



Conflict and coexistence: analysing the dynamics between traditional leadership and democratic governance in Dukuduku, KwaZulu-Natal

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the conflicts arising from the coexistence of traditional leadership and democratic local governance in Dukuduku, KwaZulu-Natal, a region marked by overlapping authority and contested land claims. Despite constitutional recognition, traditional leadership in post-apartheid South Africa remains ambiguously defined, leading to clashes with democratically elected structures over roles, responsibilities, and territory. This study uses a qualitative methodology to analyse archival materials, media sources, and meeting records and conducts semi-structured interviews with 25 stakeholders, including traditional leaders, senior citizens, and subsistence farmers. The findings reveal that introducing a local government system under the Amakhosi jurisdiction precipitates confrontations, particularly where duties intersect. In Dukuduku—proclaimed a state forest—the recognition of traditional authority creates disputes over land ownership and governance, complicating the administration of land and impacting service delivery. The analysis suggests that the institutional “invention” and subsequent “recognition” of traditional leadership in areas like Dukuduku not only challenge the perceptions of state land but also exacerbate power struggles, thereby affecting local development and governance. The study contributes to understanding the dynamic interplay between traditional and democratic governance systems in rural South Africa. It highlights the implications for policy and local administration in managing such dual governance structures effectively. This study explains how hard it is to combine traditional structures with a modern democratic framework. It also gives us a better understanding of what this means for rural governance and land management in changing societies.

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Introduction

Mtubatuba is an example of a remote community in the countryside where traditional leadership and democratic governance structures operate side by side, often resulting in conflict over overlapping responsibilities. This coexistence of different institutions of governance has proved problematic, and some have suggested that this has compromised or delayed service delivery in rural South Africa. Conflicts have revolved around the roles of these two, which are seemingly incompatible. According to Ntsebeza (2005), other scholars have argued that the institution of traditional leadership has survived to the present because not all traditional leaders were collaborators during the apartheid period. This institution, which many thought would die in the new dispensation, managed to revive and assert itself firmly during the transition period in South Africa; however, after the local government elections of 1995/6, tensions manifested themselves between newly elected rural councillors and traditional leaders (Ntsebeza, 2004, p. 75).

Many ordinary South Africans, including rural elected councillors, thought that land administration, which was a key responsibility of traditional leaders during apartheid and before, would now be the responsibility of the elected councillors in rural areas. However, this was not to be the case (ibid). Some chiefs demanded that municipalities not be established in areas under their control. However, not all chiefs have taken this position (Mwalukomo & Patel, 2012, p. 261). There were fears among traditional leaders that the establishment of municipal councils would replace them.

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On the other hand, some believe that incorporating traditional leaders into a new system of democracy is a compromise with democratic values and principles. Historically, traditional leadership has been the local government in rural South Africa throughout history before establishing democratic local governance structures. Over the years, they have maintained law and order and resolved issues related to customary law in areas under their jurisdiction. Arguably, traditional leaders still have an essential role in the new democratic South Africa, as Kompi and Twala argued, and the continuing importance of 'Traditional leaders' is demonstrated in their communities' social and political life. They are valued because they provide a sense of continuity and stability in an era of significant change' (Kompi & Twala, 2014, p. 985).

Since achieving democracy in South Africa, traditional leaders in rural areas have increasingly become involved in party politics. This concerns citizens in rural areas under the jurisdiction of traditional leaders as they are expected to take a neutral stand when addressing conflicts in their areas. In Mtubatuba, Dukuduku in particular, some traditional leaders have become active in party politics, which has led to a debate on whether or not this is the correct posture to take. As a result, this chapter attempts to address the impact this has had in the area, taking into cognisance the role traditional leaders and ward councillors have to play in social upliftment.

The Dukuduku area is under Mtubatuba Municipality. The area comprises three sections (wards) out of nineteen that comprise the Mtubatuba Local Municipality under the UMkhanyakude District. The Dukuduku area comprises Khula village, Ezwenelisha village and the Dukuduku forest area. The surroundings are St Lucia and Monzi, which the indigenous people claim are part of the Dukuduku area and were forcefully taken from them by the whites. This also includes the conserved Futhululu forest and the nearby game reserve. It is important to note that a group claiming to be indigenous to the area and thus the rightful owners of the land has filed a claim over the entire area with the land claims court (Nyathi & Ajani, 2023).

