

# The role of traditional authorities in the implementation of Integrated Development Planning Policy (IDP) in Vhembe District Municipality, Limpopo Province

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## **ABSTRACT**

*The South African post-apartheid government attempted to integrate traditional authorities and local government. The concept is to promote co-operative and inclusive government among rural communities and contemporary local government systems. Government believes traditional authorities have a role to play in democracy, particularly with regard to community service delivery in these societies and democracy particularly with regard to community service delivery. However, this attempt has encountered several constraints. This article identifies those factors that are constraining this attempt. Fifteen traditional leaders who represent rural communities in municipalities in the Vhembe District Municipality were interviewed through a semi-structured questionnaire to measure their perception with regard to their role in local government. In addition, representatives of traditional leaders' structures, municipal managers, municipal IDP managers, municipal mayors and the Vhembe District Municipal Mayor were also interviewed. The results of this study reveal that perceptions on the role played by traditional leaders in the local government IDP processes vary considerably. The results revealed that perceptions on their participation (45,5%), involvement (45,25%), submission of views (41,2%), and participation in ward committees (4,8%), council attendance (90,0%), playing a role in the proceedings (50,0%), submission of IDP*

**proposals (38,7%) and consultation by local government officials (93,2%) were indeed very diverse. The overall finding is that the real participation by traditional leaders in the IDP process is still relatively limited.**

## INTRODUCTION

The institution of traditional authorities in Africa is an integral part in the social, political and cultural establishment of African communities. Both the institutions of traditional authorities and the contemporary state are located where the traditional institutions meet the contemporary state administration (ECASA 2007:v). As a result, the position of traditional leaders has continued to grow in Africa and in South Africa in particular (Ray & Van Nieuwaal van Rouveroy 1996:1). Traditional authorities have promoted participatory democracy in the decision-making processes through structures such as advisors, holding meetings with their followers and taking collective decisions as opposed to unilateral decisions, thus making them more acceptable to communities than decisions of other spheres of governments (Traditional Leadership in the Northern Province 1999:2). The research undertaken by Oomen (2002 & 2005) shows that 73% of the population support traditional authorities in Limpopo Province. The 2005 survey by *South African Social Attitudes* reveals that the level of trust in traditional authorities is 52% and 68% in Eastern Cape and Limpopo Province respectively.

According to Ntsebenza (2004:85), the involvement of communities in decision-making processes by traditional authorities had the potential to make the institution of traditional leadership democratic. Traditional authorities also known as tribal authorities were responsible for local government and land administration before the advent of democracy in South Africa as they were empowered by *Bantu Authorities Act, 1951* (Ntsebenza 2004:77).

Despite the fact that traditional leaders were viewed as collaborators of both colonial and apartheid government the democratically elected government took steps to accommodate their institution constitutionally (Ntsebenza 1999:1). The purpose of this article is to discuss the role of traditional authorities in the implementation of the IDP. This article discusses the background and history to traditional leaders. This article, recognises the institution of traditional leadership, and defines the IDP. The focus will be on the role of the traditional authorities in the process of compiling an integrated development plan.

## RECOGNITION OF THE INSTITUTION OF TRADITIONAL LEADERSHIP

The 1993 Interim *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa*, 1993 recognised traditional leadership and houses of traditional leaders in the national and provincial spheres (Nthai 2005:5). Chapter 12 of the final *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa*, 1996, recognises



the institution, status and role of traditional leaders. It provides for the continued authority and functioning of such leaders in accordance with traditional law within the broader legal framework and for traditional leaders to participate at local government sphere (*Constitution of the Republic of South Africa*, 1996).

The recognition of the institution of traditional leaders was followed by the *Local Government: Municipal Structures Act*, 117 of 1998. Section (81) stipulates that traditional authorities who traditionally observe a system of customary law in the area of a municipality must be allowed to attend and participate in any meeting of the council. The traditional leaders must also be consulted by the council before any decision that affects their traditional authority is taken. The number of traditional leaders may not exceed 20% in relation to the total number of the elected councillors. The *White Paper on Local Government*, 1998 compels municipalities to ensure citizen participation in policy initiation and formulation, monitoring and evaluation of decision-making and also implementation of Integrated Development Planning processes.

