

INVESTIGATING THE ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF RELIGIOUS LEADERS IN
RURAL DEVELOPMENT EFFORTS IN SOUTH AFRICA: A CASE STUDY OF VHEMBE
DISTRICT IN LIMPOPO PROVINCE

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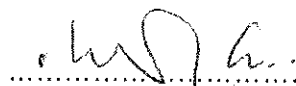
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ABSTRACT

The roles and responsibilities of Religious Leaders (RL) in rural development efforts cannot be over-emphasized. In the past, Religious Leaders have played vital roles in community development, both in rural and urban areas. It is in light of this that the researcher views the current situation in Vhembe District in general and seeks to determine whether or not this also applies specifically to the rural areas of the Vhembe District. The study explored the roles and responsibilities of Religious Leaders in rural development efforts, with particular reference to the Vhembe District of the Limpopo Province in South Africa; while aimed to investigate the role of religious leaders in developing rural communities in the Vhembe District. Selected religious communities from the Municipality were taken as a case study. A mixed research method was used while semi-structured and focus group interviews were conducted to collect data from religious leaders and communities to assess their perceptions on how they can contribute and engage in developing rural communities. Purposive and snowballing sampling were used to select participants in the study area. Field notes were taken and data was analysed using SPSS version 23.0, ATLAS.TI version 7.5.10 and thematic analysis method. The study established that RL are source of guidance on family, business and personal matters, including decisions about community development, education, health, livelihoods, and roles in civic society. Along with their well-established network of volunteers, community groups and religious communities (congregations, churches, mosques, synagogues, etc.) they potentially promote and sustain positive changes in the social norms, attitudes, and behaviours that affect development, especially in key rural remote areas. Rural development is still a major social problem which requires collective efforts to be strengthened.

Key words: Religious leaders, Religious Community, Rural Development, Vhembe District, Community development, Community Outreach