



The Role of Traditional Leadership in Rural Development in South Africa: An Analysis of the Dualistic Government System

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Abstract

Rural areas in many developing countries face distinct development challenges that often require a nuanced understanding of local governance structures. In many rural areas, traditional leadership coexists with local government structures as custodians of governance, resulting in what can be termed a dualistic government system. The dualistic government system is evident where traditional leadership operates alongside the modern democratic government structures, which were established in the post-apartheid era to provide effective service delivery. However, in some cases, there have been clashes between local governments and traditional leadership in attempting to provide service delivery in the land still under the custodianship of chieftains, which hindered the effective provision of service in most rural areas. This paper examines the role of traditional leadership in rural development by focusing on the dualistic government system prevalent in chieftain-controlled areas, using the case of Motantanyane Village in Limpopo Province, South Africa. The paper was based on a mixed-methods (qualitative and quantitative) research approach, with a sample of 86 participants who were sampled on the basis of purposive sampling and systematic sampling designs. Semi-structured questionnaires and unstructured interviews were used to collect qualitative and quantitative data. The findings showed that traditional leadership is a cornerstone of rural development and that their leadership is essential for bringing about constructive change and promoting development within their communities. The paper concluded that despite its flaws, traditional leadership continues to be important and relevant in rural communities today, especially regarding protecting social traditions, customs, and cultural values. The paper recommended that the role of traditional leadership be redefined in legislative frameworks and that it be involved in all facets of rural development decision-making to create more effective and inclusive development that addresses the issues of chieftain-controlled communities.

Keywords: *Collaborative Learning Theory; Dualistic Governance System; Rural Development; Service Delivery; Spatial Development; Traditional Leadership*

INTRODUCTION

For many years, traditional leadership played a pivotal role in instilling traditional values, allocating land and caring for the community members living in the destitute (Nemukula, 2019). However, with the dawn of democracy in South Africa, chieftain-controlled areas have been endowed with a dualistic governance system that is anchored by the elements of traditional leadership and modern democratic government structures (Dubazane & Nel, 2016; Makhoba, 2020). According to Baloyi (2016), a dual government system refers to a governing structure in which two distinct and somewhat independent systems exist within a region. This kind of system is found in many chieftain-controlled areas of South Africa, where state-established contemporary local governments exist with traditional leadership systems based on traditions, customs and cultural norms (Lukat et al., 2022). Lukat et al. (2022) argued that the institutional interplay of traditional leadership and local municipalities in rural governance has culminated in overlapping roles. Thus, it has been difficult to edify the role of traditional leadership in the modern government system. The roles of traditional leadership and modern democratic local governments seem to overlap in a dualistic system, particularly with regard to land administration, service delivery provision and development (Mudimeli, 2019; Qumba, 2021). Traditional leadership appears to

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have a distinct responsibility that overlaps with the obligations of local governments under democratic administration.

Prior to the democratic dispensation in South Africa, traditional leadership had spatial or areas that they controlled; however, in the mist of the new dispensation, all areas within the country were proclaimed to be under municipalities (Nemukula, 2019). This is coined in Section 151(1) of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996), which provides that local sphere consist of municipalities, which must be established in all areas of the country (Republic of South Africa, 1996). The proclamation resulted in conflict between the autonomized traditional leadership and municipalities, especially in matters of rural spatial development (Nemukula, 2019; Makhoba, 2020; Lukat et al., 2022). Nonetheless, legislation in democratic dispensation were formulated to incorporate the roles of the traditional leadership and local government to foster rural development and promote service delivery. Nemukula (2019) argues that the is a power contestation between the two institutions, which prompted poor service provision, riots and protests as well as underdevelopment in chieftain-controlled areas. This resorted to the question of the role of traditional leadership in enhancing rural development and service delivery provision. Today, many rural areas endure a plethora of challenges, such as inadequate spatial development, poor service delivery provision, and underdevelopment (Mudimeli, 2019; Nemukula, 2019; Makhoba, 2020; Mashamaite, 2023). Dubazane and Nel (2016) contend that despite the new dispensation, traditional leadership remains an important institution in many African states. Examples include Ghanaian, Nigeria, Botswana, Zimbabwe and South Africa, where it is recognized by their constitution. However, debates over the role of traditional leadership in rural development, especially in spatial control and allocation, continue (Dubazane & Nel, 2016; Nemukula, 2019; Makhoba, 2020).

