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Local Wisdom-Based Conflict Management in the Muna Ethnic Community: Opportunities and Challenges

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ABSTRACT: This study analyzes local wisdom-based conflict management in the Muna ethnic community, focusing on land disputes and the opportunities and challenges of integrating customary mediation with Indonesia's formal legal system. An empirical socio-legal design with a qualitative descriptive-analytical approach was employed in Muna and West Muna Regencies. Data were obtained through in-depth interviews, field observation, focus group discussions, mediation documents, customary records, and relevant legislation, and were validated through source, technique, and time triangulation, member checking, peer discussion, and audit trail. The findings show that land relations are embedded in communal-genealogical legitimacy and social recognition, while disputes are driven by ambiguous customary boundaries, undocumented oral inheritance, transfers without administrative evidence, and overlaps between customary and state-law claims. Among 73 disputes analyzed in the underlying research, boundary interpretation and inheritance were the two largest recorded sources of dispute. Customary mediation is socially effective because it relies on deliberation, consensus, kinship restoration, trusted customary leaders, and Muna values such as *pobhini-bhiniki kuli*, *poma-maasigho*, *poangka-angkatau*, and *popia-piara*. Its opportunities lie in strong social legitimacy, constitutional recognition of customary communities, restorative orientation, low social cost, and potential collaboration among customary institutions, village government, land authorities, and communities. However, its effectiveness is constrained by weak documentation, uneven formal recognition, changing intergenerational values, asymmetric power when disputes involve external actors, limited mediator capacity, and the gap between social legitimacy and administrative land evidence. The study proposes an integrative conflict-management strategy in which customary mediation performs historical-social verification and relationship restoration, while formal institutions provide documentation, registration, enforceability, and legal certainty. This hybrid arrangement positions local wisdom not as a substitute for state law but as a strategic conflict-management resource for substantive justice and prevention of recurring land disputes.

1. INTRODUCTION

Land conflict in plural legal societies is rarely a dispute about documentary title alone. It is also a contest over history, social recognition, kinship, identity, authority, and access to resources. In Indonesia, these dimensions become particularly visible where state land administration intersects with customary tenure. Legal-pluralism scholarship has long shown that multiple normative orders can operate simultaneously within the same social field [1, 2, 3]. Conflict management in such settings therefore requires more than selecting a single legal forum; it requires mechanisms capable of translating between different sources of legitimacy. The dissertation underlying this article examines land-dispute mediation among the Muna ethnic community in Southeast Sulawesi. It treats land as an economic resource and as ancestral heritage carrying social, cultural, spiritual, and collective-identity meanings. Traditional ownership includes communal and genealogical dimensions, while

recognition may depend on histories of control, testimony of customary leaders, and community acknowledgment. This setting creates a distinctive conflict-management problem when socially legitimate customary claims do not fully correspond with documentary evidence recognized by state institutions.

Formal dispute settlement provides legal certainty and enforceability, yet adversarial or highly procedural processes may be less capable of restoring damaged kinship and community relations. Mediation offers a different logic: parties participate in constructing a settlement rather than receiving a winner-loser judgment. The contemporary mediation literature emphasizes procedural fairness, party self-determination, mediator legitimacy, and the importance of context in settlement durability [4, 5, 6]. Restorative approaches add that the quality of conflict resolution should also be assessed by whether relationships, social balance, and community trust are repaired [7, 8]. For the Muna community, local wisdom provides a culturally intelligible vocabulary for this restorative function. The underlying study identifies values expressed through *pobhini-bhiniki kuli*, *poma-maasigho*, *poangka-angkatau*, and *popia-piara*. These principles emphasize mutual recognition, compassion, respect, protection, reciprocity, and social balance. They operate not merely as abstract cultural symbols but as normative resources used in deliberation, the evaluation of claims, the conduct of mediators, and the effort to restore relationships after a dispute.

