

Relevance of Traditional Leadership in Rural Community Development amidst Democratic Institutions in Southern Africa: A Critical Review

M. Tshitangoni* and J. Francis

*Institute for Rural Development, School of Agriculture, University of Venda,
Private Bag X 5050, Thohoyandou 0950, South Africa*

KEYWORDS Community Development. Elected Leaders. Governance. Traditional Leaders. Southern Africa

ABSTRACT This paper is based on an analysis and synthesis of the literature on relevance of traditional leadership in rural community development in Southern Africa. Although modernists predicted the demise of the institution, available evidence reveals that this is unlikely to happen in the foreseeable future. Tensions and conflicts characterise the relationship between democratically elected and traditional leaders. This weakens the ability of both institutions to contribute effectively to community development in rural areas. Thus, there is need for investing in efforts that might result in the development of an appropriate governance model that clearly defines the roles of traditional leadership in a democratic state such as South Africa

INTRODUCTION

The term “traditional” is often used to describe anything that is indigenous to Africa. For example, reference is always made to traditional music, healing and religion among others. All of them are accorded a lower status in comparison to their equivalents in other parts of the world (Awolalu 1976; Mndende 2008; Mungwini 2011). Despite it not normally having racial connotations, the use of the term, “indigenous” in Africa has both racial and class dimensions attached to it. This is made worse by the fact that traditional leaders in Western cultures such as the Prince of Wales in the United Kingdom (UK) and similar institutions in France and other parts of the world are not classified as such wherever they go (Mndende 2008). In Southern Africa, it is not clear why this tendency of differential labelling persists even today well after the demise of colonialism and apartheid.

When Southern African countries became independent from colonialism and apartheid they introduced democratic institutions in which councillors are an integral component of com-

munity leadership. The democratic institutions resumed the roles that traditional leadership played, with the assumption that the two institutions would co-exist (Cheka 2008; Mngomezulu 2009; Mathonsi and Sithole 2017; Mershon 2017). While this is a noble expectation, tensions and conflicts continue to characterize the relationship between the two institutions. This weakens the effectiveness of both institutions in championing rural community development.

In this paper, the state of knowledge on traditional leadership in Southern Africa is examined. An attempt is also made to distil the role of traditional leadership amidst democratic institutions such as Ward Committees. Some lessons are drawn from other parts of the world to help deepen the understanding of this issue.

In Eastern Europe, the revolutions that took place there from the late 1980s to early 1990s led to the demise of communism and elimination of the traditional system of governance (South Africa White Paper on Traditional Leadership and Governance 2003). Although in Western Europe traditional rule was abolished in the eighteenth century, a rudimentary element of it still exists. In the United Kingdom, a highly symbolic and ceremonial monarchy exists under the leadership of the Queen. This institution does not perform political and administrative roles. How-

*Address for correspondence:
E-mail: mtshitangoni@environment.gov.za,
mtde@webmail.co.za

ever, the Queen appoints the Prime Minister and has the power to dissolve the legislature. Moreover, she presides over various public engagements and ceremonial duties, and carries out symbolic or representative functions in national affairs. According to the South African White Paper on Traditional Leadership and Governance of 2003, the House of Lords in Britain has been transformed. In general, it is regarded as part of the democratic parliament despite the fact that it is founded on the principle of traditional rule.

As from 1852, various legislations were gradually introduced in Portugal. The legislations were meant to enhance the implementation of democratic reforms such as the call for the direct election of the Chamber of Duties. Another Act was passed in France in 1885, which eliminated hereditary parity, limited the number of life peers to 100 and restricted the crown's moderate power. In 1890, the constitutional monarchy was abolished as a result of increased political awareness. Twenty years later, the republic was established. In an effort to salvage the monarchy, Franco stepped down as Prime Minister and called for new elections. However, factionalism made it impossible to establish a stable government (Opello 1991). This development highlighted the difficulty of governing the country without involving traditional leadership.

While traditional leadership exists in many parts of the world, Tonga is the only country in the Pacific with such a system. This has remained largely unchanged despite its exposure to colonial forces for centuries (Campbell 2005). As is the case in Great Britain, the monarchy in Tonga is a major pillar of political stability (Campbell 2005). Although this is the case, some Tongans believe that the monarchy has outgrown its usefulness and thus should be retired (Edwards 2006). However, there is no clarity with respect to the form of governance that should replace it. Apart from this, Rosenthal (2006) examines the efforts that the king of Tonga made towards modernizing his country through monetizing the economy, internationalizing the medical and education systems, and providing the local populace with access to material wealth, education and overseas travel. These facts indicate that the argument that the monarchy acts as a barrier to radical change cannot be generalised. Also, it suggests that a government committed to social or constitutional reform is likely to need the monarchy much more than one that tries to maintain the status quo.

According to Winichakul (2008), the schema of the history of democratization that power moves step by step from absolutism to the military and finally to the people was disproved in Thailand after the 2006 coup. The role of the monarchy in Thai democracy was nurtured post-Second World War, leading to its blossoming in 1973, 1992 and 2006. In all these instances, the public called for royal intervention to save the country from descending into anarchy. This confirmed that the King of Thailand's roles and powers in politics and administration were not limited to what the Constitution prescribed. Even today this is a critical factor that helps him to maintain stability in the country. Also, the King's political charisma continues to be a major factor in overcoming all crises, thereby leading Thailand towards a stronger, more secure and prosperous nation. It has been argued that the image of the monarchy remains attractive because of its ability to stay clear of politics (Winichakul 2008). All this indicates that the current and future monarchy will never assume absolute power.

In 1932 the Thai absolute monarchy was overthrown. The legitimate ruling powers were vested in elected officials. The King continued to play a significant role of uniting the country and serving as the pillar of hope for the country's population. Therefore, although the country had been independent for more than 700 years the monarchy remained indispensable. Winichakul (2008) argues that this shows that in order for the King to survive his reign he must demonstrate individual virtues and capabilities. Moreover, there is need to empower him within the provisions of the institutional framework of the monarchy.

