settle vast types of civil disputes among their subjects, such as marital, neighborhood, land, and inheritance disputes. Traditional rulers, families, community development organisations, and religious scholars are all involved in TJS. The traditional rulers, on the other hand, are the most prominent of the lot.

The proximity to people and its wide acceptability by users are notable positive features of TJS. Furthermore, TJS proceedings are faster, non-technical, and free. Above all, it aids in the preservation of communal harmony and the avoidance of violent conflicts.

According to research conducted by Green Horizon (GH) in 2017 in the Dutse Emirate of Jigawa State, Nigeria for UK Department for International Development (DFID), the lack of an adequate record-keeping system is one of the factors impeding the delivery of justice in the traditional justice system. In the light of this, the DFID-funded Justice for All (J4A) Nigeria program, managed by the British Council, stepped in. The J4A program's goal was to improve personal safety and access to justice for all Nigerians. This intervention was beneficial to the vast number of Nigerians, principally the downtrodden, who rely on the TJS to settle their disputes. The Green Horizon studies revealed some notable issues bedeviling the traditional justice records keeping including:

- Dispute resolution is rarely documented specially at the lower levels of traditional leadership structure
- Disputes resolved at the lower traditional ruler levels are not reported to superiors
- Even if recorded, resolutions documents are often misplaced
- Lack of mechanism to track dispute resolutions made by traditional rulers
- Lack of available statistics and performance metrics

Consequently, GH was commissioned by the J4A program, among other things, to develop and implement a pilot RKS in the Dutse Emirate Council of Jigawa State, Nigeria. The new RKS was designed with the aim of improving transparency and integrity in the TJS through trackable dispute resolution cases.

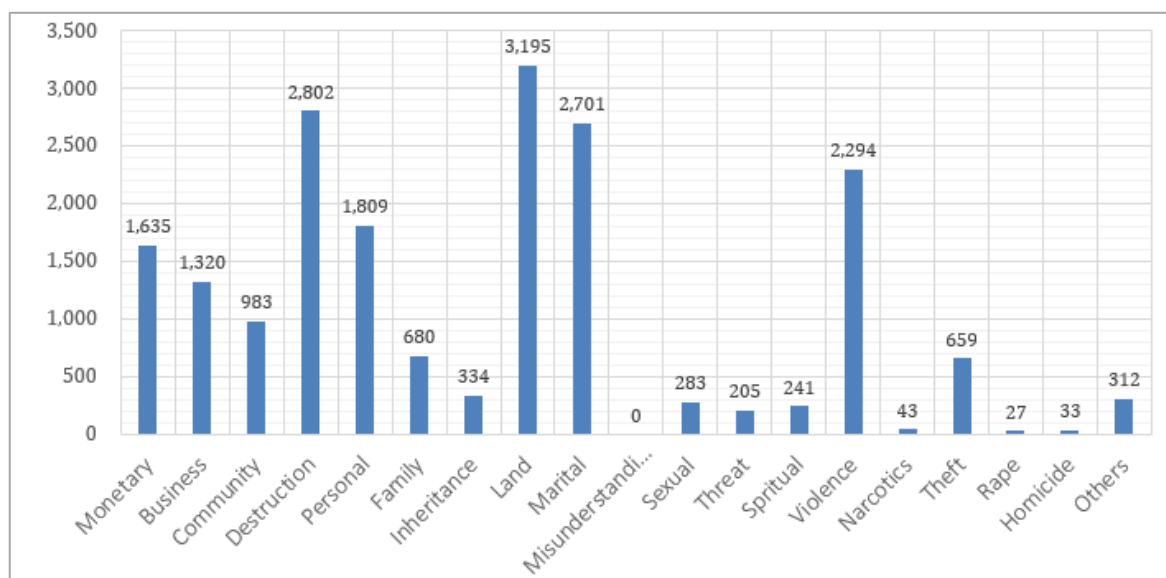
Dispute classification was introduced, taking into consideration dispute prevalence and the socio-cultural peculiarities of the Emirate. The new RKS is made up of paper data forms and a central database. Traditional leadership hierarchy in Northern Nigeria typically has four tiers, the ward, village, district, and emirate levels. So, the RKS data forms were designed to capture dispute resolutions handled at each of the four tiers. The completed forms are then sent to the



H.R.H. The Emir of Fika at the Fika Emirate RKS Centre, Yobe State, Nigeria (June 2019)

'RKS Centre', a facility where dispute resolution records are archived and captured electronically. A computer-based database tagged '*Sulhu Scribe*' was developed by GH for this purpose. The pilot Dutse RKS was successfully run by 199 ward heads, 29 village heads, and 2 district heads in 2 districts of the Dutse Emirate of Jigawa State, Nigeria. A total of 12,850 dispute complaints were recorded over a 30-month period between January 2014 and June 2016, 10,889 of which were resolved within the period, and 1,961 of which were referred to appropriate agencies.

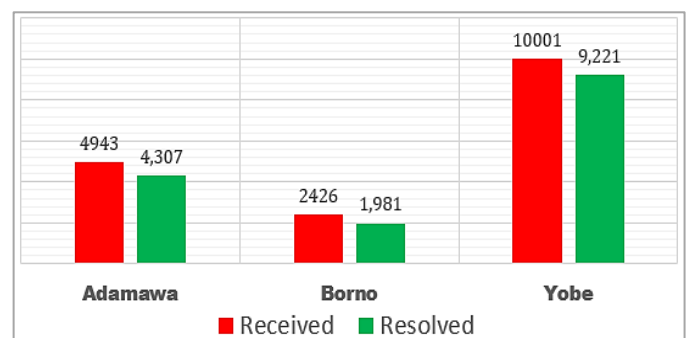
In 2019, GH was also commissioned by the EU -funded program *Managing Conflicts in the North-East (MCN)* to replicate the Dutse Emirate pilot interventions. The goals were to strengthen community-level conflict management mechanisms and build the capacity of traditional rulers to prevent conflict from escalating into violence in three target states ravaged by the Boko Haram insurgency. A total of 12 emirates and chiefdoms from Adamawa, Yobe, and Borno states in northeastern Nigeria were involved. The Dutse Emirate RKS model was customised to meet the peculiarities of the participating emirates and chiefdoms and implemented in the project areas since 2018. The project emirates and chiefdoms can now easily access TJS dispute records, query respective data, and produce and share various reports at any time. Reports such as those about traditional rulers' TJS performance and progress, dispute resolutions by gender, and dispute prevalence patterns, among others, are readily available.



Prevalence of Disputes in 12 Emirates & Chiefdoms In Northeastern Nigeria (2018- 2020)

Impacts

- Data from the 12 Emirates and Chiefdoms show that the number of disputes resolved through TJS is increasing, while the use of courts is decreasing in some emirates.
- Now, the Emirates, the Chiefdoms, and justice and law enforcement stakeholder organisations use the dispute reports and statistics from the RKS Centers as a monitoring and evaluation tool.



Dispute Complaints received and resolved from 12 Emirates and Chiefdoms in Adamawa, Borno, and Yobe States in Northeastern Nigeria (2018–2020)

- There is now information available on the involvement of women in domestic violence, inheritance rights, and maintenance disputes.