Local wisdom, however, should not be romanticized. Customary mechanisms may be socially legitimate while remaining institutionally weak when disputes involve registered titles, corporate actors, government decisions, or parties outside the customary community. Informal evidence may also become difficult to verify across generations. These challenges reflect a broader tension identified in legal-pluralism research: non-state norms may coexist with state law, but coexistence does not automatically produce equal authority or effective coordination [2, 9]. Indonesian law creates both an opportunity and a constraint for integration. The Constitution recognizes and respects customary-law communities and their traditional rights subject to constitutional conditions, while the Basic Agrarian Law acknowledges customary rights within the national agrarian framework [10, 11]. Mediation and alternative dispute resolution are also supported through national legal instruments, including the Arbitration and Alternative Dispute Resolution Law and Supreme Court mediation rules [12, 13]. At the administrative level, land-case handling is governed through regulations of the Ministry of Agrarian Affairs and Spatial Planning/National Land Agency [14]. These frameworks open institutional space, but they do not by themselves solve the practical problem of how customary outcomes become documented, recognized, and connected to land administration.

The research gap is therefore not simply whether customary mediation exists. The more important question is how local wisdom can be managed strategically so that its relational strengths are preserved while its institutional weaknesses are addressed. Previous work often examines customary law, mediation, restorative justice, agrarian administration, or conflict management separately. The Muna case permits these perspectives to be integrated around an empirical question: under what conditions can local wisdom become a reliable conflict-management resource in a modern plural legal environment?

This article aims to analyze the opportunities and challenges of local wisdom-based conflict management in the Muna ethnic community. It identifies the principal conflict drivers, explains the social logic of customary mediation, evaluates the institutional opportunities for strengthening it, examines its contemporary limitations, and develops an integrative strategy linking customary legitimacy with formal legal certainty. The article thereby reframes customary mediation from a residual traditional practice into a strategic governance mechanism for conflict prevention, resolution, and post-conflict social recovery.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1 Research Design and Location

The study employed empirical legal research (socio-legal research) with a qualitative descriptive-analytical approach. The design was selected to examine how law works in social practice rather than to evaluate rules only at the normative level. A socio-cultural approach was used to understand the values, symbols, kinship relations, and customary practices surrounding conflict, while a strategic-management perspective was used to interpret mediation as a planned process involving environmental analysis, strategy formulation, implementation, and evaluation [15, 16].

Field research was conducted in Muna Regency and West Muna Regency, Southeast Sulawesi, Indonesia. The locations were selected because customary land relations and customary mediation remain socially relevant while interacting increasingly with modern land administration, individual certification, investment, and village-government institutions. This combination made the area suitable for examining both the continuing strengths and contemporary pressures affecting local wisdom-based conflict management.

2.2 Informants and Data Collection

Informants were purposively selected from actors with direct experience or knowledge of customary mediation and land conflict. They included customary leaders who had served as mediators, disputing parties, village or local-government officials connected with land affairs and social conflict, community leaders, religious leaders, academics, and other community members familiar with customary tenure. The final number of interviews followed the principle of data saturation rather than a predetermined statistical sample.

Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews, moderate-participant field observation, document analysis, and focus group discussions. Interviews explored customary mediation stages, mediator roles, the meaning of justice and kinship, land-ownership histories, conflict causes, relations between customary and formal law, and strategies for achieving durable settlements. Observation focused on meeting procedures, language, mediator positioning, interactions between disputants, and locally meaningful symbols or practices. Documents included mediation records, peace agreements, customary materials, government records, and relevant legislation.

Focus group discussions with customary actors, community members, and village officials were used to explore collective perceptions of mediation effectiveness, identify enabling and constraining factors, and validate emerging interpretations. The combination of interviews, observation, documents, and group discussion allowed the study to compare what participants said with institutional records and observed practices.

2.3 Data Analysis and Trustworthiness

Analysis was iterative and descriptive-analytical. Data were reduced into thematic categories concerning tenure, conflict drivers, customary values, mediator legitimacy, mediation stages, opportunities, challenges, and integration with formal institutions. Themes were then interpreted through legal pluralism, restorative justice, conflict-management, and strategic-management perspectives. Qualitative analysis followed the logic of data condensation, display, interpretation, and conclusion drawing [17, 18].

Trustworthiness was strengthened through source triangulation, technique triangulation, time triangulation, member checking, peer discussion, and an audit trail. These procedures were used to test the consistency of accounts across different informants and data sources and to distinguish recurring patterns from individual perceptions [19, 20]. The analysis does not claim statistical generalization; it seeks analytic understanding of conflict-management mechanisms within the Muna socio-legal context.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Land Relations as the Social Context of Conflict

The findings show that conflict management cannot be separated from the social meaning of land. Traditional land ownership in the Muna ethnic community has communal-genealogical characteristics and relies heavily on social legitimacy. Land may be understood as family or ancestral inheritance whose legitimacy is supported by histories of occupation, collective memory, customary testimony, and recognition by surrounding communities. The underlying dissertation identifies forms including Ome land, Dasa/Ko Dasano-related land, Tondo-Tondo land, customary communal land, family land, cultivated land, and customary private holdings.