The arguments from other parts of the world presented above reveal that traditional leadership is an integral part of the lives of nations. People under its rule rely on it during hard times, thereby confirming the ability of traditional leadership to solve nations' challenges. Linked to this is the Ayittey (1999) argument that it is an enduring myth among Westerners and the elite that Africa did not have viable democratic governance institutions of its own prior to the arrival of the European colonialists. The following extract from one of the speeches delivered by President Jacob Zuma of the Republic of South Africa lends weight to this view and the crucial role of traditional leadership in societal transformation and development.

'Let me emphasise that traditional leaders have a key role to play as partners with government, to build a better life for all our people. I come here today with that message. I am here to request a stronger partnership between us, a partnership for progress and sustainable development, especially in rural areas. We urge traditional leaders to be proactive and engage government on what exactly the priorities of the people are in their areas, working with the people. This is your opportunity' (Zuma 2010).

The call from the President reinforces the importance of democratically elected and traditional institutions of leadership to co-exist in order to achieve viable rural development. However, the rallying call does not clearly define the specific roles of traditional leaders in the partnership with elected government. Mzimela (2012) takes this argument further and advances the view that African traditional leaders were an integral part of the struggle that led to the dismantling of apartheid in South Africa and colonialism in many African countries. Currently, the major challenge is how to ensure that traditional leadership receives the respect and recognition it deserves (Mzimela 2012). There is evidence in history showing that traditional leaders fought for the recognition of their people on a sustainable basis. Most of them sacrificed all they had against alien systems of government that wanted to reduce them to pariah individuals in areas under their jurisdiction (Mzimela 2012). Apparently, this ensured that traditional leaders remained relevant in the lives of their people.

The foregoing arguments highlight the centrality as well as the tried and tested nature of the traditional systems of governance. The systems were developed over centuries that went well before the colonization of Southern Africa. This experience, together with their historical character, makes the established systems the bedrock of African democracy. Taking this into account, it seems justifiable to argue that traditional leaders have a vital role to play in rural development. More supporting arguments are presented in later parts of this paper, using evidence from Southern Africa.

The establishment of democratic institutions of leadership in Southern Africa accompanied the attainment of freedom. This came in the form of Members of Parliament, Municipalities, Ward Councillors, Ward Committees, Village Development Committees and civic organizations, among

other institutions. All these are at the heart of the Western understanding and practice of democracy. Democratic institutions operate within grassroots communities and in partnership with the traditional leadership system (Koelble 2005; Duri 2017). The partnership is fostered because traditional leaders have demonstrated a considerable degree of resilience in African politics, a fact which has even stunned the world (Mngomezulu, 2009). *Inkosi* (meaning chief in IsiZulu) Luthuli, who founded the African National Congress in South Africa, had the foresight to emphasise the need for close cooperation between traditional leaders and elected public representatives, and for the former to never lose sight of the interests of their subjects (Zuma 2010). While this is a noble expectation, tensions and conflicts often characterise the relationship between the two systems (Chinsinga 2006; Francis et al. 2010; Mathonsi and Sithole 2017). Such animosity between them weakens their individual and collective effectiveness in promoting rural development.

Objective

The main objective of this study is to explore the relevance of traditional leadership system in democratic African countries.

METHODOLOGY

The extensive literature review focusing on relevant work conducted by experts in traditional leadership; this desktop study was supplemented by the author's practical experiences of growing up in a village led by traditional leaders.

OBSERVATIONS AND DISCUSSION

Relevance of Traditional Leadership in Democratic Southern Africa: A Critique

As is already reported above, traditional leadership is not unique to Southern Africa. Every country in the world has had various forms of hereditary or traditional leadership and absolute monarchies. According to the South African White Paper on Traditional Leadership and Governance of 2003, the need for a representative form of government, struggles by people at grassroots community levels in rural areas and

urban factory-based workers for better wages and working conditions, and the drive towards gender equality gave birth to the democratic order in the world.

Mamdani (1996) displays his disregard for Chieftaincy (traditional leadership) when arguing that as long as rural Africans languish under their rule they would remain mere subjects rather than empowered citizens. Logan (2009) concurs with Mamdani (1996), pointing out that traditional leadership impedes the development of a prosperous, democratic and just society. She concludes that this system does not deserve a place in any progressive society. However, Bogdanor (1995) rejects the view that traditional leadership impedes the development of a prosperous, democratic and just society as advanced by Mamdani (1996) and Logan (2009). He points out that most countries in Europe in which the monarchy has survived are amongst the most stable and prosperous in the world. Presumably, the success they enjoy results from a stable and continuous evolution of the monarchies towards parliamentary democracy. Absence of ideological conflict is also likely to be an important factor that might have assisted their economic progress. Moreover, there are countries such as Japan where a highly traditional monarchy has proved perfectly compatible with the development of an advanced and extraordinarily successful industrial society.

Ntsebeza (2006) highlights three broad positions regarding traditional leadership and democratic governance. One argument is that “dismantling” the traditional institution, especially viewed from its role in the colonial period, is a pre-condition for democratic transformation in Africa. This position rests on the fact that traditional leadership is undemocratic in its very nature (Simiyu 1987; Zungu 1996). Secondly, there is a belief that the institution has a role to play in a multi-party democracy through coexisting with democratic institutions (Logan 2009). Thirdly, some scholars argue that the institution is fundamentally democratic (Ake 2003; Njoh 2006). Although many countries have at one time or another attempted to dismantle traditional leadership upon securing independence from colonialists, invariably because of its resilience they have been forced to recognise them again later in the democratic dispensation (Dinerman 2001; Chinsinga 2006). This lends weight to the argument that traditional leadership must be an integral part of the democratic society.

Oomen (2005) is of the view that there are both normative and empirical reasons why democratic governments have often re-recognised traditional leadership. First, there is a belief that indigenous (traditional) institutions are worth recognizing. Also, the fact that the traditional system of governance is resilient and is part of the African socio-political landscape (Mngomezulu 2009) should not be ignored.