Therefore, besides the conflicts between traditional leadership and elected councillors, the land claimants constitute the third key role player in the area, which adds more complexity to social and political developments. Most strikingly, the land claimants contest ownership claims made by the established Mpukunyoni traditional authority and do not belong to the local traditional leadership. These land claimants, who refer to themselves as the original owners of the Dukuduku forest, have made it clear that the whole Dukuduku area belongs to them and not the Mpukunyoni Traditional Authority (Joseph Thethwayo, personal communication, 23 December 2019). While this paper is not interested in land claims in the area *per se*, the existence of land claimants adds another layer of complexity to the question of land administration and ownership.

Lastly, Mtubatuba, like the Dukuduku area, was a stronghold of Inkatha, a cultural-cumpolitical organisation under the leadership of Inkosi Mangosuthu Buthelezi (Nyathi & Ajani, 2023). However, the local government elections in 2011 marked a turning point in the history of Mtubatuba Local Municipality. They saw that the African National Congress (ANC) had assumed power in the area for the first time since the municipality's inception. Commentators attributed this regime change to the formation of the National Freedom Party (NFP) of Zanele KaMagwaza Msibi, which broke away from the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) and thus severely weakened the mother body. Dukuduku played a crucial role in regime change in Mtubatuba as the ANC took over one of its significant wards (Ward 4) for the first time (Nyathi & Ajani, 2023). Following the ANC's victory in Mtubatuba, the municipality did not operate effectively, leading to its dissolution in 2015 and again in 2018.

The nature of traditional leadership in KwaZulu-Natal

The landscape of traditional leadership in South Africa, particularly within the Mtubatuba local municipality, is complex and deeply intertwined with historical and political dynamics. Unlike other municipalities, Mtubatuba falls solely within the jurisdiction of the Mpukunyoni Traditional Authority, illustrating a unique aspect of traditional leadership in the region (Nyathi, 2018). This authority is part of a broader framework where traditional leadership is historically rooted and deeply entrenched in the socio-political fabric of South Africa, especially in provinces like KwaZulu-Natal (Buthelezi & Skosana, 2018). However, the historical evolution of traditional leadership reflects a complex interplay of colonial and apartheid influences, with significant implications for its role and legitimacy. Traditional leadership in South Africa has a multifaceted history, evolving through precolonial, colonial, and post-apartheid periods (Koenene, 2018).

Colonial and apartheid governments co-opted traditional leadership structures to serve their interests, resulting in compromised autonomy and legitimacy (Daphne, 1982). Once guardians of people's rights, chiefs became instruments of colonial control and were often viewed as collaborators of the oppressive regimes (Ntsebeza, 2004). The apartheid era further solidified this control, incorporating chiefs into the Bantustan system and imposing policies that undermined their autonomy (Butler, 2002).

However, traditional leaders were not monolithic in their responses to colonial and apartheid rule. While some collaborated, others resisted, symbolising forms of local resistance (Buthelezi & Skosana, 2018). The political landscape shifted with movements like Inkatha, which mobilised Zulu-speaking communities under the leadership of figures like Inkosi Mangosuthu Buthelezi (Nyathi, 2018).

Traditional leaders became key players in political mobilisation, aligning themselves with parties like Inkatha, which advocated for cultural preservation and autonomy. The post-apartheid era brought new challenges and opportunities for traditional leadership. The transition to democracy necessitated redefining their roles within a democratic framework (Buthelezi, 2000). However, tensions

emerged as traditional leaders feared the erosion of their powers in the new political dispensation (Nyathi, 2018). Political realignments and power struggles, such as those between the IFP and ANC in KwaZulu-Natal, exacerbated this tension.