This tenure structure has two implications. First, evidence of ownership may be socially strong even when written documentation is limited. Second, rights and obligations can extend beyond the individual currently occupying or cultivating the land. These features help explain why unilateral registration, sale, inheritance division, or boundary alteration can trigger conflict even when one party believes that an administrative procedure has been completed. The conflict is often simultaneously legal, familial, historical, and symbolic.

The study also identifies a transition from collective understandings of land toward more individualized claims. Certification, market value, inheritance fragmentation, population change, and investment increase the incentive to define exclusive ownership. Such change is not inherently negative, but it creates a translation problem when older communal narratives must be converted into contemporary administrative categories. Conflict becomes more likely when this conversion occurs without family deliberation or customary verification.

3.2 Main Drivers of Land Conflict

Four recurring drivers dominate the empirical material. The first is differing interpretations of customary boundaries. Traditional boundaries may rely on trees, rivers, stones, cultivation histories, or remembered landmarks. Natural markers can disappear and oral memories can diverge. In the 73 disputes analyzed in the underlying research, 25 cases (34.2%) were attributed to different interpretations of land boundaries. The finding illustrates how environmental change and intergenerational memory can transform an accepted boundary into a contested narrative.

The second driver is oral inheritance without adequate documentation. Traditional inheritance may be transmitted through family understanding rather than written division. As family structures change and land values rise, descendants may demand individual shares that earlier generations did not define precisely. Twenty-one of the 73 analyzed disputes (28.7%) were linked to inheritance problems. These disputes were frequently internal family conflicts, demonstrating that the most difficult conflict may arise among parties who must continue living within the same kinship network after the legal issue is settled.

The third driver is transfer of rights without administrative evidence. Customary sales or gifts may have been regarded as valid because they occurred before witnesses or customary authorities, yet later generations may challenge the transaction when formal documentation is absent. Thirteen cases in the analyzed set (reported in the dissertation as 18.5%) concerned transfers without adequate administrative proof. The discrepancy between remembered social transactions and state evidentiary requirements can place a good-faith possessor in a vulnerable position.

The fourth driver is overlap between customary claims and positive-law claims. A family may consider land legitimate because it has been occupied and recognized for generations, while another party holds a certificate or other administrative evidence. This creates an asymmetry of authority: customary legitimacy may be persuasive locally, whereas documentary title has stronger standing in formal administration. Such disputes cannot be resolved sustainably by ignoring either source of legitimacy.

Table 1. Principal land-conflict drivers and strategic responses in the Muna context.

Conflict driver	Empirical manifestation	Management risk	Strategic response
Boundary interpretation	Natural markers disappear; memories diverge	Competing historical narratives	Participatory boundary verification and mapping
Oral inheritance	Collective inheritance lacks written division	Intra-family recurring conflict	Family genealogy, witnessed agreement, documentation
Undocumented transfer	Customary sale/gift lacks formal evidence	Later denial and weak administrative position	Witness verification followed by formal recording
Customary–formal overlap	Socially recognized control conflicts with formal title	Asymmetric legal power	Joint social-historical and administrative verification

3.3 Local Wisdom as a Conflict-Management Resource

Customary mediation derives its effectiveness from cultural intelligibility. Parties do not enter a socially neutral procedure; they enter a forum whose language, authorities, expectations, and moral vocabulary are familiar. This can reduce defensiveness and make it possible to discuss histories and relationships that a narrowly documentary process may overlook. The legitimacy of the mediator is therefore relational as well as procedural.

Pobhini-bhiniki kuli expresses the principle that human beings share vulnerability and dignity and should recognize one another as socially connected. In conflict management, the principle discourages humiliation and frames settlement as restoration of coexistence. Poma-maasigho emphasizes mutual care and compassion, encouraging parties to consider the social consequences of rigid claims. Poangka-angkatau emphasizes mutual respect and recognition, while popia-piara emphasizes mutual protection and preservation. Together these values support a settlement logic that is relational rather than exclusively distributive.

