

DISSERTATION

DISASTER RISK REDUCTION IN AFRICA: IS THE INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF
TRADITIONAL LEADERS KEY?

Submitted by

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ABSTRACT

DISASTER RISK REDUCTION IN AFRICA: IS THE INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF TRADITIONAL LEADERS KEY?

This dissertation examines the role of traditional leaders in shaping governance of disaster risk reduction (DRR) in Africa. It argues that although traditional leaders remain central to local governance, especially in rural communities, they are still largely absent from formal DRR frameworks despite their authority, proximity to communities, and role as custodians of traditional knowledge. The dissertation argues that the formal integration of traditional leaders into disaster risk governance enhances coordination, facilitates the integration of traditional knowledge, and strengthens the legitimacy and authority of traditional leaders within DRR systems. This formalization does not create new roles for traditional leaders but enhances how these roles are exercised within DRR governance frameworks.

Using a mixed methods approach, the study combines a quantitative analysis of 34 African countries, with a qualitative case study of Zambia based on semi-structured elite interviews with three traditional leaders from North-Western, Southern, and Eastern provinces. The quantitative analysis examines trust in Members of Parliament and Traditional Leaders, contact with these institutions, and perceived responsiveness, and also assesses climate change awareness. The qualitative case study explores how traditional leaders understand and practice disaster risk reduction, including early warning, community mobilization, and the use of traditional knowledge.

The findings suggest that traditional leaders are significantly more trusted, contacted more often, and viewed as more responsive than Members of Parliament. The analysis also shows that

contact with traditional leaders is associated with climate change awareness. The Zambia case study further demonstrates that traditional leaders contribute to disaster preparedness and resilience through early warning practices, community mobilization, land and resource management, environmental stewardship, and culturally grounded adaptation practices. Overall, the study finds that traditional leaders can play an important role in shaping DRR governance and that formally recognizing and integrating them into DRR frameworks can strengthen preparedness, resilience, and locally grounded disaster governance in Africa.

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DEDICATION

To my late father, mother, and brother, whose presence remains with me.

To my uncle and aunt, for your unwavering support and care.

To my siblings, relatives and friends who showed up and stood with me.

To my partner, for supporting me through the final stretch.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Overview of Disasters in Africa

Africa has been amongst the most impacted by climate change-induced natural disasters. In 2022, extreme weather events in Africa killed at least 4,000 people and affected at least 19 million people. The 2021-22 south west Indian Ocean cyclone season was above average, producing 12 storms and five tropical cyclones. There were also at least 29 flood disasters reported across the region (Dune, 2022). A major disaster risk driver that alters the frequency and intensity of hazardous events is climate change. It affects vulnerability and exposure to weather hazards which are disproportionately concentrated in developing countries. Within these countries, it is also the poorer, often rural sectors of the population that are most affected. These rural sectors are highly dependent on agriculture and natural resources for their livelihoods. As such, they are extremely vulnerable to even the slightest variations in weather conditions. Since rain-dependent agriculture makes up a significant part of the region's economy, the agricultural sector is especially vulnerable to floods and droughts, which will only be more frequent and intense in years to come (UNDRR, n.d.; Bari & Dessus, 2022).

Disasters continue to negatively impact the region with increased exposure being attributed in part to unplanned urbanization and human settlements, unsustainable land use and infrastructure stress (African Union, 2017). Environmental degradation, poverty and conflict are also major contributors to the risks and lessen the coping capacity and resilience of communities (African Union, 2017). In addition, the cycle of disasters mirrors the cycle of poverty. Investing in disaster risk reduction (DRR) is therefore paramount to building prosperous and resilient communities. DRR protects and saves the lives and livelihoods of communities who are most vulnerable to

disasters as it limits the negative impact on those who stand to lose the most. DRR can also ensure that the most exposed are able to better anticipate, survive and recover (Concern USA, 2020; Per & van Nierkerk, 2015).

1.2 Disaster Risk Reduction Governance in Africa

It is well recognized that DRR requires a people-centered approach that can build resilience to hazards and create a culture of prevention and resilience (PreventionWeb, n.d.). In rural Africa particularly, this type of approach would require recognizing local institutions that communities rely on the most such as traditional leadership. Yet little attention has been given to examine the resilience of traditional institutions that could potentially increase our understanding of resilience to disasters (Manyena, 2014). Traditional leaders such as chiefs and village heads who make up traditional institutions, live within the villages they govern and share the realities of those affected by disasters. Moreover, they are often the primary point of contact and an immediate resource for prompt response and recovery efforts in the event of a disaster. In many cases, they are also the first to arrive at disaster scenes, even before government authorities (Zamisa & Mutereko, 2019; Tarisayi, 2018). Traditional leaders also have a deep understanding of local contexts and traditional strategies which can make them effective in guiding communities through climate change impacts. More often than not, traditional leaders are the key custodians of traditional knowledge systems and play a vital role in ensuring that traditions are respected and maintained for the benefit of future generations by guiding communities to live harmoniously with their environment and utilizing traditional practices and knowledge that predate Western influences (Musarandega, Chingombe, & Pillay, 2018).

Towards the end of the 20th century, it became increasingly recognized that to prevent losses and alleviate the impacts of disaster, risk management should focus on the exposure and

vulnerability to hazards in addition to managing them. While natural hazards cannot be eradicated, reducing vulnerability and exposure to them provides an opportunity to minimize losses, mitigate the impacts of climate change and support sustainable development (PreventionWeb, n.d.). Because vulnerability and exposure are shaped by social and governance systems at the local level, community institutions play an important role in DRR. In many parts of Africa, the traditional institution of chieftaincy has the potential to offer important lessons for understanding and practicing resilience to disasters (Manyena, 2014). Traditional leaders wield significant influence at the grassroots level and can therefore be instrumental in the implementation and coordination of climate change adaptation strategies (Musarandega, Chingombe, & Pillay, 2018).

However, in many parts of the region, there is still emphasis on top-down approaches to DRR with communities remaining passive recipients of DRR interventions while frameworks put much of the responsibility on governments (UN/ISDR Africa, 2004). Since the 1990s, efforts to strengthen disaster risk governance have led to advanced policies and strategies around the world with many African countries adopting similar approaches (Concern USA, 2020; Per & van Nierkerk, 2015). But most plans and strategies primarily pay attention to preparedness planning and contingency measures in the guise of disaster reduction. As such, a shift in the thinking of national governments from judging disaster risks only in terms of harms to recognizing the opportunities of disaster risk is needed (Per & van Nierkerk, 2015). Effective DRR therefore requires national organization and clear policy or legislative commitment that can support disaster risk management across different sectors and levels of governance, including the grassroots level (UN/ISDR Africa, 2004).

1.3 Statement of the Problem

Traditional leaders in Africa hold significant authority over land, social order, dispute resolution, community mobilization, and resource distribution. Traditional leaders' claims to land are deeply rooted in ancestral lineage and cultural practices that predate the modern state. They assert historical claims, often relying on deeds of the ancestors' and ancestralisation of property to legitimize their control over customary land. This authority is also supported by cultural beliefs, traditional values, lineage narratives, and customary norms. In many rural communities, traditional leaders' control over land is perceived as stronger and more popular than the state's claim (Chitonge, 2022). For centuries before colonial rule, local administration in Africa also centered on traditional rulers who were seen as guardians of cultural values and religious practices, enforcing laws and adjudicating conflicts. As such Traditional leaders continue to be committed to protecting local people, preserving law and order, and making pronouncements on disputes using traditional knowledge. The strength of traditional governance lies in its age-long existence and adherence to traditions, socio-cultural values, and norms, which form the basis for effective and good governance society (Olaopa & Ogundare, 2023).

Despite their deep-rooted authority and continued relevance in community life, traditional leaders remain largely absent from national DRR frameworks even though integrating traditional leaders into formal disaster governance structures can significantly enhance community resilience and DRR in African countries. Their authority, proximity to the people, and custodianship of TK could be leveraged but the role of traditional leaders in DRR is often not maximized due to vague and inadequate policies and legal frameworks (Zamisa & Mutereko, 2019). The study therefore specifically focuses on the role that traditional leaders can play in disaster governance.

1.4 Significance of the Study and Research Questions

Although much has been written on DRR in Africa, the role of traditional leaders has been overlooked and remains limited (African Union, 2004) even though they can play a crucial role in the management of natural disasters by at the community level. Across the continent, they have used their well-preserved traditional knowledge (TK) to observe and forecast weather and climate using acceptable traditional signs disaster prevention and management. This knowledge has been proven to be useful and effective in predicting occurrence hazards such as floods and droughts (African Union, 2004; Olaopa & Ogundare, 2023). But traditional leaders and traditional coping strategies are rarely incorporated into DRR plans which impacts the overall quality DRR governance (van Niekerk & Coetze, 2015; Coppola, 2015).

Traditional leaders have an important role to play in the design, development, implementation, and sustainability of DRR, but they currently do not drive initiatives and are still perceived as recipients of relief rather than initiators change (van Nierkerk & Coetze, 2015). Given the gap between the demonstrated value of traditional leaders and their limited recognition in formal DRR systems, examining how their roles are understood and institutionalized within national disaster governance is important. This leads to the central research questions guiding this study: **“What is the role of traditional leaders in shaping governance of disaster risk reduction in Africa?”** This dissertation therefore aims to contribute to the growing body of literature on DRR in Africa arguing that the formal integration of traditional leaders into disaster risk governance enhances coordination, facilitates the integration of traditional knowledge, and strengthens the legitimacy and authority of traditional leaders within DRR systems. This formalization does not create new roles for traditional leaders but rather, it enhances how they are exercised within DRR governance systems/ frameworks.

To unpack this broader question, the study considers the following secondary questions:

1. How do citizens perceive climate-related governance and how does this shape DRR?
2. How are traditional leaders integrated into disaster risk reduction (DRR) planning and implementation?

The main argument of the study is that the *formal integration of traditional leaders into DRR frameworks* will be associated with stronger coordination of disaster preparedness, early warning, and community mobilization at the grassroots level. As such, recognizing the potential of traditional leaders and incorporating more bottom-up approaches should form the basis of disaster policies and plans. Governments formalizing traditional leaders and their local coping into DRR strategies is not only necessary but also urgent with the climate change crisis and its worsening impacts (Shaw & Sharma, 2009). This will not only protect local communities but enhance their resilience.

1.5 Methodology Overview

This study uses a mixed methods approach to answer the research question and integrates both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. In political science, it is now widely accepted that an appropriate combination of quantitative and qualitative methods provides a better understanding of research problems as opposed to using them separately (Tzagkarakis & Kritas, 2022). Mixed methods research is an approach that draws from the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative research methodologies, resulting in richer insights and more robust conclusions. The main advantages of the mixed methods approach include a comprehensive understanding of the research problem, validation of data through triangulation, flexibility and adaptability during the research process, yields rich and contextualized data, provides both depth and breadth to the study and enhances interpretation of findings. Integrating both qualitative and quantitative approaches is

powerful and enables researchers to tap into the strengths of both approaches and provides a fuller, more nuanced understanding of the phenomena under study (Oranga, 2025).

1.5.1 Quantitative Analysis

The quantitative component of this study uses the merged Round 8 Afrobarometer dataset (2019–2020), which contains 40,084 respondents across 34 African countries. Afrobarometer data are collected through face-to-face interviews administered by trained national partners, using standardized questionnaires in respondents' preferred languages. The survey employs a clustered, stratified, multi-stage probability sampling design to ensure every voting-age citizen has an equal and known chance of selection, while excluding non-citizens, individuals under 18, institutionalized populations, and those living in inaccessible areas.

This analysis focuses on institutional trust as the dependent variable in the first stage, using Afrobarometer items measuring how much citizens trust various political institutions. The institutions used to measure trust in study are Traditional Leaders (TL) Members of Parliament (MPs). The study measures contact with TL and MPs, and whether respondents believe these institutions listen to citizens as predictor variables. Control variables include age, gender, and education.

Because the study also examines climate awareness and how it relates to DRR, two logistic regression models are used: the first model uses trust in MPs and Traditional Leaders as the outcome variable, and the second model examines climate awareness as the outcome variable, using contact with these institutions as a key predictor.

1.5.1 Qualitative Case Study

The qualitative component of this study used a semi-structured elite interview approach to explore the role of traditional leaders in disaster risk reduction and climate governance in Zambia.

Elite interviews were selected because traditional leaders are influential decision-makers and key custodians of traditional knowledge, and this method allows for in-depth insights into their perspectives, authority, and experiences. The study involved a focus-group style elite interview with three traditional leaders from North-Western, Southern, and Eastern provinces, conducted during the 2024 Environmental Protection Dialogue (EPD) in Lusaka. This setting enabled an interactive exchange while ensuring each leader could share their individual views. The interview focused on climate change, natural disasters, traditional early warning systems, and the integration of traditional knowledge into disaster policy.

Data collection took place during the 2024 EPD, an environmental governance conference attended by six traditional leaders and more than 450 delegates. The three participating leaders were selected through convenience sampling based on availability during the event. The discussion provided insights into how traditional leaders perceive environmental challenges, manage climate impacts, and contribute to community-level adaptation.

For analysis, multiple tools were used: STATA to identify patterns of influence and climate awareness; MaxQDA for transcription and data organization; Dovetail to identify key themes; NVivo to generate word frequency counts from the interview transcript, and Wordclouds.com was used to create the word cloud image based on these frequencies to highlight the most recurring words used. Microsoft Word was used to produce SmartArt diagrams to visualize relationships and themes within the data.

All participants provided informed consent, and confidentiality and anonymity were assured throughout the study.

1.6 Structure of the Dissertation

To answer the research questions, the dissertation is structured to move from broad conceptual foundations to comparative cross-national analysis to an in-depth case study. The chapters are organized as follows:

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Chapter 2 reviews the literature on climate-induced disasters in Africa and situates traditional leaders within disaster risk reduction governance. It examines how floods, droughts, cyclones, and other climate-related hazards have intensified vulnerability across the continent, particularly in communities that depend heavily on rainfed agriculture and natural resources. The chapter explores the role of traditional leaders in local governance and also discusses case illustrations to show how traditional leadership structures have supported disaster preparedness, response, and community resilience. The chapter further examines the opportunities and challenges of integrating traditional leaders and traditional knowledge into formal DRR frameworks, highlighting barriers such as weak formal recognition, policy gaps, and the continued dominance of top-down scientific approaches. The chapter concludes by identifying key literature and policy gaps.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework

Chapter 3 presents the theoretical framework guiding the study and conceptualizes disaster risk reduction (DRR) as a governance challenge that requires coordination between formal state institutions and local governance actors. Drawing on the Sendai Framework and participatory governance theory, the chapter examines how traditional leaders influence DRR governance through institutional trust, community participation, and the integration of traditional knowledge. It develops hypotheses linking trust in traditional leaders to their influence in DRR governance

and examining how formal recognition of traditional leaders can facilitate the integration of traditional knowledge into disaster planning and implementation. The chapter concludes with an integrative model illustrating how the interaction between formal governance structures and traditional leadership systems shapes DRR governance processes.

Chapter 4: Traditional Leaders, Modern Institutions and the Impacts on Climate Governance

Chapter 4 examines the role of traditional leaders and indigenous African institutions in climate governance, tracing their authority, legitimacy, and responsibilities in local governance, land administration, cultural preservation, and community mobilization. The chapter outlines how historical legacies, from precolonial governance systems to colonial disruptions and postcolonial marginalization have shaped the current relationship between traditional and modern institutions. It shows how traditional leaders remain central to rural climate governance, drawing on their authority and traditional knowledge to guide community-based adaptation, while also highlighting the persistent challenges they face due to weak formal recognition, institutional exclusion, and the dominance of Western scientific approaches in policy. The chapter also discusses the disconnect between traditional and modern institutions and the implications that this has for climate adaptation.

Chapter 5: Public Perceptions of Members of Parliament (MPs) and Traditional Leaders in Africa

Chapter 5 examines public perceptions of Members of Parliament (MPs) and traditional leaders across 34 African countries using Afrobarometer Round 8 survey data. The chapter outlines the historical and contemporary roles of both institutions and analyzes how citizens assess their trustworthiness, responsiveness, and influence. Using descriptive statistics and regression analyses, the findings show that citizens have significantly more trust in traditional leaders than in MPs, contact them more often, and view them as more responsive to community needs. The

analysis also reveals that traditional leaders have a stronger influence on climate change awareness than MPs. The chapter concludes by discussing the implications of these perceptions for DRR, emphasizing that traditional leaders' higher levels of trust, accessibility, and embeddedness in local governance make them important actors in strengthening community participation, climate adaptation, and DRR outcomes in Africa.

Chapter 6: Exploring the Role of Traditional Leaders in Disaster Management in Africa – A Case Study on Zambia

Chapter 6 explores the role of Traditional Leaders in disaster management in Zambia, drawing on a detailed case study and elite interviews conducted with three chiefs from North-Western, Southern, and Eastern provinces. The chapter outlines Zambia's disaster landscape, the national disaster management framework, and the position of traditional leaders within Zambia's governance and environmental systems. It highlights how chiefs respond to droughts, floods, and other natural hazards; how they use TK, early warning practices, community mobilization, and environmental stewardship to support local resilience; and how they collaborate with government structures such as the DMMU. Insights from the interviews show that traditional leaders face resource constraints but play essential roles in preparedness, communication, education, and culturally grounded disaster mitigation.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

Chapter 7 concludes the study by synthesizing the key findings illustrating that Traditional Leaders can shape DRR governance through their legitimacy, trust, and role in mobilizing communities. Drawing on both the Afrobarometer analysis and the Zambia case study, the chapter demonstrates that traditional leaders influence climate awareness, preparedness, and local resilience, while their effectiveness remains constrained by limited formal integration and

coordination with state institutions. The chapter highlights the importance of formally recognizing traditional leaders in DRR governance systems, outlines policy recommendations, discusses limitations, and identifies directions for future research.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The institutionalization of traditional leaders for disaster risk reduction (DRR) and management in Africa represents an expanding field of research that touches on environmental governance, leadership roles in community resilience and traditional knowledge (TK). This literature review examines the relationship between climate-induced natural disasters in Africa and the role of traditional leaders, the potential for TK in DRR and the need for government commitment. Traditional leaders such as chiefs and chieftainesses play an important role in local governance structures across Africa and are widely recognized as primary custodians of TK systems that inform local environmental practices. By synthesizing these key themes, this review explores the role that they play in DRR governance. It also highlights the opportunities and challenges of integrating traditional leaders into formal DRR frameworks and the significance of community participation.

2.1 Climate Induced Disasters in Africa

Despite being one of the lowest contributors to greenhouse gas emissions that are causing climate change, Africa has experienced widespread losses and damages attributed to human-induced climate change intersecting (Trisos, et al., 2022). Moreover, Africans are disproportionately employed in climate exposed sectors with 55-62% of the sub-Saharan workforce employed in agriculture where at least 95% of cropland is dependent on rainfall. Rural areas also face greater livelihood risks from climate hazards while growing informal settlements without basic services in urban areas increase the vulnerability of large populations to climate hazards intersecting (Trisos, et al., 2022). The consequences of human-induced climate change include biodiversity loss, water shortages, reduced food production, the loss of lives and reduced

economic growth. This exposure and vulnerability to climate change in Africa is multidimensional with socioeconomic, political and environmental factors intersecting (Trisos, et al., 2022).

There have been numerous hazardous events across the continent, including floods, droughts, and tropical cyclones. According to the international disaster database (EM-DAT) 789 such events were recorded between 2010 and September 2025 (EM DAT, 2025). Within this broader pattern, Cyclones Idai and Kenneth in 2019 stand out for their scale and impact with both considerably the most devastating floods and cyclones in African history. The worst-affected countries were Malawi, Mozambique, and Zimbabwe. Flooding and landslides destroyed houses, schools, health facilities, roads and bridges. The cyclones also washed away crops and livestock worsening the already fragile food security that was prevailing in the region (Mutasa, 2022). Alongside these significant physical, social, environmental impacts as well as human life losses, Cyclone Idai caused severe economic costs as evidenced by Nhundu, Sibanda, & Chaminuka (2021), who found that the economic costs were \$274 million for Zimbabwe and \$3 billion for Mozambique while the economic costs for Kenneth in Mozambique were up to \$300 million. Similarly, MacClune, Norton, & Szönyi, (2020) echoed that flooding is impacting subsistence farming for the majority of people living in Malawi, Mozambique and Zimbabwe with cyclones Idai and Kenneth particularly contributing to the existing food insecurity and crop failure. In Mozambique, for example, dams collapsed as rising waters overwhelmed flood mitigation infrastructure and inundated communities and agricultural fields due to the cyclones. In Malawi, Cyclone Idai hit districts that were heavily dependant on subsistence agriculture and animal husbandry for their livelihoods. Providing an additional perspective, Mashula, Ntombela, Kunene, Sehlapelo, & Pophiwa (2021) add that Cyclones Idai and Kenneth caused widespread displacement, affecting

millions in all three affected countries. People were forced to migrate both internally and across borders due to the destruction of homes and infrastructure.

Disaster events are not only limited to flooding as the region has also experienced droughts which have significantly impacted agricultural productivity and food security as well as increased vulnerability among farming communities. The reliance on rainfed agriculture has made the region particularly vulnerable to climatic variations as droughts lead to severe yield losses. In Africa, climate-induced droughts already impede people's ability to grow food and rear livestock. Agricultural losses from droughts are a major driver of food insecurity in the region as climate change has caused significant food insecurity with this trend rising in the 21st century (Sirba & Chimdessa, 2023). In examining the impact on maize yields in South Africa from 1993-2022, Letswamotse, et al., (2024) found that food security in South Africa was greatly impacted by its extreme susceptibility to agricultural losses brought on by drought. For instance, drought had a direct and detrimental effect on maize yield. Similarly in East Africa, Mukamana (2024) found that recurrent droughts, unpredictable rainfall and extreme temperatures which were becoming more frequent were disrupting agricultural cycles and leading to reduced crop yields thus affecting food availability.

Additionally, socioeconomic issues, such as gender inequality, poverty, and inequality, made East African populations even more vulnerable to these consequences of climate change. Using a novel data-driven approach to evaluate how drought risk in Africa affects sectors such as agriculture, Sharma, Amarnath, Amarasinghe, & Abdulkarim, (2024) also found that droughts in Africa had a detrimental effect on the social, economic, and environmental aspects of society, making them one of the most significant hydroclimatic hazards. In the Horn of Africa, drought emergencies frequently intersect with social tensions and insecurities. For example, prolonged

droughts in Somalia have threatened people's livelihood and have exacerbated the country's already fragile economy while in Ethiopia, continuous droughts have occurred in tandem with protracted internal conflicts (Sharma, Amarnath, Amarasinghe, & Abdulkarim, 2024).

Recurring climate induced natural disasters highlight the need for effective DRR governance systems not only at the national level but also at the local level. This would include enhancing the role of traditional leaders who remain key influential actors across many African local communities.

2.2 Traditional Leaders in Local Governance & DRR

Traditional leaders are often regarded important players in local community governance. They play several roles including mediators of community practices, rural-focused developmental advisers, consultants and advocate, community mobilisers, rural land use guarders, project and program implementors, as well as political liaisons (Mdluli, Reddy, & Ndebele, 2025). Traditional leaders also maintain close ties to their communities due to their proximity and deep-rooted connections to local populations. Because of this closeness, they are able to act as effective intermediaries between the state and the community, facilitating communication and governance (Honig, 2024). As such, traditional leaders are crucial to DRR initiatives because they have authority over resource management, cultural rituals, and conflict resolution. In Zimbabwe for instance, Mohammed-Katerere (2001) highlights that while chiefs have no authority to make legally enforceable management rules, in many areas they still enjoy a large degree of legitimacy. The Traditional Leaders Act relegates chiefs to enforce statutory law, and they are responsible for ensuring that the land and natural resources are used in terms of general law. In this way, chiefs are responsible for preventing over-cultivation, over-grazing, the indiscriminate destruction of

flora and fauna, illegal settlements and generally the degradation, abuse or misuse of land and natural resources.

Traditional leaders including elders of a community, and traditional healers have also largely been recognized as custodians of TK and their traditional practices have long been used to live harmoniously with the environment (Musarandenga, Chingombe & Philly, 2018). Across the region, traditional leaders using TK have informed decision making about fundamental aspects of daily and long-term activities. Their TK has become integral to social-cultural complexity which includes language, resource use practices, social interactions, religion, beliefs, values, rituals and spirituality. TK passed down through traditional leaders, is therefore an essential part of historical and cultural legacies and forms a pillar of cultural, political, economic and scientific identities (Filho et.al, 2022).

Traditional leaders have long guided their communities in responding to weather related events and managing shared resources such as land and water through traditional forms of governance systems that draw from TK. For example, in Zimbabwe, Chanza & de Wit (2016), found that land practices are interwoven with cultural beliefs under the administration of local traditional leaders. Speranza et.al, (2010), also add that in environmental governance for example, sacred forests established under traditional legislations are known to have contributed to maintaining biodiversity and reducing land degradation in local watersheds.