In Mtubatuba, traditional leaders' dominance aligned with political parties like the IFP and shaped local politics and governance (Ntombela, 2018). However, internal conflicts and succession disputes within traditional authorities often destabilise governance structures, leading to dysfunction and dissatisfaction among constituents (Nyathi, 2018). These dynamics intersected with broader political shifts, such as the emergence of the NFP and subsequent coalition politics, further complicating regional governance (Buthelezi, 2011). The dissolution of the Mtubatuba municipality in 2015 and subsequent governance challenges highlighted the complexities of local governance in areas with traditional solid leadership ties (Sowetan, 2015).

The issues of service delivery, political infighting, and administrative mismanagement underscored the need for effective governance structures that balance traditional and democratic principles (Mari, 2015). However, the legacy of apartheid-era policies and ongoing power struggles continue to shape governance dynamics in Mtubatuba and similar regions. In conclusion, the intersection of traditional leadership, political mobilisation, and democratic governance in South Africa's post-apartheid landscape reflects a complex and evolving terrain. Understanding the historical legacies, political dynamics, and governance challenges is essential for fostering inclusive and effective governance structures that meet the needs of diverse communities in regions like Mtubatuba (Nyathi & Ajani, 2023).

Local Traditional Authorities and Local Party Politics in Dukuduku: Power Struggles

Government gazette notices and official maps from the Department of Traditional and Local Government Affairs delineate the geographical boundaries and jurisdictional authority of traditional leadership structures in South Africa, particularly within the Mtubatuba and St Lucia areas. According to these sources, the Dukuduku area falls outside the jurisdiction of the Mpukunyoni Traditional Authority, as it is situated between other proclaimed traditional authorities (Association for Rural Advancement, 2002). However, despite this official delineation, traditional leaders appointed by the Mpukunyoni Traditional Authority operate within the Dukuduku area, raising questions about the establishment and legitimacy of their authority on 'state' land.

Historically, the land in the KwaMpukunyoni and Dukuduku forest areas was part of the pre-Shakan Mthethwa traditional authority, with the Mkhwanazi clan later allocated the KwaMpukunyoni area by the Mthethwa (Nyathi, 2018; Bryant, 1929). However, conflicting accounts suggest that the Dukuduku area was granted to the Ncube clan by the Mthethwa, separate from the land allocated to the Mkhwanazi clan (Mncube, 2019). This discrepancy underscores the need for further investigation into the ownership and jurisdictional boundaries of the Dukuduku forest area.

The available literature and information from local informants present differing perspectives on the historical occupancy and authority over the Dukuduku area. While some sources claim that the Mkhwanazi clan used the forest for refuge during colonial conflicts, the Ncube clan vehemently opposes this notion, asserting their historical ownership and occupation of the land (Africa Resource Centre for Housing, 2018). These conflicting narratives highlight the region's land tenure and traditional authority complexity.

During the colonial era, the government appropriated land from indigenous communities, including portions of the Dukuduku forest area, which were declared state land (Ndlovu, 2013). This led to evictions and the establishment of state-controlled commercial forests, further complicating the issue of land ownership and jurisdictional authority (Bryant, 1929). Despite these developments, the Mpukunyoni Traditional Council remained largely silent on the matter, raising questions about their stance on land dispossession and their role in advocating for the rights of local communities.

The late involvement of the Mpukunyoni Traditional Authority in the Dukuduku matter, particularly during the late 1980s and early 1990s, suggests a strategic interest in mining and land claims in the St Lucia area (Msweli, 2020). This delayed intervention contrasts with claims of historical authority and highlights the complexities of traditional leadership's relationship with land tenure and economic interests.

Moreover, the council's response to community appeals for intervention during evictions further underscores the nuanced dynamics of traditional leadership and community engagement. The establishment of traditional authority over the Dukuduku area raises critical questions about historical ownership, jurisdictional boundaries, and the role of traditional leadership in advocating for community rights. Further research is needed to reconcile conflicting narratives and understand the region's evolving land tenure and governance dynamics.