The *Municipal Structures Act*, 1998 was followed by the *Local Government: Municipal Systems Act*, 32 of 2000. Section (29) compels municipal councils to identify and consult organs of state including traditional authorities on the drafting of the integrated development plan. The people and communities who are affected by the decisions that are made must be given an opportunity to participate in decision-making processes (Cloete *et al.* 2006:114). The *Traditional Leadership and Governance Framework Act*, 2003 provides that partnership between elected leaders and traditional leaders should be established so that traditional authorities may play a role in the promotion of social and economic development. The envisaged role of traditional leaders in the promotion of social and economic development in the municipalities suggests that they should participate in the compilation and implementation of IDP.

Traditional authorities must be consulted and participate in policy-making as an organised structure because they represent communities and also their structures. If they are not consulted there may be no effective implementation of government policies (Cloete and Thornhill 2005:123).

## **DEFINING INTEGRATED DEVELOPMENT PLANNING (IDP)**

Integrated Development Planning is a process that is undertaken to produce the IDP which is a development plan for a municipal area containing short, medium and long-term objectives and strategies. The IDP serves as a principal strategic management instrument for municipalities. IDP is legislated by the *Local Government: Municipal Systems Act*, 32 of 2000. It is regarded as the first product of the integrated development process. This plan should therefore integrate all planning, budgeting and managerial activities in the municipality (DPLG 1998/1999:6).

Oranje and Van Huyssteen in (Fox and Van Rooyen 2004:131-132), regard integrated development planning as a crucial instrument of development planning in the local sphere. Integrated development planning is a process that assists municipalities to prepare strategic development plans for a five-year period (*Municipal Systems Act*, 2000, section 35 (1)).

## DEFINING TRADITIONAL AUTHORITIES

Traditional authorities are defined as structures of governance that derive part of their legitimacy from an association with the past (Oomen 2005:32). They encompass kings, other aristocrats holding offices in political structures that pre-date colonial state and post-colonial state, as well as the heads of extended families and other political and religious offices in decentralised polities that also date back to the pre-colonial period (Tettey *et al.* 2003:242).

## HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF TRADITIONAL AUTHORITIES

The African kingdoms such as Ashanti, Zulu and the Great Zimbabwe had existed long before colonialism in Africa. The archaeological findings in Mapungubwe and Thulamela prove that Africa had well organised political institutions of power (ECASA 2007:3).

Traditional authorities are also known as Tribal Authorities and were responsible for local government and land administration before the advent of democracy in South Africa as they were empowered by the *Bantu Authorities Act* 1951 (Ntsebenza 1999:4). Traditional leaders were responsible for the running of the government of their communities at that time. They regulated the affairs of their communities and settled disputes among their followers. They organised the economy for their people (Newton and Benians 1936:47). Historically, traditional leaders had a social role to play within the rural communities and were regarded as central in the stimulation of public participation with regard to political affairs (Meer and Campbell 2007:19). In rural communities where social problems are still concentrated, traditional authorities are respected by their communities (Eberlee 2003:2-3).

When the British colonial government established its African empire in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it imposed its own value systems in relation to new forms of government and administration. These replaced the old traditional patterns of authority that were based on the power of the elders and chiefs (Marshall 1996:349). The institution of chieftaincy suffered the modification under colonialism. Earlier the chief was a nucleus of tribal life who worked with his subjects in the governance of his communities. The land which he held in trust of his people was taken away by colonial powers (Newton and Benians 1936:823).