The underlying study also records practices of deliberation and consensus and the use of customary and community leaders as mediators. Their role is not simply to announce an inherited rule. They reconstruct the history of land control, hear witnesses,

interpret family and customary relationships, facilitate communication, and search for an outcome that can be socially accepted. This resembles interest-based mediation but is embedded in a thicker moral community [4, 5].

From a restorative-justice perspective, the strength of this approach is that the dispute is understood as damage to relationships and community equilibrium as well as a disagreement over rights [7, 8]. A settlement is therefore stronger when it clarifies land use or ownership while also restoring communication, dignity, and future coexistence. This is especially important in intra-family disputes, where a formal judgment may determine title but cannot by itself repair kinship.

3.4 Opportunities for Strengthening Local Wisdom-Based Conflict Management

The first opportunity is social legitimacy. Customary leaders and community witnesses often possess historical knowledge that is unavailable in administrative files. Where parties recognize their integrity, these actors can help reconstruct possession histories and distinguish genuine community memory from newly constructed claims. This locally embedded evidentiary function is particularly valuable before formal registration or during early-stage dispute prevention.

The second opportunity is the constitutional and legal recognition of customary communities and living law. Article 18B(2) of the 1945 Constitution provides a constitutional basis for recognition of customary-law communities under specified conditions, while the Basic Agrarian Law recognizes customary rights within the national agrarian system [10, 11]. The legal environment therefore permits a carefully designed interface between customary institutions and state administration rather than requiring a choice between them.

The third opportunity is the growth of mediation and restorative approaches within formal justice policy. Indonesia's alternative dispute-resolution framework and court mediation rules create institutional familiarity with negotiated settlement [12, 13]. Customary mediation can complement these mechanisms by resolving the social and historical dimensions of conflict before a dispute escalates into prolonged litigation.

The fourth opportunity is collaborative governance. The research identifies the potential for structured cooperation among customary institutions, village government, local government, the National Land Agency, and affected communities. Collaborative governance is most effective when public agencies and non-state stakeholders engage in formal, consensus-oriented processes rather than ad hoc consultation [21, 22]. In the Muna context, collaboration can connect social verification with mapping, documentation, registration, and legal recognition.

The fifth opportunity is preventive conflict management. Local wisdom need not be activated only after a dispute has become severe. Customary verification can be incorporated into inheritance agreements, boundary confirmation, land-transfer witnessing, participatory mapping, and pre-registration consultation. Preventive use is strategically important because the empirical drivers identified in this study are often predictable: boundaries, inheritance, transfers, and competing legal evidence.

The sixth opportunity is intergenerational transmission. Documenting customary principles, mediation procedures, genealogical histories, and locally accepted boundary knowledge can preserve cultural resources while improving evidentiary reliability. Documentation does not require transforming flexible custom into rigid codification. It can instead create community archives that record the basis of agreements and reduce future dependence on fading oral memory.

3.5 Challenges and Risks

The first challenge is the gap between social legitimacy and formal enforceability. A customary agreement may be accepted by the parties and community but remain vulnerable if it is not translated into documents recognized by land administration or, where necessary, formal legal processes. This gap can cause settled conflicts to reappear when land is sold, inherited, registered, or used as collateral.

The second challenge is evidentiary fragility. Oral histories, natural boundary markers, and witness memory can be highly meaningful yet difficult to verify after decades. Aging customary authorities and the disappearance of physical markers intensify this problem. A strategy that relies entirely on oral evidence may therefore reproduce uncertainty rather than eliminate it.

The third challenge is changing values and authority across generations. Younger community members may not automatically accept the authority of customary institutions to the same degree as older generations. Migration, education, urbanization, digital information, and market-oriented land values can alter expectations about ownership and dispute settlement. Local wisdom

remains relevant only if it can explain its fairness and usefulness to contemporary participants rather than relying solely on inherited status.

The fourth challenge is power asymmetry. Customary mediation works best when parties share a social field and recognize the mediator's legitimacy. Its capacity is weaker when a dispute involves corporations, outside investors, politically influential actors, or state institutions. In these settings, community actors may face information, financial, and legal-resource disadvantages. A purely customary forum may not be sufficient to protect weaker parties.