The 'Invention' of Traditional Leadership in Dukuduku State Forest during the Transition Period and post-1994

The history of the Dukuduku forest area is marked by a series of evictions and resettlements, with African communities returning to the forest in significant numbers in the late 1980s. Contrary to claims of an 'invasion' by squatters, the forest had always been occupied, serving as a refuge for those facing forced removals and as a source of livelihood through farming along the uMfolozi River. The authorities' narrative of an empty land ignores the historical presence of Indigenous communities (Mncube, 2019; Msweli, 2020). The 1980s saw a return to the forest due to political unrest in South Africa, which worsened poverty and environmental issues in the resettlement areas. Seeking refuge from violence and economic hardship, many people returned to the Dukuduku area, only to find themselves labelled as 'squatters' by the apartheid government (Liebenberg & Spies, 1994; Taylor, 2002).

Attempts to seek assistance from traditional leaders, such as Inkosi M.M. Mkhwanazi, were denounced, highlighting the disconnect between the people of Dukuduku and the established traditional authority. The failure of traditional leaders to address the community's plight further strained their relationship with the forest dwellers (Mlambo, 2019). The 1990s brought about significant changes in the dynamics of traditional leadership in the Dukuduku area, with the establishment of the Mkhwanazi Traditional Authority and the emergence of Shikishela Caiphus Mkhwanazi as a prominent leader. However, Shikishela's collaboration with conservation authorities to facilitate resettlement projects led to divisions within the community and accusations of betrayal (Nxumalo, 2019).

Mining interests and land restitution claims further complicated the situation, with traditional leaders accused of siding with external interests for personal gain. Inkosi Mkhwanazi's support for mining operations and involvement in land restitution claims drew criticism from dispossessed communities and exacerbated tensions within the Dukuduku area (Skelcher, 2003; Walker, 2008). The establishment of resettlement villages like Khula and Ezwenelisha aimed to address the housing needs of the forest dwellers but faced challenges due to community resistance and traditional leaders' mismanagement. The failure of these projects to fulfil their intended purpose underscored the complexities of land administration and community development in the area (Xaba, 2019).

The appointment of traditional leaders, often from outside the community or without the consent of the original claimants, further eroded trust and legitimacy in the traditional leadership institution. Allegations of corruption and illegal land sales tarnished the reputation of traditional leaders and exacerbated conflicts within the community (Thethwayo, 2019). Despite being demarcated as state land, traditional leaders continued to assert authority over land administration functions, leading to conflicts with government agencies and legal challenges. The lack of clarity and enforcement of land ownership laws further compounded the issue, leaving traditional leaders and community members needing clarification and trust (Brooks, 2018).

Power struggles and personal interests among traditional leaders and community structures have hampered efforts to mitigate conflicts and improve governance structures in the Dukuduku area. Calls for greater transparency, accountability, and inclusivity in decision-making processes remain unresolved, perpetuating tensions and undermining efforts for sustainable development (Stakeholder Meeting, 2014). Thus, the historical and contemporary dynamics of traditional leadership and land ownership in the Dukuduku area reflect a complex interplay of political, economic, and social factors. The failure of traditional leadership to effectively address the needs and aspirations of the community has led to widespread discontent and mistrust, highlighting the need for holistic and participatory approaches to governance and development in the region.

Traditional Leadership and the Democratically Elected Representatives in Mtubatuba, Post-2001

The transition to democracy in South Africa following the 1994 general elections brought about significant changes in governance and policy frameworks. This shift was accompanied by the establishment of new legislative acts such as the Municipal Structures Act (Act No. 32 of 2000), the Municipal Finance Act (Act No. 56 of 2003), and the Traditional Leadership and Governance Framework Act (Act No. 6 of 2004), aimed at regulating various aspects of governance and service delivery (Booyesen, 2012). However, traditional leaders nationwide were met with apprehension about these developments. Traditional leaders, particularly Amakhosi and Izinduna, expressed concerns that introducing democratic local government structures would undermine their roles and powers.

The IFP leader late Mangosuthu Buthelezi expressed this sentiment by lamenting what he perceived as the ANC-led government's betrayal in reducing the traditional leadership's involvement in local governance (Nyathi, 2018). The resistance from traditional leaders to the demarcation of areas into municipalities and their threat to boycott local government elections underscored the tensions between the traditional and democratic governance systems (Powell, 2012).