It is clear that the drive by colonial and post-colonial governments in Africa to eliminate the traditional leadership institution have failed. This is mainly attributed to the fact that the governments often overlooked the strong relationship between contemporary states and traditional authority (van Rouveroy et al. 1996). Therefore, it is important to recognise indigenous African institutions and values within the official or democratic states because they impart additional legitimacy. Such a move enables the democratic states to deal with their own administrative weaknesses. In addition, physical and emotional distance exists between democratic governments and the people they claim to serve (van Rouveroy et al. 1996). Also worth highlighting is the fact that traditional leaders occupy a central part of rural communities and understand the people at grassroots level much better. This is one of the reasons why there is still considerable respect and belief in rural areas that traditional leadership helps preserve African arts and culture. Proponents of the view that traditional leadership should be abolished need to provide answers regarding who would play this role if their arguments are to be accepted.

Most people in rural areas reside on Permission to Occupy (PTO) land, allocated to them by traditional leaders under whose areas of jurisdiction and influence they live. Such land cannot be sold. This is in sharp contrast to the situation in towns and cities where residents have title deeds for the land they occupy and can sell it. In the Chief, Headmen and sub-Headmen areas if the local population is not satisfied with living with a particular community member whose conduct deprives others of their rights and peace, the traditional leader can expel that individual or family after consulting local residents. This imparts in the residents an understanding and respect of the fact that the area where they stay in is indeed under the control of traditional leaders.

Given what has been highlighted above, the argument by Ntsebeza (2006) that traditional lead-

ers' control of the land allocation process makes them indispensable seems accurate. Despite this, the specific role of traditional leadership in Africa remains a contested issue. This makes it imperative to examine what this role should be. That discourse must take into account the views of elected leaders and residents of local communities. In the proceeding sections, a solid context and point of departure for defining the roles that traditional leaders should play amidst democratic institutions is articulated.

Logan's Studies in Africa

Logan (2009) conducted a study in 15 African countries with the aim of understanding popular perceptions towards traditional leaders, how they were formed, and how they related both to the perceptions towards elected leaders and their support for a democratic system of government. The research design was qualitative. Random sampling was used, ensuring that all adult citizens of the fifteen (15) African countries involved had an equal chance of inclusion. The sample size ranged from 1200 to 3600 respondents per country. Data were analysed using multiple regression and descriptive statistics.

In the Logan (2009) study, people who lived under a traditional leader were mainly rural, older and less educated. Positive perceptions towards traditional leaders went hand-in-hand with those towards elected leaders. This suggested that Africans did not draw a sharp distinction between selected and elected leaders. This was in contrast to what most analysts and advocates of liberal democracy expected (Logan 2009). Rather than responding to their political environment as if selected and elected leaders opposed one another, and they must make an either-or choice between them, the respondents' views highlighted a strong positive linkage between the two leadership institutions.

The results obtained in the Logan (2009) study revealed the contention that there was no evidence of a contradiction between allegiance to traditional leaders and individual commitment to democracy. Contrary to the common expectation, those who offered the most positive evaluations of their traditional leaders were equally committed to democracy than those in opposition. These observations are crucial because integration of traditional leaders into a political system may enhance the legitimacy and strength

of the latter. However, this might undermine or weaken the standing of traditional leadership. Also traditional leaders might suffer from increased exposure to corruption and rent-seeking opportunities.

In the Logan (2009) study, men and women had similar views on traditional leaders. This was surprising given the obvious concerns about the potentially discriminatory nature of patriarchal institutions. Attitudes towards traditional leaders did not relate to particular individuals or groups. Instead, it was clear that they reflected the shared experiences of the whole populations. Apart from this, so far there is no evidence that contradicts commitment to democracy and confidence in traditional leaders. Therefore, the belief that elections are the best way to select leaders is not expected to create distrust in traditional leaders. All these arguments and evidence from empirical studies suggest that hybridizing political systems with infusion of traditional leadership may be a positive step towards deepening democracy in Africa, rather than a step away from "true" democracy.

Debates on the role of traditional leadership in rural development also centre on age and level of education of the incumbents. Logan (2009) did not clearly describe what qualified one to be referred to as an "old person" and "less educated". Nor did she qualify the type of integration of traditional and elected leadership that was required. For example, should it be co-existence or affiliation to a political party. We are of the view that the only time when traditional leaders could be considerably exposed to corruption and rent seeking is when they become political party activists. Conclusion that a hybridized political system is a positive step towards achieving "true" democracy after merely evaluating the perceptions without providing an interrogated and researched institutional arrangement that spells who does what is evidently hollow because it leaves many questions unanswered.

Relevance of Traditional Leadership in Botswana

Sharma (n.d.) assessed the relevance of traditional structures in Botswana's post-colonial governance. He recommended that traditional leaders must be trained in many aspects because this would help to maintain their relevance and perform designated roles, namely presiding over

customary courts, operating the *Kgotla* (meaning court in Setswana language) and participating in the House of Chiefs. Using the results of his studies, Sharma contended that traditional leaders must be provided with improved conditions of service and resources in the form of offices, office equipment, furniture and transport. He argued that provision of the latter would make them more effective as channels of two-way communication between the government and people at grassroots community level.

In the studies in Botswana, Sharma (n.d.) found that traditional leaders faced numerous challenges. Lack of interest and being disrespected by some educated youth as well as aggressive attitudes of some political leaders towards them in relation to their authority and relevance were some of the challenges faced. Despite these challenges, the traditional leadership institution still retained its legitimacy, respect and validity from large sections of the population in rural areas. Sharma (n.d.) took all this into account and concluded that the need for cooperation and implementing work in a coordinated manner involving traditional structures, Councils, District Administration and Land Boards to provide effective service delivery was obvious. An important issue worth acknowledging was that traditional leaders were supposed to lead the people residing in areas that were under their jurisdiction, irrespective of party political affiliation. In view of this, Sharma argued that integration of traditional leadership structures in Botswana's local government system had helped to achieve the political stability and coordinated effort in local level development management that the country continues to enjoy even to this day.