The fifth challenge is mediator capacity and accountability. Social respect does not automatically provide technical knowledge of land administration, mapping, evidence, human rights, or formal mediation ethics. Mediators need training that strengthens legal and procedural competence without displacing cultural legitimacy. Transparent selection criteria and conflict-of-interest safeguards are also necessary, particularly in small communities where kinship connections are dense.

The sixth challenge is the risk of romanticization or exclusion. Customary mechanisms should not be assumed to be fair merely because they are traditional. Outcomes must remain compatible with constitutional rights, non-discrimination, procedural fairness, and the meaningful participation of affected parties. Legal pluralism is most defensible when it expands access to justice without creating a lower standard of protection for people whose disputes are handled locally [1, 2, 9].

Table 2. Opportunities and challenges of local wisdom-based conflict management.

Opportunity	Corresponding challenge	Management implication
Strong social legitimacy	Uneven formal enforceability	Convert agreements into recognized records
Historical customary knowledge	Oral evidence can fade	Community archives and participatory mapping
Restorative orientation	Power asymmetry with external actors	Access to legal/technical support
Customary mediator authority	Capacity and conflict-of-interest risks	Training, ethics, transparent selection
Legal recognition of custom	Institutional fragmentation	Formal coordination protocols
Intergenerational cultural capital	Changing youth expectations	Education and adaptive customary practice

3.6 An Integrative Customary–Formal Conflict Management Strategy

The findings indicate that the most viable strategy is not to replace state law with customary law or vice versa. Each system has a different comparative strength. Customary institutions are well positioned to reconstruct social history, identify kinship relationships, interpret local meanings, facilitate face-saving communication, and restore relationships. Formal institutions are better positioned to provide cadastral verification, standardized documentation, registration, enforceability, and protection against third-party claims. The strategic objective is functional integration.

Stage one is early conflict assessment. Before mediation, the mediator team should identify the parties, type of tenure, family genealogy, disputed boundaries, existing certificates or administrative records, prior transactions, and relevant witnesses. Cases involving violence, serious rights violations, or strong external power asymmetries should be referred or supported by appropriate formal institutions rather than treated as ordinary customary disagreements.

Stage two is dual-track evidence verification. Customary verification should document oral histories, witness testimony, genealogical relationships, previous cultivation, community recognition, and traditional boundaries. Administrative verification should examine certificates, land books, maps, transaction documents, tax records, and other relevant official evidence. Neither stream should be treated as automatically conclusive before contradictions are examined.

Stage three is culturally grounded mediation. A mediator or panel accepted by the parties should facilitate deliberation using principles of mutual respect, care, protection, fairness, and social harmony. The goal is not to pressure parties into agreement but to create a process in which legal interests and relational consequences can both be discussed. The settlement options may

include boundary clarification, division, shared use, compensation, recognition of prior transactions, or other arrangements consistent with law.

Stage four is documentation and formalization. Agreements should identify the parties, object of dispute, factual background, agreed boundaries or rights, witnesses, implementation responsibilities, deadlines, and consequences of non-compliance. Where the agreement changes or clarifies registrable land rights, parties should be assisted in completing the relevant administrative steps. This is the point at which social legitimacy is translated into legal durability. Stage five is post-settlement monitoring. Customary and village institutions should monitor implementation and maintain accessible records. Follow-up is important because conflict resolution should be evaluated not only by the signing of an agreement but by whether the settlement is implemented, relationships stabilize, and the same dispute does not recur. This is consistent with strategic-management logic in which implementation and evaluation are integral rather than optional stages [23, 24].

The model can be summarized as: customary legitimacy → joint evidence verification → restorative deliberation → documented settlement → administrative/formal recognition → monitoring and conflict prevention. This sequence preserves the distinctive social strengths of Muna mediation while directly addressing the weaknesses identified by the research.

Figure 1. Integrative local wisdom-based conflict-management strategy for the Muna ethnic community.