In the White Paper on Traditional Leadership (2003), it is stated that traditional leadership, as an institution situated in rural areas, has a role to play in the fight against poverty, homelessness, illiteracy, and the promotion of good governance throughout all corners of our country; however, it only grants the local municipalities through councils an advisory and supportive role, rather than one of authority and decision making. These institutions were later established by the Traditional Leadership and Government Framework Act 41 of 2003 (TLGFA) (Republic of South Africa, 2003b). Conversely, Makhoba (2020) argues that South African legal frameworks centered on traditional leadership are ambiguous about their roles in modern democratic governance for rural development. Chapter 12 Section 212(1) of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996) states that “national legislation may provide for a role for traditional leadership as an institution at local level on matters affecting local communities” (Republic of South Africa, 1996). The Constitution is unclear about the role of traditional leadership in addressing local matters (Makhoba, 2020). The establishment of local governments pursuant to Section 151 of the Constitution stating that “local government consists of municipalities, which must be established for the entire territory of the Republic” (Republic of South Africa, 1996); according to Mathonsi and Sithole (2017), has diminished the role of traditional leadership. Furthermore, Section 3.2 of the White Paper on Traditional Leadership and Governance (2003) states that “traditional leadership has a role to promote socioeconomic development, service delivery, contribute to national building, promote peace and stability among community members, and preserve community culture and tradition” (Republic of South Africa, 2003b). Mudimeli (2019) argues that little effort has been made to clarify the role and authority of traditional leadership in rural development. On the other hand, TLGFA (Act 41 of 2003) was established to define the roles of traditional leadership in enhancing service delivery and rural development (Nemukula, 2019; Mudimeli, 2019). However, riots and protest marches over service delivery are currently prevalent in South African rural communities (Mamokhere, 2020; Mubangizi, 2022), which has raised more questions about policy

and legal frameworks than it has provided answers about the precise roles that traditional leadership is expected to perform in these areas. This paper examines the role of traditional leadership in rural development in the context of a dualistic government system in chieftain-controlled areas, with a focus on Motantanyane Village, Limpopo Province.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Collaborative Learning Theory as a lens

The Collaborative Learning Theory serves as a lens to comprehend the significance of collaboration in chieftain-controlled areas where a dualistic governance system still exists. Nakata et al. (2022) state that Linda Harasim established the Collaborative Learning Theory in 2012 as a philosophical framework for education that describes how teachers and/or students collaborate to solve challenges through interdependent learning. This theory is based on the premise that active discussion in small groups promotes critical thinking and increases participant involvement (Huang & Ning, 2021; Nakata et al., 2022). The theory therefore emphasizes the significance of interaction and cooperation in the process of acquiring knowledge. This implies that learning is a social activity that includes collaboration and active participation in group tasks or projects (Huang & Ning, 2021). This theory contends that through social contact, discourse, and the negotiation of ideas, learners actively participate in decision-making (Schnaubert & Bodemer, 2022). Nakata et al. (2022) added that social interaction is a central component of the Collaborative Learning Theory, in which learners engage in face-to-face or online exchanges such as discussions, debates, or solving problems.

This Collaborative Learning Theory emphasizes the importance of interaction and cooperation between traditional leadership and local governments to improve the sustainability of rural development in chieftain-controlled areas. Traditional leadership and local governments involve several stakeholders, including leaders, community members, development agents, and other organizations (Baloyi, 2016). Thus, the adoption of the Collaborative Learning Theory may promote open communication channels, active participation and integration to foster a more inclusive decision-making atmosphere in the field of planning and development within dualistic governance. According to the tenet of the theory, decision-making incorporates group input and participation rather than being primarily the responsibility of a single authority (Huang & Ning, 2021; Nakata et al., 2022). The premise underpinning the theory can be used to educate local governments and traditional leadership on the importance of collectiveness in addressing community issues to achieve sustainability, particularly in rural development. This theory could be a prerequisite paradigm to create a harmonic relationship between traditional leadership and local governments and minimizes the challenges they face in rural development.

Traditional leadership in South Africa: Before and after 1994

South Africa has a deep historical context of traditional leadership that can be traced back to colonial times (Parcells, 2022). De Kadt and Larreguy (2018) state that traditional leadership has been a well-established system of governance, which generally involved kings, queens or chiefs who exercised authority over their respective communities. However, since the arrival of European colonial powers, particularly the Dutch and British, in the 17th to 19th centuries, the existing systems of traditional leadership in South Africa have faced significant challenges (De Kadt & Larreguy, 2018; Skosana, 2019). Parcells (2022) adds that the colonial powers sought to exert control over the traditional populations and reshape the landscape to suit their interests. Traditional leadership was frequently co-opted during the colonial era and utilized as middlemen by the colonial powers to uphold order and obtain resources from indigenous peoples (Parcells, 2022). In particular, the British recognized traditional leadership and built indirect rule systems

that gave them power while maintaining ultimate authority (Mokwena et al., 2020; Parcells, 2022). This colonial approach was aimed to legitimize their system of governance in all areas, including chieftains-controlled areas in South Africa, and further minimize direct administration.