## INDIRECT RULE BY TRADITIONAL AUTHORITIES

Indirect rule is defined as the system in which chiefs and kings act on behalf of the British Colonial Office through the alliances but without the transfer of political power to them (Gifford and Louis 1982:48). It was viewed as a tool for simplifying the administration of the vast populations and was a system used by the British to transfer British authority to the traditional African leaders (Marshall 1996:102). Its implementation depended on a particular colony and the traditional African chiefs or rulers who were assigned the duty to collect taxes, recruit of labour, and control of tribal unrest (Shillington 1995:355).



The British Colonial Government incorporated traditional local power structures or part of it. This was done through the adoption of a plan to purify the African institutions through traditional authorities (Afigbo *et al.* 1986:8). Traditional leaders became agents of colonial administration and accountable to white magistrates (Muriaas 2009:33).

## **LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND PLANNING**

Planning is a key component in the implementation of policies including the IDP. All activities need to be planned and structured how they should be realised. As a local government activity, planning refers to processes of assisting on the taking of decisions on the allocation of the use of resources (Mabin in Parnell *et al.* 2002:40). During the time of resistance in the 1980s against the oppressive policies of the South African apartheid government, there was a demand for planning to be a participatory process by the people of South Africa and not a unilateral and centralised process (Mabin in Parnell *et al.* 2002:44-45).

The *Local Government Transition Act* (LGTA), 1993, can be regarded as the source of new planning in South Africa. This Act was amended in 1996. It paved the way for a concept of development planning in South Africa. The amendment of LGTA compelled local governments to engage in a different way of planning. This new way of planning came to be known as the Integrated Development Planning (Mabin in Parnell *et al.* 2002:48). According to the *White Paper on Local Government*, 1998 Integrated Development Planning is one of the three tools of development of the local government system. The other two are performance management and partnership with citizens. It directs municipalities to establish a development plan for the short, medium and long term. IDP is not confined to a single actor but combines a broad range of participants.

## **NEED FOR MUNICIPAL PLANNING**

The *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa*, 1996 provides in section 152 that the purpose of local government is to promote social and economic development. It further provides for the developmental duties of the municipalities. In order to achieve the mandate of developmental duties, a municipality is required to structure and manage its administration, budgeting and planning processes to give priority to the basic needs of the community; to promote the social and economic development of the community; and participate in national and provincial development programmes. In terms of section 152 of the *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa*, 1996 the IDP must assist to: promote democratic and accountable local government; ensure that services are rendered efficiently and effectively to local communities; obtain social and economic development for marginalised and formerly disadvantaged communities; create a safe and healthy environment; involve communities in identifying their own needs and contributing to finding solutions for challenges faced by them; and ensure financial sustainability for development projects.

# PARTICIPATION OF TRADITIONAL AUTHORITIES IN IDP PROCESSES

The participation of traditional authorities in the Integrated Development Planning is confined to both their participation in the preparation of the integrated development plan and its implementation. The role of traditional authorities in the participation of IDP is recognised by the government in South Africa. The former President of the Republic of South Africa, Mr Motlanthe in his (2009) response to the debate of the National House of Traditional Leaders told them that government was delighted by their participation in the IDP processes. Figure 1 provides the comparison of selected variables that determine the role played by traditional authorities in IDP policy processes.

## The Investigation in Vhembe district

This article tests the concepts and policies with respect to traditional leaders in the Vhembe District. This is especially the case in terms of the role in the IDP process. The investigation for the purpose of this article was a mix between a qualitative and quantitative study. Face-to-face interviews utilising semi-structured questionnaires, focus group interviews and observation were part of the investigation. The findings in this article were therefore based and informed by the discussions.

The respondents for the purpose of this article are listed in Table 1.

The data analysis was a product of the statistical software as well as the qualitative interpretation of the interviews, questionnaires, focus group discussions and observation.