By leveraging their deep-rooted connections to local communities and traditional governance structures, traditional leaders can play a vital role in disaster management across Africa. As Zamisa & Muteroko (2019) observe, traditional leaders have a crucial role to play given their authority, proximity and their mandate to preserve customs and traditions. In South Africa for example, they point out that while the wave of urbanization and westernization is pervasive, traditional leadership

practices are enduring and unlikely to disappear. An important way that traditional leadership can bolster disaster management capacity is through the use of centuries of mechanisms of managing disaster.

2.3 Case Illustrations of Traditional Leadership in DRR

Traditional leaders often play a central role in organizing community-based responses to environmental challenges. In Zambia, for example, Mapeza et al. (2022) note that understanding flooding patterns in the Barotse Floodplain in the Western Province was so central that traditional leadership, through the Barotse Royal Establishment (BRE), set up a local knowledge and word-of-mouth information system called *Nokushimba*. This early warning system relied on ambassadors through village heads who communicated flooding pattern information and advised residents on when to move out of the plain as flooding advanced from low-lying areas near the Zambezi River.

Whilst most development planners and practitioners often assume that solutions to community challenges lie primarily in Western scientific knowledge, recent studies highlight the continued importance of governance systems led by traditional leaders which incorporate TK. In the Barotse Floodplain, local flood knowledge has direct implications for the livelihood options and household well-being of local communities. Under the guidance and authority of traditional leaders, communities rely on established communication networks that disseminate information based on observations of weather patterns, water levels, landscape changes, and animal behavior. These efforts function as effective early warning mechanisms and illustrate how traditional leadership structures facilitate deeper understanding and managing local environmental challenges even though they tend to be often overlooked in favor of Western scientific approaches which can lead to ineffective solutions for local communities (Mapeza et al., 2022).

In the case of Zimbabwe, following the collapse of the Tokwe-Mukosi dam and subsequent flooding, it is argued that traditional leadership was the missing link in the disaster-induced displacement. The government's approach to assisting the displaced was viewed as inadequate, as the westernized framework and knowledge utilized failed and was not in sync with the realities of the victims. The Tokwe-Mukosi dam, located in Masvingo province, was constructed between 1998 and 2016, but heavy flooding in February 2014 led to the displacement of over 6000 families who were relocated to Chingwizi, Chisase and Masangula. In Chingwizi, for example, there was rampant sexual abuse of women and girls, highlighting the shortcomings of Eurocentric models that do not take into consideration traditional leadership. The floods mainly affected 12 villages under 2 chiefs, and efforts to assist the victims should have begun with consulting these village leaders who lived among the victims, shared the same lived experiences, and were best placed to interpret people's views and aspirations. The integration of traditional leaders could have facilitated ubuntu and helped overcome many of the challenges faced by the displaced (Tarisayi, 2018).

2.4 Traditional Leaders and the Use of Traditional Knowledge in DRR

Traditional leaders often convey TK both formally and informally among groups and communities through social encounters, oral traditions, oral histories and many more (Bruchac, 2014). While there is not yet an accepted definition of TK, it is generally the body of practical knowledge based on observations and experiences of indigenous peoples over a period. Passed down from generation to generation, TK includes an extensive understanding of environmental interrelationships (BOEM, n.d.). Generally, it can be scientifically relevant and practical in real-world applications and not just anecdotal so it should not be dismissed as unscientific, but rather, it should be integrated with modern scientific early warning systems (Haokip, 2022). Jessen et.al,

(2021) further argue that indigenous ways of knowing may be considered science in their own right while Berkes, Colding & Folke (2000) add that as a way of knowing, TK is similar to western science in that it is based on accumulation of observation though different in fundamental ways. TK may not be scientific in a Western sense, but it can be crucial for disaster resilience (Khalafzai & Nawaz, 2016).

TK plays a crucial role in disaster management in Africa by providing localized insights and adaptive strategies that have been honed over generations. In rural areas and communities particularly, traditional leaders have long recognized it as an important tool for DRR that can contribute towards saving human lives and properties from the consequences of disasters (Dube & Munsaka, 2018). But documentation of TK for DRR is necessary as technological data alone cannot contribute to improving peoples lives unless it is combines with an understanding of local contexts and needs (Rai & Khawas, 2019) Traditional leaders have long interpreted and coordinated the use TK in rural communities to address disasters is effective in the protection of the lives and properties of the people and communities. In this way, they have used it to provide practical, context-specific insights that are essential for effective disaster management in many African communities (Wahab & Ojowolo, 2011)

While traditional leaders can provide valuable information for resource management and DRR, there remain gaps for many countries in integrating them and TK into DRR policy (McElwee, 2022). Incorporating traditional leaders and applying TK in DRR can help fill up gaps and compliment modern practices in dealing with disasters. However, they are often neglected in formal DRR policies (Rai & Khawas, 2019). Even though traditional leaders and TK are increasingly recognized as vital for DRR particularly in rural communities, they are often marginalized by institutions working in disaster management. Some of the key factors that have

prevented this include colonial legacies; preference for scientific knowledge is superior; and institutional barriers (Dekens, 2007).

2.5 Institutionalizing Traditional Leaders in DRR Governance in Africa

Traditional leaders remain key authorities in local governance even though their roles in formal DRR frameworks remains limited and underutilized. They play a crucial role in disaster management and coordinate use of TK which is often rooted in local practices and experiences. The role of traditional leaders is not well recognized in DRR as policymakers continue to rely on mitigation strategies based on scientific knowledge even though they helped local communities survive generations through applying TK. Understanding how local communities have adapted is key to developing sustainable policies to mitigate future challenges (Iloka, 2016).

Institutionalizing traditional leadership and mechanisms for DRR in Africa is not without challenges and limitations. These include a lack of formal recognition, lack of documentation of TK, insufficient integration into policy frameworks, and the prevailing skepticism towards traditional practices. Colonialism, for example, diminished the relevance of traditional leaders and promoted western ideals, has left a legacy of dependency on Western systems of governance leaving traditional systems often overlooked. Prior to colonialism, indigenous African societies thrived under the governance of their own customs and traditions (Adodo, 2023). In Mozambique for example, Jonas, Artur, Eriksen, & Movik (2024), found that colonialization introduced scientific systems that altered local systems. Prior to colonialization, local traditions and practices in Chokwe district were deeply ingrained in the local culture and were a significant part of the community's approach to managing environmental challenges like droughts and flood. However, the centralization of power during the socialist era in Mozambique created a legacy where traditional systems were often overlooked or suppressed.

Botswana provides a clear example of the institutionalization of traditional leaders through the constitutional establishment of the House of Chiefs (known as Ntlo ya Dikgosi), which formalizes chiefs' roles within national governance as an advisory body to Parliament. The establishment of the Ntlo ya Dikgosi by the Constitution was a significant recognition and mark of respect for traditional leaders. The Ntlo ya Dikgosi was established primarily for giving traditional leaders a forum at the national level where they could articulate their views on matters of interest to their tribes. It is a 35-member advisory body to Parliament that provides a platform for traditional leaders (Dikgosi) to influence national policy regarding culture, land, and customary law. Generally, the National Assembly might take note of the views of this House if it considers it politically expedient to do so or if it considers these to be in keeping with the national interest, but while a minister of the National Assembly can consult the House for its opinion, they are not obliged to accept it. While it cannot pass laws or block legislation, strength of the Ntlo ya Dikgosi lies in its constitutional mandate to review specific bills and its role in promoting local development and tribal welfare (Keshav, 2011).

2.6 Literature and Policy Gaps

While the role of traditional leaders is increasingly recognized in DRR and climate change adaptation, much of the existing literature still focuses more on describing community practices than on examining how traditional leaders themselves interact with governance structures. Several studies highlight the importance of traditional leaders for local adaptation, but not many explore how they are incorporated into formal institutions, how they engage with state-led DRR systems, or how these relationships can influence community-level outcomes. There is also limited research on the challenges traditional leaders face when working alongside modern disaster management frameworks, particularly in African contexts where they remain central actors in local governance.

These gaps limit understandings of how traditional leaders function within broader governance arrangements. This study attempts to fill these gaps by examining the role of traditional leaders and their locally grounded knowledge systems in disaster governance.

It is widely recognized that disaster management and planning are a key element of government work with the government having the primary responsibility for DRR and management (Kong & Sun, 2021), but the current disaster resilience policies are limited because they are based on mechanistic scientific paradigms. As such, the marginalization of traditional leadership in climate and disaster policies in Africa undermines the robustness of these policies. Overlooking traditional leaders creates a disconnect between policy frameworks and the realities faced by the local and vulnerable communities which can then hinder adaptation and resilience efforts for those that rely heavily on their traditional leaders guidance in managing environmental challenges (Coetzee, Van Nierkerk, & Emmanuel, 2017). In Zambia for example, Manda, Matenga, Mdee, Smith, & Nkiaka (2024) found that donor driven community climate adaptation projects often misaligned with local traditional structures as the tendency was to favor top-down policy centric approaches. By excluding and overlooking traditional governance systems, implementation strategies tended to limit the potential for different different sources of expertise to intersect and collaborate which then weakened communities abilities to adapt to climate change effectively.

Poorly functioning laws, policies and institutional arrangements also contribute to vulnerability to hazards (Johannes, Nacelle, & Jordaan, 2017). In Kenya for example, the government seeks information primarily from sources it trusts such as other government departments, its communities and the media when making planning decisions. With no existing legal frameworks guiding Kenya's integration of traditional leaders into disaster processes, the

coordination of preparedness is not strong, and that the lack of political will to prioritize these traditional frameworks further reduces DRR thoroughness (Rono-Bett, 2018). Political will to formalize traditional leaders is relevant for disaster preparedness and risk reduction and integrating traditional leaders into DRR governance systems is essential as they can provide valuable insights and tools for adaptation and mitigation for vulnerable communities (Bussell, 2016; Nyahunda, 2024).

Decentralization is arguably believed to contribute good disaster governance by increasing local capacity and by bringing in local perspectives primarily through traditional leaders (Hermansson, 2018). As Bussell (2016) suggests, decentralization enhances decision-making while centralization of power and budgeting around disaster management creates ineffective and inefficient processes which can exacerbate challenges during disasters. Local governments are often the first line of defense in disasters with traditional leaders being primarily responsible for managing the response to and recovery from those events. For example, in assessing whether countries that decentralize power to the local level have less people affected and economic damage, Vassilis & Tompkins (2017) found that the transfer of power reduces the impact of hazards on population. However, other studies have found that shifting of power and decentralization does not always work. In examining the challenges that disaster leadership faces to move away from a top-down, command-and-control style to distributed leadership, Bongo & Manyena (2015) found that there are some tensions in shifting from command and control to distributed leadership in DRR which leads them to also question the Sendai Framework which appears to be silent on leadership and instead emphasizes ‘good governance’ to enhance organizational and institutional capacity for disaster resilience. In Cameroon, Buh-Wung, Tongwa, Burnley, & Zouh T (2012) examined seven regions in the country where people suffered losses from disasters to evaluate the progress of

Cameroon in implementing the Hyogo Framework for Action. The analysis focused particularly on the role of local governance systems in DRR and found that there was a significant scope for improvement across several local governance indicators. This could be attributed to political reasons as Bang (2013) found that in Cameroon, the challenges of local government vary from one region to another, based on political preferences. A similar pattern is also in in Rwanda, where the institutional framework for disaster management and response is coordinated by Ministry of Disaster Management and Refugee Affairs through the Rwanda National Disasters Operation Center. Although DRR has been integrated into sustainable policies and plans, most local districts do not have adequate capacity to plan for disasters (Rugigana, et al., 2013).

2.7 Conclusion

Traditional leadership plays an essential role in enhancing local community resilience to climate-related disasters in Africa. Traditional leaders and the communities they govern are crucial for developing effective climate change and DRR strategies, especially through their TK which serves as an essential tool for DRR and climate change adaptation that enables them to respond to environmental challenges effectively. They hold valuable insights and adaptative strategies rooted in local contexts. Engaging traditional leaders and their communities in DRR initiatives not only enhances resilience but also ensures that strategies are contextually relevant and sustainable in the face of climate challenges.

Community participation and leveraging on the influence of traditional leaders is crucial for effective DRR in Africa, as it fosters resilience and enhances local capacities. As Khalafzai & Nawaz (2016) point out, communities can play an essential role in effective and efficient DRR and management as they can guide disaster adaptation and contribute to their resilience. When disasters happen, before government and any other support reaches, it is the traditional leaders and that must

respond immediately to their community needs (NIDM, 2014). Traditional leaders are usually the first responders to disasters at the community-level, they mobilize their communities to provide guidance on rescue activities, evacuation and help less capable and differently able members of their communities. Traditional leaders and community members are therefore not passive, but active participants in the implementation of DRR and post-disaster reconstruction activities. Hence, they are in a better position and have more incentive to plan and implement DRR actions for their own safety than a central government (Delica-Willison & Gaillard, 2012).

While any system of local planning and protection must be integrated into larger administrative and resource capabilities, it is also important to realize that traditional leaders and their communities cannot implement community-based disaster mitigation alone (Zubir & Amirrol 2011). A key element to DRR such as engaging in sound community development practices involving interactions among those affected is vital to successful outcomes. This can help policymakers to build local capacity and remediate the impacts of disasters in the future (Hales, Walzer, & Calvin, 2012). In Africa particularly, it is important to implement effective public awareness activities to increase the knowledge among communities of the risks they face using a participatory development communication approach (Chagutah, 2009). All stakeholders, including traditional leaders and their communities are relevant in community-based disaster recovery and resilience. Mechanisms for gathering all stakeholder input into policy and decision-making activities must be developed (Aggestam & Hodge, 2011).

The various studies in this literature review highlight the importance of engaging traditional leaders and utilizing traditional practices such as TK to foster community involvement for sustainable disaster management. While traditional leaders hold significant potential for DRR and climate adaptation, their integration into mainstream development practices remains limited. The

marginalization of traditional perspectives in disaster and climate strategies, often dominated by scientific paradigms, can hinder effective responses to climate change. The institutionalization of traditional leadership for DRR in Africa presents a promising pathway for enhancing community resilience and sustainable disaster management. Traditional leaders, as central figures in local governance, are pivotal to this process. However, challenges such as the overlooking of traditional governance systems and policy gaps must be addressed to realize their full potential in DRR.

Institutionalizing traditional leaders would involve integrating them into formal governance structures, policies, and DRR frameworks. The systematic documentation and validation of the knowledge they steward is also essential both for preservation and for supporting its incorporation into formal strategies. When scientific approaches are complemented and balanced with the knowledge held by traditional leaders, climate responses can be strengthened, DRR can be enhanced, and resilience can be built in vulnerable communities. Traditional leaders can serve as key intermediaries between local communities and formal institutions, and they can be empowered through training in DRR strategies and disaster response to support the integration of their knowledge with contemporary methods, creating hybrid knowledge systems. By facilitating dialogue and knowledge-sharing, traditional leaders can help bridge the gap between scientific and traditional approaches to DRR.

CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter frames Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) as governance challenge because it is an important aspect for its effective implementation (UNDRR, 2015). Fundamentally, DRR is the policy objective of anticipating and reducing risk. Disaster risk management is the implementation of DRR. (UNDRR, n.d.). When DRR is framed as governance challenge, it becomes evident that effective DRR requires comprehensive strategies that integrates governance at all levels from local to national. In so doing, the focus shifts the from not only natural sources of disasters but to also include political, economic and social factors that influence vulnerability and resilience to disasters (UNDRR, 2015). Because DRR is an essential part of sustainable development, it must include society, government, NGOs and the private sector. It requires a people centered and multifaceted approach that creates a culture of prevention and resilience. To be effective, DRR involves combining both top-down, institutional approaches with bottom-up, community-based approaches (UNDRR, n.d.). As such, DRR requires a robust governance process to build long-term resilience to multiple hazards, an inclusive approach, and a preventative culture. This means reducing existing risks, avoiding the creation of new risks, and making risk-informed investments. Moreover, improved DRR results from a combination of top-down, institutional changes and strategies, and bottom-up, local, and community-based approaches (Mead, 2022; UNDRR, n.d.). In Africa however, most policy frameworks rarely focus on, strengthening traditional coping capacities nor emphasize the preservation of the local knowledge and experiences that underlie these survival mechanisms. Additionally, while most countries support decentralized implementation of DRR interventions, devolution of authority to lower

administration levels has been limited. Most DRR systems are top-down and lack adequate partnerships with communities presenting that gap in governance (African Union, 2004).

3.1 Conceptual Foundations of DRR

3.1.1 The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction

International guidelines like the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030 and the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) fundamentally shape DRR as a framework for policy and practice. The Sendai Framework was first major agreement of the post-2015 development agenda and provides Member States with concrete actions to protect development gains from the risk of disasters. The Framework was adopted at the Third UN World Conference in Sendai, Japan on March 18, 2015. It is the outcome of stakeholder consultations which were initiated in March 2012 and inter-governmental negotiations held from July 2014 to March 2015. The Framework succeeds instrument to the Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA) 2005-2015: Building the Resilience of Nations and Communities to Disasters. As such, the Frameworks elements are built to ensure continuity with the work done by countries and other stakeholder under the HFA as well as introduce a number of innovations called for during its consultation and negotiation processes (UNDRR, 2025; UNDRR, 2015). The UNDRR as the lead agency within the United Nations (UN) system for the coordination of disaster risk reduction, is tasked with supporting the implementation, follow-up and review of the Sendai Framework (UNDRR, 2025).

The Sendai Framework identifies four key priority areas that guide disaster risk reduction efforts at the local, national, regional, and global levels. Priority 1 is understanding disaster risk. Policies and practices for disaster risk management should be based on an understanding of disaster risk in all its dimensions of vulnerability, capacity, exposure of persons and assets, hazard

characteristics and the environment. Such knowledge can be leveraged for the purpose of pre-disaster risk assessment, for prevention and mitigation and for the development and implementation of appropriate preparedness and effective response to disasters. Priority 2 is strengthening disaster risk governance to manage disaster risk. Disaster risk governance at the national, regional and global levels is of great importance for an effective and efficient management of disaster risk. Clear vision, plans, competence, guidance and coordination within and across sectors, as well as participation of relevant stakeholders, are needed. Strengthening disaster risk governance for prevention, mitigation, preparedness, response, recovery and rehabilitation is therefore necessary and fosters collaboration and partnership across mechanisms and institutions for the implementation of instruments relevant to DRR and sustainable development. Priority 3 is investing in DRR for resilience. Public and private investment in disaster risk prevention and reduction through structural and non-structural measures are essential to enhance the economic, social, health and cultural resilience of persons, communities, countries and their assets, as well as the environment. These can be drivers of innovation, growth and job creation. Such measures are cost-effective and instrumental to save lives, prevent and reduce losses and ensure effective recovery and rehabilitation. Lastly, priority 4 is enhancing disaster preparedness for effective response and to “Build Back Better” in recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction. The steady growth of disaster risk, including the increase of people and assets exposure, combined with the lessons learned from past disasters, indicate the need to further strengthen disaster preparedness for response, take action in anticipation of events, integrate DRR into response preparedness and ensure that capacities are in place for effective response and recovery at all levels. Empowering women and persons with disabilities to publicly lead and

promote gender equitable and universally accessible response, recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction approaches is key (UNDRR, 2015).

Importantly, the Sendai Framework also emphasizes the integration of traditional, indigenous, and local knowledge with scientific approaches, especially under its Guiding Principles and Priority 1. The Guiding Principles emphasize inclusivity and community-based strategies for reducing the risk of disasters and place emphasis on the contribution of local, indigenous, and traditional knowledge in addition to scientific information,

“(d) Disaster risk reduction requires an all-of-society engagement and partnership. It also requires empowerment and inclusive, accessible and non-discriminatory participation, paying special attention to people disproportionately affected by disasters, especially the poorest. A gender, age, disability and cultural perspective should be integrated in all policies and practices, and women and youth leadership should be promoted. In this context, special attention should be paid to the improvement of organized voluntary work of citizens;” (UNDRR, 2015: pp. 13)

Priority 1 also calls for a comprehensive understanding of disaster risk that incorporates both scientific and traditional knowledge systems to inform policy and practice,

“(i) To ensure the use of traditional, indigenous and local knowledge and practices, as appropriate, to complement scientific knowledge in disaster risk assessment and the development and implementation of policies, strategies, plans and programmes of specific sectors, with a cross-sectoral approach, which should be tailored to localities and to the context;” (UNDRR, 2015: pp. 15)

As the Sendai Framework places that great emphasis on the integration of TK in governance for sustainable and inclusive DRR, it becomes essential to analyze traditional leaders as mobilizing

and coordinating institutions as well as examine how they utilize TK and relate the state in this context. At the same time, analyzing these governance structures in DRR requires a clear understanding of disaster risk and the structural elements (hazard, exposure, vulnerability) that shape its materialization.

3.1.2 Disaster Risk

A disaster is understood as a serious disruption of the functioning of a community or a society at any scale due to hazardous events interacting with conditions of exposure, vulnerability and capacity, leading to one or more of the following: human, material, economic and environmental losses and impacts (UNDRR Terminology, 2017). Although disasters are sometimes referred to as external shock, disaster risk is a result of the complex interaction between the development processes that generate conditions to exposure, vulnerability and hazard. Thus, disaster risk is the combination of the frequency and severity of hazard, the number of people exposed and their vulnerability. Understanding disaster risk requires considering the hazard, exposure to it, as well as the society's capacity to protect itself. A community's resilience is therefore dependent on its ability to resist and recover from disasters. Thus, countries should invest in disaster risk reduction which can overtime reduce potential losses. Ignoring disaster risk only negatively impacts any social and economic development. (UNDRR, n.d.). To understand disaster risk, the hazard, exposure, vulnerability and society's capacity to protect itself from disasters should be taken into consideration. These are influenced by a number of risk drivers, including poverty and inequality, poorly planned and managed urban and regional development, climate change and environmental degradation. Resilience is then the community's ability to resist, absorb, accommodate, recover from disasters, whilst at the same time improve wellbeing. (UNDRR, n.d.).

3.1.3 Hazard

A hazard is considered to be a process, phenomenon or human activity that may cause loss of life, injury or other health impacts, property damage, social and economic disruption or environmental degradation (UNDRR Terminology, 2017). Every country is exposed to multiple hazards so it is crucial to take into account the risk associated with the entire spectrum of hazards that could impact individuals or property. Furthermore, each hazard often triggers a sub-set of hazards. For example, tropical cyclones or hurricanes can bring strong winds, storm surges, and heavy rainfall in addition to causing secondary hazards like landslides. Natural hazard events can be characterized by their magnitude or intensity, speed of onset, duration, and the area they cover. Hazards occur at different intensities, over different time scales and at different geographical scales, for instance, the impact of tornadoes tends to be localized whilst droughts can over tens of thousands of kilometers (UNDRR, n.d.).

The Hazards Information Profiles (HIPs) published by The UNDRR and the International Science Council (ISC) provide standardized definitions of 281 hazards grouped into eight hazard types including: hydrological meteorological; extraterrestrial, geological, environmental, environmental; chemical; biological; technological; and societal (UNDRR, 2025). The HIPs offer extensive information and have been utilized in various contexts including disaster risk reduction planning, disaster response planning, monitoring, research, and teaching by various stakeholders (Des Combes, 2025). This standardization is vital for global DRR efforts and supports the implementation of the Sendai Framework which emphasizes the importance of understanding disaster risk as its first priority highlighting the need for comprehensive hazard assessments.

3.1.4 Exposure

Exposure is the situation of people, infrastructure, housing, production capacities and other tangible human assets located in hazard-prone areas (UNDRR Terminology, 2017). Exposure matters for DRR because it identifies the location, type, and characteristics of critical infrastructure, which is essential for understanding potential vulnerabilities. Disruption of critical infrastructure can lead to severe socio-economic consequences and cascading impacts on communities (Scaini, et al., 2024). If a hazard occurs in an area where there is no exposure, then there is no risk. For example, in October 2013, typhoon Lekima hit the Northwest Pacific Ocean peaking around 240kilometres per hour but did not cause any impact on people or their property, thus, there was no exposure. On the other hand, typhoon Haiyan which hit the region in November 2013, affected about 11 million people causing around 6000 casualties and the loss of more than 1.5 billion US dollars. The difference was in impact as there were no people or property in the path of Lekima (UNDRR, 2025).

Since it is possible to be exposed but not vulnerable to hazards, the extent to which exposed people or economic assets are actually at risk is generally determined by how vulnerable they are. But growing evidence suggests that in the case of extreme hazards, the degree of disaster risk is a consequence of exposure more than it is a result of vulnerability. For example, everyone who was exposed to the Tsunami on December 26, 2004, in the Indian Ocean, was at risk regardless of income, ethnicity or social class (UNDRR, 2025). People and economic assets become concentrated in areas exposed to hazards through processes such as population growth, migration, urbanization and economic development. Previous disasters can also drive exposure by forcing people from their lands and to increasingly unsafe areas. Many hazards prone areas such flood plains, attract economic and urban development, offer significant economic benefits or are of

cultural or religious significance to the people who live there. As more people and assets are exposed, risk in these areas becomes more concentrated. But at the same time, risk also spreads as cities expand and as economic and urban development transform previously sparsely populated areas (UNDRR, 2025).