The Bantu Authorities Act of 1951 was passed to institutionalize the role of traditional authority during the apartheid system (Mokwena et al., 2020; Parcells, 2022). According to Rogerson (2022), the Act established tribal authorities, composed of traditional leaders, who were given limited powers over designated “homelands” or Bantustans, which were created as separate territories for different ethnic groups. These homelands were designed to segregate and marginalize black South Africans, and the traditional leadership became a key figure in the implementation of apartheid policies (Rogerson, 2022). After 1994, South Africa endured the birth of democracy, which resulted in substantial change. Traditionalists still believed that traditional leadership is still important and relevant today, particularly in rural communities, as it is a component of societal cultures (Makhoba, 2020). Hence, the democratic government of South Africa has pledged to erase not only the legacy of apartheid but also the spatial fragmentation within the country (Monama et al., 2022). Traditional leadership in South Africa now serves as a symbolic and cultural act within communities, and a consultative role in local governance. They are recognized as part of the country’s diverse cultural heritage, and their participation in decision-making processes is aimed at promoting inclusivity and addressing the needs of traditional communities (Makhoba, 2020; Mokwena et al., 2020). However, the role and influence of traditional leadership on rural development in contemporary South Africa remain a topic of debate. As South Africa continues to grapple with the legacies of its past, the future of traditional leadership is likely to continue to evolve alongside broader societal changes.

Traditional leadership in modern democratic governance: Criticisms and challenges

In rural communities under chieftaincies, traditional leadership continues to be a cornerstone of governance, and it has a long history of institutionalizing colonial and later apartheid government system in South Africa. Despite having piloted into a democratic dispensation, there are still debates in many African countries about how the institution of traditional leadership may fit into the democratic government systems (Mudimeli, 2019; Wang et al., 2021; Sato et al., 2022). Bakamana (2021) asserts that some African countries such as Botswana and Zimbabwe have shown how harmoniously the goals of traditional systems and those of the government may co-exist. According to Nxumalo (2012:11), “extensive research has been done on the role of traditional leadership, especially in African development context”; however, traditional leadership has remained a topical debate within the contemporary government administration in many parts of the world. Many studies have emphasized the role of traditional leadership as a key factor that may be deployed as a crucial body of authority in rural development (Mudimeli, 2019; Wang et al., 2021). However, due to their operational nature, traditional leadership practices tend to be incompatible with modern democratic conformances (Sato et al., 2022).

Traditional leadership institutions, roles and functions within many modern governments remain unclear and contentious, particularly regarding rural development in terms of service delivery provision, despite the adoption of legal frameworks such as the Traditional Leadership and Governance Framework Act (2003) in South Africa. However, the specifics of their contributions to the growth and development of communities remain vague, undefined, and undervalued (Mathonsi & Sithole, 2017; Mudimeli, 2019; Makhoba, 2020). Nevertheless, traditional leadership institutions continue to be essential to South Africa’s constitutional democracy and community development, particularly in chieftain-controlled areas (Koenane, 2018). In South Africa, the role of traditional leadership in rural communities is to, *inter alia*, maintain peace, unite society, prevent societal customs and culture from being disrupted, allocate land, represent communities in dispute

resolution and faction conflicts, and promote community identity (Koenane, 2018; Mustasilta, 2021; Sato et al., 2022). According to Mawere et al. (2022), the primary responsibility is to provide leadership to their communities while performing the obligations allocated to them under customary law. Traditional authorities are given the custody of communal land under customary law. Mudimeli (2019) postulates that the presence of traditional powers in modern and democratic society poses certain development challenges such as underdevelopment and service delivery problems in chieftain-controlled areas. Therefore, incorporating traditional leadership as partners and decision-makers can lead to more successful and inclusive development initiatives that address the distinctive challenges of chieftain-controlled areas.

Legal frameworks in South Africa anchored on traditional leadership

The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, adopted in 1996, advocates for a dual system of governance in chieftain-controlled areas, which includes both elected democratic structures and traditional leadership. Section 151 of the Constitution states that “local government consists of municipalities, which must be established for all of the areas of the Republic” (Republic of South Africa, 1996). Legal frameworks such as the Local Government: Municipal Systems Act 24 (2000), the Local Government: Municipal Structures Act (1998), and the Traditional Leadership and Governance Framework Act (TLGFA) (2003) were passed in South Africa after the advent of democracy to restructure land administration and harmonize relationships between traditional leadership and local government (Makhoba, 2020). The legislative instruments are in line with the Constitution; nonetheless, they are unable to override the Constitution’s authority and obligations, which prioritize municipalities. Among the collection of traditional leadership laws passed in the 2000s, the TLGFA (41 of 2003) is the first and most significant law. This Act was put into action on December 19, 2003 (Republic of South Africa, 2003a). The TLGFA’s goals include the recognition of rural areas under chieftains, the creation and acknowledgment of traditional councils, and the conception of a legal framework within which traditional leadership will function (Republic of South Africa, 2003a; Makhoba, 2020). Traditional leadership was given authority under this Act to ensure that the institution be put back in its rightful position, thus restoring the dignity of chieftains and their communities (Republic of South Africa, 2003a).