**Table 1 Respondents for this study**

Traditional leaders in municipal councils	15
Vhembe House of Traditional Leaders	10
Provincial House of Traditional Leaders	10
Local Municipal Mayors	4
Local Municipal Managers	4
Executive Mayor	1
District Municipal Manager	1
IDP Managers	5
SANCO	10
MEC	1
HOD	1
<b>TOTAL SAMPLE</b>	<b>62</b>



A 5-point Likert scale was used to measure the level of the role of traditional authorities in IDP policy implementation in a local municipality in Vhembe District Municipality. The responses ranged from strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree and do not know. The data that were collected came from the respondents who were selected in terms of their roles. The responses were captured in a spreadsheet and analysed by means of SPSS, version 18 of 2010. Responses of each category were recorded separately on the spreadsheet, tables and figures. The responses of each category were added together to give a single percentage for presenting the results. The findings of the data analyses were comprehensively interpreted and will be explained in the next section.

## FINDINGS

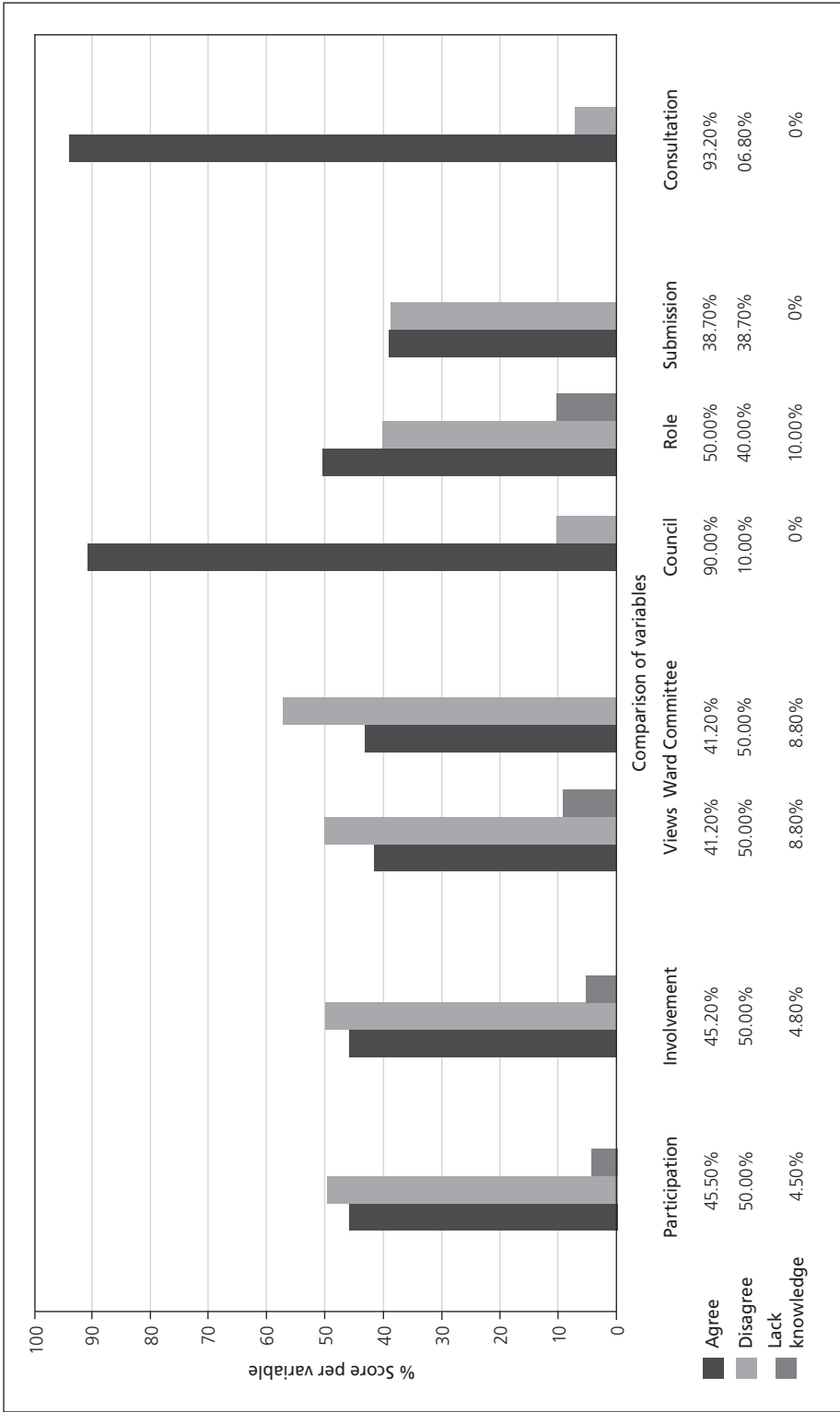
Figure 1 reflects the different perceptions on the role played by traditional authorities in the IDP policy processes in the Vhembe District Municipality, Limpopo Province. For example, this findings clearly reveals that the levels of agreement and disagreement on the role played by traditional authorities in the municipal IDP processes in the Vhembe District Municipality reveal highest variations in consultation (93,2%), council meeting attendances (90%) and the role played by traditional leaders in IDP policy processes in the Vhembe District Municipality (50,0%). These results might suggest that the majority of traditional leaders who represent communities in local government systems in the Vhembe District Municipality are satisfied that these factors are well handled in this municipality. This perception might be positive with regard to promoting co-operation among stakeholders in municipal systems. This is in this Municipality particularly apparent when realising that incidences of hostility and resentments have been very common among traditional leaders in municipal councils and municipal authorities in some parts of South Africa. In addition, these perceptions might indicate improved service delivery to communities because traditional leaders are probably going to encourage their subjects to actively co-operate and participate in municipal processes.

