

**ROLES OF TRADITIONAL LEADERSHIP IN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AMIDST
DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS IN VHEMBE DISTRICT OF LIMPOPO PROVINCE**

By

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ABSTRACT

This thesis focused on an examination of the roles of traditional leadership in community development amidst democratic institutions in Vhembe District of South Africa's Limpopo Province. The study tested the hypotheses that youth and adults, males and females, elected and traditional leaders had the same perceptions on how traditional leaders responded and coped with changes in government over the past years. Furthermore, they had the same perceptions on the roles of traditional leaders. Also examined in this study was whether elected leaders effectively engaged communities on development issues.

Nine Traditional Councils in Vhembe District were purposively and proportionally sampled, taking into consideration ethnic representation. Using the stratified random sampling technique 14 villages in Makhado, Mutale and Thulamela local Municipalities were selected. Fourteen Ward Councillors whose Wards were aligned to the sampled villages were selected for interviews as well. One hundred and twelve focus group discussions and 14 key informant interviews were carried out. A semi-structured interview guide was used to collect data, with a tape recorder serving as an assistive device.

Thematic Content Analysis was used to organise and analyse the qualitative data. Using an inductive approach, the interview transcripts and field notes were analysed. The results obtained in phase 1 were consolidated into a questionnaire that was eventually administered to the sampled traditional and elected leaders. The responses to the questionnaire were either agreement (code 1) or divergence (code 2). Descriptive statistics and nonparametric tests such as Kruskal-Wallis and Mann-Whitney U tests were carried out using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22.0.

Thirteen (13) primary views on how traditional leaders has responded and coped with changes in Government over the past years were identified. No statistically significant differences in perceptions were observed due to age, gender and position of authority with respect to the following views on how traditional leaders responded and coped with changes in colonial, apartheid and democratic rule: the institution is planned by God; they are critical community leaders by virtue of birth; they are the only leadership institution that Africans have known since human kind; they are closer to the people on the ground than their elected counterparts; and they are knowledgeable about people's needs ($P > 0.05$). Adult male members of Traditional and Headmen Councils agreed to a greater extent with the perception that traditional leadership institution is democratic in nature ($P < 0.001$); Africans understand and believe in its governance system ($P < 0.001$); and that they are respected by Africans ($P < 0.001$). This results showed that traditional leaders were not impeding the development of a

prosperous, democratic and just society. However, there is need to develop more effective strategies for strengthening the relationship between the elected and traditional leadership institutions.

Twenty-six (26) roles that could be placed into seven (7) performance areas were identified. Among the main roles of traditional leaders identified in this study were running customary courts; determining use and allocation of stands; report any unrest in the community to the police; ensuring that circumcision schools are carried out; consider and make recommendations on trading licences in their areas; and the registration of birth, death and customary marriages. Significant differences in the perceptions were observed between adults and youth ($P < 0.01$); elected and traditional leaders ($P < 0.001$). There was no effect of gender. Moreover, no differences in perceptions were observed between male members of Traditional and Headmen Councils; and elected leaders. These results confirmed that traditional leaders were still performing the roles entrusted to them for Centuries. It was concluded that the need for strengthening the co-existence of elected and traditional leaders in community development in rural areas was not questionable.

Traditional leaders were reported to be effective in engaging communities, resulting in people-centred decisions being made; they planned and held regular, well-attended meetings that involved residents of the areas under their jurisdiction. The meetings took place on days and at times most convenient to the local community; and they presided over discussions that dealt with matters of real concern to grassroots communities. The unearthed mechanisms for effective community engagement might help to reduce the increasingly common service delivery protests. Also, the study clarifies how to achieve ownership of community development initiatives. Lastly, ideas on the appropriate mechanisms for effective community engagement are evident.

The implications for rural development are improved accessibility of local government and other services; fair, transparent and effective land allocation; increased regeneration of morals and social cohesion. The governance interventions suggested are that a policy that give effect to the performance of the roles by traditional leaders and a governance model for effective discharge of the roles in a coexistence relationship between the two institutions of leadership must be developed. This study contributes the performance areas and specific roles of Traditional leaders in community development; and proposed framework governance model.

Key words: Community development, democracy, governance, roles, traditional leader, elected leader.