3.1.5 Vulnerability

Vulnerability includes the characteristics determined by physical, social, economic and environmental factors or processes which increase the susceptibility of an individual, a community, assets or systems to the impacts of hazards (UNDRR Terminology, 2017). It is the human dimension of disasters which results from a variety of institutional, political, social, cultural, economic, and psychological elements that influence people's lives and their surroundings (UNDRR, 2025). Because vulnerability can mean different things to different people and is frequently defined using a range of phrases, such as "predisposition," "fragility," "weakness," "deficiency," or "lack of capacity," it can be a challenging concept to understand. Some definitions of vulnerability have included exposure in addition to susceptibility to harm. However, it is widely understood that exposure is distinct from the "susceptibility" component of vulnerability because one might be exposed to environmental hazards without being susceptible to them. Experts agree that understanding vulnerability requires more than analyzing the direct impacts of a hazard (UNDRR, 2025).

Vulnerability also concerns the wider environmental and social conditions that make it more difficult for individuals and groups to deal with the effects of hazards. Moreover, Vulnerability is also complex. It is not just about poverty even though the poor generally tend to suffer the worst from disasters. Economic pressures compel individuals to live in hazardous areas and conditions making poverty both a cause and an effect of hazards, especially in nations with

poor risk governance. But there are a number of other factors including physical, such as poor design and construction of buildings and unregulated land use planning; social factors such as inequality, marginalization, social exclusion and discrimination by gender, social status, disability and age; and environmental factors such as poor environmental management, overconsumption of natural resources, decline of risk regulating ecosystem, services and climate change (UNDRR, 2025).

3.1.6 Capacity

Capacity is the combination of all the strengths, attributes and resources available within an organization, community or society to manage and reduce disaster risks and strengthen resilience (UNDRR Terminology, 2017). In addition to focusing on people's vulnerability to hazards, understanding their capacity to anticipate, cope with, resist and recover from disasters is also necessary. Similar vulnerability, capacity depends on social, economic, political, psychological, environmental and physical assets and the wider governance regimes. The starting point for capacity development is the existing knowledge, strengths, attributes and resources individuals, organizations or society has. Capacity may include infrastructure, institutions, human knowledge and skills, and collective attributes such as social relationships, leadership and management (UNDRR, 2025).

Capacity, or the lack of it, is central to reducing disaster risk and critical to meeting development objectives. Reducing disaster risk necessitates collaboration and participation from all facets of society. Empowerment and inclusive, accessible, and nondiscriminatory involvement are also necessary. At the household level, people have more control over capacities because they are frequently internal (sometimes referred to as endogenous) to communities. Building capacity may therefore be a simpler approach for individuals than trying to lessen susceptibility, given many

of the factors that contribute to vulnerability are impacted by political and economic factors rather than households, such as governance. In many low- and middle-income countries, the impacts of disasters are often absorbed by low-income households, perpetuating and escalating poverty and compromising development outcomes. Increasing capacity gives vulnerable populations the chance to develop, adapt to climate change, and lower their risk of disaster (UNDRR, 2025).

3.2 Framing DRR as Governance Challenge

This approach emphasizes the importance of inclusive, multistakeholder collaboration and the need for robust governance frameworks to manage and mitigate disaster risks effectively. As noted earlier, Priority Area 2 of the Sendai framework emphasizes the need for strong governance structures to manage disaster risks effectively. One of the ways to achieve this at the national and community levels that the framework calls for is empowering local authorities through regulatory and financial means to work and coordinate with civil society, communities and indigenous peoples and migrants in disaster risk management (UNDRR, Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015 - 2030, 2015).

The Sendai Framework also recognizes that while states have the overall responsibility for reducing disaster risk, it is a shared responsibility between Governments and relevant stakeholders particularly, non-state stakeholders. The framework acknowledges that through their experience and traditional knowledge, indigenous people provide an important contribution to the development and implementation of plans and mechanisms, including for early warning (UNDRR, 2015). As such, effective DRR governance requires the involvement of diverse stakeholders including indigenous people and marginalized groups. In particular, local knowledge is crucial for developing effective DRR strategies. Co-produced strategies, which involve communities in the design process can be a means to bridge the gap between high-level policies and practical,

grassroots level solutions. By incorporating local knowledge, co-produced DRR strategies can ensure that interventions are relevant and effective for the populations they aim to serve. This then fosters partnerships and helps in designing solutions that are tailored to the unique challenges and vulnerabilities faced by different communities. Leveraging local knowledge can help create strategies that directly address the specific needs of communities and promotes effective governance by ensuring that DRR initiatives are locally driven and responsive to community needs (Cabral-Ramírez, Niño-Barrero, & DiBella, 2025). By viewing DRR in this way, policymakers can collaborate with various stakeholders including traditional and local leaders to create more resilient societies that are better prepared for future disasters.

3.3 Applying Participatory Governance Theory to DRR and Building Hypothesis

This section applies participatory governance theory to DRR and develops the hypotheses that guide the analysis.

3.3.1 Participatory Governance Theory in DRR

Participatory governance is a variant or subset of governance theory that puts emphasis on democratic engagement, in particular through deliberative practices. While democratic participation is generally considered a political virtue in itself, participatory governance claims to offer even more as it is seen to contribute to the development of communicative skills, citizen empowerment, and community capacity-building. Numerous experiences show that community participation can enhance the effectiveness of programs in both developed and developing states. In fields such as health and environmental protection, community participation has been seen to lead to quicker responses to emerging issues and problems, more effective development and design of solutions appropriate to local resources, higher levels of commitment and motivation in program implementation, and greater overall satisfaction with policies and programs (Fischer, 2012). In

DRR, participatory governance would therefore mean the involvement of various stakeholders, including local leaders and communities in decision-making processes to enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of DRR initiatives.

While public administrators play a significant role in implementing DRR policies and disaster management, participatory approaches are central to DRR efforts in that they leverage diverse stakeholders including the community in identifying problems, strategizing and planning actions (Indarti & Juim, 2019). By integrating local actors in the planning and execution of DRR strategies, participatory governance advocates for bottom-up approaches that empower communities and ensure that their voices are heard. These local actors are crucial for effective disaster risk reduction because they possess a deeper understanding of their local environments, livelihoods, and cultural values, perspectives that outside actors may overlook when focusing primarily on hazards. As such, their participation is essential across all stages of DRR, from risk assessment and planning to response and recovery. Strategies developed solely by outside agencies often become non-operational and impractical if they do not align with local knowledge systems, needs, and priorities (Cadag, et al., 2017).

The participatory governance perspective provides a strong foundation for this study's theoretical framework. It emphasizes that effective DRR happens when governance processes are inclusive, deliberative and responsive to the local knowledge and needs of the community. In this view, community participation through traditional leadership and integrating TK becomes a key component through which resilience can be built and sustained. In the African context where modern and traditional governance structures co-exist, applying this framework assumes that leveraging traditional leadership and integrating TK into formal DRR will achieve more sustainable outcomes. The following hypothesis are derived from this foundation.

3.3.2 Trust in Traditional Leadership and the Mediation of Community Participation

A key aspect of DRR is meaningful local community participation (Zubir & Amirrol, 2011). Broadly, community participation is understood as the active involvement of people in making decisions about the implementation of processes, programs and projects which affect them. It is encouraged in many areas of development, including DRR. These participatory approaches are valuable in DRR because they enable people to explain their vulnerabilities and priorities. This allows problems to be defined correctly and responsive measures to be designed and implemented. The principal resource available for mitigating or responding to disasters is people themselves and their local knowledge and expertise. The process of working and achieving things together can strengthen communities by reinforcing local organization and participatory risk reduction initiatives. This is likely to be sustainable because they build on local capacity as participants have ownership of them (van Niekerk, 2011).

Local communities are essential partners for emergency preparedness, response and post-disaster recovery and their participation can lead to more sustainable and resilient outcomes. Local community based DRR is better suited to accommodate a community's needs and vulnerabilities. Facilitating community participation, especially those that tend to be marginalized, enables them to mobilize their resources and skills to improve their disaster resilience. Local community participation in DRR requires targeted efforts to address a range of existing participation barriers among marginalized groups and the promotion of platforms and mechanisms for engagement that are formally inclusive and accessible. (GDFRR, 2022). But this participation does not occur in a vacuum. It is often shaped by traditional leaders who yield substantial legitimacy and trust, often exceeding that of national institutions particularly in rural areas where they remain pervasive to rural life (Chigwata, 2015). This trust and influence are a distinguishing feature of governance

structures in Africa where traditional leaders act as intermediaries between the government and their local populations (Jackson & Marquette, 2003). In this way, traditional leaders in Africa play a pivotal role in facilitating community participation, particularly in local governance and development processes. As legitimate and trusted representatives of their communities, they act as rural-focused developmental advisers, community mobilisers, and political liaisons. They also engage with local government processes and advocate for community needs and interests (Mdluli, Reddy, & Ndebele, 2025). Traditional leaders can also act as intermediaries between the state and local communities. With their established authority and cultural significance, they can mobilize community members and ensure effective DRR outcomes. Engaging them is essential for fostering community involvement and addressing local needs (Balasuriya, 2023). Additionally, by acting as intermediaries, traditional leaders facilitate communication between government institutions and grassroots communities, ensuring that the voices of marginalized groups are heard. They provide a platform for marginalized groups to voice their rights and interests which enhances communication and decision-making processes (Nompumelelo, 2024). Involving traditional leaders can enhance the acceptance of DRR initiatives by ensuring that community priorities and needs are reflected. In this way, they can bridge traditional and formal governance systems.

While communities and their traditional leaders do not control all the conditions that affect them, they have the ability to change the conditions that can increase their resilience. Communities can build resilience through their responses to shocks and stresses as well as actively develop resilience through capacity building. Building resilience will of course vary from community to community (Berkes & Ross, 2013). Many local traditional societies have specialized resource management practices and knowledge that they use for their livelihoods. Their local observations and knowledge can provide insights to local impacts and adaptations (Berkes, 2007). Thus,

engaging communities through their traditional leaders can facilitate them to become groundbreakers in DRR (GDFRR, 2022).

Building on this logic, community-based DRR efforts are most impactful when they involve the direct participation of those most likely to be exposed to hazards in planning, decision-making, and operational activities at all levels of responsibility (Zubir & Amirrol, 2011). However, to reiterate, such participation is not automatic, and it is often mediated by local authorities who can mobilize collective action. Traditional leaders, where they are perceived as legitimate and trustworthy, are well positioned to facilitate meaningful participation, coordinate community engagement, and shape the implementation of DRR initiatives. In this way, the perceived trust levels in traditional leadership will shape the extent of their influence within DRR governance structures.

H1: Where traditional leaders are perceived as more trusted authorities relative to elected representatives, their formal integration into DRR frameworks will strengthen their influence in shaping climate and disaster risk governance.

3.2.2 Traditional Leadership and Traditional Knowledge in DRR Governance

Similar to Western scientific knowledge, TK as a way of knowing is based on an accumulation of observations. However, the practice of TK differs in that it is largely dependent on local social mechanisms. The generation, accumulation and transmission of TK proceed along very different lines than those of Western science. TK is also embedded in local social norms and cultures (Berkes, Colding, & Folke, 2000). TK plays a critical role in building disaster resilience of indigenous people because it can potentially contribute to building resilience to natural hazards. Traditional leaders as TK holders can therefore play an active role as participants in DRR governance. They can play a crucial role in developing adaptation strategies that incorporate TK.

For example, they can use TK to guide flood adaptation that is location specific. Traditional leaders and locals possess valuable TK that can contribute to their adaptation and resilience. Additionally, local resources, networks, cultural values and attitudes can enhance adaptive capacity in DRR. While local communities have increasingly survived several natural hazards, they are expected to experience disproportionate impacts due to changing climate which is making hazards more intense and frequent (Khalafzai & Nawas, 201).

TK is not only an important source of wisdom for sustainability, but it is also crucial for DRR. The Sendai Framework emphasizes the role of TK in tackling disaster risk. It recognizes that indigenous people around the world have used their TK to prepare for, cope with and survive disasters. Their methods and practices such as observing animal behavior to gain early warning signs of hazards such as cyclones have been passed down over several generations. The framework explicitly calls on governments to employ a people-centered approach and engaging directly with local communities and indigenous peoples in the design and implementation of policies, plans and standards. It also advocates for the use of TK and practices to compliment scientific knowledge in disaster risk assessments (UNDRR, 2015).

TK is therefore important in planning for community development and can be used as a planning tool for local community DRR. Traditional leaders use TK to predict the occurrence of disasters and their impact which can assist in the adaptation of better intervention measures. When TK is not widely used in local communities, they continue to suffer from natural disasters. Traditional leaders and local people have in depth experience and understanding pertaining to their local environment. As such, they possess information that can be relied on to help their communities better plan and manage disasters to reduce the risk and impact. Victims of disasters

are in fact people that have capacities and important TK to tackle disasters (UNDRR, 2015; Dube & Munsaka, 2018).

Taken together, this suggests that the integration of traditional leaders and TK into DRR is about recognition in addition to policy. Traditional knowledge is embedded within customary governance structures and transmitted through recognized community institutions (Berkes, Colding, & Folke, 2000; Berkes, 2007). Traditional leaders often serve as custodians of this knowledge, shaping how it is interpreted, shared and incorporated into collective decision-making (Mdluli, Reddy, & Ndebele, 2025; Nompumelelo, 2024). As such, the extent to which traditional knowledge is integrated into DRR governance depends in part on the formal recognition and institutional positioning of traditional leaders within state frameworks.

H2 Formal recognition of traditional leaders within DRR frameworks will be associated with more substantive integration of traditional knowledge into DRR planning and implementation.

3.3. Enabling Conditions and Systemic Constraints

Although the formal integration and the role of traditional leaders in DRR governance are the primary focus of this study, these processes operate within broader political and institutional environments which shape their effectiveness.

3.3.1 Political Commitment

Political commitment is essential for governments and people to reduce potential human suffering in disasters including climate vulnerability (Lassa, 2020). The lack of political commitment has often been cited as one of the culprits inhibiting countries to prioritize actions towards mitigating hazards and reducing risks in short and long term. However, the future of societal resilience depends largely on political commitment to allocate resources to manage and reduce disaster risks and vulnerabilities as well as build resilience. Addressing disaster risk is

therefore a matter of administrative and political priorities at the global, regional and national level. To make a resilient society a reality, a set of social, administrative and political commitments must exist at all levels of governance (Lassa, Surjan, Caballero-Anthony, & Fisher, 2019). Formal recognition remains symbolic in the absence of sustained political will.

3.3.2 State Capacity

Governments that consider risk in policymaking and successfully integrate risk management into their governance frameworks and development have a better record of DRR and resilience building (Danaa & Thorlund, 2022). Commitments from nations can vary and may include investment in early warning systems; disaster vulnerability reduction activities such as fiscal allocation for mitigation; raising awareness; promotion; and incentives for stakeholders to participate in managing risks (Lassa, Surjan, Caballero-Anthony, & Fisher, 2019). Integration requires adequate resource allocation and coordination between national and local structures.

3.3.3 Economic Development

The frequency and intensity of disasters disproportionately affect poor countries and poor communities. More than half of disaster deaths occur in low development countries, and these suffer far greater economic losses relative to their GDP than richer countries as their capacity to reduce risk is much more limited. As such, disasters can induce poverty (DFID, 2005). Natural disasters therefore affect developing countries the most because many lack the resources and funding to protect their communities adequately. There is lower ability to cope with and recover from disaster impacts and there is lack of infrastructure to protect against hazards (Hallegatte, Vogt-Schilb, Rozenberg, Bangalore, & Beaudet, 2020). While natural disasters affect both developed and developing countries, the consequences of disasters such as economic losses are

much greater in low-income countries (Zorn, 2017). Economic conditions shape DRR priorities and to a larger extent the capacity for formal integration given limited resources available.

3.3.4 Political Stability

Political instability also has a direct impact on DRR and a countries disaster preparedness. Fractured political environments prevent significant progress towards implementation of DRR. Political instability, the propensity of a government collapse either because of conflicts or rampant competition between various political parties, is an important determinant of environmental policy outcomes (Hussain, 2014). Disasters can sometimes trigger political unrest, for example in autocratic states, where they play an important role in creating the enabling conditions for political protest while in democratic states, protests can stem from people holding their leaders to account for deaths caused by disasters (Williams, 2011). In Africa, high exposure to climate hazards is met with low resilience to withstand them. Disasters lead to mass displacements and political unrest only exacerbates the situation as government are unable to respond to and prepare for such climatic shocks (Andre, Hajmanova, & Espinosa, 2020). This stability or lack of it, shapes DRR governance processes and can influence the integration of traditional leadership.

3.4 Integrative Theoretical Model

The preceding sections of this chapter developed the theoretical foundations connecting traditional leadership, trust, community participation and traditional knowledge to DRR governance. Drawing from the Sendai Framework and participatory governance theory, this study conceptualizes DRR as a governance process shaped by the interactions between formal state intuitions and local (informal) leadership structures.

In this framework, top-down and bottom-up processes are complimentary rather competing where centering DRR as a dynamic process that integrates traditional leadership structures top

support resilience and preparedness outcomes. In this way, the integration of traditional leadership influences DRR governance through trust at the local level, participation and coordination between the state and the community, and incorporation traditional knowledge into planning and implementation. International frameworks, particularly the Sendai Framework, provide the overarching policy environment within which national and local governance arrangements progress while political commitment, state capacity, economic development and stability operate as contextual conditions that enable or constrain the mechanism for integration.

Figure 1 is an illustrative model of the how formal recognition and integration of traditional leaders' shapes DRR governance quality based on facilitating community participation and traditional knowledge integration whilst leveraging on institutional trust to influence preparedness and resilience.

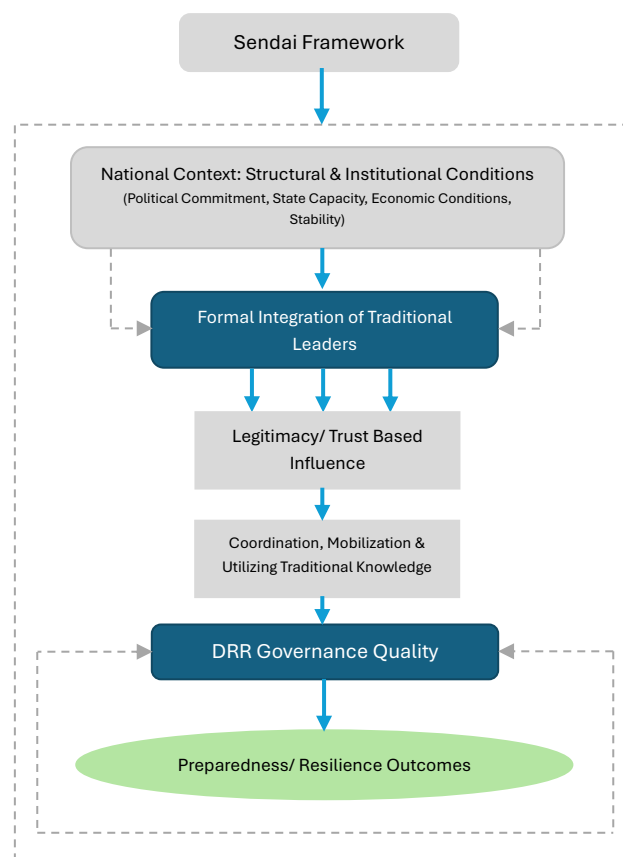


Figure 1: Integrative Model of Traditional Leadership Governance

This model aligns with the principles of the Sendai Framework, which emphasizes an all-inclusive approach to DRR (UNDRR, 2015). It is also consistent with Berkes (2007) and Berkes & Ross (2013), who conceptualize resilience as arising from interconnected social-ecological systems that integrate institutional support and community capability. The model centers on the formal integration of traditional leaders in DRR governance structure's identity key area where this could be operational including: rallying citizen trust; facilitating participation and coordination with state and local actors; and incorporating traditional knowledge. Political commitment, state capacity, economic conditions, and stability serve as the broader conditions which either enable or constrain the integration processes. The model thus serves as a conceptual framework to analyze how formalizing of traditional leaders influences DRR governance.

3.5 Theoretical Implications

This framework positions DRR as a process shaped by interactions between formal and informal governance structures emphasizing the formal integration of traditional leaders. It provides a basis for analyzing how governance arrangements shape DRR processes. Ultimately, the integration of traditional leaders within DRR frameworks has implications beyond disaster preparedness but extends into broader environmental concerns like climate change.

DRR governance is built on institutional trust, community participation and inclusivity. This premise is supported by global frameworks such as the Sendai Framework which highlights inclusive approaches to DRR. National plans should increasingly empower traditional leaders and their communities to be more actively involved in the adaptation and decision-making processes with adaptation plans that are location and context specific calling for active participation of local communities and indigenous people (UNFCCC, 2020).

Traditional leadership also functions as an intermediary institution connecting TK to formal policy and national plans (UNFCCC, 2020). Local communities' diverse forms of knowledge are deeply rooted in their relationship with the environment. Their ability to observe, adapt and mitigate helps them to face new and complex circumstances that often impact their ways of living. TK strengthens their ability to tackle climate change and its impacts. As custodians of this knowledge, traditional leaders are often the best placed to facilitate this incorporation (Coppola, 2015; Magni, 2016; IIRR, 2022).

CHAPTER 4 - TRADITIONAL LEADERS, MODERN INSTITUTIONS AND THE IMPACTS ON CLIMATE GOVERNANCE

Traditional leaders and indigenous African institutions have long played a vital role in the governance and socio-economic development of African societies. Rooted in history, culture, and custom, these institutions have been and continue to be central to maintaining social cohesion, managing community resources, and dispute resolution. Traditional leaders particularly are central to indigenous African institutions serving as key figures and heads of their communities. Not only do they uphold cultural values, but they also maintain law and order. Traditional institutions, based on native laws and customs, include royal families, councils of chiefs, and traditional security members who all play fundamental roles in local governance (Opasin, 2016).

Traditional leaders and institutions utilize TK for effective administration and social cohesion though colonial neglect marginalized these institutions and relegated them to ceremonial roles rather than empowerment in governance (Olaopa & Ogundare, 2023). Historically, the imposition of Eurocentric governance models during colonial times disrupted indigenous political systems, creating a lasting tension between traditional and modern institutions. Colonial administrations introduced western institutions with little to no consideration for existing governance structures, fundamentally altering political landscapes. These colonial legacies continue to influence modern governance structures that tend to often sideline traditional leaders in decision-making processes (Mawere & Mukonza, 2024). For good governance and sustainable development in Africa, it is essential to acknowledge and integrate traditional leadership within modern systems, as they embody the cultural heritage and communal spirit of society (Olaopa & Ogundare, 2023).

4.1 Defining Traditional Leaders and Their Context

4.1.1 Conceptualizing Traditional Leaders: Core Definitions, Authority and Legitimacy

Generally, traditional leaders are unelected leaders who maintain real power within their local communities. They depend in part on the local society and economy for their well-being. Thus, they have incentives to facilitate local development projects within their communities during their lifetime. They are rulers who have power by virtue of their association with the customary mode of governing a place-based community. The power and positions of traditional leaders' changes overtime and across societies (Baldwin, 2015). In political science, the terms traditional leader and chiefs are often used interchangeably. As an umbrella term, they represent the wide array of titles held by traditional leaders in different countries and communities. Generally, Francophone African countries refer to these types of leaders as customary authority while it is common to refer to them as traditional authority in Anglophone countries (Honig, 2020).

Traditional leaders in Africa are therefore people who hold authority and influence within their communities derived from cultural heritage and historical practices. They often include chiefs, kings, and elders who play significant roles in local governance, social cohesion, and cultural preservation (Mawere & Mukonza, 2024). What distinguishes traditional leaders from ethnic elites and local politicians is tradition as a claim to authority. Common origin, shared ethnic ties, rituals and local beliefs in their spiritual powers reinforce the authority of traditional leaders. Despite being part of the modern state, it is tradition that allows them claim legitimacy that is independent from and in many cases, superior to the states (Honig, 2020).

Though traditional chiefs have historically received little attention from political scientists, they are an important factor in African politics that cannot be ignored (Baldwin, 2015). Unlike political leaders, traditional leaders claim their authority through tradition. Myths of common

origin and shared ethnic ties within their communities maintain and reinforce the authority of traditional leaders. This authority is also enhanced through rituals and even local beliefs in their spiritual powers. Tradition is what allows these elites to claim legitimacy that is independent from and sometimes superior to the state even though they are part of the state. As such, traditional leaders gain power from local institutions and the state (Honig, 2020).

