

Beyond the statute: Institutional performance and capacity constraints in regulating land disputes in Accra, Ghana

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ABSTRACT

Persistent land disputes in Ghana have often been attributed to weaknesses in land legislation, although less attention has been paid to the performance of the institutions responsible for implementing the law. Guided by principal-agent theory and situated within the context of legal pluralism, this study examined the functional roles and performance of land regulatory authorities in mitigating disputes within the Accra Metropolitan Assembly and assessed the institutional constraints affecting their effectiveness. A critical-case research strategy and quantitative descriptive survey design were employed. The target population comprised Lands Commission officials, Accra Metropolitan Assembly officials, traditional authorities, legal practitioners and civil society representatives. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire administered to 150 respondents selected using stratified random sampling. The data were analysed using descriptive statistics, Analysis of Variance and correlation analysis. Overall functional performance was rated poor (mean = 2.17), while dispute-resolution effectiveness was also poor (mean = 2.24). Inadequate funding (mean = 4.32), poor inter-agency coordination (mean = 4.18), and corruption and unethical practices (mean = 4.12) were the leading constraints. Coordination had the strongest positive relationship with overall effectiveness ($r = 0.428$, $p < 0.01$), while perceptions of authority effectiveness differed significantly across stakeholder groups ($F = 8.742$, $p < 0.001$). Traditional authorities were most frequently perceived as effective (38.7%), whereas the Accra Metropolitan Assembly was least frequently identified (8.0%). The study concluded that persistent land disputes reflected institutional capacity, coordination and accountability weaknesses more than statutory inadequacy. It recommends stronger inter-agency coordination, protected funding, modernised land-information systems, anti-corruption oversight and structured customary mediation. The study contributes new empirical evidence by shifting attention from legislative adequacy to the performance of the institutions mandated to regulate land disputes in Ghana.

Keywords: Land Dispute Resolution, Legal Pluralism, Regulatory Authorities, Ghana

I. INTRODUCTION

Secure land rights underpin poverty reduction, investment, and social stability, and are embedded across the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, most directly in Goal 1 (No Poverty) and Goal 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions) (United Nations, 2022). Yet formal tenure remains the exception rather than the rule. Across 85 reporting countries, only 43 per cent of adults hold legally recognised documentation of their land rights (United Nations, 2025). Where governance is weak, the consequences include tenure insecurity, contested ownership, and protracted conflict that depresses investment and erodes public trust (World Bank, 2024).

The deficit is most severe in Sub-Saharan Africa, where just 15 per cent of adults possess legal documentation of their land rights (United Nations, 2025). The difficulty is compounded by the coexistence of statutory and customary tenure regimes, whose overlapping mandates and contested authority generate persistent disputes (Kwakye et al., 2024). Reform trajectories across the region have diverged, but for most states, the binding obstacle has proven to be not the absence of law. Rather, it is the weakness of the institutions charged with applying it (World Bank, 2024). Ghana exemplifies this pattern. Approximately 80 per cent of its land is held under customary tenure administered by chiefs, family heads, and stool or skin authorities, with the remainder governed by statutory bodies led by the Lands Commission (Kasanga & Kotey, 2001). The Land Act, 2020 (Act 1036) sought to harmonise fragmented legislation, clarify registration and dispute-resolution procedures, and consolidate the regulatory architecture. Yet implementation continues to be undermined by poor statutory-customary coordination, double sales, defective documentation, and limited institutional capacity (Gyamera et al., 2018; Kwakye et al., 2024). These pressures are most acute in the Accra Metropolitan Assembly, where rapid urbanisation

and rising land values intensify competition for land. National data indicate that land disputes constitute roughly 52 per cent of all court cases in Ghana (Ghana Business News, 2023), with senior judges estimating that land matters may dominate as much as 70 to 90 per cent of pending litigation (MyJoyOnline, 2025).

The persistence of land conflict in Ghana is conventionally framed as a problem of inadequate law. The evidence increasingly points elsewhere. Despite reforms exceeding US\$200 million through the Land Administration Project and successor interventions, dispute volumes have not fallen, and land litigation remains the single largest category of civil cases nationally (Ghana Business News, 2023). Tellingly, an Appeal Court judge has attributed this persistence to weak enforcement of the Land Act rather than to a deficiency in the statute itself (MyJoyOnline, 2025), locating the binding constraint in institutional performance, not legislative design.

Herein lies the gap. The literature has thoroughly diagnosed the disease, the causes, forms, and consequences of land disputes (Gyamera et al., 2018) and has examined customary dispute-resolution pathways as an alternative remedy (Kwakye et al., 2024). What it has not done is evaluate the physician. No study has empirically assessed how the regulatory bodies mandated under Act 1036, principally the Lands Commission and the metropolitan assembly, actually perform their dispute-mitigation function, nor diagnosed why they underperform, within Ghana's most dispute-dense jurisdiction. This omission matters because interventions cannot be designed for an institution whose performance has never been measured. This study addresses the gap by moving beyond the statute: it shifts the unit of analysis from the conflict to the regulator, and from the adequacy of the law to the capability of the institutions responsible for enforcing it, using Accra as a critical case.