The coexistence of traditional leadership and democratic structures posed challenges to rural development, especially in areas where tensions between the two systems were pronounced, such as Mtubatuba. Previously, traditional leaders wielded significant authority in resource allocation and decision-making. However, the advent of democratically elected representatives shifted the power dynamics, leading to clashes over jurisdiction and service delivery responsibilities (Williams, 2010). While the South African Constitution acknowledges the place of traditional leaders in the new democratic dispensation, the precise nature of their authority and its relationship with other institutions remains ambiguous.

This ambiguity has contributed to conflicts between traditional leaders and elected officials tasked with delivering services to rural communities (Williams, 2010). Traditional leaders and ward councillors often aligned politically in Mtubatuba, where the IFP enjoyed dominance. However, tensions arose when disagreements occurred over major projects or political allegiances. The murder of ANC ward councillor Siphon Zungu in 2008 serves as evidence that these disputes occasionally descended into violence (Sowetan, 2008).

Similar tensions were observed in Dukuduku, where conflicts between traditional leaders and elected officials, particularly during the tenure of IFP councillor Timothy Maphanga, highlighted the complexities of governance in rural areas (Fika Buthelezi, 2018). The dissolution of the Mtubatuba municipality in 2015 underscored the challenges faced in reconciling the roles of traditional leaders and elected representatives in rural governance. While some advocate for abolishing traditional leadership, others argue for its retention due to its accessibility and perceived effectiveness in resolving local disputes (Mathe, 2018). However, criticisms of traditional leadership, particularly allegations of bias in dispensing justice, underscore the need for greater accountability and

transparency within the institution (Interviewee X, 2018). The ongoing debate surrounding the coexistence of traditional leadership and democratic governance reflects the complexities inherent in reconciling diverse perspectives on governance in post-apartheid South Africa.

Methods

This study employed a qualitative research methodology to explore the governance dynamics in rural South Africa, specifically focusing on the interaction between traditional leaders and democratically elected officials. The research utilised semi-structured interviews as the primary data collection method, allowing for in-depth exploration of participants' perspectives and experiences. The sampling strategy involved purposeful sampling to select participants who were community leaders with firsthand experience in navigating the interface between traditional leadership and democratic governance structures.

A total of 21 community leaders were selected from various rural areas in South Africa to ensure diversity in perspectives and experiences. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with each participant, following a predetermined set of open-ended questions designed to elicit detailed responses regarding their roles, interactions, challenges, and perceptions of governance in their respective communities. The conversational interviews allowed participants to express themselves freely while ensuring that all relevant topics were covered. Before the interviews, ethical considerations were addressed, including obtaining informed consent from participants, ensuring confidentiality and anonymity, and allowing participants to withdraw from the study without repercussion.

Data analysis followed a thematic approach, systematically coding and categorising interview transcripts to identify recurring themes and patterns. Initially, transcripts were read and reread to gain familiarity with the data. Then, codes were generated to capture key interview concepts and ideas. These codes were organised into broader themes and subthemes, subsequently refined through iterative analysis and discussion among the research team. The trustworthiness and credibility of the findings were ensured through various means, including member checking, where participants were allowed to review and confirm the accuracy of their interview transcripts.

Triangulation was employed by comparing and contrasting data from participants and sources to corroborate findings and enhance the study's validity. Overall, the qualitative research methodology employed in this study provided a comprehensive understanding of the complexities surrounding governance in rural South Africa, shedding light on the interactions, tensions, and potential pathways for collaboration between traditional leaders and elected officials.

Results

The study's results reveal multifaceted dynamics in the governance landscape of rural South Africa, particularly concerning the interplay between traditional leaders and democratically elected officials. The findings underscore this interface's significant tensions and complexities and the implications for governance, service delivery, and community development. Firstly, the study elucidates the historical context shaping the relationship between traditional leaders and democratically elected officials. As Nyathi (2018) highlighted, the transition to democracy in 1994 marked a pivotal moment in South Africa's governance, leading to establishing democratic local government structures. Traditional leaders, however, resisted this change because they saw it as a threat to their authority and independence (Buthelezi, 2000).