Across the region, traditional leaders run court systems and allocate land. Moreover, the same leaders who were opposed to the positions of traditional leaders during the 1950s and 1960s also increased the power of chiefs during their countries transitions to democracy. For example, in Ghana, the government of Kwame Nkrumah sought to break the power of traditional leaders in the 1950s, dethroning chiefs and transferring their powers over land to local governments. But by the 1990s, the Ghanaian government was actively cultivating support of chiefs and constitutionally recognized their right to allocate land (Baldwin, 2015). Due to their proximity to local communities, many traditional leaders have maintained their power partly. In the 1990s, for many countries the role of traditional leaders was formalized in new laws and policies. For example, Ghana's 1992 constitution provided traditional leaders the power to appoint 30% of the seats in District Councils. Modern traditional leaders are tied to the state through various formal and informal relationships. For example, in countries like Namibia, Zambia, South Africa and Botswana, traditional leaders advise governments as members of Houses and Chiefs, comparable to the House of Lords in the United Kingdom with much less influence (Honig, 2020).

4.1.2 Hierarchical Structures, Roles and Responsibilities of Traditional Leaders

Selection Process and Hierarchical Structures

Traditional leadership structures are often hereditary, with authority passed down through family lines, maintaining a connection to historical kingdoms and ancestral lineage (Honig, 2024).

In many tribal systems, chieftaincy was hereditary and reserved to certain lineages by right of genealogical linkages to founding ancestors who were members of the family that first settled or founded the settlement (Ayittey, 2006). While ancestral lineages chose the chief, succession was not always automatic. The chief must always hail from the royal clan meaning that those outside the clan were ineligible. Within the royal clan, several could be eligible which then giving rise to competition and choice. While alive, chiefs may appoint an apparent heir with advice from the council. Most times, the chief's eldest son is nominated but succession can be blocked if he is found to be unfit or incompetent to lead. In tribes where royal linkages did not exist, different lineages offered candidate for the position. A group of elders would choose the chief from a number of contestants or even rotate chieftaincy amongst the lineages. But generally, the chief was never elected through ballot, he was appointed (Ayittey, 2006). As such, traditional leaders are not democratic leaders. They are rarely selected by an electoral procedure with few formal checks on their power and they usually rule for life. While the expectation would be that they would be exploitative of their populations, the reality is that most of these leaders are socially and economically embedded in their societies (Baldwin, 2015).

Traditional leaders usually operate within hierarchical structures that emphasize their roles as custodians of community values and norms. Different terminology is used to refer to traditional leaders at different levels of hierarchy although these terms vary from country to country and not all levels exist in every country (Baldwin, 2015). This hierarchy typically includes a paramount chief at the top, followed by chiefs, and village headmen who each have specific roles and responsibilities within their communities (Olaopa & Ogundare, 2023).

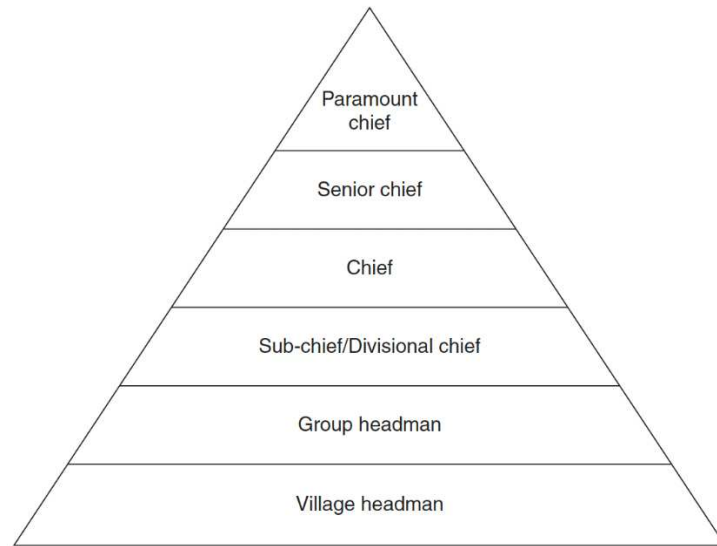


Figure 2: Standard Terminology for Positions in Traditional Hierarchy (Baldwin, 2015)

Roles and Responsibilities

Traditional leaders' and their responsibilities are deeply rooted in historical, cultural, and political contexts and these vary across the continent. Generally, the chief is more of a leader than a ruler who performs many functions. As the political or administrative head of the tribe, a chief is responsible for the maintenance of order, handling public affairs and is the ultimate authority in all matters pertaining to the welfare of the community. In the Buganda kingdom in Uganda for example, the chief is also responsible for certain kinds of public work such as cutting and keeping open roads, for building and maintaining compounds of senior chiefs and for making servicing places for drawing water and for hunting down dangerous wild beasts (Ayittey, 2006).

Traditional leaders also play a crucial role in maintaining law and order, utilizing traditional knowledge to adjudicate disputes and enforce community norms (Olaopa & Ogundare, 2023). In some cases, chiefs preside over the Chiefs Court which is the final court of appeal. In the Shona kingdom of Zimbabwe for example, presiding over the court is the most significant role of the chief. Additionally, traditional leaders play a crucial role in land and resource management. In

South Africa for example, traditional leaders are key players in rural land governance where they manage land allocation and often serve as intermediaries between political parties and local communities (Nyathi, Mbatha, & Cebekhulu, 2025). In Ghana, traditional leaders are involved in land management practices by exercising authority over community land and negotiating compensation for its use (Ankisiba, 2013). In Zambia, the 1995 Lands Act strengthened the role and power of traditional leaders by empowering them to allocate land to individuals and companies, including foreign investors (Oyama, 2021). Overall, the chiefs are the final authority on matters pertaining to the use and possession of land. As such, they have the right to distribute land not already occupied and the right to expropriate land, that is instructing people to vacate land occupied and used by them because it is required for public or general purposes (Ayttey, 2006).

Traditional leaders also play an important role in cultural preservation, often acting as custodians of traditional knowledge, customs and social norms. By acting as custodians of local history, values, and spirituality, traditional leaders validate and transmit the traditions, norms and values of their communities to ensure continuity (Omagu, 2013). Traditional leaders interpret and uphold beliefs, oral traditions and customs of their communities to ensure that these are passed down through generations. Amongst the Ndebele of Zimbabwe for example, traditional leaders are expected to safeguard their culture whilst maintaining social order and representing peoples interest to foster a sense of identity (Ndlovu & Dube, 2012). This role of oral traditions upheld by traditional leaders, is important in preserving cultural values and identity because it serves as a means of transmitting ancestral wisdom and cultural preservation. Traditional leaders thus also serve as community stewardship facilitators who play a vital role in the preservation of culturally significant sites and safeguarding their associated values (de Jesus Jopela, 2011).

4.1.3 Historical Legacies: Pre-colonial Governance Structures, Colonial Influence and Disruption, and Post-colonial Dynamics

While some have argued that chiefs gained their power through colonial legacies and postcolonial policies of indirect rule (Baldwin & Ricart-Huguet, 2023), it is not entirely true that traditional leaders are colonial constructions. In fact, the position of some traditional leaders was altered by colonial administrations during the first half of the twentieth century as during colonial rule, many traditional leaders lost their status, power and influence (Baldwin, 2015). However, in other instances, those who had colonial recognition gained new powers, enlarged jurisdictions, and increased influence. Some precolonial chiefs such as the Mwata Kazembe in Zambia had agency in constructing colonial order. Senior Chief Mwata Kazembe convinced the British to choose his lieutenants as chiefs and was able to retain the structure of his kingdom (Baldwin, 2015).

Pre-colonial Africa consisted of a wide diversity of politics and social and economic systems including centralized kingdoms and empires, centralized mid-sized kingdoms, and widely scattered chiefdoms. Pre-colonial leaders and their communities were not isolated by their social and economic circumstances. By providing their subjects with access to land and resources, they guaranteed justice and an equitable distribution of riches. Everyone has equal access to resources. The system helped to build Egyptian pyramids, the groundnut pyramids of Kano, the Benin and Yoruba arts work, the Igbo bronze, and the astronauts of Timbuktu, and there was trading between kingdoms and empires (Osuigwe , 2023). In Nigeria for instance, prior to European colonialism, the Akoko society was structurally arranged and positively administered for the benefit of the people of the region. Kings and chiefs were at the apex and supported by a courtier class who managed palace affairs and administered justice (Faboyede, 2019). In Zimbabwe, the Ndebele kingdom was characterized by a strong patriarchal system. Authority of leaders, referred to as

Inkosi, was deeply rooted in cultural practices and indigenous knowledge systems (Ndlovu & Dube, 2012). Precolonial African kingdoms also featured significant roles for women in governance such as the Benin queen mothers; the Dahomey; the Asante; the Buganda; and the Eswatini queen mothers. These leaders were integral to socio-economic and political affairs for their communities, demonstrating the urgency and leadership of women in precolonial African societies (Musingafi , 2023).

During colonial times, many African kingdoms and traditional leaders faced significant disruption to their political authority and governance structures (Eldredge , 2017). At this time, many leaders became subject to higher-level leaders appointed by colonial masters. The initial reaction to this arrangement varied widely across the continent. In some instances, traditional leaders resisted incorporation and were only subjugated by conquest. In other cases, traditional leaders sought alliances with the European powers in the hopes that this would give them an edge in their military and political relations with other African leaders (Baldwin, 2015). Though traditional institutions were resilient, colonial interventions altered their functions and reduced their autonomy (Eldredge , 2017). In South Africa for example, traditional leaders were integral to community governance before colonial rule. Traditional leaders served as rule makers and held significant power. But colonialism ushered in a dispensation about leadership, authority and accountability. In many instances, colonial powers used traditional leaders as puppets and treated them as a means of communication between the colonialists and their subjects. The introduction of headman by colonial masters also altered traditional leadership. Those who resisted colonialism were rendered ineffective through dethronement, ridicule and punishment. Traditional leaders' power was not only crushed but their culture, customs and traditions were undermined as heathen. Even though their judicial power was retained, it was subject to the right of appeal to white

magistrates (Mvenene, 2023). In Nigeria, the colonial powers introduced a regular payment of salaries chiefs. The British selected a number of chiefdoms, primarily for geographical reasons and then appointed the chiefs as salaried headmen of administrative districts. So, the chiefs were paid to carry out British demands as well as perform the traditional functions of governance. The main demands were to maintain order and collect taxes from the citizens. In some cases, chiefs obtained extra money by sitting in a court created by the British administration (Palagashvili, 2018). In Botswana, however, a significant feature of the Bechuanaland Protectorate was that traditional leaders, specifically tribal chiefs, also known as the Kgosi, were granted significant autonomy by colonial powers. The wide jurisdiction accorded to them enabled them to retain considerable authority and regulate nearly all aspects of tribal life. This arrangement allowed these leaders to maintain their influence and control over their communities (Jones, 1983).

In the post-colonialism era, African kingdoms and the role of traditional leaders became a complex interplay of historical legacies, cultural dynamics and modern political structures. The de facto power of traditional leaders declined across the continent (Baldwin, 2015). Although some traditional leaders had assisted in liberation struggles across the continent, some postcolonial governments viewed them as repressive collaborators of colonial regimes, hindering modernization and nation-building efforts of the 1960s and 1970s (Kyed & Buur, 2007). With the exception of Botswana, post-colonial African leadership never built upon the democratic nature of the indigenous institutions of the peoples of Africa but instead imposed foreign systems that disregarded indigenous governance. They imposed these systems on their citizens and continued with the same repressive rule under colonialism and in some countries, they did even worse. They stripped chiefs of their traditional authority and even set out to destroy their indigenous institutions (Ayittey, 2010). In some instances, traditional leaders were banned all together as in the cases of

Tanzania and Mozambique. The overwhelming majority curtailed their legal powers in local governance, often limiting their role to cultural and spiritual activities (Kyed & Buur, 2007). But despite these challenges, traditional leaders and institutions continue to play an important role in African societies. In the last two decades, traditional leaders have seen a resurgence in their status in many countries. Amongst rural dwellers, their influence is particularly strong in local governance (Baldwin, 2015).

4.2 Indigenous African Institutions and Their Role in Governance

4.2.1 Informal Governance Mechanisms

Indigenous African institutions, often based on kinship, lineage and traditional authority, play a crucial role in informal governance mechanisms across the continent. In most societies, political organizations began at the lineage or village level. When migrating families formed a village, the original founder became the owner of the village and his clan then constituted the royal family. Lineage was typically the most powerful and effective force for unity and stability with each lineage having its head chosen according to its own rules. The African chiefdom was structurally composed of four basic units of government: The Chief as the central authority; the Inner or Privy Council that advised the chief; the Council of Elders; and the Village Assembly of commoners or meeting (Ayttey, 2006).

Indigenous institutions often operate through traditional leadership structures and emphasize collective responsibility. Key characteristics of indigenous African institutions include community participation and representation, community-based decision making, cultural legitimacy, social cohesion, checks and balances, as well as both decentralized and centralized governance frameworks (Wane, Opondo, Alam, Kipkosgei, & Tarus, 2022; Oni & Sugun, 2010). In decentralized systems such as the Acholi, Luo and Keiyo, local organization is emphasized with

the Council of Elders, Chief Priests, Moral Elders and Chiefs who carried out various functions to ensure the community remains stable and prosperous. In centralized systems, the king had authority over their boundaries. While governance systems were different, the mechanisms shared similar pillars, features, and principles anchored by humanism, communism, and the spiritual of governance amongst African peoples (Wane, Opondo, Alam, Kipkosgei, & Tarus, 2022). These institutions, which derive their legitimacy from community norms influence informal governance mechanisms by mediating social interactions and exchanges which then shape political behavior. They also often fill gaps left by formal institutions and provide essential support in social protection (Kpessa-Whyte, 2018). These institutions also foster trust and cooperation among community members and provide a framework for understanding relationships and conflict resolution to maintain social order and influence informal governance mechanisms by fostering local knowledge and participation (Oni & Sugun, 2010; Shivakumar, 2003).

4.2.2 Formal Recognition and Integration

In many African societies, traditional and modern governance structures coexist. As such, the integration of these traditional institutions and traditional leaders into modern governance systems presents both challenges and opportunities. Governments across the continent vary in their level of engagement with traditional leaders. Sometimes they are collaborators as state politicians will consult traditional leaders and treat them as gatekeepers to the local communities, other times, and other times they are challengers. Often times, governments rely on traditional leaders to help with the distribution of public goods such as fertilizer or donations as they may find it necessary to use a chief as the intermediary for social and practical reasons. As such, traditional leaders can gain both material and political influence from closer relationship with the government and use

this to retain their influence. By serving as intermediaries, they respond to pressure from both the state and their communities (Honig, 2020).

A challenge of integrating traditional leaders into modern governance has been through conflicts over land access, and a lack of involvement in formal decision making. The dual allegiance of citizens to both chiefs and citizens, further complicates this. In Ghana for example, local governance is an area where traditional leadership and the constitutional government often times clash. Traditional leaders sometimes feel they are left out when government makes decisions that affect their populations without consulting or involving them (Abotsi & Galizzi). Similarly in South Africa, misunderstandings between traditional leaders and elected local government officials have led to clashes. On the one hand, some believe that traditional leadership is an outdated institution but on the other hand, some regard traditional leaders as custodians of customary values and the only leaders who are truly responsible for community wellbeing both historically and religiously (Scheepers & du Plessis, 2017). Furthermore, integrating traditional leadership in modern governance is sometimes seen as a stumbling block towards greater democratization. The averseness to traditional leadership stems from its potential to counteract progress especially in such areas as political organization, women empowerment and economic advancement (Dipholo, Tshishonga, & Mafema, 201).

While the integration of traditional leadership into modern governance systems presents challenges, it also offers opportunities for enhancing governance and development in Africa. Many Africans still strongly adhere to traditional leadership which they consider to be very legitimate, and indispensable even in contemporary democratic governance processes (Nsaidzedze, 2019). Furthermore, Africans have their own understanding of democracy, which is pointedly different from the liberal democracy of the West. In essence, traditional leadership is democratic based on

its own unique way (Mawere, Matshidze, Kugara, & Madzivhandila, 2021). Traditional leaders are seen to be promoters of transparent and accountable leadership, political mobilizers, peacemakers, symbols of unity, as well as architects of participatory governance and social justice (Nsaidzedze, 2019). Additionally, the unique form of democracy practiced within traditional institutions, which emphasizes consensus, resonates with the local population. Community members feel involved in decision-making processes, thereby increasing their trust in leaders who prioritize their voices and opinion. As such, traditional institutions can enhance democratic governance by promoting transparent and accountable leadership. The integration of traditional leadership into governance systems can provide a unique African perspective on democracy, that emphasizes consensus and community participation (Mawere, Matshidze, Kugara, & Madzivhandila, 2021). In Botswana, as mentioned previously mentioned, traditional leaders are formally recognized through the Constitution, which established the House of Chiefs (Ntlo ya Dikgosi) as an advisory body on matters of tradition and customs (Oageng, Seaba, Molomo, & Molefe, 2020). This recognition of traditional authority continues to influence state administration and community governance in the country reflecting a blend of traditional and modern political governance frameworks (Jones, 1983).

4.3 Traditional Leaders' Involvement in Rural Climate Governance

4.3.1 Rural Climate Governance Practices

Traditional leaders in Africa play a crucial role in engaging rural communities to promote climate change adaptation and mitigation strategies. In addition to acting as governing authority, traditional leaders are familiar with the conventional methods of addressing the adverse consequences of climate change. They mobilize communities to adopt climate adaptation practices by leveraging on their local knowledge and authority (Musarandega, Chingombe, & Pillay, 2018).

In communities like Kajiado County in Kenya, Maasai elders and traditional leaders have been central to facilitating community-based adaptation to drought and water scarcity. These leaders share in-depth traditional ecological knowledge on grazing patterns, water management techniques, and drought-resistant livestock breeds. This information is then included into local adaptation programs to increase their applicability and efficacy. Similarly, in the Kitui County, the Kamba community's customary institutions, such as the Kamburu council of elders, actively participate in developing community-led climate change adaptation strategies, providing guidance on traditional resource management (Oino & Musau, 2024).

Traditional leaders' involvement in climate adaptation is essential due to their deep-rooted influence and understanding of local customs and practices. In Nigeria for example, rural communities have over the years developed critical norms and practices to ensure production despite adverse climate conditions. Despite long bouts of erosion and flooding, these communities' practices have ensured survival. This creativity and experience can be useful informal adaptation and resilience strategies to climate change in Nigeria to which traditional leaders can play a crucial role in facilitating that integration (Edlyne & Anugwom, 2022). In Zimbabwe, indigenous knowledge systems are one of the crucial determinants of resilience building for rural communities. As such, traditional leaders contribute by facilitating community engagement and leveraging indigenous knowledge, which enhances collective efficacy and resource mobilization. Their involvement is crucial in fostering a supportive environment for resilience-building initiatives, ensuring that practices are culturally relevant and effectively implemented within the community (Nyahunda, NemaKonde, & Khoza, 2024).

4.3.2 Challenges in Local Climate Governance

Traditional leaders' involvement in climate governance is essential due to their influence and deep understanding of local customs and practices. However, they encounter difficulties stemming from colonial, institutional and socio-political factors among others. During colonization, traditional leaders and TK were mainly overlooked. This neglect distorted their functions and reduced them to counselors inside colonial political institutions by preventing African resources from consistently carrying out their traditional duties of promoting effective administration. But even after independence, the roles of traditional leaders are sometimes marginalized in modern government systems where responsibilities are shared with political office holders. In some cases, traditional authorities were formally excluded from local and district government structures, as seen in post-independence Tanzania and Mozambique. This lack of formal recognition has seriously hampered the development and contributions of traditional institutions, culture, religions, and indigenous resources to governance in Africa (Olaopa & Ogundare, 2023). Furthermore, many institutional frameworks do not adequately incorporate traditional leaders into climate governance and adaptation frameworks. In Turkana County in Kenya for example, there is a lack of coordination between customary institutions such as the Turkana Council of Elders and formal government structures which has hindered the effective implementation of community-based adaptation initiatives (Oino & Musau, 2024).

Traditional leaders also face challenges regarding lack of or inadequate participation in climate initiatives and decision-making. In Zambia for example, despite policy recognition of traditional leaders through their inclusion in the House of Chiefs, councils, the Constituency Development Fund, and Ward Development Committee, their effective participation in governance such as in the Kafue wetlands has faced significant challenges. Traditional leaders have raised concerns that they are excluded from operationalization of the Catchment Management Councils

(CMCs) in the Kafue flats despite their essential role in climate governance. The implementation of environmental programs in the Kafue wetlands without the consultation of traditional leaders has also been criticized. Additionally, there is also limited participation in local institutions (Ndambwa & Moonga, 2024). Even in Zimbabwe, despite legal recognition, traditional leadership was relegated to the background in disaster-induced displacements like Tokwe-Mukosi flood displacements. Government and non-governmental organizations adopted Eurocentric models, which sidelined traditional leaders and the lived experiences of the displaced. Efforts to assist the displaced did not adequately involve local traditional leaders such as village heads and chiefs, who shared the realities of the flood victims. Instead, decisions were made by technocrats (Tarisayi, 2018).

4.4 The Disconnect Between Traditional and Modern Institutions and the Implications for Climate Governance

The disconnect between traditional and modern institutions in climate governance in Africa is rooted in a complex interplay of both historical and cultural factors. Historically, colonialism and autocracy undermined traditional governance structures. Prior to the establishment of colonial states, African societies were governed by living and evolving legal systems. However, colonizers reinterpreted these systems and ranked them as backwards. This was coupled with the European jurisprudential idea that custom had to be static and fixed to possess legal force, rooted in the broader belief that non-European societies were naturally static rather than capable of progress. In many colonized societies, such as Namibia, local chiefs were not traditional leaders but rather administrative creations of the colonial state. This dynamic undermined their role in resource management (Nijar, 2013). In the Okavango Delta in Botswana, the disconnect was particularly evident in resource management, such as water governance, where statutory institutions often

undermine traditional practices that view resources as communal assets with cultural significance. Here, colonialism played a significant role in the marginalization of customary water management systems. Traditional water management systems, which included various rules, norms, taboos, and values, were historically used by rural communities to manage water resources and resolve conflict. However, these were legally recognized following the advent of colonialism and as such there was a lack of recognition and weakened customary water management even though traditional practices continued to exist. The marginalization was further exacerbated by the statutory institutions' emphasis on the economic value of water which often overlooked its social and cultural significance. As such there was a lack of recognition and weakened customary water management even though traditional practices continued to exist (Gondo, Kolawole, & Mbaiwa, 2019).

Power imbalances, marginalization and the prioritization of scientific knowledge are also a contributing factor to the disconnect between state and traditional institutions. Power imbalances in climate change adaptation often overlook rural voices in decision-making processes. In Ghana, entrenched hierarchies dictate what is considered legitimate policy and action in adaptation efforts. They also determine whose values are prioritized during decision-making processes. As a direct consequence of these hierarchies, the interests of certain actors are systematically excluded from adaptation planning and implementation. This marginalization results in a disconnect between state and traditional institutions, as the prioritization of scientific knowledge often overlooks local knowledge and values (Garcia, Tschakert, & Karikari, 2023). In Zimbabwe, the prioritization of scientific knowledge creates a form of knowledge apartheid characterized by the historical and ongoing sidelining of TK especially in disaster risk management. TK is perceived as archaic, primitive and inferior making it difficult to promote its use and integration in planning. During the

colonial era, TK was dismissed as invalid and irrelevant, and this bias was perpetuated by policy makers. Furthermore, the lack of documentation of TK hinders its testing and validation overtime. Due to rarity of national level documentation, TK often dies with custodians (Mutasa , 2015).

The divide between traditional and modern institutions also carries significant consequences for adaptation and resilience efforts. For one, the marginalization of TK in climate change policy creates policy gaps that weaken adaptation and mitigation outcomes. This underutilization in climate change policy frameworks results significantly diminishes their effectiveness. This is especially evident in efforts to reduce vulnerability, enhance adaptive capacity, and strengthen resilience for African communities that rely on TK as key resource for coping with climate change. These communities depend on TK to make decisions and predict weather, especially when modern technology is not available. Ignoring this knowledge in policy leaves out an important resource for tackling climate change (Nyahunda, 2024). The actual application of TK and practices for climate change in disaster risk management and policy formulation and implementation remains unfulfilled. The embracing of western scientific approaches has historically led to the abandonment of TK in formal decision-making processes which may not be contextually appropriate or sustainable for African communities (Kai & van Niekerk, 2024). Despite the wealth of TK and strategies developed by rural communities for climate change prevention, mitigation, early warning, vigilance, and response, these are often not well recognized in national climate change initiatives and policy formulation in countries like Nigeria (Musa & Omokore, 2011). The failure to integrate indigenous knowledge into climate change policies results in lost opportunities for developing adaptation strategies that are sustainable, inclusive, and cost-efficient. The current gap leads to policies that are usually costly, top-down and short lived (Ajani, Mgbenka, & Okeke, 2013).