Sharma (n.d.) observed that traditional leaders were initiating socio-economic development through striking a healthy balance between tradition and modernity. In Botswana, customary courts handled approximately 80 percent of criminal cases and 90 percent of civil cases. Traditional leaders were popular in rural areas because they were easily accessible and also resolved cases faster than modern courts. Apart from this, ordinary people understood how they worked. However, the quality of justice that these courts imparted left much to be desired (Sharma n.d.).

In Rwanda, customary courts successfully dealt with lesser criminal cases and institutions such as *gacaca* courts that were more effective

in making meaningful judgements than Western-style courtrooms that cost a lot of money (Economic Commission for Africa 2007). Speaking at a Southern African conference on traditional leadership, the President of the Zimbabwe Council of Chiefs, Senator Charumbira (2012) stressed that there was no backlog of cases in his own customary court. He pointed out that in most instances the local population preferred to withdraw cases presided over by the Western-style courts in favour of the Chief's court. This might suggest that people in the rural areas under his jurisdiction trusted traditional court proceedings and the faster speed with which cases were resolved in comparison to conventional courts. There is need to carry out scientific research in order to confirm or reject the Chief's claims, including highlighting the reasons why people preferred the Chief's court, if at all. Only after such a study can it be appreciated that the traditional courts play an integral role in lowering the levels of crime in African societies in rural areas.

Another view emanating from Sharma (n.d.) was that administrative personnel serving traditional leadership councils must be integrated into local government service management and the local police into the national force. He argued that the integration was necessary because it would impart consistency in service delivery as opposed to competing with elected government systems.

In Botswana, Madagascar and Uganda, Land Boards were introduced and took away the exclusive authority of the Chiefs to allocate land (Sharma n.d.; Englebert 2002; Kleinbooi et al. 2011; Kendie 2017). It was argued at the point of establishment that this would make land allocation more transparent, in line with the western understanding of democracy. However, allocation of land by Land Boards, Civic society or any other structure elected democratically failed to make it transparent. The allocation of land by traditional leaders was regarded as transparent as reflected in the following quote

"during the time the land matters were administered by Dikgosi (chiefs in Setswana), there were little or no conflicts on land allocations, there were minimal delays in land allocation, there was proper consultation between the community and tribal administration and land use matters and land issues were dealt with transparently and with utmost sense of maturity" (Sharma n.d.).

Sharma (n.d.) indicated that the Venson Commission established in Botswana considered land allocation views and concluded that,

“Land Boards are still appropriate institutions to manage and deal with land matters. Land, a valuable and scarce resource, requires technical competency of the highest order in its management. Secondly, land administration requires a multi-skilled team of technicians and land use specialists. It is therefore doubtful that the institution of Tribal Administration could handle land management issues of the present day Botswana. To this end, it is the considered view of the Commission that what is required is to improve the operational efficiency of Land Boards and establish formal links with Tribal Administration”.

The views expressed above highlight the need for critical evaluation of the current arrangements and decide what the role of the traditional leadership system should be. In addition, Sharma's work laid bare several other issues that must be considered when allocating land to those who need it. However, his exclusive reliance on secondary data analysis made it difficult to make firm conclusions. For example, it is still not clear whether lack of training compromises traditional leaders' ability to play the roles they are supposed to. Moreover, the recommendation is difficult to implement because the traditional leaders' training needs that must be addressed are not known. Nor are the appropriate training methods distilled in Sharma's work. Therefore, the fact that traditional leaders must be trained does not add much knowledge or provide a clearer direction on how to transform this governance institution. Furthermore, Sharma's work primarily focused on the situation in Botswana and thus does not provide a governance framework for the suggested cooperation and coordinated work of traditional leaders, District Administration and Land Boards. A broader and more robust analysis is needed if the arguments are to be generalizable.

Relevance of Traditional Leadership in South Africa

Oomen (2000) explained the study she undertook in the Greater Ngwaritsi Makhudu Thamaga Transitional Local Council (TLC) in Limpopo Province of South Africa. She described the changing position of traditional authority

with respect to land allocation, local government and dispute settlement, and the detection of the driving forces behind tradition and tribalism. The study, which was based on a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods, focused on socio-economic status and ideas relating to land, local government, customary law, traditional leadership and development. It was confirmed that the main functions of traditional authority involved settling disputes, allocating land and conducting initiation ceremonies. Only intermittent co-operation between the Greater Ngwaritsi Makhudu Thamaga TLC and the Mamone Traditional Authority existed. The uncertainty within the TLC and Traditional Authority about their respective powers was cited as a major cause for concern and was likely to trigger conflicts.

Oomen (2000) contended that a clear distinction between outside influences and internal dynamics relating to re-traditionalisation was not easy to make. In support of Sharma's conclusion based on the situation in Botswana, respondents in the Oomen (2000) study cited that the Magistrates' court was located far away. Also, the latter's procedures were not easy to understand. Lack of personnel and inadequate institutional capacity to carry out the local government functions were regarded as hindrances to the performance of the TLC. Elected Councillors of the TLC and members of the Tribal Council were said to be corrupt. It was alleged that the Councillors accepted bribes, for example sharing money that government earmarked for community development.

One of the major weaknesses of the Oomen (2000) study was its failure to solicit the views of ordinary community members. Only people in leadership positions, namely the Chief, members of the royal family and village elders serving as members of the *Kgoro* (referring to the court in the Northern Sotho language) participated in the study. Moreover, the researcher approached her study with a pre-conceived set of roles for traditional leaders, namely land allocation, local government and dispute settlement. This situation makes it necessary to carry out a similar study that explores what grassroots community members and their leaders believe should be the roles of traditional leaders amidst democratic institutions.