1.1 Research Objectives

The study pursued the following objectives:

1. To examine the functional roles and performance of land regulatory authorities in mitigating land disputes within Ghana's dual land-tenure framework, with particular reference to the Accra Metropolitan Assembly.
2. To assess the institutional challenges constraining the performance of these authorities and identify strategies for strengthening their land-dispute-mitigation capacity.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Framework

2.1.1 Principal-Agent Theory

Principal-agent theory explains relationships in which one party, the principal, delegates responsibilities to another party, the agent, who is expected to act in the principal's interest (Jensen & Meckling, 1976; Eisenhardt, 1989). In public administration, citizens and the state may be regarded as the principals, while public institutions serve as agents responsible for implementing laws and delivering services. However, delegated responsibilities may not be performed effectively where principals cannot adequately monitor agents, incentives are misaligned, information is unevenly distributed, or misconduct is not appropriately sanctioned.

In Ghana's land sector, the state and citizenry delegate land administration and dispute-mitigation responsibilities to institutions such as the Lands Commission, the Office of the Administrator of Stool Lands and metropolitan assemblies. Under the Land Act, 2020 (Act 1036), these institutions are expected to undertake land registration, maintain records, regulate transactions, enforce land laws and support dispute resolution. Their performance may nevertheless be weakened by inadequate funding, poor coordination, corruption, limited staffing, weak monitoring and insufficient technological capacity.

Principal-agent theory is therefore relevant to this study because it provides a basis for examining the difference between the statutory mandates assigned to land regulatory authorities and their actual performance. It also helps explain how institutional constraints may produce delays, weak enforcement, inaccurate records and ineffective dispute resolution. The theory directly supports the study's first objective by guiding the assessment of regulatory performance and the second objective by explaining how resource, accountability and coordination failures constrain institutional effectiveness. However, because Ghana's land sector operates through both statutory and customary systems, principal-agent theory is complemented by legal pluralism, which explains the institutional environment within which these authorities perform their functions.

2.1.2 Legal Pluralism

Legal pluralism refers to the coexistence of multiple legal and normative systems within the same social setting (Griffiths, 1986). In Ghana, statutory land law operates alongside customary tenure systems administered by stools, skins, clans, families and traditional authorities. Approximately four-fifths of the country's land is held under customary tenure, while statutory institutions such as the Lands Commission and metropolitan assemblies perform registration, planning, valuation and regulatory functions (Kasanga & Kotey, 2001; Owusu Ansah & Chigbu, 2020).

The coexistence of these systems may provide flexibility and local legitimacy, but it may also create overlapping authority, inconsistent procedures and competing claims. Customary authorities may rely on oral histories, local boundaries and traditional allocation practices, whereas statutory institutions depend more heavily on formal documentation, surveys and registration procedures. Where these systems are poorly coordinated, multiple sales, conflicting records, jurisdictional uncertainty and delayed dispute resolution may arise (Anafo et al., 2023; Fosu, 2022).

Legal pluralism complements principal-agent theory by explaining the institutional environment within which land regulators operate. While principal-agent theory focuses on delegation, accountability and institutional performance, legal pluralism highlights the difficulty of implementing regulatory mandates where several authorities exercise simultaneous influence over land. It therefore helps explain why coordination, information sharing and clearly defined responsibilities are essential to effective dispute mitigation. In this study, legal pluralism provides the contextual basis for examining how statutory and customary authorities interact within the Accra Metropolitan Assembly. It also supports the assessment of whether overlapping mandates and conflicting jurisdictions constrain the effectiveness of land regulatory institutions.

2.2 Empirical Review

2.2.1 Functional Roles and Performance of Land Regulatory Authorities

Land regulatory authorities are expected to perform interconnected functions relating to land registration, valuation, surveying, record management, planning, enforcement, and dispute resolution. In Ghana, these responsibilities are distributed among the Lands Commission, the Office of the Administrator of Stool Lands, metropolitan, municipal and district assemblies, and customary authorities. Their effectiveness depends not only on the existence of statutory mandates but also on the extent to which these functions are performed efficiently, transparently and consistently.

Studies on Ghana's land-administration system have generally concentrated on institutional mandates and governance arrangements. Biitir and Nara (2016) found that Customary Land Secretariats could improve local land documentation and support dispute resolution, although their effectiveness depended on adequate resources and cooperation from customary authorities. Similarly, Biitir et al. (2017) observed that integrating statutory and traditional land-governance institutions was constrained by fragmented responsibilities and weak coordination. Ibrahim et al. (2020) further showed that collaborative land-management arrangements could enhance participation and local accountability, but institutional interference and limited financial capacity weakened their performance.

Research on land disputes also points indirectly to regulatory underperformance. Multiple sales, boundary conflicts, fraudulent transactions and defective documentation have been linked to weak record systems, ineffective enforcement and limited coordination among land institutions (Gyamera et al., 2018; Owusu Ansah & Chigbu, 2020). In rapidly urbanising areas, rising land values and competing claims place additional pressure on regulators to maintain accurate records, prevent illegal transactions and provide timely dispute-resolution services.