Despite their vital role, the integration of traditional leaders and institutions into formal adaptation frameworks is not without its challenges. In Turkana in Kenya, the lack of coordination between customary institutions, such as the Turkana Council of Elders, and formal government structures has hindered the effective implementation of community-based adaptation initiatives. This disconnect affects the alignment of priorities, resource allocation, and accountability mechanisms. Local leaders and customary institutions can play a crucial role in shaping climate change adaptation. (Oino & Musau, 2024). In Zambia, many organizations implementing environmental programs in the Kafue wetlands have been criticized for not consulting traditional leaders during the design of climate change initiatives. This lack of consultation leads to a disconnect between local realities and the programs implemented, hindering community engagement and ownership. Even though the 2023 revised National Decentralization Policy emphasizes the participation of traditional leaders, there has been limited involvement of chiefs and village headmen in the Sub-Catchment Councils or Water User Associations in climate-related initiatives under the Water Resources Management Authority (Ndambwa & Moonga, 2024). In the case of the Tokwe-Mukosi floods, efforts to assist the displaced did not adequately involve local traditional leaders such as village heads and chiefs, who shared the realities of the flood victims. Instead, decisions were made by technocrats. Even though the government's minister of local government highlighted that traditional leaders were linchpins in community development who were best placed to interpret people's views and aspirations, they were overlooked. The challenges faced by the Tokwe-Mukosi victims, such as rampant sexual abuse, are attributed to the neglect of Ubuntu, an African philosophy emphasizing humanity and community. Traditional leadership, as an embodiment of Ubuntu, could have mitigated these issues if integrated into the displacement process (Tarisayi, 2018). Traditional leaders, who have for a long time been useful in the

governance of people in various rural communities, can play a supportive role in climate change adaptation. Traditional leaders do not only serve as governance authorities but also know the traditional strategies of combating the negative effects of climate change. They have the power to manage grassroots communities and can thus be utilized as drivers in the use of traditional climate change adaptation strategies (Musarandega, Chingombe, & Pillay, 2018). While integrating TK into climate change policy has its challenges, it presents opportunities for more inclusiveness. Policies can be better suited with the realities of rural African communities and strengthened by recognizing TK and the role of traditional leaders as key custodians this knowledge.

CHAPTER 5: PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS OF MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT (MPs) AND TRADITIONAL LEADERS IN AFRICA

5.1 Background on Traditional and Modern Institutions

Actors in the governance of African countries includes all levels of governments, political parties, traditional leaders, and other key stakeholders (Smit, 2018). Colonialism in Africa created a split leadership between traditional and modern (Alidu 2022). Colonialism particularly introduced centralized governance structures that undermined traditional leadership. In South Africa, for example, colonial and apartheid policies systematically dismantled traditional leadership institutions, reducing their political and judicial powers and creating divisions within communities. These policies significantly damaged the institution of traditional leadership. Through its policies, colonialism actively exploited traditional leaders and the impact of colonialism extended to destroying traditional leadership institutions and negatively affecting the unity and livelihood of indigenous communities (Moila, 2024). In Ghana, colonialism disrupted African traditional institutions by imposing foreign governance structures and cultural practices, undermining indigenous authority and social systems. The introduction of colonial rule altered power dynamics, leading to a legacy of self-opposition among Africans (Oyeniya, 2021).

Today, most African countries are characterized by parallel institutions, one representing the formal laws of the state, and the other representing traditional institutions that are more commonly adhered to in rural areas. These parallel systems often complement each other in contemporary governance, though they sometimes contradict one another. Evidence suggests that traditional institutions have continued to metamorphose under the postcolonial state as Africa's socioeconomic systems evolve. They are referred to as traditional not because they exist in an unaltered precolonial form, but because they originate from precolonial political systems and are

adhered to principally, though not exclusively, by populations in the traditional (subsistent) sectors of the economy. Following the colonial experience, traditional institutions may be considered informal in the sense that they are often not sanctioned by the state. However, they are not merely customs and norms; they are systems of governance that were formal in precolonial times and continue to exist in a semiformal manner in some countries and an informal manner in others (Mengisteab, 2019). Traditional leadership is more of a personal rule associated with the office holder and underpinned by history, tradition, and customs. Modern leadership on the other hand, relies on democratic and transparent institutions to function and legitimacy is drawn from the people and their vote and documented legislations. These features influence the kind of role that leadership will play in society (Alidu, 2022).

5.1.1 Parliament

Political parties are an important element of political systems and form the central intermediate institution between the population and the government. They represent diverse political views and interests (Basedau, 2019). In Africa, political parties historically developed as part of the parliamentary system with the notion that Members of Parliament (MPs) represent the whole nation. Parliaments are therefore representative institutions ideally established to represent citizens preferences as expressed through elections. Parliaments are interchangeably used with legislatures and assemblies (Salih, 2005). Legislatures are the institution explicitly established to represent society's diverse interests in government and promote vertical accountability of the state to the public at large (Barkan, 2009). Parliaments are crucial to good governance in Africa and are one of the key institutions of democracy. They play an important role in legislation, oversight and representation. Their representational role includes ensuring that citizens and other stakeholders have a voice at all levels of government (UNECA, 2004).

Pre-colonialism, assemblies, historic kingdoms, and centralized chiefdoms were common features of African states. Colonialism introduced Africans to the Western concept of parliaments. Colonial powers left behind democratic political institutions with their versions of a parliamentary government with several parties and opposition. Parliaments in Africa thus emerged as a result of the formation of modern political parties rather than as a result of the evolution of the continents endogenous polity, political systems, chiefly or monarchical assemblies (Salih, 2005).

During the colonial period, the role of parliament was confined to the following domains: Political modernization which signaled the shift from traditional to modern assemblies; political socialization in which the involvement of educated Africans in the lower levels of administration became more accessible; constitutional development in which political parties similar to those of the West were founded and organized in haste and political elites took their seats in constituent assemblies; legislation with the role to establish three distinct branches of government including the legislature, the executive and the judiciary; and representation in which legislatures evolved as a means for representing society, geographical areas and interests in parliaments and assemblies (Salih, 2005) . The establishment of parliaments was viewed as a cornerstone for the transition to independence and the establishment of democracy. All former British colonies became independent states as parliamentary systems in the Westminster tradition in which most members were elected from a single district as in Britain. The presiding officer was the Speaker, and the chief administrative officer was the Clerk (Barkan, 2009).

Post-independence, from the mid 1960s to the end of the 1980s, many African states became one-party states, military, or military socialist regimes under the rule of authoritarian leaders. During this time, parliaments were formed and expected to be loyal to the single political party or military leaders. These one-party system parliaments were all purpose institutions which

enacted laws and legislations as well as engaged in decision making, policy implementation, and justified executive decisions. Legislative powers of parliament were under the scrutiny of the ruling party. As such, MPs were not true representations of the electorates but rather, carefully vetted by the central committee. In some instances, more than 25% of MPs were selected from social forces such as army officers. Parliaments were also used to bestow legitimacy on illegitimate and non-competitive political processes. Additionally, parliaments were the voice of the ruling elites and their regime. The role of parliament was largely the affirmation and confirmation of the status quo which led to political oppression (Salih, 2005). Many states also elected their MPs from single member districts or small multi-member districts rather than by proportional representation from large multi member districts (Mattes, Barkan, & Mozaffar, 2012).

The spread of democratization processes in the 1990s contributed to the emergence of multiparty systems which considerably changed the role of parliamentary systems across Africa (Salih, 2005). The return to multiparty politics in Africa with the holding of multiparty elections gave rise to a broad range of regimes from semi-authoritarian states to liberal democracies (Barkan, 2009). With some exceptions, one-party systems disappeared, and competitive elections emerged. In multiparty systems, African parliaments assumed the following roles of political governance: legislation, representation, scrutiny of the executive, political recruitment of talent, legitimacy and conflict management (Salih, 2005).

In modern democracies such as South Africa, for example, Parliament plays an important role. MPs are elected to represent the people of the country and act as a voice of the people. As such, Parliament is to be held accountable to the people. MPs have the right to ensure that as elected public representatives, they can bring important matters to the attention of the Houses and the public (Parliament of RSA, 2024). In Botswana, the Parliament is the supreme legislative

authority consisting of the President and the National Assembly and is charged with the responsibility of legislation, representation and oversight. (Government of Botswana, 2024). In Kenya, Parliament which is comprised of the National Assembly and Her Majesty who was represented by the Governor-General, has the power to make laws applying throughout the country (National Assembly of the Republic of Kenya, 2024).

5.1.2 Traditional Leaders

Traditional leaders often play an important role in governance especially at the local community level (Smit, 2018). As such, they are an important local institution. They control resources, particularly land, collect informal taxes, influence voting, and implement local development projects (Henn, 2018). In most of sub-Saharan Africa, traditional authorities are as much a part of modern political landscapes as any political party or local council. While their titles, official status and sources of authority vary across communities and countries, they continue to exercise public authority in many rural zones. Traditional leaders have not only been resurgent but have reasserted themselves through the advances of political liberalization, democratization and decentralization. They have carved new political spaces for themselves, notably in local governance (Logan, 2013).

Traditional leaders exist across sub-Saharan Africa at multiple geographic levels encompassing various positions from village headmen to kings (Honig, 2019). For example, in Kisumu, a secondary city in Kenya, traditional leaders play an officially recognized role in governance. Locations are headed by chiefs, sub locations are headed by assistant chiefs, and sub units are headed by one or two village elders. These all play a role in the governance of Kisumu (Smit, 2018). Overall, traditional leaders should be understood as a heterogeneous set of actors whose positions are shaped by internal institutions, embeddedness in local communities, and

historical relationships with the state (Honig, 2019). In many states, traditional leaders have the capacity to organize responses to rural problems over elected politicians and state institutions due to the permanency of their positions (Baldwin, 2015). While traditional leaders exist across most of sub-Saharan Africa, there are a small number of countries do not formally recognize them at all. For example, in mainland Tanzania, the chieftancy institution was formally abolished by law in 1963 by the government through the African Chiefs Ordinance (Repeal) Act, No. 13 of 1963 enacted by the Parliament of Tanganyika and assented to by Julius Nyerere (Tanganyika, 1963).

Traditional institutions link traditional leaders to their communities, who are sometimes referred to as subjects or followers. These institutions are sets of rules and norms that are shared among the members of the community tying them together. They are reinterpreted or replicated over time. They may be informal institutions unrecognized by the state or formally recognized within the state law. Traditional leaders play a key role in implementing the institutional rules and norms within their communities and have the ability to change them, but they exist independent of individual leadership, that is, if a traditional leader dies, the institution will remain. A key source of influence that traditional leaders have over their populations is in designating when and why subjects should be obedient to them and what they can expect in return. However, traditional institutions provide the rules and norms for succession, thus establishing the legitimacy of the traditional leader's authority. The amount of power and legitimacy traditional leaders derive from the state and community varies across and within countries. Some local populations have strong support for their traditional leaders and believe in claims to authority while others are skeptical and suspicious (Honig, 2019).

The independence era in Africa generally saw traditional leadership on the verge of new democratic politics. Nationalist leaders were of the view that chiefs were antidemocratic. As such the institution of traditional leadership clashed with nationalist movements calling for political equality and democracy. Additionally, the administrative functions that traditional leaders performed during colonial rule delegitimized them in the eyes of independence movement leaders. Many nationalist leaders called for their removal and a transfer of power to new bureaucracies overseen by elected leaders. In countries like Mozambique and Tanzania, laws abolished the positions of chiefs shortly after independence while Kings were disposed of in Burundi and Uganda. In the cases of Zambia and Ghana, chiefs were not eliminated but their judicial and administrative roles were reduced, and power was transferred to official courts or local councils (Baldwin, 2015).

However, sixty years post-independence, most efforts to eradicate or replace chiefs have been unsuccessful. Across the region, traditional leaders run court systems and allocate land (Baldwin, 2015). The contemporary power of chiefs has increased due to high quality land. While their power has been historically associated with hierarchy and political centralization, the increasing scarcity of land in the postcolonial era has generated pressure for land rights which have increased chief's powers (Baldwin & Ricart-Huguet, 2023). Land control is a significant source of power for traditional leaders and it provides them with influence over their local populations who rely on them for secure land rights. Overall, traditional leaders are often the primary authority in the daily lives of rural citizens (Honig, 2019).

5.2 The Importance of Public Perceptions in Governance and Leadership

Understanding citizens' perception of government and leadership performance is important for governance (Aitalieva & Morelock, 2019). The selection of traditional and modern leaders

constitutes a major difference between the two. Modern leaders are elected democratically by their people in a relatively competitive manner while traditional leaders are born into nobility or inherit power. This has an impact on the performance evaluation of both types of leaders. Modern leaders are evaluated by citizens and the international community based on performance while traditional leaders are not evaluated in the same way (Alidu, 2022).

Positive perceptions of public sector performance can promote active citizenship which can be viewed as an indicator of a strong and thriving democracy. Positive perceptions of government are also associated with higher levels of citizen satisfaction with the government (Aitalieva & Morelock, 2019). Public perceptions are critical because they can help to shape interactions between the government and society. These perceptions can influence government actions and the willingness of vulnerable groups to engage in actions such as evacuation when threatened with a natural hazard such as a cyclone or hurricane. Public perceptions can also help to underpin the strength of existing policy subsystems and in some instances, foster a context in which policy change can occur (Sledge & Thomas, 2021).

In the 1990s, many governments in Africa undertook governance reforms. With the support of international donor organizations and pressure from disenfranchised groups within the countries, governments introduced measures to increase transparency and accountability including making policy formation more readily available, opening up decision making processes, and holding public officials to task for efficient use of resources (Goldsmith, 2003). However, at the local government level, survey data from the Afrobarometer 2008/2009 surveys on insights on the performance of local governments showed that citizens found elected local governments as largely unresponsive with only a third of respondents feeling that local government leaders listen. Furthermore, citizens regarded local government councils as weak institutions with limited

functions attributing responsibility for most tasks to the central government. As such, local governments were seen to perform below par. People were especially unhappy with council performance at integrating citizens into the agenda setting and decision-making procedures of local self-government (Bratton, 2012). When it comes to traditional leadership, majority citizens express support for traditional leaders as they perceive that they can represent the needs of the community to the state. As such, many citizens would like to see traditional leaders have a greater role in governance (Honig, 2019).

Since governments do not last forever and are elected for a specific period, they require the support of the people to be strong. Public support is therefore important for the effectiveness and legitimacy of the government. Governments need to strive to make sure the citizens feel they are ruling in the public interest not the interest of the government (Aiyede, 2022).

While trust in political institutions varies greatly throughout African countries, it is essential for democratic governance. Trust levels are influenced by a number of factors ranging from historical transitions to political diversity to economic performance. Generally, the research indicates that trust in government is declining with this trend being attributed to low approval ratings of democracy, lapses in control of corruption, and low levels of transparency and accountability coupled with low levels of freedom of expression (Kwame, 2022). In South Africa for example, using public opinion data from the South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) for the period 2003-2012, Gordon, Roberts, & Struwig (2015) found that low trust was significantly driven by citizens' satisfaction with the services they received, political efficacy and political knowledge. Using data from the Afrobarometer surveys from 1999 to 2014 to examine patterns and trends in youth's trust in government and civic and political engagement in sub-Saharan Africa, Archibong & Raiyan (2020) found that generally, youth exhibited lower levels of

trust in most government institutions compared to older cohorts. However, there were notable exceptions where youth showed higher trusts including in courts and in national broadcasting. Furthermore, it was also found that young women were more likely to participate in community decision making than their male counterparts.

5.3 Data Collection: The Afrobarometer Survey

This study draws on the Round 8 Afrobarometer survey to analyze the public perceptions of MPs and traditional leaders. The Afrobarometer surveys measure the social, political, and economic atmosphere in more than 30 countries in Africa. The surveys have been undertaken at periodic intervals since 1999 having started with 12 countries in the first cycle, round 1(1999). The coverage has progressively increased over time and covered a total of 36 countries in Round 6 (2014 – 2015). This study uses Round 8 surveys which were done in 2019 and 2020 covering 34 countries (Afrobarometer, 2024; Afrobarometer, 2019). The Afrobarometer merged datasets combine data from all countries in a given round into a single dataset (Afrobarometer, 2024). This study uses the merged Round 8 (2022) dataset.

A national partner in each of the survey countries is responsible for collecting data and disseminating the findings at the country level. The national partners train interviewers (usually in a five-day workshop) to ensure that they are familiar with the questionnaire in national and local languages, the sampling protocol, and best field practices (Afrobarometer, 2024). The Afrobarometer relies on personal interviews to obtain information from individual respondents. These interviews are conducted in a language of the respondent's choice using electronic tablets and usually take about an hour. Responses are strictly confidential. The same questionnaire, which contains identical or functionally equivalent items, is applied to every respondent in each country.

Because questions are standardized, responses can be compared across countries and over time (Afrobarometer, 2019; Afrobarometer, 2024)

5.3.1 Sample size

The data used in the study covers 34 countries namely: Angola, Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Carbo Verde, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire (Ivory Coast), Eswatini (Lesotho), Ethiopia, Gabon, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Malawi, Mali, Mauritius, Morocco, Mozambique, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Sudan, Tanzania, Togo, Tunisia, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

The standard sample size for Afrobarometer surveys in each of the countries is 1200 with some countries having a larger sample size based on the availability of funds. The sample is a representation of a cross-section of citizens of voting age in each country. This means that non-citizens and those who have not attained voting age (typically 18 years) are excluded from the survey. Those living in areas determined to be either inaccessible or not relevant to the study, such as those experiencing armed conflict or natural disasters, as well as national parks and game reserves are also excluded from the study. Furthermore, those living in institutionalized settings, such as students in dormitories, persons in prisons, police/military barracks, hospitals/nursing homes, or quarantined areas are also excluded from the survey (Afrobarometer Network, 2019). The total sample size used in this study is 40,084 respondents from the 34 countries listed previously.

5.3.2 Sample design

The Afrobarometer uses a clustered, stratified, multi-stage, probability sample design aimed at giving every citizen an equal and known chance of being chosen for inclusion. This is to ensure that the survey results provide an unbiased estimate of the views of the national voting age

population. To increase the precision of the estimate, the Afrobarometer stratifies the sample of 1200 interviews by the key social characteristics of the population usually by sub-national area and residential locality. This reduces the likelihood that distinctive types of people such as those belonging to a particular ethnic or language group are left out of the sample. The sample is clustered into units for which there is reliable data such as household to achieve greater logistic efficiency. In the multi-stage sampling, geographically defined sampling units of decreasing size at each stage are selected. This process has four stages in urban areas and may have five stages in rural areas. Random sampling is conducted with probability proportionate to population size to guarantee that larger geographical units have a proportionally greater probability of being selected in the sample (Afrobarometer Network, 2019).

5.3.3 Dependent Variable

Trust is essential for any political system (Bratton & Gyimah-Boadi, 2016). Trust in government signifies the confidence of citizens in the actions of government to do what is right and perceived as fair. It is an important foundation upon which the legitimacy of political systems is built. Trust is essential for social cohesion and well-being. Trust affects the governments' ability to govern and act without coercion and is also necessary for the effective functioning of public institutions. The level of trust in government can be affected by many contextual factors such as natural disasters and the extent of corruption (OECD, 2013).

In Africa, institutions earning the public's trust are also essential to the successful pursuit of development. Aside from the mechanical enforcement of administrative standards or the legal enforcement of constitutional rules, good governance also requires that citizens share a widespread culture of social confidence that public officials, and the institutions they represent, will instinctively do what is best for the citizens (Bratton & Gyimah-Boadi, 2016). As trust represents

a positive perception of government, it is primarily measured by perception surveys (OECD, 2013). Institutional trust is measured as the perceived trustworthiness of various political institutions as expressed by citizens in Afrobarometer surveys of public opinion. The Afrobarometer asks, “How much do you trust each of the following?” and then provides a list of 12 common political institutions found in African countries. Response categories range from “not at all” through “just a little” and “somewhat” to “a lot” (Bratton & Gyimah-Boadi, 2016). For this study, I use Traditional Leaders and Parliament (MPs) as institutions to measure trust.

Independent Variables & Control Variables

5.3.4 Independent Variables

There are several factors that can lead to citizens trust in their political institutions. To understand which factors can help to explain trust in MPs and Traditional Leaders, this study looks at the following possible sets of relationships to determine how much trust citizens have in MPs and traditional leaders:

I. Contact with Traditional Leaders and MPs

Contact with political actors is measured using Afrobarometer’s questions on whether respondents have reached out to leaders about an important problem or to express their views. The survey asks: “During the past year, how often have you contacted any of the following persons about some important problem or to give them your views?” Respondents are then asked separately about *a political party official* (Q12C) and *a traditional leader* (Q12D). Response categories range from “never,” “only once,” “a few times,” to “often,” coded from 0 to 3, with additional codes for refusal, don’t know, and missing responses. Bratton (2012) suggests that contact with leaders is an important indicator of political engagement and can shape perceptions of responsiveness, representation, and ultimately trust in institutions

II. MPs and Traditional Leaders Listen

Perceived responsiveness is measured through Afrobarometer questions that assess how much leaders “try their best to listen” to ordinary citizens. The survey asks: “How much of the time do you think the following try their best to listen to what people like you have to say?” Respondents rate Members of the National Assembly (Q38A) and traditional leaders (Q38C) on a four-point scale ranging from 0 (“none of the time”) to 3 (“all of the time”), with additional categories for refusal, don’t know, and missing responses. Perceived listening is widely recognized as a key dimension of political responsiveness and an important driver of institutional legitimacy, because citizens are more likely to trust leaders who they believe take their concerns seriously (Bratton & Gyimah-Boadi, 2016).

5.3.5 Control Variables

To make sure that the study accounts for variability, the study considers other variables that might affect institutional trustworthiness. While the study is not particularly focused on these, they are included in the model to control for as much variation in trustworthiness:

I. Age

Age is measured by asking respondents how old they are, recorded as a continuous variable representing the respondent’s age in years.

II. Gender

Gender is measured by recording the respondent’s self-reported gender as either male or female.

III. Education

Education is measured by asking respondents to report their highest level of completed schooling, ranging from no formal education through primary, secondary, post-secondary, university, and postgraduate levels.

5.4 Results

5.4.1 Perceived Trust of Members of Parliament and Traditional leaders

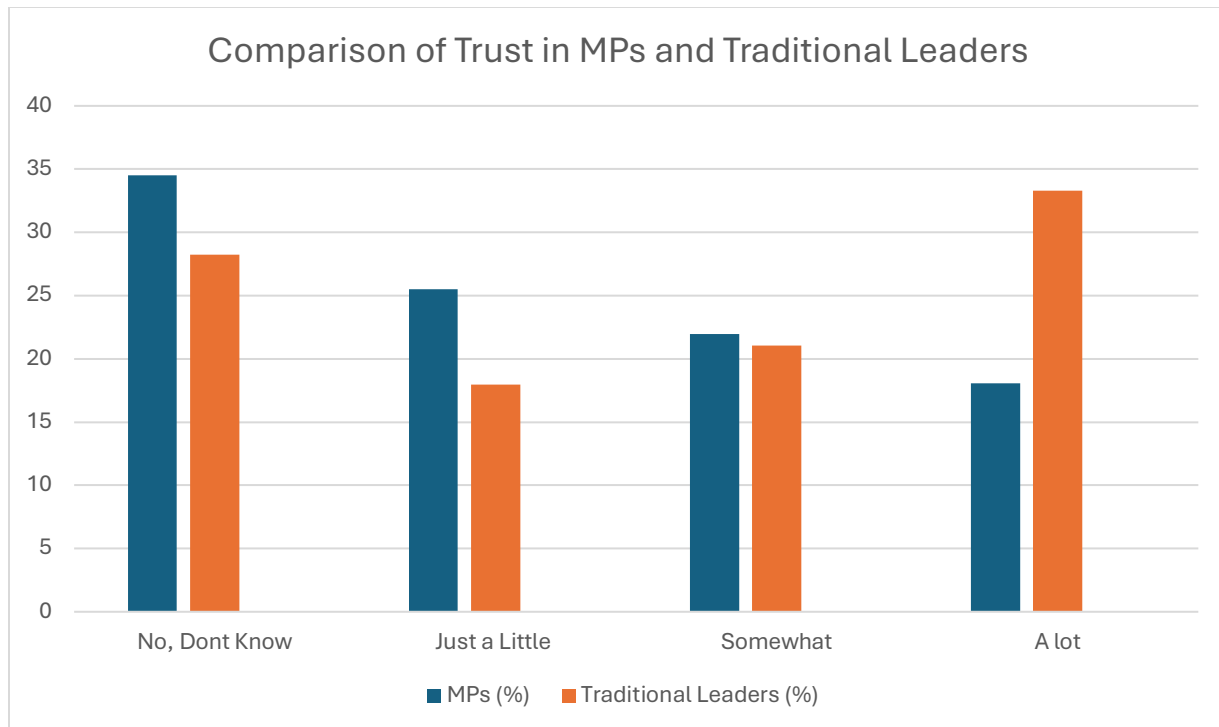


Figure 3: Comparison of Trust in MPs and Traditional Leaders

Respondents were asked: “How much do you trust each of the following or haven’t heard enough to say?” for both Parliament and Traditional Leaders. The results indicate that trust in Parliament is relatively low: only 18.04% of respondents report trusting Parliament “a lot,” 21.96% say they “somewhat” trust Parliament, and 25.49% indicate they trust Parliament “just a little.” In contrast, trust in Traditional Leaders is noticeably higher. A larger share of respondents, 33.27%, report trusting Traditional Leaders “a lot,” 21.04% say they “somewhat” trust them, and 17.98% indicate they trust them “just a little.” Taken together, these results show a clear difference in public

trust in the two institutions. Traditional Leaders command substantially higher levels of trust than Members of Parliament.