Moreover, the findings illuminate the power dynamics between traditional leaders and elected officials. Traditional leaders often wield considerable influence and authority within their communities, as they are deeply entrenched in local customs, traditions, and social structures (Williams, 2010). Their cooperation and support are crucial for effective governance and community development initiatives.

However, tensions arise when traditional leaders and elected officials clash over jurisdictional boundaries, resource allocation, and decision-making authority (Powell, 2012). Traditional leaders may view the establishment of democratically elected structures as encroaching on their traditional roles and powers, leading to resistance and conflict (Nyathi, 2018). Conversely, elected officials may perceive traditional leaders as obstacles to democratic governance and accountability, particularly when traditional practices conflict with constitutional principles (Booyesen, 2012). The study also highlights the role of political affiliations in shaping the dynamics between traditional leaders and elected officials. Cooperation and collaboration are more likely to occur in areas where traditional leaders and elected officials belong to the same political party (Nyathi, 2018).

Conversely, political differences may exacerbate tensions and hinder effective governance, as seen in the case of Mtubatuba municipality during the transition from IFP to ANC governance (Sowetan, 2008). Furthermore, the findings underscore the importance of community perceptions and experiences in shaping governance outcomes. While some community members value the accessibility and familiarity of traditional leaders, others perceive them as biased or ineffective in addressing their needs (Interviewee X, 2018). This highlights the nuanced nature of community preferences and the need for inclusive governance approaches that accommodate diverse perspectives. Overall, the study's results shed light on the intricate governance dynamics in rural South Africa, particularly concerning the interaction between traditional leaders and democratically elected officials. The findings underscore the

need for collaborative approaches that leverage the strengths of both traditional and democratic governance systems while mitigating tensions and addressing the diverse needs of local communities.

Discussion

The discussion of the study's findings delves into the complex relationship between traditional leaders and democratically elected officials in rural South Africa, drawing on existing literature to contextualise and analyse the dynamics observed. The tensions and conflicts highlighted in the results are consistent with previous research documenting the challenges of integrating traditional and democratic governance structures (Buthelezi, 2000). Traditional leaders, deeply rooted in local customs and traditions, often perceive introducing democratically elected officials as threatening their authority and autonomy (Williams, 2010). This resistance reflects broader concerns about the erosion of traditional power structures in the face of democratic reforms (Booyesen, 2012).

Moreover, the discussion explores the implications of political affiliations on governance dynamics. The alignment of traditional leaders and elected officials with different political parties can exacerbate tensions and hinder collaboration (Nyathi, 2018). Political differences may further polarise communities and impede effective decision-making, as seen in the Mtubatuba municipality's transition from IFP to ANC governance (Sowetan, 2008).

The findings also raise questions about the effectiveness of current governance structures in addressing community needs and promoting development. While traditional leaders are often valued for their accessibility and familiarity with local contexts, their perceived biases and limitations in addressing modern challenges underscore the need for inclusive and accountable governance mechanisms (Interviewee X, 2018). Furthermore, the discussion explores the role of community perceptions in shaping governance outcomes. The diverse views expressed by community members reflect the complex interplay of cultural, social, and political factors influencing attitudes towards traditional and democratic governance (Mathe, 2018). This highlights the importance of community engagement and participatory decision-making processes in fostering trust and legitimacy in governance institutions.

Additionally, the discussion considers the implications of the findings for policy and practice. The study underscores the importance of acknowledging and addressing the power imbalances and historical legacies shaping governance dynamics in rural South Africa (Powell, 2012). Policy interventions should promote collaboration and dialogue between traditional leaders and elected officials while safeguarding the rights and interests of marginalised communities (Booyesen, 2012).