Although these studies identify important institutional weaknesses, few have systematically measured how well land regulatory authorities perform their assigned functions across registration, enforcement, public education, record maintenance, coordination and dispute resolution. This study addresses that limitation by assessing the functional performance of regulatory authorities within the Accra Metropolitan Assembly and comparing stakeholders' perceptions of their effectiveness.

2.2.2 Institutional Challenges Constraining Regulatory Performance

The effectiveness of land regulatory authorities is influenced by the financial, human, technological and organisational resources available to them. Inadequate funding may limit staff recruitment, training, field inspections, surveying, public education and the maintenance of reliable land records. Where agencies lack sufficient resources, service delays, incomplete documentation and weak enforcement may become persistent features of land administration.

Existing studies identify institutional fragmentation and poor coordination as major constraints within Ghana's land sector. Biitir et al. (2017) found that the integration of statutory and customary land institutions was weakened by overlapping responsibilities and limited cooperation. Similarly, Ibrahim et al. (2020) reported that collaborative land-governance arrangements could be undermined by financial constraints, institutional interference and unclear authority.

These weaknesses may result in duplication, conflicting decisions and uncertainty over which institution is responsible for particular land matters.

Technological and administrative limitations also affect regulatory performance. Poor record-keeping, limited digitalisation and incompatible information systems may increase processing delays and create opportunities for multiple transactions involving the same parcel. In addition, inadequate staff training, high caseloads and complex bureaucratic procedures may reduce the speed and quality of dispute-resolution services.

Corruption, political interference and weak accountability further constrain institutional effectiveness. Where regulatory decisions are influenced by private interests or misconduct is not adequately sanctioned, public confidence in land institutions may decline. Ahmed et al. (2018) demonstrate how power relations and private interests can shape customary land transactions, while broader evidence links weak enforcement and poor institutional accountability to persistent land disputes. Although these constraints are widely acknowledged, limited research has assessed their relative severity or linked them directly to measured regulatory effectiveness. This study therefore examines how funding, coordination, corruption, staffing, technology, record management and conflicting jurisdictions constrain land-dispute mitigation within the Accra Metropolitan Assembly.

2.2.3 Strategies for Strengthening Land-Dispute-Mitigation Capacity

Improving land-dispute mitigation requires reforms that address institutional, technological and coordination weaknesses within the land-administration system. One widely proposed strategy is the modernisation and digitalisation of land records. Integrated digital systems can improve access to reliable information, reduce processing delays and limit the risk of multiple or conflicting transactions. However, technological reform is most effective when supported by adequate infrastructure, trained personnel and consistent data-management procedures.

Inter-agency coordination is also essential because land administration involves statutory institutions, metropolitan assemblies and customary authorities with related responsibilities. Biitir et al. (2017) emphasised the need for stronger integration between decentralised statutory institutions and traditional land-governance bodies. Clear responsibilities, regular information sharing and compatible record systems can reduce duplication, jurisdictional conflict and inconsistent decisions. Customary Land Secretariats may also provide a useful platform for linking local land information with formal administrative processes (Biitir & Nara, 2016; Kwakye et al., 2024).

Alternative dispute resolution offers another strategy for improving accessibility and reducing the burden on formal courts. Ibrahim et al. (2022) found that mediation and customary processes were valued for their accessibility, lower costs and ability to preserve social relationships. The Lands Commission's efforts to strengthen institutional ADR capacity further indicate growing recognition of these mechanisms (Lands Commission, 2024). Nevertheless, customary and alternative outcomes require proper documentation and links to formal records to improve consistency and enforceability.

Other important strategies include increased funding, staff training, stronger accountability systems, public education, and effective anti-corruption measures. These interventions should be implemented as complementary reforms rather than isolated actions. This study therefore assesses stakeholders' views on the most important strategies for strengthening the dispute-mitigation capacity of land regulatory authorities within the Accra Metropolitan Assembly.

2.3 Empirical Synthesis and Research Gap

Existing studies have established that land disputes in Ghana are associated with overlapping customary and statutory claims, multiple sales, boundary uncertainty, weak documentation, rapid urbanisation and ineffective enforcement (Gyamera et al., 2018; Owusu Ansah & Chigbu, 2020). Research has also shown that customary institutions, Customary Land Secretariats and alternative dispute-resolution mechanisms can improve accessibility, local participation and dispute settlement, although their effectiveness is often constrained by inadequate resources, weak coordination and unclear responsibilities (Biitir & Nara, 2016; Ibrahim et al., 2020; Ibrahim et al., 2022).

The literature therefore provides important evidence on the causes of land disputes, the mandates of regulatory institutions and the potential value of customary and alternative mechanisms. However, these strands remain insufficiently integrated. Studies of disputes generally emphasise their causes and consequences, while studies of land institutions tend to describe legal responsibilities or broad administrative weaknesses without systematically measuring actual performance. Similarly, research on customary dispute resolution often treats it as an alternative to formal institutions rather than examining how it interacts with statutory regulatory systems.