South Africa’s new democratic government embraced and developed the Spatial Planning and Land Use Management Act 16 of 2013 as a legislative framework to address historical injustices in spatial planning. Before SPLUMA, the newly elected democratic government of 1994 passed the Development Facilitation Act of 1995. The Development Facilitation Act of 1995 was enacted to speed up the processes for development (Maluleke, 2017). The SPLUMA was enacted after the failure of the Development Facilitation Act of 1995. The SPLUMA was passed in 2013 although it did not take effect until 2015. The goal of SPLUMA is to encourage uniformity and consistency in practices and decision-making for all land development under its jurisdiction (Republic of South Africa, 2013). The SPLUMA oversees the rights of traditional councils, notably those relating to land use management and planning, in the realm of traditional leadership (Maleham, 2018; Drummond & Nel, 2021).

The National House of Traditional Leaders 22 of 2009 was also enacted to serve as a platform for traditional leadership to engage with the local government on matters affecting their communities and helps ensure that their voices are heard in policy-making processes. Section 11(1) of the National House of Traditional Leaders Act 22 of 2009 outlines that the House of Traditional Leadership has the authority to collaborate with provincial houses of traditional leaders and to advance the position of traditional leadership within the framework of democratic constitutional government (Republic of South Africa, 2009; Nemukula, 2019). It also describes traditional leadership as encouraging peace, stability, and togetherness in traditional communities, and

assuring the preservation of community culture and customs. Furthermore, the House of Traditional Leaders is responsible for guaranteeing traditional communities' social well-being and welfare, as well as ensuring socio-economic development and service delivery (Nemukula, 2019). The Municipal Structures Act (117 of 1998) was enacted to govern and recognize traditional leadership and municipal structures. This Act describes the framework of local government and establishes municipalities and their categories (Maseko, 2016). The Act fits traditional leadership in Section 81, explaining that "a traditional leader who is entitled to participate in the proceedings of a municipal council may designate a senior traditional leader or, if there is no senior traditional leader, another traditional leader, to participate in his or her place" (Republic of South Africa, 1998).

Local Government: The Municipal Systems Act (32 of 2000) is among the policy and legislative frameworks passed after 1994. This Act, *inter alia*, intends to govern how municipal powers and functions are exercised and carried out (Republic of South Africa, 2000). Arguably, this Act divorced itself from the existence of traditional leadership institutions. Although most rural regions in South Africa are under the custodianship of traditional leaders, the Act places municipal governments at the forefront of rural development. Maseko (2016) argues that even if the Act ignores traditional institutions, it places focus on a sizable traditional group or a segment of the rural people. In fact, statements of this nature in an Act need a review of the relevant policy to find and fix any problems (Maseko, 2016). However, it is important to recognize that while the legal and policy frameworks aim to incorporate traditional leadership into the governance structure, there have been debates and controversies surrounding the role of traditional leadership, particularly regarding rural development. This issue continues to be a topic of discussion and potential areas for further amendments and improvements in the legal and policy frameworks.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Approach

The paper adopted a mixed methods research approach (Creswell, 2009), incorporating the elements of qualitative and quantitative research approaches (Saunders, 2009) for the comprehensive and in-depth purpose of understanding. The qualitative research approach enabled the researchers to provide a clear and detailed description of actions and representations of actions so that issues relating to the traditional leadership role on rural development could be better understood. The results of the quantitative research were presented in figures, tables and percentages to provide answers to the questions of how much and how many. The quantitative research approach was employed to analyze and interpret data in terms of statistical values concerning the role of traditional leadership in sustainable rural development.

Population and Sampling

The specific population included the Heads of Households at Motantanyane Village, South Africa. The key informants consisted of the chief, Traditional Councils, and Municipal Officials at the Lepelle-Nkumpi Local Municipality. The paper sampled the participants from the specific population using a combination of probability and non-probability sampling designs. Based on non-probability sampling, a purposive sampling design was used to select participants from the Municipal Officials of the Lepelle-Nkumpi Local Municipality as well as the Chief/*Ntona* and Traditional Councils at Motantanyane Village. The selection of these key informants was based primarily on the researchers' judgment. Household heads in Motantanyane Village were selected using a systematic sampling design based on probability sampling. The overall sample size consisted of 86 participants (including 6 Municipal Official, 1 Chief/*Ntona*, 8 Traditional Councils and 71 Household Heads at Motantanyane Village).