5.4.2 Perceived Contact with MPS and Traditional Leaders

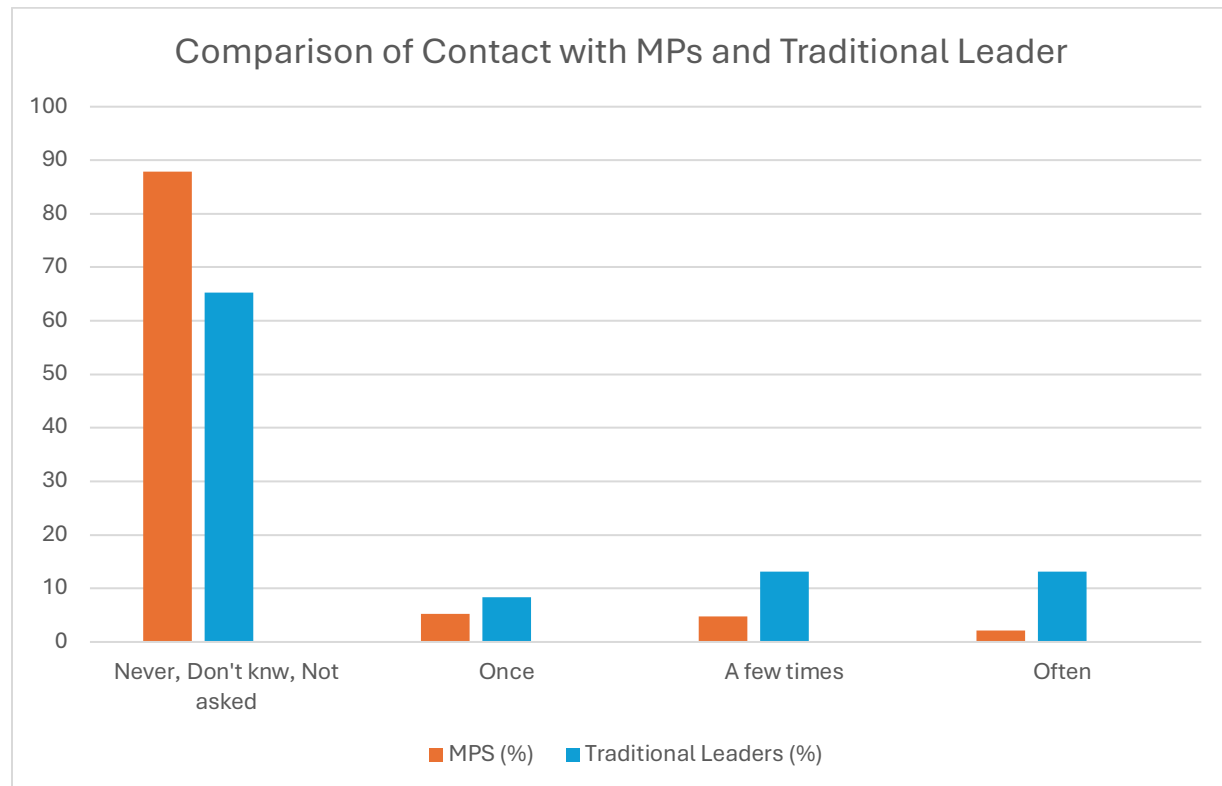


Figure 4: Comparison of Contact with MPs and Traditional Leaders

Respondents were asked: *“During the past year, how often have you contacted any of the following persons about some important problem or to give them your views?”* for both Members of Parliament and Traditional Leaders. Overall, contact with MPs is very limited. Only 2.18% of respondents report contacting their MP “often,” 4.75% contacted an MP “a few times,” and 5.2% contacted an MP “once” in the past year. In contrast, contact with Traditional Leaders is noticeably higher. A larger proportion of respondents, 13.13%, report contacting a Traditional Leader “often,” 13.19% have done so “a few times,” and 8.37% contacted a Traditional Leader “once.” Taken

together, these results show that citizens are significantly more likely to reach out to Traditional Leaders than to MPs when they have an important problem or wish to express their views.

5.4.3 Perceived Responsiveness of MPs and Traditional Leaders

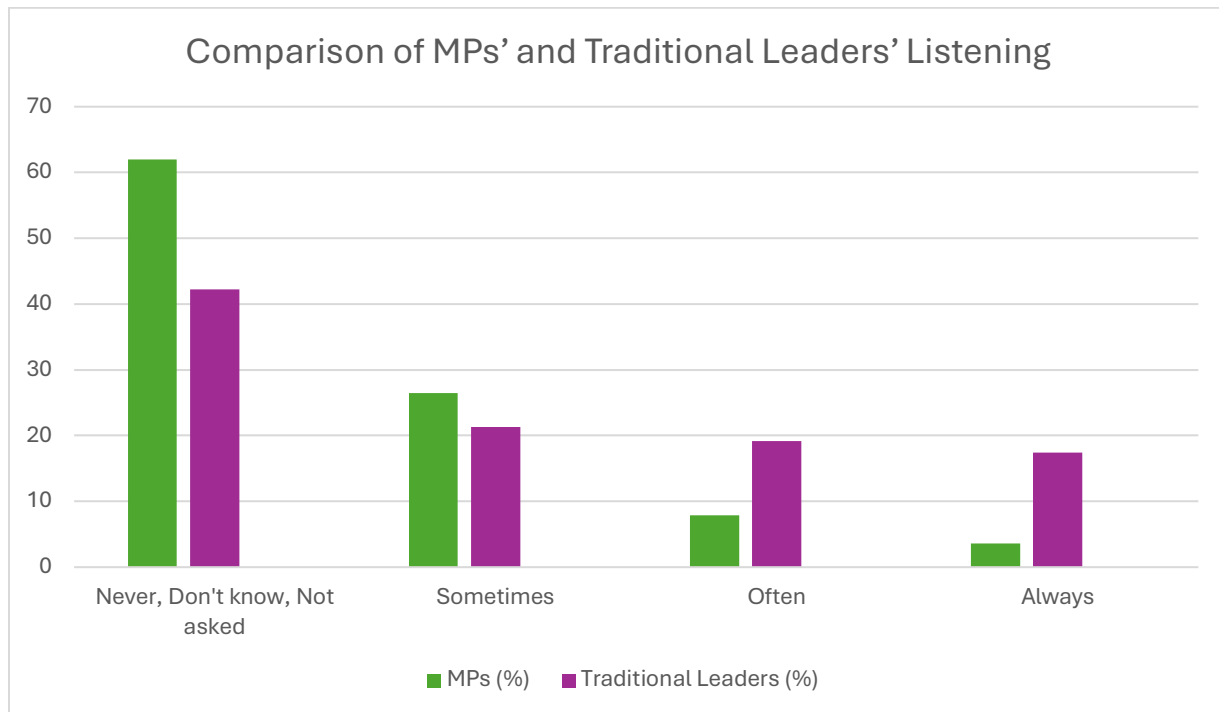


Figure 5: Comparison of MPS and Traditional Leaders' Listening

Respondents were asked: *“How much of the time do you think the following try their best to listen to what people like you have to say?”* for both Members of Parliament and Traditional Leaders. The results indicate that very few respondents feel that MPs consistently listen to them, with only 3.65% stating that MPs “always” listen and 7.87% reporting that MPs “often” listen. A larger share, 26.50%, believe that MPs “sometimes” listen, while the majority, 61.98%, feel that MPs never listen, do not know, or were not asked. In contrast, perceptions of Traditional Leaders’ responsiveness are considerably more favorable. Among respondents, 17.40% indicate that Traditional Leaders “always” listen and 19.13% report that they “often” listen, with an additional 21.27% stating that they “sometimes” listen. Although 42.20% feel that Traditional Leaders never

listen or do not know, this group is still substantially smaller than the share holding similar views about MPs. Overall, respondents view Traditional Leaders as more attentive and responsive than

5.4.4 Members of Parliament.

Perceived Influence of Traditional Leaders in Local Governance

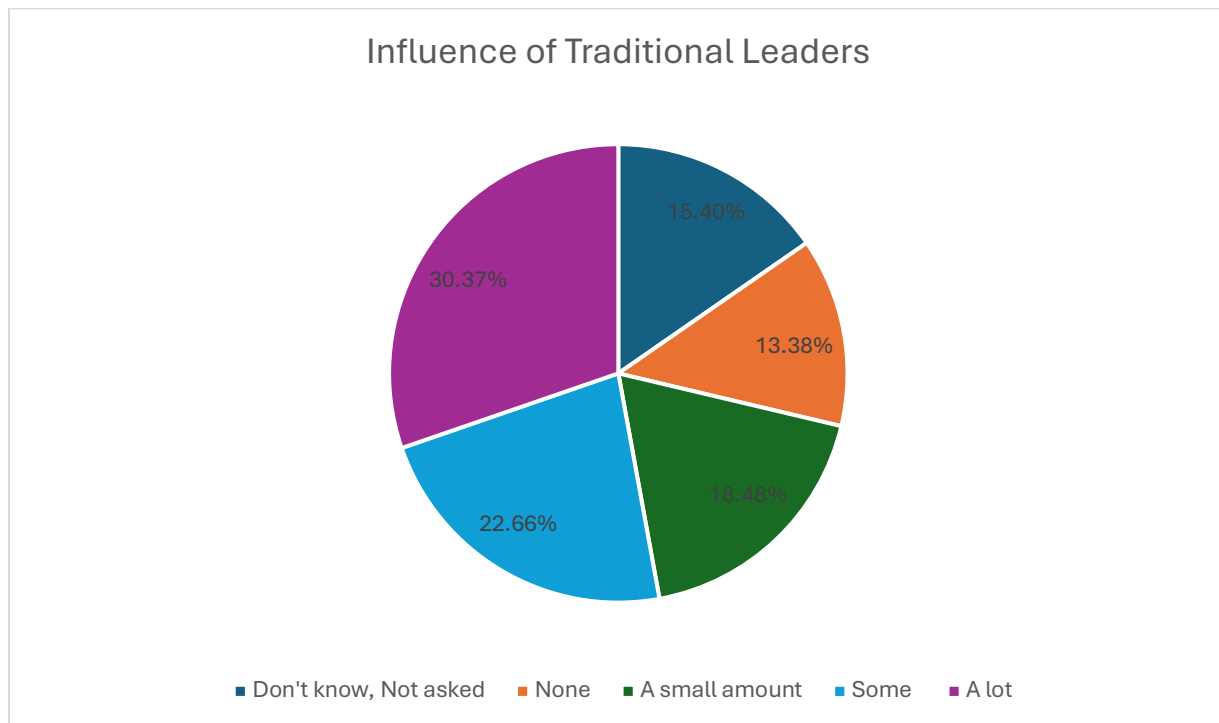


Figure 6: Influence of Traditional Leaders

Respondents were asked: “*How much influence do traditional leaders currently have in governing your local community?*” The results show that 30.37% of respondents believe that Traditional Leaders have “a lot” of influence, while 22.66% feel they have “some” influence. An additional 18.48% report that Traditional Leaders have only a small amount of influence. Meanwhile, 13.38% of respondents say that Traditional Leaders have no influence, and 15.40% either do not know or were not asked. Overall, most respondents perceive Traditional Leaders as having at least some degree of influence in local governance.

5.4.5 Perceptions of Who Traditional Leaders Serve

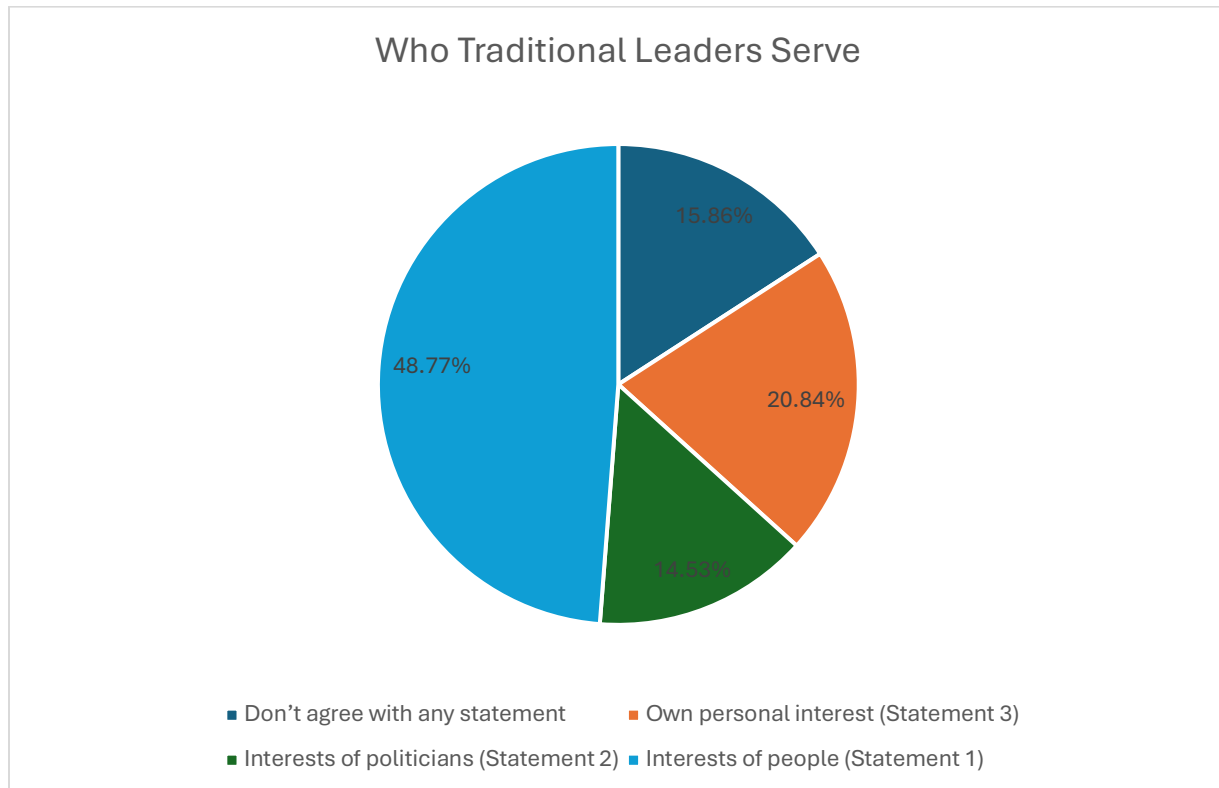


Figure 7: Who Traditional Leaders Serve

When asked which statement best reflects who Traditional Leaders serve, nearly half of the respondents (48.77%) indicated that Traditional Leaders look out for what is best for the people in their communities. In contrast, 14.53% felt that Traditional Leaders mostly serve the interests of politicians and government officials, while 20.84% believed that Traditional Leaders look out for their own personal interests. A further 15.85% of respondents did not agree with any of the statements presented. This shows that nearly half of all respondents view Traditional Leaders as primarily serving the interests of the people in their communities, a share that is substantially higher than those who believe they serve political or personal interests.

5.4.6 Factors Influencing Public Perceptions

To further understand what shapes public trust in Members of Parliament and Traditional Leaders, two separate regression models, one predicting trust in MPs and the other predicting trust in Traditional Leaders were estimated. The models assess whether the key independent variables meaningfully influence trust, and they show which factors are most important in predicting citizens' perceptions of political and customary institutions. Overall, the regression results suggest that perceptions of responsiveness, particularly whether MPs and Traditional Leaders are seen as listening, are the strongest predictors of trust in both models. While the two institutions differ in the extent to which trust can be statistically explained, the findings underscore the importance of citizen engagement and perceived responsiveness in shaping institutional legitimacy.

5.4.7 Regression: Trust in MPs

Table 1: Trust in Members of Parliament

Dependent Variable: Trust in Members of Parliament (MPs)	
Independent Variables	Coefficient
Contact MPs	0.045*** (0.008)
MPs Listen	0.362*** (0.006)
Age	0.001* (0.000)
Education	-0.058*** (0.002)
Gender	-0.019 (0.010)

Number of Observations: 48,084
 F Statistic: 888.52
 R²: 0.085
 p < .10, * p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001.
 Standard Error in parenthesis
 Question: How much do you trust each of the following, or haven't
 you heard enough about them to say: The National Assembly?
 Responses: Not at all, just a little, Somewhat, A lot

The regression results show that the overall model is statistically significant ($p < .005$), meaning the independent variables reliably predict trust in MPs. However, the R-square value of 0.085 indicates that the model explains about 8% of the variation in trust. This suggests that although the predictors have meaningful effects, much of the variation in trust in MPs is influenced by factors outside the model.

All independent and control variables are significant at the .05 level. An increase in contact with MPs is associated with an average increase of 0.04 in trust. Feeling that MPs listen has the strongest positive association with trust: for every one-unit increase in perceived responsiveness, trust increases by 0.36 on average. Education is negatively related to trust, with each increase in education level decreasing trust in MPs by roughly 0.02. Trust is also slightly lower for men than for women by about 0.01.

5.4.8 Regression: Trust in Traditional Leaders

Table 2: Trust in Traditional Leaders

Dependent Variable: Trust in Traditional Leaders	
Independent Variables	Coefficient
Contact Traditional Leaders	0.125*** (0.005)
Traditional Leaders Listen	0.455*** (0.005)

Age	-0.002*** (0.000)
Education	-0.075*** (0.002)
Gender	-0.005 (0.010)

Number of Observations: 48,084

F Statistic: 3696.68

R²: 0.277

* p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001.

Standard Error in parenthesis

Question: How much do you trust each of the following, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: Traditional Leaders?

Responses: Not at all, just a little, Somewhat, A lot

The F-test is statistically significant ($p < .05$), indicating that the model predicts trust in traditional leaders better than chance. The R-square value of 0.277 shows that the model explains 27.7% of the variation in trust, meaning it is a substantially better fit than the model for MPs.

All independent and control variables are significant at the .05 level except for gender. Contact with Traditional Leaders has a positive association with trust, with each increase in contact raising trust by 0.12 on average. Perceived responsiveness, the feeling that traditional leaders listen, has the strongest effect, increasing trust by approximately 0.45 for every one-unit rise. Education is negatively associated with trust: each increase in education level reduces trust by about 0.07. Although trust in traditional leaders is slightly lower for men than for women (by 0.005), this difference is not statistically significant.

5. 5 The Influence of Leadership in Climate Change Awareness

Having examined how the independent variables shape trust in Members of Parliament and trust in traditional leaders, the analysis now turns to a related outcome, climate change awareness. Although this variable is not a direct measure of disaster experiences, it is the closest proxy within

the survey for understanding how leadership engagement may influence public awareness of environmental risks. Because much of the communication around climate risks, environmental issues, and community preparedness occurs through interpersonal channels, it is reasonable to expect that citizens who interact with political or traditional authorities may have greater access to information about climate-related issues. This expectation also aligns with the earlier descriptive results, which showed that traditional leaders, in particular, maintain closer and more frequent contact with community members. For these reasons, the same leadership-contact variables are included in this model to assess whether engagement with MPs or traditional leaders is associated with higher levels of climate change awareness.

Climate change awareness is measured using the survey question: “Have you heard about climate change, or haven’t you had the chance to hear about this yet?” Responses were coded as 1 for “Yes” and 0 for “No,” with “Refused” and “Don’t know” coded as non-substantive responses. This binary measure captures whether respondents possess basic awareness of climate change as an environmental phenomenon.

5.5.1 Regression: Climate change awareness

Table 3: Climate Change Awareness

Dependent Variable: Heard About Climate Change	
	Coefficient
Contact Members of Parliament	0.005 (0.004)
Contact Traditional Leaders	0.019*** (0.002)
Age	0.000*** (0.000)

Education	0.056*** (0.001)
Female	-0.091*** (0.004)

Number of Observations: 48,084

F Statistic: 866.19

R²: 0.083

* p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001.

Standard Error in parenthesis

Question: Have you heard about climate change, or haven't you had the chance to hear about this yet?

Responses: No, Yes

The F-test for the model is statistically significant at the .05 level, indicating that the independent variables collectively predict climate change awareness. However, with an R-squared value of .08, the model explains only about 8% of the variation in awareness, suggesting that while the predictors are significant, many other factors not captured in the survey also shape individuals' exposure to climate change information. All variables in the model are significant at the .05 level except for gender. For an increase in contact with MPs, there is an average increase of .005 in climate change awareness, whereas an increase in contact with traditional leaders is associated with a larger increase of .19. Education also has a strong positive association, where each increase in educational attainment corresponds to an average rise of .05 in climate change awareness.

5.6 Discussion and Implications for Disaster Risk Reduction

To assess the public perceptions of MPs and traditional leaders among citizens, trust was used to measure the quality and capacity of these two types of leadership. It was predicted that those who contact leadership will have more trust in these institutions and those who feel that their leaders listen will also have more trust in these institutions. To account for variability in the results, demographic factors were also considered including education, age, and gender.

The first part of the analysis was a general description of the different levels of citizen trust in both MPs and traditional leaders. Second, the analysis tests some factors of trust in these leaderships, namely contact with leadership and responsiveness as well as demographic factors including age, gender and education. Thirdly the analysis also considers how these factors are linked to climate change awareness among citizens.

The findings show that contact with leadership and how leadership responsiveness has an impact on how much trust citizens will have in the type of leadership. The data shows citizens are more likely to contact traditional leaders to address their concerns and needs than they are to contact MPs. They also feel that traditional leaders are more responsive to what they have to say than they do MPs. Overall, the data confirms that the Africans surveyed are more trusting of traditional leaders than they are of MPs.

Trust in institutions matters because it is an important component of democratic legitimacy. When citizens trust their institutions, they are more likely to contribute to a strong and robust society. This means they are more willing to listen to leadership and support policies aimed at improving the country and will be predisposed to want to help implement policies (GCIS). As such, trustworthy institutions and governance are important for disaster risk reduction and management. In Africa particularly, there is still emphasis on top-down approaches to DRR with communities remaining passive recipients of DRR management activities while frameworks put much of the responsibility on governments (UN/ISDR Africa, 2004). Though evidence shows that improved DRR depends on the participation of a wide range of actors, communities do not adequately participate in the design and implementation of disaster reduction programs (African Union, 2004). Traditional coping strategies and the preservation of TK, and experience of disasters

is rarely incorporated into DRR plans. This lack of acknowledging TK, skills, and competencies in DRR impacts the overall quality of DRR governance (van Niekerk & Coetze, 2015).

As the data shows, citizens are more trustworthy of traditional leaders. Traditional leaders play an important role not only in governing of their local community but also in doing what is best for their community. This matters for DRR as traditional leaders are the closest to the people and the key custodians of the TK of the people. Their TK has long been used to observe and forecast weather and climate using traditional signs and disaster prevention management at the local level. Mechanisms and strategies in times of disasters are employed by traditional leaders and their institutions and societies (Olawale & Saheed, 2023).

While the primary responsibility for DRR and management rests with the government (Kong & Sun, 2021), decentralization is believed to contribute to good disaster governance by increasing local capacity and by bringing in local perspectives (Hermansson, 2018). As citizens trust traditional leaders more, they can play a more relevant and significant role in DRR governance by building more resilient societies at the grassroots level. Their position in the local community and the influence that they have can be leveraged on to strengthen traditional coping capacities as well as preserve the local knowledge and experiences that underlie these survival mechanisms in communities (African Union, 2004). Furthermore, traditional leaders can play a supportive role in climate change adaptation. Climate change is affecting many people in developing countries including those in Africa, who may feel unprepared for its consequences. Many small-scale farmers in rural areas who depend on favorable weather conditions are challenged with dwindling yields with each passing rainy season threatening their survival. Traditional leaders therefore have a role to play in the fight against climate change because they can act as an intermediary between people and the state (Chulu, 2022). Traditional leaders have

governed rural communities for a long time so they can play a supportive role in climate change adaptation. In addition to serving as governance authorities, they know the traditional strategies that can be used to combat the negative effects of climate change. Because they have the power to manage grassroots communities, they can be utilized in traditional climate change adaptation strategies (Musarandega, Chingombe, & Pillay, 2018).