Limited empirical evidence therefore exists on how effectively land regulatory authorities perform their dispute-mitigation functions within a high-pressure urban jurisdiction such as the Accra Metropolitan Assembly. There is also

insufficient evidence linking specific institutional constraints, including funding, coordination, corruption, staffing, technology and record management, to overall regulatory effectiveness.

This study addresses these gaps by assessing the functional performance of land regulatory authorities, examining the institutional challenges that constrain them and evaluating strategies for strengthening their capacity. It further contributes by applying principal-agent theory within a legally plural land-governance context to explain the relationship between institutional capability, accountability, coordination and dispute mitigation.

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Study Area

The study was conducted in the Accra Metropolitan Assembly (AMA), purposively selected as a critical case for examining the performance of land regulatory authorities in Ghana. The critical-case logic, as articulated by Flyvbjerg (2004), justifies the deliberate selection of a single site on the principle that if a phenomenon is observed under the most demanding conditions, similar or sharper manifestations can reasonably be expected elsewhere. The AMA satisfies this criterion: as the administrative and commercial core of Ghana's Greater Accra Region, it experiences acute land pressure arising from rapid urbanisation, population growth, and rising land values, while simultaneously hosting the heaviest concentration of land regulatory institutions in the country. If the regulatory authorities are observed to underperform their mandate under these most demanding conditions, where institutional capacity is most concentrated, then performance failures in less-resourced jurisdictions become a near-certain inference. The AMA was therefore positioned as the analytical site at which the study's central question, whether the binding constraint on land-dispute mitigation lies in the law or in the institutions applying it, could be tested with maximum force.

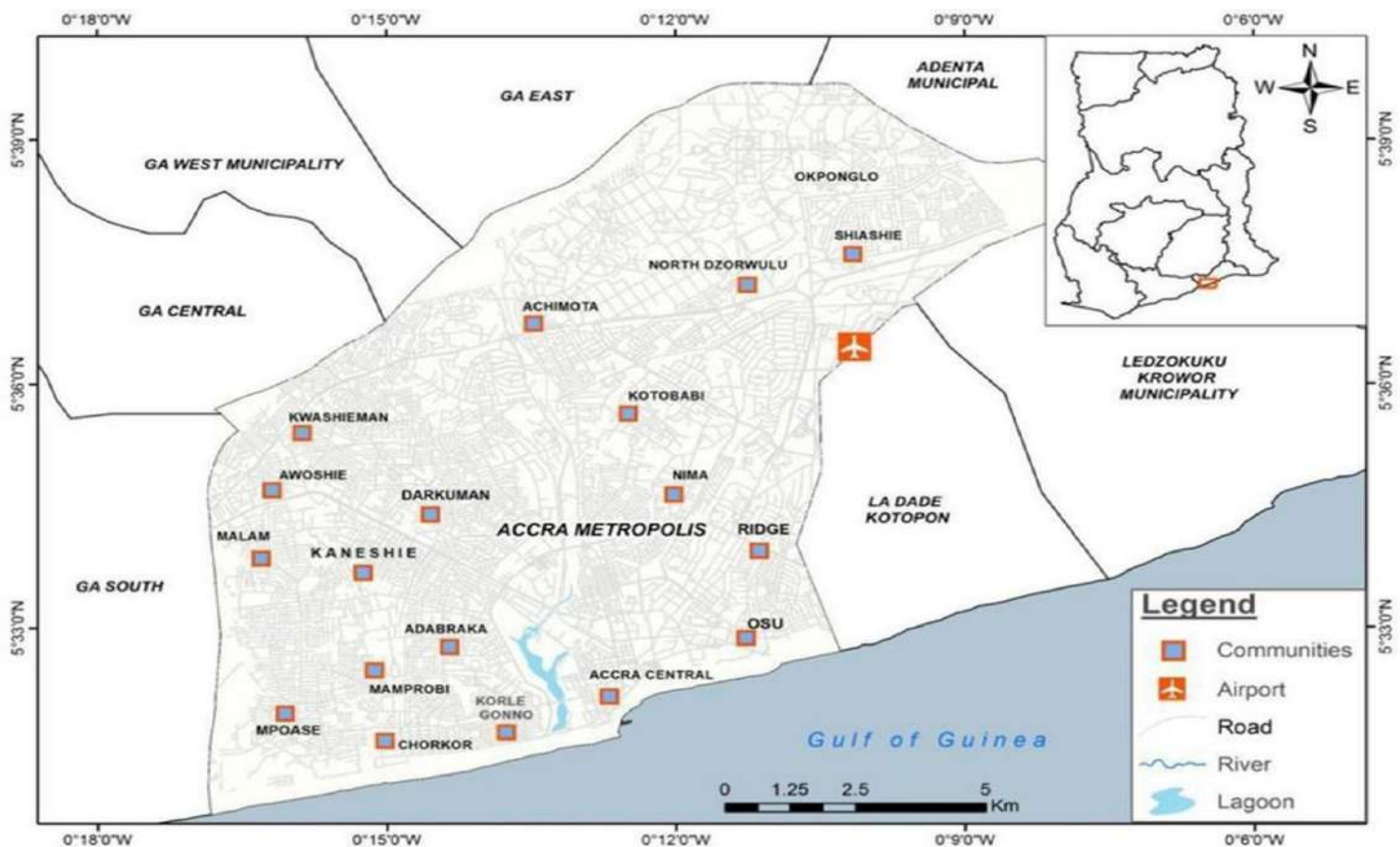


Figure 1

Map of the Accra Metropolitan Assembly

Source: (Fagariba & Song, 2017)