Data Collection and Analysis

The data (quantitative and qualitative) were gathered from both primary and secondary sources. Primary data were collected through semi-structured questionnaires and unstructured interviews, which included facts, opinions, impressions and views of the respondents and key informants. Quantitative data were collected from the Chief/*Ntona*, Traditional Councils and Household Heads in Motantanyane Village using a semi-structured questionnaire method, while an unstructured interview method was used to collect qualitative data from Municipal Officials in Lepelle-Nkumpi Local Municipality. On the other hand, the secondary data included perspectives gathered through a review of the literature relating to the topic of the study. Secondary data were collected from Google Scholar and academic journal articles, books, government legislation and policy frameworks, government reports, statistics, and other related publications.

This paper adopted a thematic analysis method to analyze the qualitative data. The qualitative data were analyzed thematically in accordance with the research questions and objectives. According to O'Leary (2014:300), "thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns within the data. It minimally organizes and describes the dataset in detail." The qualitative data acquired from the participants were thoroughly evaluated, immersed, coded, categorized, and then systematically analyzed and interpreted to establish the meaning and extensive descriptions. The paper employed the IBM SPSS Statistics 22.0 software to analyze the quantitative data that were acquired through semi-structured questionnaires. The quantitative data were turned into statistical percentages, graphs, charts and tables for numerical representations using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software to conduct several statistical analyses. Tables, charts and graphs were utilized to analyze themes, illustrate proportions and values.

Validity and Reliability

A pilot study was conducted to modify and finalize the data collection tools (unstructured interview and semi-structured questionnaire) to confirm the validity of the data acquired from the respondents and key informants. A sample of 5 participants (with 4 households in Motantanyane Village and 1 key informant) was purposively sampled and used in the pilot study. The pilot study helped the researchers to determine whether the data collection methods included any erroneous and ambiguous items. For promoting truthfulness during the data collection, the participants were assured of anonymity and confidentiality. The researcher further ensured that the processes for collecting data were trustworthy by determining that data were gathered under conditions and settings that were acceptable to the participants. The process of responding to the questionnaires and interviews ran smoothly through self-administration.

Ethical Considerations

The Turfloop Research Ethics Committee at the University of Limpopo, South Africa granted permission to conduct this study (Ethical Certificate Number: TREC/32/2023: PG). The researchers were mindful of ethical considerations from the beginning to the conclusion of the study.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Quantitative Data from Questionnaire Surveys

This section analyzes and interprets the quantitative data acquired through questionnaire surveys at Motantanyane Village. The study consisted of 80 respondents, including 71 household representatives, 1 Chief/*Ntona* and 8 Traditional Councils from Motantanyane Village. The results

from the questionnaires were compiled and organized into thematic areas to address a range of issues regarding the role of traditional leadership in rural development.

Structures for spatial development in Motantanyane Village

Table 1 depicts the research findings regarding the institution responsible for spatial development in Motantanyane Village. According to Table 2, traditional leadership is responsible for spatial development in Motantanyane Village, as expressed by 96.2% of the respondents. Meanwhile, 3.8% chose the local municipality to be responsible for Motantanyane Village’s spatial development. The findings suggest that most respondents believed that traditional leadership holds the responsibility for spatial development in Motantanyane Village. A smaller percentage attributed this responsibility to the local municipality. This suggests that a dualistic governance structure does exist in Motantanyane Village. However, traditional leadership appears to wield more influence and is the main catalyst in spatial development planning. It is also worth noting that no respondents chose an alternative institution for spatial development.

Table 1. Structures for spatial development in Motantanyane Village

Institution	Percentage (%)
Traditional Leadership	96.2%
Local Municipality	3.8%
Other	0%
Total	100%

Source: Authors

The importance of traditional leadership in Motantanyane Village

Figure 1 pertains to the perceived importance of traditional leadership in Motantanyane Village. Figure 1 shows that 12.5% of respondents strongly agreed that traditional leadership is important in Motantanyane Village. Another 12.5% of respondents agreed that traditional leadership is important in the area. However, Figure 1 indicates that 11.8% of the respondents were unsure or undecided about the importance of traditional leadership in the village. In contrast, Figure 1 shows that 15% of respondents disagreed with the idea that traditional leadership is important in Motantanyane Village. The majority of respondents, 46.2%, strongly disagree with the notion that traditional leadership is important in the area.