Another study worth considering is that of Fokwang (2005). In this study, he compared the Tshivhase village in Limpopo Province of South Africa and Bali in Cameroon. The status and

roles of traditional leadership in socio-economic and cultural development was interrogated. Unstructured interviews, observation, newspaper articles and archives were used to collect data. Chiefs actively involved in party politics were said to be unpopular and not well respected in their communities. The fact that Chiefs had always been the custodians of land in many parts of Africa (Boafo-Arthur 2001) meant that they could continue to play a major role in the socio-economic development of their communities (Fokwang 2005).

The failure of Fokwang (2005) to understand the Tshivenda language might have limited the study findings. Evidence of the existence of this problem included incorrectly spelling some names (for example Radio *BaVenda* instead of *Vhavenda*). No such radio station exists though. Instead, the radio station that broadcasts using the Tshivenda language is Phala Phala FM.

Quite often, most people in rural areas prefer to use idioms to express their views. Because of this tendency, some important contributions that interviewees made might have been missed when interpreting the data obtained in the study. It can be argued that an interview conducted using a language that the researcher and interviewees understand is better informed than one which relies on an interpreter. In this study, there was no reference to customary legislations that traditional leadership introduced and which have over the years helped it to earn legitimacy.

Cook (2005) studied the Royal Bafokeng Traditional Administration in the North West Province of South Africa. The study sought to highlight some inherent tensions due to overlapping forms of governance as was also the case in other parts of Africa. Tensions were of a political, social, cultural and economic nature. No detailed methodology was provided even though it was indicated that data were gathered from seven out of 29 villages. Seventy respondents, who were mainly ordinary villagers, were interviewed.

It was reported that the Royal Bafokeng Traditional Administration offered the people under its leadership the rights to be heard and participate in decision making. By extension, this meant that the administration was accountable to the local population. Numerous communal rights were also implicit, including the right to land, to consensual decision making and the right to maintain certain traditions, be they in

the area of governance, family law or cultural expression. The Bafokeng people were actively involved in their governance structures through participating in meetings at village and broader community levels. They lobbied their Headmen, Councillors and the *Kgosi* (chief in the SeTswana language) to solve community issues and initiate the needed programmes and services.

Because of Cook's failure to present the research methodology used in the study, it remains unclear how the seven out of 29 villages and 70 respondents were selected. Only ordinary villagers participated in it, implying that the views of those in positions of responsibility, namely traditional and democratically elected leaders, were not included. For this reason, the conclusions drawn might be incomplete and contestable. Nevertheless, it was revealed that villagers could maintain certain traditions. The traditions were not specified. Nor were the reasons for not maintaining some of them indicated. How the people lobbied their *Kgosi*, Headmen and Councillors in solving community challenges should have been clearly elaborated.

Relevance of Traditional Leadership in Zimbabwe

The post-independence Constitution of Zimbabwe attempted to abolish traditional leadership. This was done through the post-colonial government trying to dismantle the inherited legal dualism, arguing that the intention was to create a "non-tribal" nation. Traditional leaders were stripped of their judicial duties and became symbolic figures dealing with cultural issues. In 1993, this was reversed. The shift in policy was prompted by the realisation that it was difficult to deliver services to rural areas adequately without the assistance of traditional leaders. Currently, the Constitution of the country provides for national and provincial houses of Chiefs (Mijiga 1998). The National Council of Chiefs is entitled to have 10 of its members in the National Assembly. Traditional leaders are also represented in Rural District Councils. It is worth noting that traditional leaders can participate in party politics and vie for seats in Parliament.

The post-colonial government in Uganda also tried to dismantle the traditional leadership system. Kings and Kingdoms were abolished. However, in 1986 the traditional leadership system was restored with the aim of ensuring that

there was effective service delivery in rural areas. However, the traditional leaders were denied political powers or roles.

In Zimbabwe, Alexander (2006) noted that Chiefs ruled with the help of advisors and Councillors. Village Headmen and senior family members provided advice to the Chief on how to lead their tribes or any other related matter of concern. Among the Venda-speaking people of South Africa, when serious issues were discussed and decided upon all adult men were summoned to attend through the practice of *Tshivhidzo* (tribal meeting in Tshivenda language). The Chief adjudicated over serious cases such as murder, witchcraft and offences. Outsiders were allowed to attend the courts.

Relevance of Traditional Leadership in Mozambique

Traditional authorities in Mozambique administered land in areas that they controlled before the independence in 1975. After the adoption of Marxism-Leninism in 1977 the newly formed Frelimo-led government disbanded traditional leaders and replaced them with party cadres (Mamdani 1996; Macia 1997). Kyed and Buur (2005) revealed that traditional authorities were abolished mainly because they were accused of having collaborated with the now deposed colonial government. However, the pressure that the opposition (Renamo) exerted, internal discontent within Frelimo and the civil society campaigns for reinstatement of traditional leadership forced the government to issue Ministerial Decree 15/2000 in June 2000. It stipulated that traditional authorities now integral components of local governance in the country. The decree did not clarify whether they would continue exercising the roles they had prior to independence. Nor did it clarify how the traditional authorities should work with elected leaders.

The preceding debate raged in the media and beyond, focusing on the role of traditional authority in local governance. In response, the government through the decree included the possibility of establishing secretaries of suburbs or villages. It was argued that this was an attempt to increase the participation of the people in rural areas in development and governance. Recognised traditional leaders were renamed community authorities.

Relevance of Traditional Leadership in Malawi

Some compelling arguments on the roles of traditional leadership have emerged from Malawi (Chinsinga 2006). The Chinsinga (2006) studies seem to be the most detailed interrogation of this system in the country. For this reason, this section is biased towards his work. The studies focused on the interface between tradition and modernity, with a specific focus on the struggle for political space at the grassroots community level. The rationale of the study was to examine poverty reduction in the context of political and administrative reforms. Specific areas of focus in the studies, which utilised semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions, were the patterns of power structures and relationships among institutional actors and stakeholders at various levels of government and society.