Customary legitimacy	Conflict assessment	Dual verification	Restorative mediation	Formalization	Monitoring
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3.7 Theoretical Contribution

The study contributes to legal-pluralism theory by showing that the practical issue is not simply the coexistence of legal orders but the management of interfaces between them. Customary and state law generate different forms of evidence and legitimacy. Conflict escalates when institutions treat these forms as mutually exclusive. The proposed model instead assigns them complementary functions and creates a sequence through which social recognition can be examined, documented, and connected to formal administration. It also contributes to conflict-management theory by emphasizing relational durability as an outcome. Conventional measures of dispute resolution can focus on whether a case is closed. The Muna case suggests that closure is insufficient where disputants are relatives, neighbors, or members of the same community. Effective conflict management must consider implementation, restored communication, acceptance by relevant social actors, and recurrence risk. These dimensions align with restorative justice but extend it into strategic monitoring. A third contribution is the conceptualization of local wisdom as strategic capital. Local values are often discussed as cultural heritage or normative ideals. Here they function as resources that shape mediator legitimacy, communication, acceptable settlement behaviour, and social enforcement. Their value is therefore contingent on institutional capacity. Local wisdom becomes strategically powerful when it is connected to documentation, capable mediators, collaborative institutions, and formal recognition.

3.8 Policy and Managerial Implications

For local government, the first priority is to establish a clear coordination protocol for customary land disputes. The protocol should specify when customary mediation may be used, how village government participates, when land-office verification is required, how agreements are documented, and how cases involving certificates or external actors are escalated. The protocol should not convert customary institutions into subordinate administrative offices; its purpose is to make interfaces predictable.

For customary institutions, capacity development should combine cultural authority with practical skills in mediation ethics, conflict analysis, documentation, participatory mapping, land administration, and rights protection. Training should be co-designed so that technical standardization does not erase culturally meaningful communication practices.

For the National Land Agency and village administrations, the findings support stronger pre-registration social verification in locations where customary claims remain significant. Participatory mapping and documented consultation can identify potential conflicts before registration creates competing claims. Where possible, customary witnesses and family representatives should be involved transparently in verification without displacing statutory procedures.

For communities, preventive documentation is essential. Families should be encouraged to record inheritance decisions, witnessed transfers, boundary agreements, and mediation outcomes. Community archives can preserve customary history while

reducing the evidentiary burden placed on aging witnesses. Digital copies may be useful, but access, privacy, and control of sensitive customary information must be considered.

For policymakers, evaluation indicators should extend beyond the number of settlements. A stronger monitoring framework would examine time to settlement, implementation rate, recurrence, party acceptance, restoration of communication, administrative formalization, perceived fairness, participation of vulnerable parties, and whether the agreement can withstand later transactions or inheritance.

4. CONCLUSION

Local wisdom-based conflict management remains highly relevant in the Muna ethnic community because land disputes are embedded in social history, kinship, identity, and community recognition as well as formal legal rights. The underlying research shows that conflict is frequently generated by ambiguous customary boundaries, undocumented inheritance, informal transfers, and overlaps between customary and state-law claims. These drivers make purely documentary or purely customary approaches incomplete. The principal opportunity of customary mediation lies in its social legitimacy, restorative orientation, cultural intelligibility, and ability to mobilize trusted actors and community memory. Muna values such as *pobhini-bhiniki kuli*, *poma-maasigho*, *poangka-angkatau*, and *popia-piara* provide a normative basis for mutual recognition, compassion, respect, protection, and social harmony. These values help mediation address the relational damage that often remains after a land conflict. The principal challenges are weak formal enforceability, fragile oral evidence, changing intergenerational authority, mediator-capacity gaps, institutional fragmentation, and power asymmetry when external actors are involved. These limitations mean that local wisdom should not be treated as an autonomous substitute for the formal legal system.

The recommended strategy is an integrative customary–formal model. Customary institutions should lead social-historical verification and restorative deliberation where they possess legitimacy, while formal institutions provide cadastral verification, documentation, registration, rights safeguards, and enforceability. Joint evidence verification, written settlements, administrative follow-through, and post-settlement monitoring can transform customary mediation from an informal end point into an institutional bridge. Future research should evaluate this model prospectively in actual mediation cases and compare outcomes with conventional administrative or litigation pathways. Comparative research across Indonesian ethnic communities would also help distinguish the universally transferable elements—such as dual verification and post-settlement monitoring—from culturally specific elements that should remain locally defined.