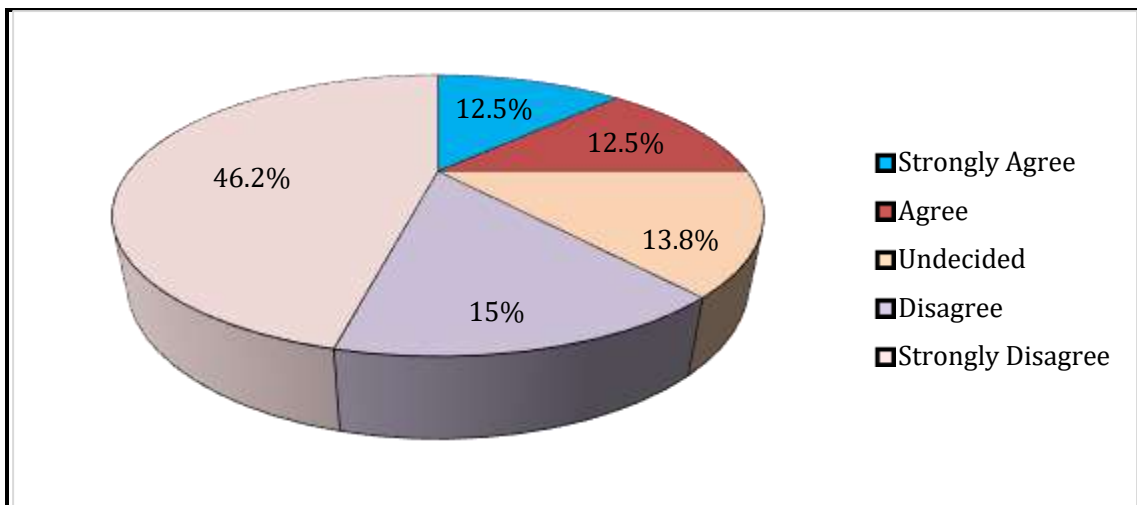


Figure 1. The importance of traditional leadership in Motantanyane Village

Figure 1 shows that many respondents perceived traditional leadership as not important in the area. The findings suggest that the importance of traditional leadership is diminishing in Motantanyane Village. This might be attributed to the persistence in the service delivery challenges witnessed in the areas (Tshitangoni & Francis, 2018). Figure 1 further shows that 13.8% of respondents were unsure whether traditional leadership was important in the area. The findings could mean that the efficacy of traditional leadership in the community was often not seen, yet they have proven to be vital in other community issues at some point. Traditional leadership in South Africa may have proven futile because its functions have been reduced because of the establishment of municipalities under Section 151 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996) (Mathonsi & Sithole, 2017). Mudimeli (2019) contends that little effort has been made to define the functions and powers of traditional leadership in rural development; as a result, their major practices on issues affecting the community are difficult to perceive. Figure 1 depicts a cumulative contrast of respondents who perceived that traditional leadership was significant. This could reflect that traditional leadership persists to play a significant role in Motantanyane Village.

The role of traditional leadership in Motantanyane Village

Figure 2 shows the perspectives of the respondents on the role of traditional leadership in Montantanyane Village. Figure 2 indicates that 15% of the respondents strongly agreed that traditional leadership plays a crucial role in Motantanyane Village. Furthermore, Figure 2 shows that 17.5% of the respondents agreed that traditional leadership plays a pivotal role in the area. According to Figure 2, 31.2% of the respondents were indecisive “undecided” when asked about the role of traditional leadership. Conversely, Figure 2 shows that 23.8% of the respondents disagreed with the notion that traditional leadership plays a significant role in Motantanyane Village. While 12.5% of the respondents strongly disagreed that traditional leadership plays an important role in the village.