The Chinsinga (2006) study revealed that indirect rule in 1933 conferred legislative, judicial and fiscal powers on Chiefs over their respective areas of jurisdiction. In 1953, the powers were revoked when statutory district councils were launched. Furthermore, the Malawian constitution recognised Chiefs as legitimate actors in local governance. Chinsinga (2006) elaborated on two schools of thought. First was the perception that the traditional institution was incompatible with democratization and decentralization. He also highlighted the existence of another widely held view that there was some kind of co-existence between democratic and traditional leadership institutions in Malawi.

Chieftaincy was widely perceived to be an embodiment of the virtues of political accountability, transparency, service and probity. The results of the Chinsinga (2006) study confirmed the Lule (1995) argument that traditional leaders played a very critical role in the livelihoods of the people they led. The reasons for this view were that the leaders inspired and motivated their people to be involved in every aspect of development; advocate cooperative action; and extol the commitment and broad involvement of all members of a community in formulating and implementing policies for enhanced local development. Traditional leaders facilitated the achievement of these goals because they were respected, appreciated and exemplary.

Elected leaders such as Councillors often took recourse to democracy as the primary basis for their influence, authority and legitimacy.

This thinking and practice was in stark contrast to that of traditional leaders who traced their influence, authority and legitimacy to cultural heritage, in particular the ownership of land (Chinsinga 2006). Worth highlighting was the Councillors' use of English in meetings as a way of side-lining the predominantly illiterate traditional leaders during development-oriented debates.

Chinsinga (2006) argues that politicians are fully aware that Chiefs exert considerable power, influence and authority over their communities. This is why various strategies are commonly implemented are in the form of reinstating Chiefs deposed during the one party era; appointing new Chiefs; promoting Chiefs; building houses and offices for Chiefs; and including all Chiefs on the government's pay roll.

Finally, Chinsinga (2006) contends that in the eyes of the communities in rural areas, traditional leaders are far more legitimate catalysts of development and change than democratically elected leaders. This is mainly due to the fact that they lead villages and also live with the people they govern. Consequently, they fully appreciate the challenges that grassroots communities face. The specific roles of traditional leaders include conflict resolution and crime prevention; presiding over various ceremonies; keeping population registers; making decisions relating to community development projects; and playing a critical role in the moral restoration of the society. Being in the coal face of issues and facing them head-on makes traditional leadership indispensable in rural areas.

The various studies reviewed above reveal that traditional leaders can play a significant role in domesticating and customising the reforms of the exigencies of local conditions. This takes place despite their poor material circumstances, which render them easy targets for politicians. Politicians tend to prefer entrenching the upward rather than the downward pattern of accountability. Yet the twin process of democratization and decentralization is a pillar of local governance. The poor relationship existing between traditional authorities and Councillors seems to arise principally because the former want to constitute and lead primary structures of local government in rural areas. Table 1 is a summary of seven research documents used in this review.

What can be Gleaned about Roles of Traditional Leadership from Literature?

Available evidence in literature reveals that traditional leadership is not withering away. This is in stark contrast to the hopes and predictions of modernists. Given this fact, it is imperative to clearly define the roles of traditional leadership within the democratization landscape. This argument finds support from Lund (2006) who suggests that the institution must be kept intact because it exercises public authority at grassroots community level in most parts of Africa. The findings of the Chinsinga (2006) studies in Malawi provide evidence in support of retaining the institution.

Various aspects of traditional leadership in many parts of the world were distilled even though the aim was to specifically focus on Southern Africa. It was highlighted that Africa had for long not known any other form of governance besides traditional leadership. The institution has been at the apex of the political hierarchy dating back to the time when Africans switched from the nomadic way of life to become settled communities (Mngomezulu 2009). This means that traditional leaders add extra legitimacy to any democratic state. For this reason, destroying the traditional leadership system can be equated to destroying African customs and values, which are the backbone of the people's pride, heritage and dignity. Thus, traditional leadership should not be done away with.

In pre-colonial Africa, Chieftaincy enjoyed the freedom of performing its roles and responsibilities as a governing institution without having to compete with elected leaders. Firstly, Chiefs had executive powers, which included distribution of land. Secondly, they had legislative powers, mainly using unwritten laws. For instance, every community member was expected to farm and contribute to *Dzunde* (referring to Chief's farm among the Venda people). Failure to do so was regarded as disobedience. When a person disobeyed such authority, he or she was liable for a fine. Traditional leaders could serve as judges, trying a wide range of cases. All the legislations used were rooted in local customs. Traditional leaders presided on customary court cases in consultation with the *Khoro* (referring to tribal court among the Venda people), made up of village elders.

Traditional leadership withstood the challenges of the colonial times. In many instances, traditional leaders successfully resisted attempts to destroy the institution with little or no help from the people they led. Their powers and functions were diluted during the struggle for democracy and early years of post-colonial periods. However, they were invariably reinstated mainly due to the considerable influence they wielded. In particular, the democratically elected governments realised that effective and efficient service delivery would not be possible without active participation of traditional leaders.

In post-colonial Africa, changes in government entailed redefining the powers and functions of traditional leaders. Various legislations that aimed to achieve the goals of the new government were enacted. Although most of the new laws were intended to dismantle traditional leaders, rarely did these achieve the desired results. The resilience of traditional leadership has consistently been demonstrated by its ability to withstand various shocks in the past and continued existence in most African countries till today.

Despite some predisposition to nepotism it can be argued that traditional leadership institution has always been democratic enough. Having a proper administration system with provision for referrals and appeals has often helped cement its democratic character. The move towards democratically elected governments' recognition of traditional leadership as well as defining their powers and functions similar to what they exercised during pre-colonial times, viz. executive, legislative and judiciary powers, highlights that the institution is required to foster rural development. The major bone of contention has been the nature of the desirable institutional arrangements (how the two institutions can co-exist or not) and a call for greater clarity on the perceived roles of traditional leaders in the hybridised political and administrative system. This review has revealed that none of the scholars paid attention to building an understanding of the missing link between the two leadership institutions, particularly as this relates to community development in Southern Africa. For this reason, it remains unclear how traditional and democratically elected leadership can co-exist and harmoniously spearhead rural development.