3.2 Research Design and Approach

The study employed a critical-case research strategy (Flyvbjerg, 2006), with the Accra Metropolitan Assembly selected as the single analytical site and operationalised through a positivist, descriptive survey design implemented as a mono-method quantitative approach (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This orientation was appropriate to the study's purpose, which required the systematic measurement of regulatory performance and the objective examination of relationships among variables rather than the manipulation of those variables. The descriptive survey permitted standardised data collection from a range of stakeholders at a single point in time, yielding a structured account of how the regulatory authorities discharged their dispute-mitigation function and of the challenges they faced. Aligning the study's philosophical assumptions, case-selection logic, design, and methods in this way supported the generation of analytically generalisable, policy-relevant evidence (Saunders et al., 2019).

3.3 Population and Sampling

The target population comprised stakeholders with direct involvement in land governance and dispute mitigation within the AMA, organised into five groups: Lands Commission officials, Accra Metropolitan Assembly officials, traditional authorities (chiefs and queen mothers), legal practitioners, and civil society representatives. A stratified random sampling technique was employed, with the five stakeholder groups serving as strata and simple random selection applied within each stratum. Stratification ensured that each meaningful group was represented in adequate numbers and reduced the bias that over-representation of any single group might have introduced (Etikan & Bala, 2017). A sample of 150 respondents was drawn, allocated proportionally across the strata: Lands Commission officials (48; 32%), AMA officials (39; 26%), traditional authorities (30; 20%), legal practitioners (21; 14%), and civil society representatives (12; 8%). This size balanced statistical adequacy against the specialised nature of the population and the practical constraints of time and resources.

3.4 Data Collection

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire, the standard instrument for descriptive survey research. The questionnaire was developed from the literature and refined through expert consultation, and its content was anchored to the study's two objectives. The sections relevant to this manuscript assessed the functional roles and performance of the regulatory authorities in mitigating land disputes, and the institutional challenges constraining that performance together with strategies for strengthening it. Items were predominantly closed-ended, using five-point Likert scales to capture stakeholders' perceptions and attitudes, which Field (2018) notes are well suited to the statistical analysis of subjective judgements. Prior to administration, the instrument was pilot-tested with 30 respondents drawn from across the stakeholder categories, and their feedback informed refinements to question wording, response categories, and overall structure.

3.5 Data Analysis

Data were analysed using SPSS version 28.0, following cleaning procedures to address errors and missing values. Descriptive statistics were used to summarise respondent characteristics and to assess regulatory performance: mean scores and standard deviations were computed for each item on the five-point Likert scales, and mean values were interpreted against performance bands to classify the functional roles, the severity of challenges, and the effectiveness of dispute-resolution mechanisms. Inferential analysis then employed analysis of variance (ANOVA) to test for differences in perceptions across the five stakeholder groups, and correlation analysis to examine relationships between key variables, notably between inter-agency coordination and overall regulatory effectiveness, with statistical significance assessed at the conventional thresholds ($p < 0.05$ and $p < 0.01$). Together, these analyses addressed the first objective by measuring the authorities' performance and the second by identifying the institutional factors associated with, and the differences in perception surrounding, that performance.

3.6 Validity, Reliability, and Ethical Considerations

Content validity was established through the literature review and expert appraisal of the instrument by specialists in land governance and research methodology, while face validity was confirmed through the pilot study; construct validity was examined through factor analysis and the inspection of correlations among related items. Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, with values of 0.70 or above taken to indicate acceptable internal consistency (Field, 2018). Ethical protocols were observed throughout: participation was voluntary and based on informed consent, respondents' anonymity and the confidentiality of their responses were protected, and the data were used solely for the purposes of the study.

IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

4.1 Respondent Profile

A total of 150 respondents participated in the study. Their socio-demographic characteristics are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1
Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Characteristic	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Stakeholder group	Lands Commission officials	48	32
	Accra Metropolitan Assembly officials	39	26
	Traditional authorities	30	20
	Legal practitioners	21	14
	Civil society representatives	12	8
Sex	Male	89	59.3
	Female	61	40.7
Educational level	Bachelor's degree	67	44.7
	Master's degree	52	34.7
	Doctoral degree	13	8.6
	Other qualifications	18	12
Professional experience	10 years or less	48	32
	11–20 years	67	44.7
	More than 20 years	35	23.3

4.2 Functional Performance of Land Regulatory Authorities

Respondents assessed the performance of land regulatory authorities across ten mandated functions using a five-point scale ranging from 1 = Very Poor to 5 = Excellent. As shown in Table 2, the overall mean score was 2.17, indicating poor performance. Land valuation was the only function rated fair, with a mean of 2.67. All other functions were rated poor, with prevention of illegal transactions recording the lowest mean of 1.87, followed by public education on land rights at 1.89 and collaboration between authorities at 1.95.