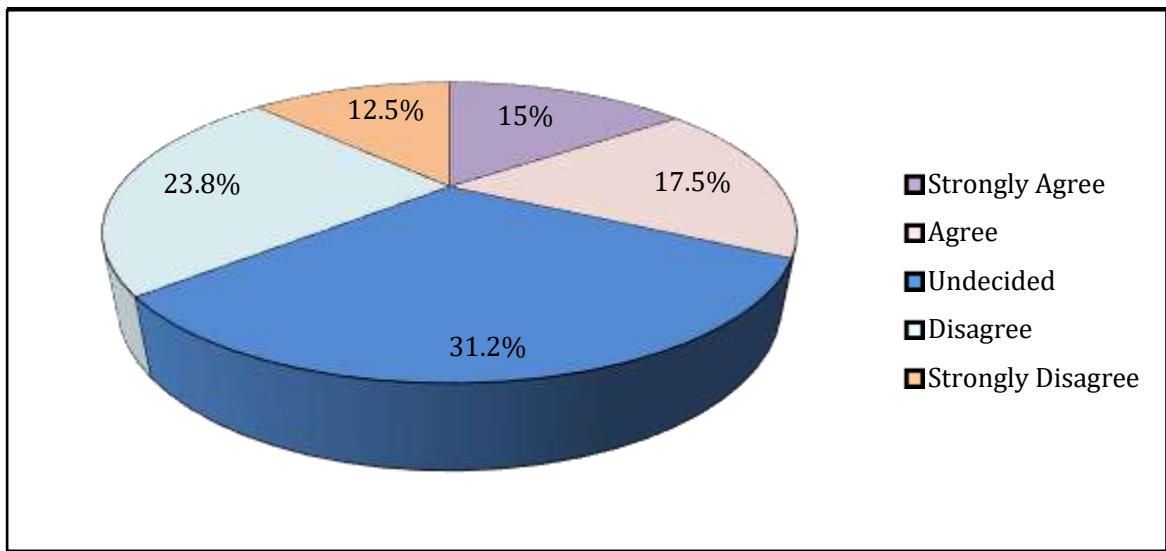


Figure 2. Role of traditional leadership in Motantanyane Village

According to Figure 2, higher statistical results (31.2%) failed to establish whether or not the traditional leadership had a major influence on the community. This could also mean that the respondents were uninterested in the function that traditional leadership performs in Motantanyane Village. Figure 2 further reveals a second highest cumulative of 23.8%, which could suggest that traditional leadership lacks a significant role in the area. Figure 2 reveals that

traditional leadership lacks importance in the community. This indicates that a sizable portion of the respondents does not view traditional leadership as crucial in the area. Figure 2 further shows that 12.5% of the respondents strongly disagreed that traditional leadership plays a significant role in the village. This suggests that a smaller but still notable percentage of respondents held strong negative opinions on the significance of traditional leadership. [Mudimeli \(2019\)](#) and [Bakamana \(2021\)](#) reaffirmed the role of traditional leadership that they can still play in the areas under their control. Thus, chieftains are ordained as community leaders, and their primary tasks include, among other things, administering land, ensuring community safety and mediating disputes ([Mudimeli, 2019](#); [Bakamana, 2021](#)). In contrast, Figure 2 depicts a total of 17.5% and 15% of respondents who believed that traditional leadership plays a significant role in the area. This indicates that a relatively proportion of respondents expressed agreement, but not as strongly as the previous category.

Qualitative Data from the Interview Schedules

The study consisted of six participants who were purposively sampled to represent the Lepelle-Nkumpi Local Municipality. The researchers used quotations in the qualitative data analysis to avoid misinterpretation of the results, and the participants were classified as follows: Participant 1, Participant 2, Participant 3, Participant 4, Participant 5, and Participant 6.

Functions of traditional leadership in rural areas

Literature and quantitative results established that traditional leadership has had strongholds and control over many rural communities in South Africa. Thus, traditional people still believed that traditional leadership is still essential and relevant today in rural communities, particularly in matters pertaining to the protection of the traditions, customs and cultural values of society. They serve as a mediator between the community and the local government, and they maintain peace, unite society, prevent the disruption of societal customs and culture, distribute land, represent communities in dispute resolution and faction conflicts, and foster a sense of community identity ([Mustasilta, 2021](#); [Sato et al., 2022](#)).

“Traditional leadership play a critical role to play as guardians of communal land that is essential to the provision of services. They can connect society and the municipality because they are the institution that is closest to the people on the ground. “Most of the time, traditional leaders connect municipalities with rural residents.” – Participant 2

This may suggest that traditional leadership has a responsibility for managing land concerns in rural areas, acting as the community’s representative at the municipal level, and creating a sense of community involvement with local government. Figure 2 depicts that traditional leadership plays a significant role in Motantanyane Village. Traditional leadership has been a part of people’s culture; hence, societies believe that the institution is still significant and relevant, particularly in rural communities ([Makhoba, 2020](#)). In the South African context, the scope of traditional leadership in the democratic era was defined in legislation and policy frameworks such as the TLGFA (41 of 2003) and the Constitution of the [Republic of South Africa \(108 of 1996\)](#). However, the government has not yet adopted key policies relevant to the roles of chieftains, especially regarding the community land tenure. Although significant concerns remain unresolved, it is also true that the topics are highly complicated and that some of them have become so politicized as to stymie local discussion.

“This is challenging, but yes, I consider traditional leadership important in democratic rural areas. However, what they should do in a democratic setting differs. Their roles must be refined and adapted to the current circumstances.” – Participant 6

This may indicate that traditional leadership continues to be important in rural areas; however, their role in the modern democratic government system may be different and their roles may be unclear in legal frameworks. Accordingly, traditional leadership roles are uncertain and imprecise, especially in the policy and legal frameworks enacted in South Africa (Nkosi, 2016). Mudimeli (2019) contended that little effort has been made to define the functions and powers of traditional leadership in rural development; as a result, their major practices on issues affecting the community are difficult to perceive. Figure 1 depicts a cumulative contrast of respondents who perceived that traditional leadership was significant. This could reflect that traditional leadership persists to play a significant role in Motantanyane Village.