During the change in governments the powers and functions of the traditional leaders has been modified or changed, and in some cases did not even exist. All this was introduced

through legislations aimed at achieving the goals of the particular government. Evidence has been made available that the institution of traditional leadership consistently resisted any form of government that attempted to turn them into their puppets. In the process, they always bargained to be recognised, respected and afforded an opportunity to play a meaningful role in popular governance.

CONCLUSION

This review has clarified that traditional leadership is relevant in Africa's rural community development. However, the tensions and conflicts that often exist between traditional and elected leadership institutions reduce their effectiveness in contributing to rural development. In South Africa, it is likely that this problem might be addressed through refining the generalised roles of the former as provided in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa of 1996 and the Traditional Leadership Framework Act of 2003. In order to achieve this, it is crucial to carry out studies that would provide insights on the specific roles that traditional leadership should play. Apart from this, there is need for an appropriate governance model that ensures that there is effective and efficient co-existence of the two leadership institutions. Developing the capacities of traditional leaders to effectively engage on rural development is crucial.

Another critical question to address is whether there is any need at all for maintaining a democratically elected leadership in rural areas. Would it not be proper to transform traditional leadership institutions so that they play the roles and functions that democratically elected leaders are currently playing?

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study it is recommended that research be conducted to:

1. Explore how the traditional leadership system in Africa has responded and coped with changes in Government over the years.
2. Understand how the traditional and democratically elected leadership systems can be modelled such that there are guaranteed harmonious relationships.
3. Establish desirable institutional arrangements (how the two institutions can co-exist) and a call for greater clarity on the

Table 1: Abridgment of seven research documentation

<i>Source and study area</i>	<i>Rationale of the study</i>	<i>Results of the study</i>	<i>Gaps in knowledge revealed</i>
1. Sharma (n.d.) Botswana	Assessing the relevance of traditional structures in post-colonial governance	Traditional leaders are relevant in post-colonial governance. They must be trained and provided with infrastructure to administer rural areas.	Training needs were not identified. No framework for co-operation and co-ordination of the institutions of governance were proposed.
2. Oomen (2000) Limpopo of South Africa	Changing position of traditional authority and the detection of the driving forces behind the new salience of tradition and tribalism	Lack of clarity of roles of institutions, co-operation and understanding of the legal system by community members.	Views of ordinary community members were not captured because they were excluded from the study.
3. Boafo-Arthur (2001), Ghana	Attempts to influence the place and role of chiefs in both local and national administration	Chieftaincy is indispensable. Traditional leaders' work schedule must be clearly spelled out.	No statistics to back the conclusions made. Therefore, the findings are questionable.
4. Fokwang (2005). Tshivhase area in South Africa and Bali in Cameroon	Status and role of traditional leadership in socio-economic and cultural development	Chiefs can play an important role in socio-economic development of areas under their jurisdiction.	Failure to identify factors that Chiefs could use to influence community development
5. Cook (2005) North West Province of South Africa	Inherent tensions arising from overlapping roles of the various forms of governance in Africa today	Traditional administration offers its subjects the rights to be heard and participation in decision making.	Views of traditional and democratic leaders were not obtained because they were excluded from the study.
6. Logan (2009) 15 African countries	Understanding perceptions towards traditional leaders and their support for a democratic system of government.	Hybridizing political systems may best represent a positive step towards deepening democracy in Africa, rather than a step away from "true" democracy.	Concluding that a hybridised political system is a positive step towards achieving the "true" democracy, without provision of institutional arrangement of this system is a premature conclusion.
7. Chinsinga (2006) Malawi	Examination of the politics of poverty reduction in the context of political and administrative reforms focusing on the patterns of power structures and relationships among institutional actors and stakeholders at various levels of government and society.	The problematic relationship between customary authorities and councillors arises due to the former wanting to constitute primary structures of local government in rural areas. Traditional leaders opposed to the introduction of alternative structures of leadership that appear to challenge their hegemony, power, prestige, influence and authority. Multifaceted nature of political space especially in terms of the strategies used by the councillors and traditional leaders to gain influence, authority and legitimacy in the arena in which the contests are waged. Community members regard customary authorities more legitimate catalysts of development and change compared to democratically elected leaders.	Sources of conflicts between traditional and elected leaders revealed, providing empirical evidence on how traditional leaders are used for political gain. Study failed to propose what must be done with the weak material circumstances of traditional leaders, which make it easy for politicians to manipulate them. A governance model taking into account the multifaceted nature of political space not proposed.

Source: Author

perceived roles of traditional leaders in the hybridized political and administrative systems.