4.1 Implementation Roadmap, Safeguards, and Future Research

An implementation roadmap is needed because institutional integration cannot be achieved through a single regulation or training activity. In the short term, local government and customary institutions can develop a standardized but culturally flexible mediation record. The form should document the identity and consent of parties, the disputed land, customary history, witnesses, maps or sketches, documents examined, the mediation process, settlement terms, implementation schedule, and signatures. The purpose is not to bureaucratize customary deliberation but to preserve evidence that may otherwise disappear when mediators, witnesses, or family elders are no longer available.

A second short-term priority is the creation of a referral matrix. Not every dispute should follow the same pathway. Intra-family disputes over inherited land may be particularly suitable for customary mediation because kinship restoration is central. Boundary disputes may require customary testimony combined with participatory mapping. Cases involving an existing certificate require early coordination with the land office. Disputes involving companies, large investments, alleged coercion, violence, or substantial power imbalance require additional legal safeguards and should not rely exclusively on community pressure to reach settlement. A referral matrix can protect the legitimacy of customary mediation by preventing it from being used outside the conditions in which it is capable of producing fair outcomes. In the medium term, mediator development should use a competency framework. Cultural knowledge and community trust remain indispensable, but mediators also need skills in conflict diagnosis, active listening, reframing, negotiation, documentation, basic land law, administrative procedures, mapping literacy, ethics, confidentiality, and the identification of unequal bargaining power. Capacity building should involve experienced customary leaders as co-trainers so that professionalization strengthens rather than displaces local knowledge. Periodic peer review can be used to discuss difficult cases without disclosing confidential information.

Digitalization creates both opportunity and risk. A community-based archive can preserve genealogies, settlement records, historical boundary descriptions, maps, and prior agreements. When appropriate, geospatial information can be linked to written

narratives so that future generations can understand both the physical boundary and its customary basis. However, land information is sensitive. Digital systems require rules on access, consent, data ownership, correction, and protection against unauthorized use. A poorly governed database could create new conflicts by transforming provisional or contested narratives into apparently authoritative digital records.

The model also requires safeguards for procedural justice. Parties should understand that participation in mediation is voluntary, that mediators must disclose relevant relationships, and that vulnerable participants should have meaningful opportunities to speak. Agreements should not be accepted merely because they restore surface-level harmony. A durable settlement requires informed consent, understandable terms, realistic implementation, and compatibility with applicable law. Where a party needs independent legal or technical advice, access to such assistance should be facilitated before final agreement.

From a management perspective, performance measurement should combine efficiency, justice, and sustainability. Efficiency indicators can include duration, cost, and number of meetings. Justice indicators can include perceived neutrality, voice, transparency, and understanding of the outcome. Sustainability indicators can include implementation, recurrence, later administrative recognition, restored communication, and the absence of retaliatory conflict. Community-level indicators can examine whether mediation strengthens trust in customary and public institutions rather than shifting disputes from one forum to another. The opportunities and challenges identified in Muna also have implications for other culturally plural regions. The transferable principle is not the replication of Muna terminology outside its cultural setting. Rather, other communities can identify their own locally legitimate values, authorities, evidentiary traditions, and reconciliation practices, then examine how these can interface with formal institutions. Comparative research should therefore focus on functions—social verification, relational restoration, documentation, rights protection, and enforcement—while allowing the cultural form of those functions to vary.

Future research can test the integrative model through comparative case tracking. Cases could be grouped according to pathway—customary mediation only, formal mediation only, litigation, or integrated customary–formal mediation—and followed over time. Outcomes should include settlement durability, implementation, cost, time, participant satisfaction, perceived fairness, family or community relationship quality, administrative recognition, and recurrence. Such evidence would allow the normative promise of local wisdom-based conflict management to be evaluated against observable long-term outcomes.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Jumanudin: Conceptualization, investigation, data curation, analysis, writing—original draft. Usman Rianse: Supervision, methodology, strategic-management analysis, writing—review and editing. Herman: Legal analysis, supervision, validation, writing—review and editing. Wa Kuasa Baka: Socio-cultural analysis, supervision, validation, writing—review and editing. Heryanti: Legal and policy analysis, supervision, validation, writing—review and editing.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

ETHICS STATEMENT

The study involved qualitative interviews, observation, and group discussion. Participation was voluntary and the research purpose was explained to participants.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The qualitative data are part of the underlying dissertation research. Non-confidential supporting material may be made available by the corresponding author upon reasonable request, subject to participant confidentiality and applicable institutional requirements.

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