As the data suggests that traditional leaders have more contact with the people and are more responsive to their needs, they can play a broader role in the development agenda particularly in relation to climate justice by promoting local voices. Moreover, they can even promote these voices at the global level. For example, Her Royal Highness Chieftainess Muwezwa of the Ila People of Southern Province in Zambia attended the United Nations (UN) Conference of Climate Change (COP26) in 2021 where she spoke about strengthening local voices in policymaking and ensuring local solutions are considered by climate action at all levels. Traditional leaders and their knowledge can be harnessed to interpret the threats posed by climate change to communities (Mugochi, 2022) and they can play a key role in adopting environmentally friendly practices at the village level (Chulu, 2022).

CHAPTER 6: EXPLORING THE ROLE OF TRADITIONAL LEADERS IN DISASTER MANAGEMENT IN AFRICA – A CASE STUDY ON ZAMBIA

Disaster management is a critical concern globally, especially in regions where vulnerable communities face recurrent natural hazards. In Africa, traditional leaders play a fundamental role in local governance, wielding influence over their communities through cultural, social, and political structures that predate formal state systems. Despite their importance, the contributions of traditional leaders to disaster management remain largely underexplored, overlooked and underutilized within formal policy frameworks. In Zambia, where floods and droughts frequently challenge rural communities, traditional leaders are often at the forefront of mobilizing resources, coordinating responses, and utilizing traditional knowledge to mitigate disaster impacts. This chapter aims to explore the role of traditional leaders in disaster management through the lens of Zambia as a case study, with insights drawn from elite interviews conducted with four chiefs. The chapter will seek to answer the additional questions, “*What roles do traditional leaders play in disaster management in Zambia?*” and “*How can their perspectives inform policy and practice?*” By examining their perspectives, this chapter seeks to bridge the gap between traditional and formal governance systems and highlight opportunities for integrating traditional leadership into comprehensive disaster management strategies

6.1 Overview of Disaster Management in Zambia

6.1.1 Common Disasters in Zambia

Zambia experiences several natural hazards which impact the already fragile environment and vulnerable populations (OVP Zambia, 2015). Zambia has a historical pattern of seasonal and flash floods, as well as extreme temperatures and droughts, which have intensified in severity and frequency in recent decades (The World Bank Group, 2021).

For many years, Zambia has been experiencing extreme weather conditions with increased frequency and intensity exacerbated by climate change (IFRC, 2023). The Disaster Management Operations Manual defines floods as the high flow of water which overtops either the natural or artificial banks of a river (OVP Zambia, 2015). Natural disasters associated with floods in Zambia have been caused by river flooding from heavy or severe rainfall sometimes associated with hailstorms that can destroy crops and buildings. While flooding affects almost all provinces in the country, it is worse in areas where surface vegetation has been removed and in low playing valleys in Zambezi, Kafue, Luapula, Chambishi and Luangwa River basins (DMMU, 2005). Most recently, the floods of 2022 and 2023, were the most severe in over 50 years as they affected more families and districts with a total 154,608 people affected. The flooding occurred across 9 provinces in 37 districts, with the Southern Province experiencing the most severe impact. The floods submerged a significant portion of the crops for an estimated 80% of the communities in the Southern province that rely on subsistence farming as their primary source of livelihoods. These floods also occurred at a time when the country, including the flood affected districts, were experiencing food insecurity (IFRC, 2023).

Droughts have also been a common disaster experienced in Zambia with certain areas of the country, notably Western, Southern, Central, Eastern and Lusaka provinces particularly susceptible to periodic droughts. The Disaster Management Operations Manual defines drought as a period of abnormally dry weather that persists long enough to produce a serious hydraulic imbalance such as crop damage or water supply shortage with the severity of the drought dependent upon the degree of moisture deficiency, the duration and the size of the affected area (OVP Zambia, 2015). Droughts often lead to the disruption of productive activities that are dependent on water and agriculture (DMMU, 2005). Between 2022 and 2023, Zambia underwent

one of the driest agricultural seasons in over 40 years which has not only caused major crop and livestock losses but also severely affected the livelihoods of communities across the country. It is estimated that about 58,000 people between October 2023 and March 2024 were in an emergency condition and up to 2 million people in crisis and requiring urgent humanitarian assistance. The drought conditions destroyed up to one million hectares of maize which accounted for nearly half of the country's maize under cultivation leaving millions of people from farming household at risk of acute food shortages and malnutrition until the next planting season. This ongoing drought disrupted food access, exacerbated food insecurity and contributed to rising malnutrition levels (IFRC, 2024).

6.1.2 The Disaster Management Act

The Disaster Management Act was established in 2010 and enacted by the Parliament of Zambia. The Act has eight (8) chapters and administrative provisions. It establishes a system for anticipating, preparing for, preventing, coordinating, mitigating, and managing disaster situations, including organizing relief and recovery efforts following a disaster. It essentially provides a legal framework for the country to effectively respond to natural disasters and emergencies across all stages, from prevention to recovery. The Act also establishes the National Disaster Management and Mitigation Unit and provide for its powers and functions. It provides for the declaration of disasters and establishes the National Disaster Relief Trust Fund. Furthermore, the Act provides for the responsibilities and involvement of the members of the public in disaster management and provides for matters connected with, or incidental to, the foregoing (Disaster Management Act, 2010).

The Act seeks to resolve a number of key issues: it sets conditions under which a disaster or an emergency can be declared including who declares and at what level; it puts legal authority

to the National Disaster Management regime to mobilize the necessary resources in order to effectively and efficiently deal with emergency situations; it sets conditions under which an evacuation can be ordered and managed; it creates specific functions and powers at different levels of the disaster management command and control structure; and it sets legal provisions necessary for putting in place disaster preparedness plans by various institutions depending on the nature of their operations. The Act further defines functions of stakeholders at different levels and holds them accountable for their functions and seeks to establish for the maintenance and operations of the disaster Management System for anticipation, coordination, command and control of disaster situations as well as organization and management of relief and development efforts in the country which currently lack legal support (SADC - DRM IMS, 2020).

There are also key benefits highlighted in the Act including: the impact of disasters on communities and individuals shall be minimized as citizens shall be compelled to take actions that shall avoid or minimize the impact of a disaster on them; organizations and individuals who are required to carry out disaster management responsibilities shall feel protected; citizens will be better protected against disasters as the law will oblige Government to protect its citizens from the effects of disaster; disaster relief resources shall be better accounted for as the law will provide punitive measures aimed at protecting disaster relief resources from misapplications; donated disaster relief materials shall be more responsive to a given disaster situation as the law will provide conditionality for bringing in and receiving external relief assistance; disaster situations will be orderly/smoothly handled as the law will provide conditions under which a disaster or an emergency can be declared including who declares, and at what level and how to deal with evacuations issues; and the country, communities and individuals will be safer from disasters as

the law will provide for the requirement of institutional disaster preparedness plans (SADC - DRM IMS, 2020).

6.1.3 The Disaster Management and Mitigation Unit (DMMU)

Disaster management administration in Zambia is embedded on shared responsibilities among various stakeholders coordinated by the Government through the Disaster Management and Mitigation Unit (DMMU) in the Office of the Vice President (OVP Zambia, 2025). It was created in 1994, as a permanently established statutory government agency, forming part of the Office of the Vice President, charged with the responsibility of ensuring the achievement of the nation's Disaster Management Objectives. The Unit draws its powers from the Disaster Management ACT No. 13 of 2010. The overall implementation and coordination of all disaster management activities and programs in the country is done through the DMMU. The Unit exercises its mandate through the National Disaster Management Council of Ministers, Disaster Management Technical Committee of Permanent Secretaries and appropriate broad-based committees at Provincial, District and Satellite levels. The Unit is headed by the National Coordinator, who is at the level of a Permanent Secretary (SADC - DRM IMS, 2021). The National Coordinator is the Chief Executive Officer of the DMMU and executes the decisions of the National Disaster Management Council (NDMC) and National Disaster Management Technical Committee (NDMTC) (OVP Zambia, 2005). The DMMU is made up of two (2) service departments: Disaster Risk Management and Disaster and Humanitarian Operations Management. It is headed by the National Coordinator, and each directorate is led by a Director with numerous sections under them. It has representation in ten (10) provincial headquarters which are headed by Provincial Coordinators. The DMMU also has representation at the district level through District Disaster Management Officers (OVP Zambia, 2025). The DMMU also works with and

collaborates with the SADC DRR Unit and all relevant regional bodies in handling different aspects of disaster preparedness, prevention and mitigation (OVP Zambia, 2005).

The DMMU has a mission to develop, coordinate, and monitor disaster management programs with the aim to minimize loss of lives, damage to property and the environment. The DMMU seeks to have a community based, developmental and multisectoral approach that combines disaster preparedness, prevention, and mitigation, and integrates disaster management into national development. To do this, the DMMU has eight (8) main objectives including: putting in place appropriate preparedness measures in order to manage disasters effectively and efficiently; activating a response mechanism for effective and timely search and rescue operations in order to save life and reduce damage to property; putting in place measures to restore livelihoods and other life support systems in affected communities; mitigating the disruptive and destructive effects of hazards and all disasters in order to reduce their impact on vulnerable communities, assets and the environment; putting in place preventive measures in order to reduce the negative effects of hazards and strengthen the national capacity for disaster management in order to avoid the adverse impact of hazards; and effectively coordinating disaster management activities through a body of procedures and practices in order to avoid duplication of efforts and resources at all levels (OVP Zambia, 2025).

As the central planning, coordinating, and monitoring institution for the prevention, mitigation, preparedness, response and post disaster recovery, the DMMU carries out several functions and activities. It advises the Technical Committee on the progress and constraints in DRR and climate change; it warns the public of an eminent disaster and predicts its effects; it maintains a data collection and dissemination systems; it formulates disaster management strategies and actions plans and updates them; it establishes early warning systems; it conducts

public and media briefings on disaster related programs, progress and constraints; it promotes the recruitment, training and participation of volunteers in disaster management; it conducts assessments before, during and after disasters; it collaborates with research and learning institutions on DRR and climate change; and it manages the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) (OVP Zambia, 2005).

The EOC is a duly equipped facility of the DMMU which remains in a state of preparedness. It is the nerve center that always monitors emergencies and possible responses and feeds into the normal operations of the DMMU. It is also the primary location from the mobilization and coordination of responses and resources are carried out in the event of a disaster (OVP Zambia, 2005).

6.2 Role and Functions of Chiefs in Zambia

6.2.1 Leadership Hierarchy in Zambia

In Zambia, the term chief refers to the head or leaders of a tribe or clan or ethnic group of a particular area. It also means most high, most respected or revered amongst the community. The chief is the one in charge of an area and the custodian of customs and resources in that area. The chief is governor of the area. Ascendancy to chief status is hereditary in accordance with traced historical customs and traditions (Kawang'u, 2023).

Prior to colonialism in Zambia, there were four hierarchical institutions: the Bemba, Chewa, Lozi, and Ngoni polities. The Lozi kingdom was located on the western boundary of the subsequent Zambian state, the Chewa and Ngoni in the east, and the Bemba in the north. These polities had developed state-like structures with militaries, bureaucracies, systems of taxation, and multiple levels of hierarchy through a process of endogenous state building. The remainder of the territory in precolonial Zambia was governed by nonhierarchical institutions. British colonial

authorities sought to implement a coherent policy of indirect rule throughout the territory and attempted to create new hierarchies where such structures did not previously exist. As such, they designated chiefs as senior chiefs or tribal chiefs who had authority over lower-level chiefs within the ethnic and linguistic groups that the British considered to be a tribe. Following independence, the Zambian governments maintained the system established by the British (Honig , 2022). The government also enacted the Chiefs Act of 1965, Chapter 287 of the Laws of Zambia to make provision for the recognition, appointment and functions of Chiefs and Deputy Chiefs; for the exclusion of former Chiefs and Deputy Chiefs from specified areas in the interests of public order; for the appointment and functions of Kapasu's; and for matters incidental to or connected with the foregoing (Kawang'u, 2023).

Currently, there are 286 chiefs in Zambia categorized into Paramount Chief (4), Senior Chief (43) and Chief (239).

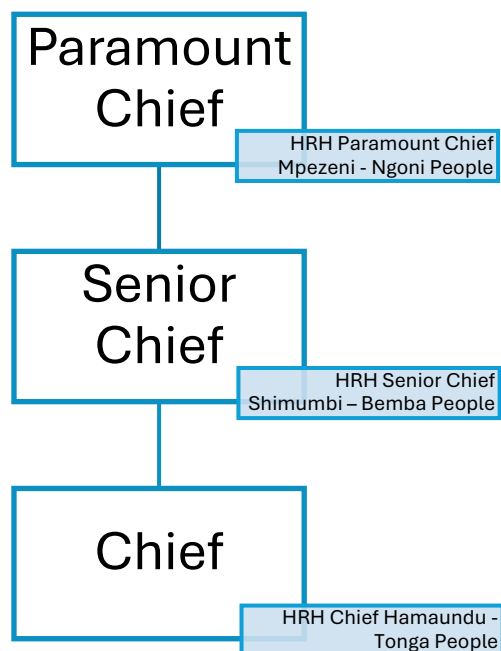


Figure 8: Hierarchy of Chiefs in Zambia

Paramount chiefs are the supreme traditional authority amongst the tribes where this level of seniority exists. The Paramount Chiefs include the Litunga of Barotseland/Lozi people, Kalonga Gawa Undi of the Chewa people, Mwene Lubemba Chitimukulu of the Bemba people and Chief Mpezeni of the Ngoni people. The Paramount Chief presides over traditional ceremonies and has the authority to give guidance on all other matters relating to customs and traditions. The Paramount Chief also guides the selection process, appoints and installs subordinate chiefs and can discipline or dethrone a chief in accordance with the customs and traditions of his ethnic group. He or she acts as the final arbitrator of all conflicts related to traditional and customary practice in all chiefdoms under him. All senior chiefs, chiefs, headmen or headwomen under a Paramount Chief are recognize him as the supreme leader and receive instructions from his office (Kawang'u, 2023).

Traditionally, all chiefs under a Paramount Chief or Senior Chief are children or members of his or her lineage and are subject to the rule and control of their supreme leader. Sometimes, chiefs can be former workers who are then rewarded a portion of land to govern but still under the supreme leadership. In some ethnic groups such as the Lozi or the Bemba, ascendance to paramountcy follows a trajectory where one starts out as a chief, then is promoted to senior chief then moves to the paramount throne. In ethnic groups where this is no paramount chief, Senior Chiefs perform the role of the supreme traditional role including chiefdom administration and appointing subordinate chiefs as well as village headmen and women who are then answerable to them.

Each village also has a leader called a village headman or headwoman who reports to the chief. These have local titles that differ depending on the ethnic group they belong to. In the Lozi chiefdom for example, they are referred to as “Induna,” in the Bemba chiefdom, they are called

“Bafilolo,” in the Lunda chiefdom, they are called “Mwinimukala” and in the Tonga chieftaincies, they are called “Sibuuku” (Kawang'u, 2023).

6.2.2 Influence of Traditional Leaders in Local Governance.

Historically, chiefs in Zambia have been spokespersons for their subjects and advocates of their wellbeing. They were also critical figures in the fight for independence, for example, their royal highnesses Chief Kanongesha, Chief Gawa and Chief Kaytetye are recorded to be amongst the chiefs that travelled to the United Kingdom with leaders of the United National Independence Party (UNIP) to negotiate for the country's independence in 1964 (Kawang'u, 2023).

In the area of development, chiefs are key stakeholders in the implementation of development programs. They are seen as key agents of change in influencing their subjects to do what the governments and its partners want implemented. For example, chiefs have been used to advocate and urge their subjects to stop charcoal burning. This agency-master relationship between the central-government and chiefs can be traced back to pre-independence. Colonial masters used chiefs as agents to collect taxes, control the use of natural resources and implement government agenda on behalf of central government. Post independence, chiefs remain key agents for the effective implementation of the central government agenda. This relationship explains the lack of full participation of chieftaincy in governance as there is a lack of structured and well-defined roles of the office of the chiefs and inadequate funding (Kawang'u, 2023). There have been some efforts to enhance the participation of chiefs in the governance system such as an increase in the Constituency Development Funds (CDF) with a call for increased local participation and new guidelines providing for two representatives of a chief on the CDF committee in 2022. However, the role and expectation of chiefs in Zambia remains to stand as role models in society, foster development, maintain unity and harmony, as well as fight for just causes in their communities.

Since chiefs are considered wise and infallible, their subjects follow what they do and say under the premise that their actions are well thought out and in the interest of all. This influence and trust that chiefs command is their biggest defining asset (Kawang'u, 2023).

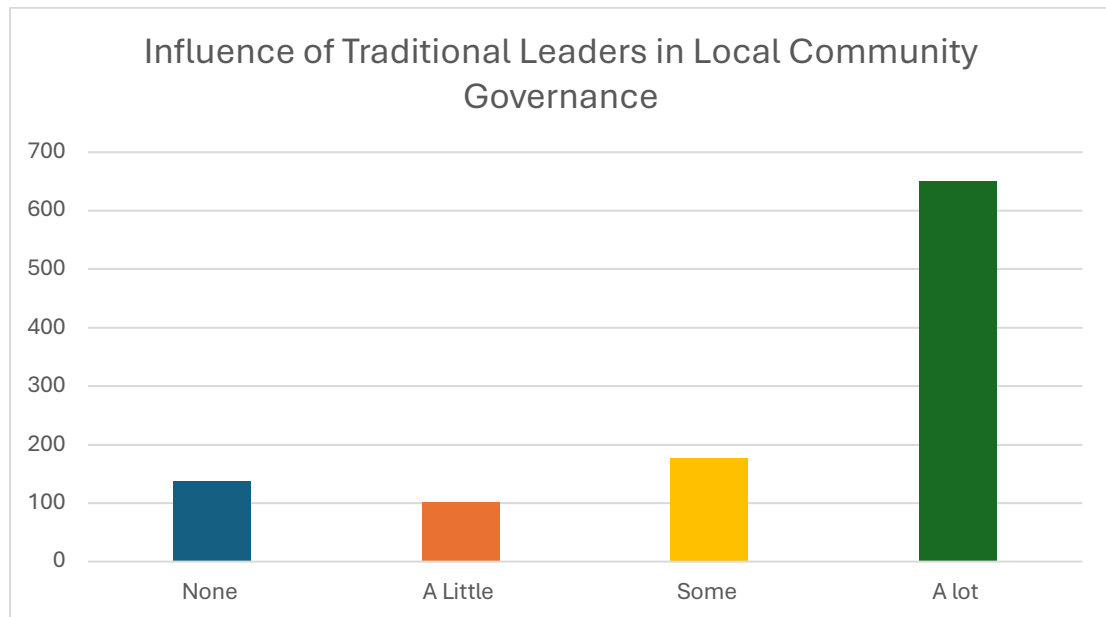


Figure 9: Influence of Traditional Leaders in Local Community Governance

Figure 9 shows how respondents perceive the influence of traditional leaders in local community governance. Respondents were asked “How much influence do traditional leaders currently have in each of the following areas: Governing your local community?” The results shows that 138 respondents believe traditional leaders have no influence, 101 respondents perceive only a small influence, 177 respondents perceive some or moderate influence and 651 respondents perceive a strong influence, a significantly higher number. The data therefore suggests that traditional leaders are widely viewed as influential in local community governance with majority of the respondents indicating that they felt these leaders had a lot of influence showing how central these figures are for decision-making, policy implementation and development priorities of the central government agenda.

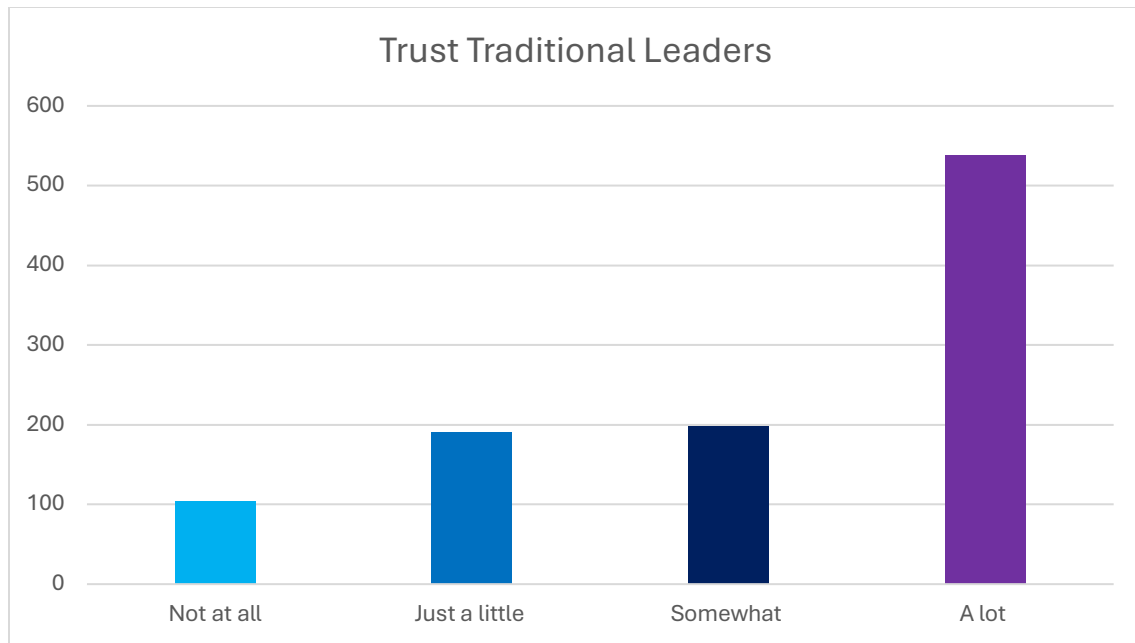


Figure 10: Trust in Traditional leaders

Figure 10 shows how much respondents trust traditional leaders. Respondents were asked “How much do you trust each of the following, or haven’t you heard enough about them to say: Traditional leaders?” The results show that 104 respondents do not trust traditional leaders at all, 191 have little or minimal trust in traditional leaders, 198 have some or a moderate level of trust in their traditional leaders and 538 trust their traditional leaders a lot. The data suggests that overall trust in traditional leaders is generally high with a majority of the respondents indicating that they have a lot of trust. This high level of trust shows the legitimacy of traditional leaders in community and may also contribute to their influence in local governance as shown in the previous chat.

6.2.3 Rural Agriculture

In terms of agriculture, Zambia is primarily an agrarian society with majority subsistence farmers with many rural populations depend on the natural resources available in their locality for survival. As such, chiefs hold land in trust for their subjects. They allocate land for community grazing, agricultural purposes, burial purposes and human habitation purposes. They pass decrees

and control trees than can and cannot be cut down for medical and nutrition purposes, they control seasonal activities of the year such as when livestock is to be released at free range as well as when to set bush fires to protect crop yield. The chiefs also provide guidance for preparing fields, growing and harvesting food. Furthermore, chiefs also perform the function of agricultural officers and meteorologists. These roles have been performed for centuries and the role that chiefs play in fostering agricultural activities of rural communities cannot be overstated (Kawang'u, 2023).

Unfortunately, there is a lack of appreciation of indigenous agricultural practices from the central government as most of their planning focuses on genetically modified (GM) seed varieties and chemical fertilizers without consultation. Furthermore, planning, monitoring and evaluation of programs such as the Fertilizer and Input Support Program (FISP) is done without input from the chiefs. In this instance, chiefs were only given ceremonial roles during the flagging off of the distribution of fertilizers and farming inputs to farmers overlooking their influential role in the community explaining why the program recorded less success (Kawang'u, 2023).

6.2.4 Traditional Practices for Managing the Environment, Local Early Warning Systems and Disaster Mitigation Techniques

In Zambia, traditional practices are essential for controlling environmental concerns, especially when they combine traditional knowledge with modern methods. These customs have strong cultural roots and have proven successful in tackling issues like resource conservation, flooding, and climate change adaption.

In the Barotse Flood plain in the Western Province of Zambia for example, there are a number of important local knowledge systems that are early warning systems based on observations of weather, water level and landscape, and animal behavior, which are widely disseminated through a specific communication network (Mapedza, et al., 2022). A robust system

of traditional leadership that operates alongside and enhances the national governance structure is one of the customs that the Lozi people still uphold and that has contributed to the preservation of the region's natural riches. The Litunga oversees the Barotse Royal Establishment (BRE), which is in charge of managing natural resources. A long-standing custom that the Lozi people have employed to adjust to a climate that is subject to erratic weather patterns is the yearly Kuomboka ceremony, in which the Litunga and his subjects relocate to higher land when the plains flood (Chileshe, et al., 2024). Flooding usually occurs from January until May, with a peak in April, is called *Lungu* in the local Lozi language and means the water stand still indicating the peaking of floods. The first signal that inundation is coming is spider ballooning locally known as *Mendayi*, which produces silk threads in the air. The abundance of the silk threads indicates a bigger magnitude of expected flooding. Communities also plan their farming operations in accordance with the flood warning signal. For example, it would be necessary to harvest ripe crops to prevent flooding and harvest destruction (Mapedza, et al., 2022). Additionally, communities in the Barotse Floodplain are working to mitigate the effects of climate change. To guarantee food security, they are expanding their farming operations by engaging in winter farming and growing crops like cassava that are resistant to pests, diseases, and drought (Chileshe, et al., 2024).