REFERENCES

- Ake C 2003. *The Feasibility of Democracy in Africa*. Dakar: CODESRIA.
- Alexander J 2006. *The Unsettled Land: State – Making and the Politics of Land in Zimbabwe 1893-2003*. Oxford: James Curry.
- Awolalu JO 1976. What is African traditional religion? *Studies in Comparative Religion*, 10(2): 1-10.
- Ayittey GBN 1999. *Africa in Chaos*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Bofo-Arthur K 2001. Chieftaincy and Politics in Ghana since 1982. *West Africa Review*, 3(1): 10-21.
- Bogdanor V 1995. *The Monarchy and the Constitution*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Buur L, Kyed HM 2005. State Recognition of Traditional Authority in Mozambique: The Nexus of Community Representation and State Assistance. *Discussion Paper 28*, Uppsala, Nordiska Afrikainstitutet.
- Campbell IC 2005. The Quest for Constitutional Reform in Tonga. *The Journal of Pacific History*, 40(1): 91-104.
- Charumbira FZ 2012. *The Traditional Leaders and Justice Delivery*. Unpublished Paper, Harare.
- Cheka C 2008. Traditional authority at the crossroads of governance in Republican Cameroon. *African Development*, XXXIII: 67-89.
- Chinsinga B 2006. The interface between tradition and modernity: The struggle for political space at the local level in Malawi. *Civilizations*, 54(1- 2): 255-274.
- Cook SE 2005. Chiefs, kings, corporatization, and democracy: A South African case study. *Brown Journal of World Affairs*, XII(1): 125-137.
- Department of Provincial and Local Government 2003. *White Paper on Traditional Leadership and Governance*. Pretoria: Government Printer.
- Dinerman A 2001. From ‘Abaixo’ to ‘chiefs of production’: Agrarian change in Nampula province, Mozambique, 1975-87. *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 28(2): 1-82.
- Duri FPT 2017. Interfacing the past and the present: Traditional leaders, politics and materialism in Zimbabwe since the pre-colonial period. In: A Nhema-chena, M Mawere (Eds.): *Africa at the Crossroads Theorising Fundamentalism in the 21st Century*. Bamenda, Langaa RPCIG, pp. 253-286.
- Economic Commission for Africa 2007. *Relevance of African Traditional Institutions of Governance*. Addis Ababa.
- Edwards C 2006. The role of monarchy in Tonga “A constitutional project”. *Parliamentarian*, 86(3): 205-208.
- Englebort P 2002. Born-again Buganda or the limits of traditional resurgence in Africa. *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 40(3): 345-368.
- Fokwang J 2005. Tribal innovators? Traditional leadership and development in Africa. *CODESRIA Bulletin*, 3 and 4: 41-43.
- Francis J, Dube B, Mokganyetji T, Chitapa T 2010. University-rural community partnership for people-centred development: Experiences from Makhado Municipality, Limpopo Province. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 24(3): 357-373.
- Kendie SB 2017. The effects of chieftaincy and land conflicts on the socio-political development of northern Ghana. *International Journal of Social Science Research*, 5(1): 102-119.
- Kleinbooi K, de Satge R, Tanner C 2011. *Decentralised Land Governance: Case Studies and Local Voices from Botswana, Madagascar and Mozambique*. Institute for Poverty Land and Agrarian Studies. Cape Town: University of the Western Cape.
- Koelble T 2005. *Democracy, Traditional Leadership and the International Economy in South Africa*. Cape Town: University of Cape Town.
- Logan C 2009. Selected chiefs, elected councilors and hybrid democrats: popular perspectives on the co-existence of democracy and traditional authority. *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 47(1): 101-128.
- Lule G 1995. *The Role of Traditional Leaders in the 21st Century*. Unpublished Paper, Kampala.
- Lund C 2006. Twilight institutions: Public authority and local politics in Africa. *Development and Change*, 37(4): 685-705.
- Mamdani M 1996. *Citizens and Subjects: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Mathonsi N, Sithole S 2017. The incompatibility of traditional leadership and democratic experimentation in South Africa. *African Journal of Public Affairs*, 9(5): 35-46.
- Mershon C 2017. *Local Public Goods and Political Elites: Elective and Chieftaincy Authority in South Africa*. Unpublished Paper, Chicago.
- Mijiga FS 2008. The Role of Traditional Leaders in a Democratic Dispensation: A Selection of International Experiences (1998). From <http://www.ndi.org/files/027_ww_tradleaders.pdf> (Retrieved on 18 September 2008).
- Mndende N 2008. Traditional Leadership and Governance Re-contextualized’ (2007). From <<http://www.ddp.org.za/ddp-programmes/local-government/annual-national-local-government-conference/presentation-2007/Mndende.doc>> (Retrieved on 18 October 2008).
- Mngomezulu BR 2009. *The Future of Traditional Leaders in South Africa: A View From Below*. Unpublished Paper, Durban.
- Mungwini P 2011. Philosophy and tradition in Africa: Critical reflections on the power and vestiges of colonial nomenclature, thought and practice. *A Journal of the Philosophical Association of Kenya*, 3(1): 1-19.
- Mzimela M 2012. *The Role of African Traditional Leadership in Local Governance and Development*. Unpublished Paper, Harare.
- Njoh AJ 2006. *Tradition, Culture and Development in Africa: Historical Lessons for Modern Development Planning*. Hampshire: Ashgate.
- Ntsebeza L 2006. *Democracy Compromise: Chiefs and the Politics of Land in South Africa*. Cape Town: Human Sciences Research Council.
- Oomen B 2000. “We must now go back to our history”: Retraditionalisation in a Northern Province

- Chieftaincy. *Journal of African Studies*, 59(1): 71-95.
- Oomen B 2005. *Chiefs in South Africa: Law, Power & Culture in the Post-Apartheid*. New York: Palgrave.
- Opello WC 1991. *Portugal: From Monarchy to Pluralist Democracy*. Colorado: Westview Press.
- Rosenthal JP 2006. Politics, culture, and governance in the development of prior informed consent in indigenous communities. *Current Anthropology*, 47(1): 119-142.
- Simiyu VG 1987. The democratic myth in the African traditional societies. In: WO Oyugi, A Gitonga (Eds.): *The Democratic Theory and Practice in Africa*. Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, pp. 49-70.
- Sharma KC (n.d.). Role of Traditional Structures in Local Governance for Local Development: The Case of Botswana. World Bank, Washington DC. From <<http://info.worldbank.org/etools/docs/library/153055/BOTSWANA.pdf>> (Retrieved on 11 October 2008).
- Van Rouveroy, van Nieuwaal EAB, Ray DI 1996. The new relevance of traditional authorities in Africa. *Journal of Legal Pluralism and Unofficial Law*, 37-38: 27-29.
- Winichakul T 2008. Toppling democracy. *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, 38(1): 11-37.
- Zungu S 1996. Traditional leaders' capability and disposition for democracy: The example of South Africa. In: W Hofmeister, I Scholz (Eds.): *Traditional and Contemporary forms of Local Participation and Self-government in Africa*. Johannesburg: Konrad Adenauer-Stiftung, pp. 161-77.
- Zuma GJ 2010. *Official Opening of the National House of Traditional Leaders, Old Assembly, Parliament, South Africa*. Cape Town: Presidency.

Paper received for publication on August 2015
Paper accepted for publication on December 2016