Contrary to this positive perceptions, participation in the ward committee (57,2%), involvement (50%), representation of views (50%) and participation (50%) in the IDP processes indicated some poor levels of performance in this municipality. They are revealed by the increasingly high number of respondents who thought the municipality was not doing enough. This is in contrast with the role played by traditional leaders in municipalities' IDP processes as indicated in Figure 1. These results represent a divided view among important stakeholders of service delivery to communities. These results might be suggesting that some serious attention has to be given to improving relations between traditional leaders and municipal authorities.

It is clear that a comprehensive number of traditional leaders who represent communities in this Municipality still lack access to crucial information. It is evidenced by the results of this study that revealed that traditional leaders have limited knowledge on the submission of IDP policy proposals; consultation of traditional leaders in the IDP policy processes; attendance of council meetings and ward committee meetings. These areas revealed very low information availability among stakeholders in this Municipality.

Only 28,15% of stakeholders in the Vhembe District Municipality have insufficient knowledge and information on issues pertaining to IDP processes in this municipality.

**Figure 1** Perceptions on the role played by traditional leaders in the Vhembe District Municipality, Limpopo Province





## CONCLUSION

This article argued that perceptions of stakeholders in relation to involvement, participation, consultation, submission of IDP proposals to the municipal council, the role played by traditional leaders in local government processes, value of views in the municipal councils and participation in ward councils remain widely diverse and divided.

The majority of the respondents argued that traditional leaders were not actively participating in municipal IDP processes in the Vhembe District Municipality. Some also argued that their role and submission of IDP proposals to municipal councils were also very limited.

However, a large majority (93,2%) of the respondents argued that traditional leaders in this municipality were sufficiently consulted in the municipal IDP processes. It is clear from the findings that an efficient and effective traditional leadership structure that actively participates and involves itself in municipal IDP processes might be of great benefit for the communities they represent, particularly in terms of service delivery and community development.

It is imperative for municipalities to solicit real participation by all the stakeholders, in particular the traditional leaders' structure through any means that might make their participation move beyond the level of mere consultation to actual participation in decision making in IDP processes. It is clear from the results that there is reasonably sufficient information and knowledge among various stakeholders with regard to the municipal IDP policy processes in this municipality as the majority of the stakeholders have that information and knowledge.

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