Table 2
Assessment of Regulatory Authorities' Functional Performance

Functional role	Mean	Std. Dev.	Level
Land registration processes efficiency	2.34	1.12	Poor
Boundary demarcation services	2.18	1.08	Poor
Land valuation services	2.67	1.23	Fair
Enforcement of land laws and regulations	2.12	0.98	Poor
Public education about land rights	1.89	0.87	Poor
Maintenance of land records	2.45	1.15	Poor
Collaboration between authorities	1.95	0.92	Poor
Appeal mechanisms establishment	2.23	1.05	Poor
Prevention of illegal transactions	1.87	0.89	Poor
Policy implementation consistency	2.01	0.95	Poor
Overall mean	2.17	1.03	Poor

The findings demonstrate a substantial difference between the statutory responsibilities assigned to land regulatory institutions and their actual performance. The particularly low ratings for prevention of illegal transactions, public education and inter-agency collaboration suggest weaknesses in enforcement, stakeholder engagement and institutional coordination. From a principal–agent perspective, these outcomes indicate that the institutions entrusted with implementing land laws are not effectively discharging their delegated responsibilities. The findings are consistent with Biitir and Nara (2016) and Biitir

et al. (2017), who identified weak institutional capacity, fragmented responsibilities and poor coordination as persistent limitations within Ghana's land-administration system.

Respondents also assessed the effectiveness of dispute-resolution mechanisms across thirteen dimensions. The overall mean was 2.24, indicating poor effectiveness. Fairness of dispute-resolution processes, community involvement and the use of alternative dispute resolution were rated fair. However, the use of technology recorded the lowest mean of 1.65, followed by coordination between authorities at 1.89 and enforceability of decisions at 1.98.

Table 3
Effectiveness of Land Dispute-Resolution Mechanisms

Resolution mechanism	Mean	Std. Dev.	Level
Speed of response to dispute reports	2.21	1.09	Poor
Quality of the investigation conducted	2.45	1.18	Poor
Fairness of dispute resolution processes	2.67	1.24	Fair
Accessibility of resolution services	2.34	1.15	Poor
Cost-effectiveness of mechanisms	2.12	1.03	Poor
Transparency in decision-making	2.28	1.12	Poor
Enforceability of decisions	1.98	0.96	Poor
Alternative dispute resolution use	2.54	1.21	Fair
Coordination between authorities	1.89	0.88	Poor
Public satisfaction with outcomes	2.08	1.01	Poor
Technical expertise of staff	2.43	1.17	Poor
Use of technology in resolution	1.65	0.78	Poor
Community involvement in processes	2.59	1.23	Fair
Overall mean	2.24	1.08	Poor

The relatively higher ratings for community involvement and alternative dispute resolution support the findings of Ibrahim et al. (2022), who observed that customary and mediation-based mechanisms remain valued because of their accessibility and ability to preserve social relationships. Nevertheless, the poor ratings for enforceability, technology and coordination indicate that dispute-resolution outcomes are not sufficiently integrated into formal land records and institutional processes. Respondents were further asked to identify the authority they perceived as most effective in resolving land disputes. Traditional authorities were selected most frequently, accounting for 38.7%, followed by the Lands Commission at 28.0%. The Accra Metropolitan Assembly was identified by only 8.0% of respondents.

Table 4
Authority Perceived as Most Effective in Resolving Land Disputes

Regulatory authority	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Traditional authorities	58	38.7
Lands Commission	42	28
Courts / judicial system	32	21.3
Accra Metropolitan Assembly	12	8
Other agencies	6	4
Total	150	100

The greater perceived effectiveness of traditional authorities reflects the continuing legitimacy of customary dispute-resolution arrangements within Ghana's plural land-governance system. However, the low rating of the Accra Metropolitan Assembly indicates that formal statutory authority does not automatically produce practical effectiveness. The result reinforces the need for stronger coordination between customary and statutory institutions rather than treating the two systems as separate dispute-resolution channels.

4.3 Institutional Challenges Constraining Regulatory Performance

Respondents assessed the severity of twelve institutional challenges on a five-point scale ranging from 1 = Not a Challenge to 5 = Critical Challenge. As shown in Table 5, inadequate funding and resources recorded the highest mean of

4.32 and was the only constraint rated critical. Poor coordination between agencies followed with a mean of 4.18, while corruption and unethical practices recorded a mean of 4.12. High caseloads, insufficient staffing, outdated legal frameworks and limited technology were also rated as major challenges.