Moreover, the discussion emphasised the need for capacity-building initiatives to strengthen traditional leaders and elected officials' governance capacities. Training programmes that promote effective leadership, conflict resolution, and participatory decision-making can enhance the ability of governance actors to navigate complex governance challenges (Nyathi, 2018). Overall, the discussion highlights the importance of adopting a nuanced and context-specific approach to governance in rural South Africa. By recognising the diverse interests, perspectives, and power dynamics at play, policymakers and practitioners can develop more inclusive and responsive governance systems that meet the needs of all community members.

Implications for Practice and Policy

The implications of this study extend beyond the specific case of South Africa's rural governance dynamics, offering insights into broader issues of governance, development, and democracy in diverse contexts. By examining the complex interplay between traditional leaders and democratically elected officials, the study sheds light on the challenges and opportunities inherent in integrating different governance systems (Booyesen, 2012). Firstly, the findings underscore the importance of recognising and respecting the diverse forms of governance present in post-colonial societies. Traditional leadership structures, rooted in centuries-old customs and traditions, often coexist alongside modern democratic institutions. Ignoring or marginalising traditional leaders can lead to tensions and conflicts that undermine effective governance and development efforts (Buthelezi, 2000).

Secondly, the study highlights the need for inclusive and participatory approaches to governance that actively engage with local communities. Meaningful dialogue and collaboration between traditional leaders, elected officials, and community members are essential for building trust, fostering social cohesion, and promoting sustainable development (Nyathi, 2018).

Moreover, the findings underscore the importance of addressing power imbalances and historical injustices in governance systems. Often seen as representatives of historically marginalised communities, traditional leaders must be empowered to play a meaningful role in decision-making processes (Williams, 2010). At the same time, efforts should be made to ensure accountability, transparency, and the protection of human rights within traditional leadership structures (Powell, 2012). Furthermore, the study highlights the need for context-specific approaches to governance reform. There is no one-size-fits-all solution to integrating traditional and democratic governance systems. Instead, policymakers and practitioners must tailor interventions to local contexts, considering the unique cultural, social, and political dynamics (Mathe, 2018).

Additionally, the findings suggest the importance of strengthening the capacity of traditional leaders and elected officials to fulfil their roles effectively. Capacity-building initiatives, including training programs and mentorship opportunities, can enhance governance actors' skills in conflict resolution, negotiation, and community engagement (Interviewee X, 2018). Furthermore, the study underscores the importance of political inclusivity and pluralism in fostering democratic governance. Political parties should

refrain from instrumentalising traditional leadership for partisan purposes, as this can undermine the legitimacy and effectiveness of governance institutions (Sowetan, 2008).

Furthermore, the findings highlight the need for ongoing research and dialogue on the role of traditional leadership in contemporary governance systems. As societies evolve and change, governance structures and practices must also change. Continuous reflection, learning, and adaptation are essential for building resilient and responsive governance systems that meet the needs of diverse populations (Fika Buthelezi, 2018). Finally, the study suggests that integrating traditional and democratic governance systems is not a zero-sum game. Instead, it presents an opportunity to harness the complementary strengths of both systems to address complex governance challenges.

By fostering collaboration and synergy between traditional leaders and elected officials, policymakers can build more inclusive, equitable, and effective governance systems that promote the well-being of all citizens (Simo Mhlongo, 2008). Thus, the implications of this study underscore the importance of recognising, respecting, and engaging with diverse forms of governance in pursuit of inclusive and sustainable development. By embracing complexity, embracing diversity, and fostering collaboration, societies can build governance systems that are responsive, accountable, and resilient in the face of evolving challenges and opportunities.

Conclusion

This study provides valuable insights into the intricate governance dynamics in post-apartheid South Africa, specifically focusing on the interaction between traditional leadership and democratic governance structures. Through a qualitative exploration involving semi-structured interviews with 21 community leaders, the research highlights the tensions, challenges, and opportunities inherent in integrating traditional and democratic governance systems. The findings underscore the importance of recognising traditional leadership's historical significance and cultural relevance while promoting inclusive, participatory approaches to governance that prioritise community engagement and collaboration.

Moving forward, policymakers, practitioners, and scholars must continue to engage in dialogue, research, and capacity-building efforts to foster more effective, equitable, and resilient governance systems that address the diverse needs and aspirations of South Africa's population.

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