“Traditional leaders play no role in the community, other than to protect some cultural values, customs and traditions of the society. Regarding community development and service delivery, the municipality is the main agent. Traditional leaders are incapable of creating community development. Their existence is only recognized because those traditional communities are under their jurisdiction, and they are custodians of land resources.” – Participant 3

This indicates that traditional leadership is more crucial to the preservation of traditions, customs and cultural values than they are to the management of everyday community issues such as development and service provision. Local governments tend to be the main agent of community development and service delivery provision in chieftain-controlled areas. Despite being in a democracy that has constitutionally recognized traditional leadership roles, the institution continued to play a role in rural areas (Makhoba, 2020). Furthermore, traditional leadership plays a constant role in rural areas, such as protecting cultural values, customs and traditions of the society; however, they lack a role in service delivery and community development. This may mean that local governments are critical in terms of service delivery and development in rural areas. The research findings generally indicate that traditional leadership is significant and should be protected for the affairs of the community, especially traditional and cultural issues. Given that traditional leaders are community representatives, they could produce positive results by assisting local municipalities in social mobilization. Traditional leaders within the Lepelle-Nkumpi Local Municipality seem to play a bigger role in rural communities given that they are more at the grassroots level than the municipal government.

Cooperation between municipal governments and traditional leadership

The mutual understanding and effective collaboration between traditional and local governments is crucial for community prosperity and should be maintained to support sustainable development. There is a lack of institutionalized cooperation between traditional leadership and local government, which hinders prospective rural development and service delivery.

“Some of the Mantona do not attend municipal meetings because they do not see a need, and this somehow affects development in their area of jurisdiction. Embarrassingly, the Mantona have a tendency of demanding remuneration whenever the municipality wants to initiate projects in their areas, especially when such projects require some resources from the area. When the municipality is unable to make those remunerations, they reject the proposed

project.” – Participant 5

This suggests a poor collaboration between traditional and local governments due to absenteeism in the municipal meetings that concern community development issues. It also shows that certain traditional leaders are likely to be a barrier to development and service delivery since they want to personally benefit from the municipal future development for their communities. Maleka and Rapatsa (2021) stated that the lack of collaboration between municipalities and traditional leadership arose due to the establishment of a local government system in South Africa due to the passage of a new democratic legislation. Local governments were given authority over traditional authorities, allowing them to handle land issues and bring divergent South African tribes together (Maleka & Rapatsa, 2021). For instance, the Municipal Systems Act 32 of 2000 expanded the powers and functions of local governments while divorcing itself from defining the roles of traditional leadership. Collaborative Learning Theory proclaimed the vitality of collaboration to foster effective development and service delivery. Wangayi Martha reminds us that “when two elephants are fighting the grass suffers”. Indeed, when the traditional leadership and local government lack a harmonious relationship, people at the grassroots will always suffer through no/poor service delivery and underdevelopment. Therefore, it is of paramount importance that the two institutions collaborate to foster effective development in rural areas.

CONCLUSIONS

Indeed, traditional leadership is crucial in influencing rural development amongst their areas of jurisdiction. The research findings indicated that traditional leadership is instrumental in protecting the traditions, cultural values, norms, customs and identity of rural society as well as fostering societal cohesion and mediating conflicts. In contrast, traditional leadership is viewed as antiquated and primitive. Nonetheless, some traditional people perceived that it is still important and relevant in the contemporary governance system, especially in the preservation of social traditions, customs, and values. This paper concludes that traditional leadership is a cornerstone of rural development; therefore, their leadership is instrumental in driving positive change and fostering development within their communities. The paper recommends that traditional leadership should be recognized, respected and incorporated in the processes of rural development. Furthermore, local governments should make a deliberate consideration and ensure that traditional leadership is inclusive, equitable, and aligned with democratic principles. This can be achieved through educational campaigns and robust engagement with traditional leadership on matters pertaining to rural development. Additionally, through the premise of the Collaborative Learning Theory, traditional leadership should work or integrate with local governments in the development planning and decision-making process for more effective and inclusive development plans to address the unique challenges and aspirations of rural communities.

LIMITATION & FURTHER RESEARCH

Due to resource constraints (finance, effort and time), the study was conducted in a local context; the prospects of traditional leadership may vary from country to country or region to region. Therefore, it may not be possible to generalize to the world as a whole. Thus, further research can focus on a national or international perspective about the role of traditional leadership in rural development, for the generalization of the scope. This paper looked at Motantanyane Village as a case study on the role of traditional leadership in rural development. There is little research on the role of traditional leadership in rural development, prompting further research on the topic for future academic endeavors. Further studies may broaden the scope by conducting qualitative and quantitative research on a national and international scale.

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