Table 5

Institutional Challenges Facing Land Regulatory Authorities

Challenge	Mean	Std. Dev.	Level
Inadequate funding and resources	4.32	0.87	Critical
Poor coordination between agencies	4.18	0.92	Major
Corruption and unethical practices	4.12	0.95	Major
High caseload and backlog	4.08	0.98	Major
Insufficient staffing levels	3.98	1.02	Major
Outdated legal frameworks	3.89	1.05	Major
Lack of modern technology	3.85	1.08	Major
Political interference	3.79	1.12	Major
Complex bureaucratic processes	3.76	1.15	Major
Poor record-keeping systems	3.73	1.18	Major
Inadequate training for staff	3.68	1.21	Major
Conflicting jurisdictions	3.54	1.25	Moderate

The findings indicate that institutional underperformance is associated with a combination of resource, coordination and accountability constraints. Inadequate funding can restrict staff recruitment, training, surveying, public education, digitalisation and record maintenance. This supports the findings of Biitir and Nara (2016), who observed that the effectiveness of local land-governance institutions depends substantially on adequate financial and administrative capacity.

Poor inter-agency coordination was the second most severe challenge. This finding is consistent with Biitir et al. (2017), who identified fragmented responsibilities and limited integration between statutory and customary land institutions as persistent weaknesses in Ghana's land-administration system. Within a legally plural system, poor coordination may produce duplicated functions, conflicting decisions and uncertainty regarding institutional authority.

The high rating assigned to corruption and unethical practices also reflects an accountability problem. From a principal-agent perspective, corruption may arise where institutional monitoring is weak, incentives are misaligned, and misconduct is not effectively sanctioned. Political interference and complex bureaucratic processes may further reduce transparency and weaken public confidence in regulatory decisions. The findings therefore suggest that improving regulatory performance requires more than legislative reform. It requires adequate resources, effective institutional coordination, strengthened accountability, modern technology and improved administrative capacity.

4.4 Strategies for Strengthening Dispute-Mitigation Capacity

Respondents assessed eleven strategies for strengthening the capacity of land regulatory authorities using a five-point importance scale. As presented in Table 6, modernising land-registration systems received the highest mean score of 4.45, followed by improving coordination mechanisms at 4.38 and increasing funding for land agencies at 4.32. These three strategies were rated extremely important, while all remaining strategies were rated very important.

Table 6*Strategies for Strengthening Land-Dispute-Mitigation Capacity*

Recommendation	Mean	Std. Dev.	Level
Modernise land registration systems	4.45	0.78	Extremely important
Improve coordination mechanisms	4.38	0.82	Extremely important
Increase funding for land agencies	4.32	0.85	Extremely important
Strengthen legal frameworks	4.28	0.88	Very Important
Implement anti-corruption measures	4.25	0.91	Very Important
Enhance staff training programmes	4.21	0.94	Very important
Digitise land records and processes	4.18	0.97	Very important
Create specialised land courts	4.12	1.01	Very important
Improve surveying and mapping	4.08	1.04	Very important
Establish one-stop-shop services	4.05	1.07	Very important
Increase public education programmes	3.98	1.1	Very important

The prioritisation of modernisation reflects the weaknesses identified in the use of technology, record maintenance and the prevention of illegal transactions. Integrated digital land-information systems could improve access to accurate records, reduce processing delays and limit multiple or conflicting transactions. However, technological reforms must be supported by reliable infrastructure, trained personnel and consistent data-management procedures.

Improved coordination was the second-highest-rated strategy, corresponding with the poor performance of inter-agency collaboration and the high severity assigned to coordination challenges. This finding supports Biitir et al. (2017), who emphasised stronger integration between statutory and customary land-governance institutions. Regular information sharing, clearly defined responsibilities and compatible record systems could reduce duplication, jurisdictional overlap and inconsistent decisions.

The high priority assigned to increased funding also reflects its identification as the most severe institutional challenge. Adequate financial resources are required for staffing, training, surveying, digitalisation, public education and dispute-resolution services. Anti-corruption measures were similarly rated highly, indicating the importance of transparent procedures, effective monitoring and enforceable sanctions. The results further demonstrate the need for complementary reforms rather than isolated interventions. Modernisation, funding, coordination, accountability and staff development must be pursued together to strengthen the institutional capacity of land regulatory authorities and improve land-dispute mitigation within the Accra Metropolitan Assembly.

4.5 Statistical Relationships and Stakeholder Differences

Correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationships between selected institutional variables and regulatory effectiveness. As shown in Table 7, inter-agency coordination recorded the strongest positive relationship with overall effectiveness ($r = 0.428$, $p < 0.01$). Funding adequacy was also positively associated with dispute-resolution quality ($r = 0.387$, $p < 0.01$), while years of professional experience showed a moderate positive relationship with perceived effectiveness ($r = 0.342$, $p < 0.01$).

Table 7*Relationships among Selected Institutional Variables*

Variables	r	Sig.	Interpretation
Years of experience × perceived effectiveness	0.342	$p < 0.01$	Moderate +
Educational level × system performance rating	0.289	$p < 0.01$	Weak +
Funding adequacy × dispute-resolution quality	0.387	$p < 0.01$	Moderate +
Coordination level × overall effectiveness	0.428	$p < 0.01$	Moderate +
Stakeholder type × challenge severity	0.256	$p < 0.05$	Weak +

The positive association between coordination and overall effectiveness indicates that regulatory performance improves as cooperation among land institutions increases. This finding reinforces the earlier results in which poor coordination emerged as both a major institutional challenge and one of the weakest areas of performance. It is also consistent with Biitir et al. (2017), who found that fragmented responsibilities and weak integration constrained the performance of statutory and customary land-governance institutions.

The relationship between funding adequacy and dispute-resolution quality further confirms that financial capacity influences the ability of regulatory authorities to recruit staff, maintain records, undertake investigations and provide timely dispute-resolution services. The result supports Biitir and Nara's (2016) observation that the effectiveness of local land institutions depends substantially on adequate financial and administrative resources. Analysis of Variance was also conducted to determine whether stakeholder perceptions differed significantly across the five respondent groups. The results are presented in Table 8.

Table 8

Differences in Perceptions across Stakeholder Groups

Variable	F	p-value	η^2
Perception of authority effectiveness	8.742	< 0.001	0.194
Challenge severity ratings	6.234	< 0.001	0.146
Recommendation importance	4.186	0.003	0.103
Dispute causes significance	5.891	< 0.001	0.139

The results show statistically significant differences among stakeholder groups in their perceptions of authority effectiveness, challenge severity, recommended strategies, and the significance of land-dispute causes. The largest effect was recorded for perceived authority effectiveness ($\eta^2 = 0.194$), indicating that stakeholder affiliation accounted for a substantial proportion of the variation in effectiveness ratings. Differences in challenge severity also produced a large effect ($\eta^2 = 0.146$), while the effects for recommendation importance and dispute causes were moderate to large.

These differences suggest that perceptions of regulatory performance are influenced by respondents' positions within the land-governance system. Officials working within statutory institutions may evaluate performance differently from traditional authorities, legal practitioners and civil society representatives because of differences in institutional experience, responsibilities and interests. However, the Analysis of Variance results establish only that differences exist; post-hoc comparisons would be required to determine precisely which stakeholder groups differed from one another.

4.6 Study Limitations

This study was limited by its single-case, cross-sectional quantitative design. The findings reflected stakeholders' perceptions of regulatory performance at one point in time rather than independently audited administrative outcomes. The focus on the Accra Metropolitan Assembly also limits direct statistical generalisation to other jurisdictions. Future studies should triangulate stakeholder perceptions with administrative records, compare multiple metropolitan and district assemblies, and incorporate qualitative interviews to provide deeper explanations of institutional performance.

V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

This study examined the functional performance of land regulatory authorities in mitigating land disputes within the Accra Metropolitan Assembly and assessed the institutional challenges constraining their effectiveness. The findings showed that the authorities' overall functional performance and dispute-resolution effectiveness were poor. Prevention of illegal transactions, public education, inter-agency collaboration, use of technology and enforceability of decisions were among the weakest areas of performance.

Inadequate funding, poor coordination and corruption emerged as the most serious institutional constraints. The positive relationship between coordination and overall effectiveness further demonstrated that fragmented institutional arrangements directly weakened regulatory performance. Traditional authorities were perceived as more effective in resolving land disputes than the Accra Metropolitan Assembly, highlighting the continuing importance of customary institutions within Ghana's legally plural land-governance system.

The study concludes that the persistence of land disputes in Accra cannot be explained solely by weaknesses in legislation. It also reflects inadequate institutional capacity, weak accountability and ineffective coordination among the

bodies responsible for implementing land laws. By shifting attention from the causes of land disputes to the performance of the institutions mandated to prevent and resolve them, the study provides an institution-centred explanation of land-dispute persistence in Ghana.

5.2 Recommendations

The government should establish a formal inter-agency coordination mechanism involving the Lands Commission, the Office of the Administrator of Stool Lands, the Accra Metropolitan Assembly and recognised customary authorities. The mechanism should clarify institutional responsibilities, facilitate regular information sharing and support the development of an integrated land-records system. This would reduce duplication, jurisdictional conflict and inconsistent decisions.

Adequate and protected funding should be provided to land regulatory institutions to support staffing, training, surveying, public education, digitalisation and dispute-resolution services. Land-registration and record-management systems should also be modernised and integrated to improve access to reliable information, reduce delays and minimise multiple or conflicting transactions. Budgetary allocations should be linked to measurable service-delivery targets to strengthen accountability.

Independent anti-corruption measures should be strengthened through confidential reporting channels, transparent investigations and enforceable sanctions for misconduct. Customary authorities should also be formally incorporated into the dispute-resolution process through accredited mediation arrangements whose outcomes are properly documented and connected to statutory land records. Such integration would utilise the legitimacy and accessibility of customary institutions while improving consistency, accountability and enforceability within the wider land-governance system.

Declaration of Interest

The authors declare that they do not have any known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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