The Tonga people of Southern Zambia have also developed a range of traditional practices for soil and water conservation. These include selective harvesting, totemism, taboos, organic farming, crop rotation, and intercropping. Additionally, they place a high value on the sacredness of water sources, which are protected through traditional authority and cultural practices. These practices have been shown to be effective in maintaining soil fertility, preventing erosion, and ensuring the sustainability of water resources. For example, in many fields, there are trees like Musangu and Muunga. These trees are important because they show that the soil is good for

growing crops. When farmers see these trees, they know that the soil is fertile, which means it has the nutrients needed for plants to grow well. The elderly people in the community take care of these trees by either keep the existing trees healthy or planting new ones. It is also customary for the Tonga people to not plant crops too close to water sources, like rivers or areas where water collects. This is because they believe that eroded soil can increase siltation which can harm the water sources, making them less useful. Such practices of protecting wetlands and riverbanks help keep water sources clean and healthy as well as reduce flooding and soil erosion (Kanene, 2016).

Amongst the Ngoni people in the Mpezeni chiefdom, various beliefs and practices, such as taboos and totems are employed to conserve natural resources. Such beliefs help regulate how the community interacts with the environment and promotes sustainable practices. Sacred places, including graveyards, forests, and streams, also play a significant role in this conservation effort. These areas are considered sacred and play a crucial role in the cultural and religious identity of the Ngoni people, serving as vital ecosystems for biodiversity. Furthermore, activities, such as hunting, setting fires in sacred areas, and cutting trees for timber, are strictly regulated or completely prohibited. This regulation reflects the community's commitment to preserving their natural environment and resources, ensuring that they are used sustainably (Zulu, Farrelli, & Chomba, 2024).

6.2.5 Traditional Leaders' Contribution to Disaster Management

In Zambia, traditional leaders are essential to disaster management because they use their authority, local expertise, and community trust to improve response, preparation, and recovery. Traditional leaders, play critical roles in disaster preparedness, early warning dissemination, and evacuation efforts at the grassroots level. Traditional leaders serve as vital intermediaries between government authorities and local populations; they facilitate communication and mobilize

resources for disaster preparedness and response. Their involvement also enhances community resilience, as they help to implement culturally relevant strategies and ensure that local needs and perspectives are integrated into disaster management frameworks (Chitondo, Chansa, Mpolomoka, & Ngulube, 2024).

The Zambian government's also National Disaster Management Policy acknowledges the importance of traditional authorities in disaster management. As such and traditional leaders are members of the Disaster Management Committees at various levels. To build capacity for disaster prevention, one of the measures and actions to be undertaken includes training traditional and community leaders in disaster risk management and climate change issues (OVP Zambia, 2015).

6.3 Methodology

6.3.1 Research Design

In exploring the role of traditional leaders in DRR and climate governance in Zambia, the study employs a qualitative research approach using elite semi-structured interviews to gain in-depth insights from traditional leaders in disaster-prone regions of Zambia. The overarching goal is to deduce how they and their traditional knowledge can be integrated into disaster policy while also identifying the challenges and opportunities for collaboration between traditional leaders and formal government in disaster management.

Elite interviews were preferred for the study as they a valuable method for gaining insights into the perspectives and decision-making processes of individuals who hold significant power and influence within their respective domains. The elite interviews were also useful in providing context and insight to help make sense of the results and develop explanations from the results from the analysis of the Afrobarometer survey (Hochschild, 2009).

The research design utilized fieldwork involving a round of conducting focus group style elite interviews with three traditional leaders from North-Western, Southern, and Eastern provinces of Zambia. The methodology involved semi-structured questions that were tailored individually but also facilitated collective discussion which then encouraged leaders to build on each other's insights while at the same time ensuring each leader had the opportunity to speak and express their opinions. This methodology also allowed the interviewer to elicit honest and in-depth responses from the interviewees and facilitated discussion around the room on disaster management including how traditional knowledge informs disaster prediction as well as traditional and modern early disaster warning systems enhancing the thoroughness and relevance of the research findings.

Elite interviews were appropriate for this case for the several reasons. Given the hierarchical nature of traditional leadership in the Zambia, elite interviews were a fitting method for capturing their nuanced, authoritative insights. Not only are traditional leaders' key figures and decision-makers in their communities, but they are also key custodians of traditional knowledge including early warning systems which is rarely documented in official reports or policies. As such, they were valuable informants on how traditional knowledge is utilized in their communities and how it could be integrated into disaster policy enabling the researcher to capture this information directly from these authoritative figures. Additionally, since the participants were all traditional leaders, the group setting was culturally appropriate and allowed for shared experiences while still recognizing their individual authority. The focus group format of the elite interviews encouraged a natural discussion that ensured all leader's insights were prioritized and explored in depth. Furthermore, the elite interview approach utilized in the focus group ensured that each leader had the opportunity to contribute as an expert with the researcher directing questions strategically to each leader to balance the participation.

6.3.2 Data Collection Methods

Data for this study was collected during my participation in the 2024 Environmental Protection Dialogue (EPD), a conference attended by six (6) traditional leaders from various regions of Zambia (see map). The 2024 EPD was held in Lusaka, Zambia, from 9th to 11th October with more than 450 delegates participating physically at the Mulungushi International Conference Center (MICC) and more than 100 participants attending virtually. The event provided an opportunity to engage with traditional leaders in discussions on environmental governance and disaster management. During the conference, I conducted elite interviews in a focus group setting with three (3) of the leaders who were available and willing to share their insights. This setting allowed for an interactive exchange of ideas while ensuring that each leader's expertise and unique perspectives were captured.

The Center for Environmental Justice (CEJ) Zambia with its associated partners has hosted EPDs from 2020 on various issues relating to management and protection of the environment. CEJ is a non-governmental organization established in 2010 whose mandate is to create platforms and processes that promote environmental justice for most vulnerable people in society. Anchored on this mandate, CEJ fosters access to quality and accurate information on environmental protection, extractive industries, sustainable energy, climate change, water security and agriculture with the ultimate aim of enhancing accountability for better decision making and sustainable development as well as a support safe and adaptive environment as basic fundamental human rights to having a better and prosperous livelihood (CEJ Zambia, 2025).

EPDs are an environmental accountability space for multiple stakeholders aimed at co-creating solutions to our environmental problems; deliberate upon issues surrounding environmental policy, plans, mechanisms and frameworks, as well as capacity to attain set national

objectives, implement actions on environmental protection in all sector and enhanced policy dialogue for improved decision making at national level; and finding win-win solutions that can address both environmental challenges and wellbeing of our communities and sustained exchange of experiences and information on how we can safeguard the environment while enhancing people's livelihoods (EPD, 2024).

In recognizing the pivotal role of traditional leaders in ensuring environmental sustainability as well as being custodians of local traditions, knowledge, cultural values and possessing a deep understanding and invaluable insight, the CEJ initiated the Traditional Leaders Caucus (TLC), as a side event of EPDs, which are a space for chiefs and chieftainess to discuss issues patterning to land laws, environmental governance and mineral resource management in Zambia. The first TLC held alongside the EPD 2022 was attended by fifteen (15) traditional leaders and the second TLC held alongside EPD2023 was attended by twelve (12) traditional leaders. While the TLC was held in 2022 and 2023, it was not convened in 2024. The six (6) traditional leaders that attended the event included His Royal Highness (HRH) Dr. Chief Mumena of the Kaonde people in Kalumbila district in North-Western province who was also the guest speaker of the EPD; HRH Chief Ishima of the Lunda people in *Zambezi district* North- Western province; HRH Chieftainess Muyeza of the Ila people of *Itezhi Tezhi district* in Southern province; HRH Chieftainess Msoro of the Kunda people in Mambwe district in Eastern province; HRH Chief Mnukwa of the Ngoni people in Chipangali district in Eastern province; and HRH Chieftainess Sinazongwe of the *of the Tonga people in Southern province*. Additionally, there was a panel discussion on the codification of customary land law, which focused on the complexities of Zambia's land tenure system. The panelists included their Royal Highnesses Dr. Chief Mumena, Chief Mnukwa, Chief Ishima, and Chieftainess Msoro.

The discussion took place in one of the holding rooms of the conference center and focused on climate change and natural disasters. The discussion also explored how these leaders perceive and respond to environmental challenges within their communities. The chiefs shared their experiences, highlighting the impact of climate change on traditional land use, resource management, and disaster preparedness. Their insights provided a deeper understanding of the role traditional leadership plays in local adaptation strategies and the integration of indigenous knowledge into broader climate and disaster policies. Overall, the interview lasted for a total of twenty-eight (28) minutes.

6.3.3 Data Analysis Techniques

The data analysis employed a combination of STATA, NVivo, Dovetail and Wordclouds, and each serving a distinct role in processing and interpreting both quantitative and qualitative data. This mixed-methods approach was to ensure a comprehensive analysis of climate change and natural disaster-related discussions with traditional leaders.

STATA was used to identify patterns of influence of traditional leaders have local governance and the impact they have in raising climate change awareness. The software allowed me to run descriptive statistics and correlation analyses to identify trends and relationships. MaxQDA was primarily used for transcription and data conversion, ensuring that all interview recordings were accurately transcribed. The software also allowed for the exportation of the transcripts into Excel format, facilitating further organization and analysis. After transcription, Dovetail was used to identify key themes emerging from the discussions. This tool enabled systematic tagging and categorization of responses, highlighting recurring topics related to climate change, natural disasters, and traditional governance practices. For visual analysis, NVivo was employed to generate thematic connections within the data and Wordclouds was used to generate

a visual illustration. This helped to illustrate the relationships between different themes, providing deeper insights into how traditional leaders perceive and engage with climate and disaster policies.

6.3.4 Ethical Considerations

Before participating in the focus group discussion, all interviewees signed an informed consent document to ensure they fully understood the nature of the study and their role in it. This document clearly outlined the purpose of the research, the reasons they were invited to participate, and alternative options for involvement. It also detailed any potential risks and benefits associated with their participation, while clarifying that there were no financial costs involved. Additionally, the document assured them that all records would remain confidential and that their identities would be protected in any publications or presentations. To provide transparency and accessibility, my email and contact information were included, allowing participants to seek further clarification or ask any questions regarding their involvement in the study.

6.4 Contributions of Traditional Leaders to Disaster Management in Zambia: Key Insights from Elite Interviews

The Focus group interviews with the traditional leaders focused on discussing the impact of natural disasters on communities and potential solutions. HRH Chief Ishima highlighted the dual challenges of drought and flooding affecting agriculture and fishing livelihoods. HRH Chieftainess Msoro detailed how flooding and drought are causing food insecurity, housing collapse, and human-wildlife conflict and Chieftainess Sinazongwe discussed the situation in her district emphasizing the effects of drought on education, animal health, and increased crime. The leaders collectively identified needs for improved disaster management resources, including early warning systems, training, and better equipment. They emphasized the importance of integrating traditional knowledge with modern solutions and restoring cultural practices to enhance resilience.

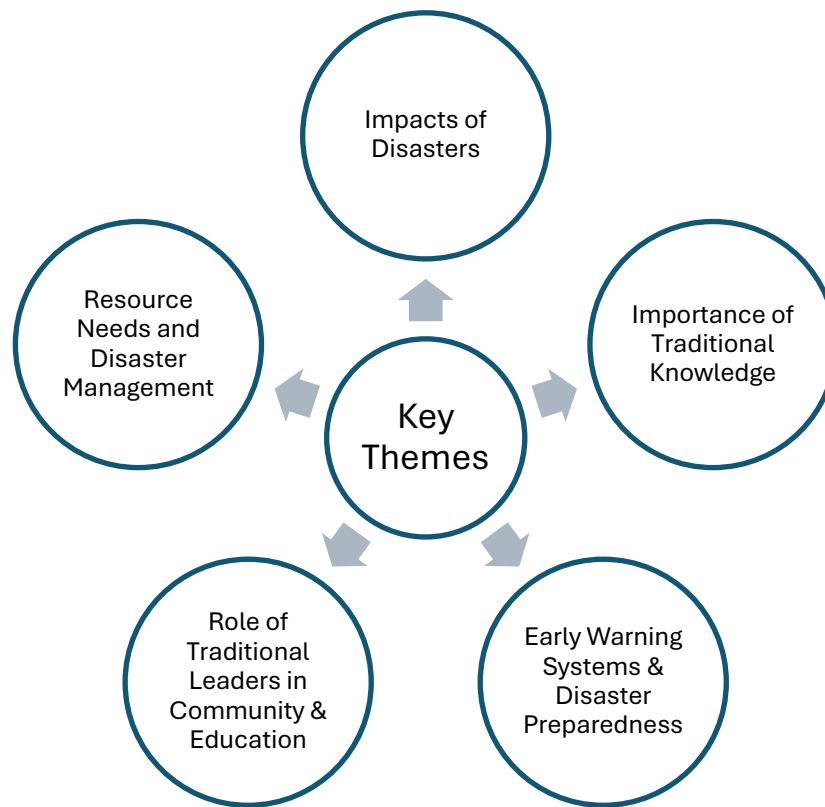


Figure 13: Key Themes from Interviews

Figure 13 visually represents the key themes identified during elite interviews with traditional leaders.

6.4.1 *The Impact of Natural Disasters*

HRH Chief Ishima explained that drought has severely affected farming and fishing activities in their rural community. Flooding, when there is good rainfall, destroys crops and causes hunger by submerging fields, making farming and movement difficult.

“As a rural community, the two occupational activities that my people are involved in is farming and fishing. And farming, as you are aware, depends on rainfall. And with the coming of the drought, which is one of the serious issues, it has really hit.” – HRH Ishima.

Chieftainess Msoro described how above-normal rainfall leads to flooding, causing crop loss and food insecurity, particularly for those cultivating near riverbanks. Flooding also results in the collapse of houses built with fragile materials, rendering people homeless and dependent on disaster mitigation interventions.

“People lose their crops, particularly the people that are in the habit of cultivating by the river banks... Most of the time, they find it easier to cultivate by the riverbank because of soil fertility on the riverbanks, along the riverbank as it is. So, you find that what is happening as we go along is that every time we have heavy rains, you know, above normal rainfall, you find that that water is actually eating into the riverbank. So, we are losing quite a bit, huge chunks of land. And with that huge chunk of land is that you can actually see your crops going away. And so that's the loss of crops. And then that loss leads to food insecurity in communities and at household level as well.” – HRH Msoro.

HRH Chieftainess Msoro explained that drought leads to human-wildlife conflicts in buffer zones near national parks, resulting in livestock losses and, in some cases, human casualties. Drought also contributes to food insecurity, early marriages, teen pregnancies, and increased malnutrition among children as communities struggle to cope with the effects. Chieftainess Sinazongwe also discussed how drought resilience has forced people to cultivate near riverbanks, affecting animal habitats and leading to diseases like anthrax. The drought has also caused people to shift to charcoal burning and rock cutting for income, while children drop out of school due to lack of resources. Land degradation from mining activities and deforestation are additional environmental concerns in the region.

“And I think the other disaster that we have also encountered is the drought. I think the drought has also had a number of effects as well, in that it has, in a way, led to human wildlife conflicts... We've lost a lot of livestock and also in some very unfortunate cases, human life, because the competition for water, for the competition for food has led these animals to start now using the villages as hunting grounds.” – HRH Msoro.

“Many of my people in Sinazongwe district, they've gone to near the riverbanks to do cultivation. For that reason, it has. It has affected the livelihood of animals because they've no pastures now to where to graze.”
– HRH Sinazongwe

6.4.2 Importance of Traditional Knowledge and Practices

HRH Chief Ishima suggested returning to African roots and traditional methods, such as storytelling, to address modern challenges like climate change. HRH Msoro emphasizes the need to incorporate indigenous early warning systems, such as observing grasshoppers to signify drought and dragonflies to signify rainfall into mainstream disaster management practices. HRH Sinazongwe highlighted the historical use of ancestral spirits and rainmakers to address weather-related issues, highlighting the importance of cultural practices in addressing environmental challenges.

“I think it would be better if as Africans we went back to our roots. Because if we went back to our roots, most of these challenges, like climate change, they are new phenomenon, they are new technologies... We had traditional methods through storytelling.” – HRH Ishima.

“I think it's important to incorporate the indigenous early warning systems and also the mainstream early warning systems. If you like. The indigenous systems, I can refer to, for example, when you see a lot of grasshoppers, you know, there's the green and brown grasshoppers, then you know that you are actually headed for a drought or a hunger situation. And for example, the dragonflies, you know, if you see a lot of dragonflies around, then you know it's raining, it's a signal of rain.” – HRH Msoro.

“I would just say we are running away from our culture and norms. Because what I found when, from the time I was too young, I could see to say if that time rains cannot come as it's supposed to be to come at that stage, they could use ancestral spirits as well. They were rainmakers.” – HRH Sinazongwe.

HRH Chieftainess Sinazongwe advised finding a balance between modern approaches and traditional practices to address environmental challenges effectively. She emphasized the importance of community sensitization on afforestation, suggesting that each community member should plant trees to restore forest reserves.

“Though we are living in a modern world whereby we have to start from the onset. Also sensitizing the community on the importance of afforestation, whereby it must be a mandate that every human has to plant to plow back the what the plants.” – HRH Sinazongwe.

6.4.3 Early Warning Systems and Disaster Preparedness

Chief Msoro advocated for the integration of indigenous and mainstream early warning systems, as well as the establishment of low-cost data collection stations in rural areas. She stressed the importance of training first responders and providing proper equipment, such as boats and medical supplies, to effectively manage disasters. She further highlighted the need for community shelters and centers to accommodate people affected by disasters is highlighted as a crucial resource.

“It may be low cost early warning stations that can be built with data stations, you know, put in place where data can be real time data can be collected... We need equipment that can actually help us in terms of responding to disasters. And also, we need to have centers that can accommodate people in the event that they suffer disasters and they're made homeless. And so, you know, maybe to build some shelters in communities where we're able to help each other.” – HRH Msoro

6.4.4 Role of Traditional Leaders in Community Mobilization and Education

HRH Chieftainess Msoro emphasized the responsibility of traditional leaders in mobilizing communities, providing education and awareness about disaster management. She suggested creating a central repository for indigenous information, translated into local languages, to facilitate knowledge dissemination. She noted that traditional leaders are encouraged to set an example through proper farming practices and to embrace the knowledge of older generations to improve community resilience.

“Where do I see traditional leaders in all this? I think it's very important that we mobilize our communities. We have the responsibility of mobilizing our

communities in regard to providing education and awareness... I think it's very important for us to have a central repository where we have this information stored. And that also needs resources so that it's translated in our local languages so that everybody is able to understand it and is able to take part in disseminating this information. I think that's also very critical for our communities. And the other thing that I think is also very critical for us as traditional leaders in managing natural disasters. I think it's also very important that we also serve as an example in the way that we also conduct ourselves in regard to, for example, farming practices.” – HRH Msoro

6.4.5 Resource Needs and Disaster Coordination

The leaders discussed the need for human resources, financial support, capacity building, and the importance of integrating traditional knowledge with modern disaster management approaches. The leaders emphasized the need for early warning systems, better equipment, medical supplies, and community shelters, while also highlighting the importance of preserving indigenous knowledge. HRH Chief Ishima emphasized the need for improved human resources to implement modern disaster management technologies and capacity building for traditional leaders.

“I think in regard to our needs in managing natural disasters, we really need early warning systems.” – HRH Msoro.

“The resources that we need is a human resource in order to mitigate these countries catastrophes...And also on the human resource, we would want of course like two weeks together with the government, so that there is a proper coordination between the government and traditional leaders.... Then we also need capacity building. For any special training that can be

given to the royal establishment and also the villagers so that they are able to curb the situation.” – HRH Ishima.

6.5 Conclusion

The findings from this chapter highlight the critical role traditional leaders play in disaster risk reduction (DRR) and the opportunities to strengthen their contributions within formal disaster management frameworks. By integrating their local authority, indigenous knowledge, and community trust, traditional leaders can significantly enhance resilience-building efforts in disaster-prone regions.

6.5.1 Opportunities for Strengthening the Role of Traditional Leaders in DRR

Traditional leaders' role's in DRR can be strengthened by explicitly including them in the disaster management process and ensuring that they actively participate in community awareness initiatives. Furthermore, community resilience can be improved by using traditional leaders as communication channels for disaster training programs (Zamisa & Mutereko, 2019). In many cases, traditional leaders can act as a bridge between the community and higher authorities, ensuring smooth information flow and effective resource allocation (Mercado, 2024). Thus, to fully leverage the potential of traditional leaders in DRR, there is therefore a need for policy integration that formally recognizes their role in disaster preparedness, response, and mitigation. Traditional leaders can complement formal disaster management strategies by acting as intermediaries between government agencies and communities, ensuring culturally appropriate interventions. Institutionalizing their role through national and regional policies while preserving cultural identity will foster greater collaboration and sustainability in disaster governance

6.5.2 Capacity Building

Involving traditional leaders in capacity building for disaster management in Africa is essential. In particular, training them in the context of their role in climate change adaptation and disaster management can enhance their effectiveness and enable them to integrate traditional with modern climate adaptation strategies (Musarandega, Chingombe, & Pillay , 2018). Traditional leaders can also help assure that there is culturally appropriate training which encourages local ownership of disaster management projects. Their involvement can ensure that training initiatives are accessible, long-lasting, and meet the specific requirements of communities in times of disasters (Olu, et al., 2018). Empowering traditional leaders with formal disaster management training is therefore essential for improving their effectiveness in DRR. Training programs should equip them with skills in early warning systems, emergency response, and climate adaptation strategies while incorporating traditional knowledge. Such capacity-building efforts can strengthen local-level disaster preparedness and response, ensuring that traditional leaders can work alongside governmental and humanitarian agencies in a structured and informed manner.

6.5.3 Leveraging Traditional Knowledge (TK)

Traditional methods have been shown to be effective in preventing and mitigating disasters since they are based on cultural and spiritual ties to the environment. Improved understanding of these practices and integrating TK with modern methods can lead to a more inclusive approach to disaster management (Olaopa, 2025). TK is not merely anecdotal but can be scientifically relevant and practical in real-world applications. Lived experiences provide rich local warning indicators derived from observations of birds, animals, and natural phenomena. This TK is often embedded in oral traditions, such as stories, songs, poems, and lullabies, which can serve as valuable resources in understanding and predicting disaster (Haokip, 2023). Documenting traditional knowledge in disaster management in Africa is crucial, as much of this knowledge is passed down

orally and ingrained in local customs. Documentation of TK can strengthen local communities' adaptive tactics, empower them, and result in more culturally appropriate and sustainable DRR policies that are suited to their unique circumstances (Iloka, 2016). As such, systematic documentation of traditional disaster mitigation practices is crucial for integrating indigenous knowledge into modern disaster management frameworks. Traditional early warning systems, land management practices, and community-based disaster preparedness methods have proven effective over generations. Establishing repositories of traditional knowledge, translated into local languages, can ensure its preservation and accessibility while fostering a hybrid approach that blends indigenous and scientific methodologies

6.5.4 Collaboration with Stakeholders

To enhance disaster management, especially in vulnerable communities, it is necessary for stakeholders to adopt a collaborative polycentric governance approach (De Sisto, Shearing, Heffernan, & Sanderson, 2024). Effective collaboration amongst stakeholders can enhance disaster management and allow them to work together to develop shared capacity and resilience. It can also promote a sense of collective responsibility and motivate action that safeguards communities during times of disasters (Teo, Goonetilleke, Ahankoob, & Deilami, 2018). Since traditional leaders possess valuable insights into local customs, social dynamics, and environmental conditions, involving them in disaster policies and programs can increase the acceptance and support for government policies and programs. When traditional leaders endorse government initiatives and mobilize community participation, it boosts the legitimacy of these efforts. When governments consult with traditional leaders, it also ensures that policies are culturally appropriate (Chotib, 2024). Building strong partnerships between traditional leaders, government institutions, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and international bodies is therefore vital for enhancing

disaster resilience. Multi-stakeholder collaboration can facilitate resource mobilization, knowledge exchange, and the development of community-driven DRR solutions. Recognizing traditional leaders as key stakeholders in DRR policy discussions and implementation efforts will help bridge the gap between formal governance structures and community-based disaster management strategies.

Overall, traditional leaders hold a unique and influential position in their communities that can be harnessed to improve disaster preparedness and response. By institutionalizing their role, enhancing their capacity, preserving their knowledge, and fostering partnerships, disaster management efforts can become more inclusive, effective, and culturally relevant. Future research and policy efforts should focus on creating frameworks that integrate traditional leadership into national disaster governance while respecting the social and cultural fabric of local communities. In Zambia, this could mean explicitly recognizing and formalizing the roles of traditional leaders within the Disaster Management Act of 2010 which could be done through detailed policy guidelines and acknowledging their contributions at the grassroots level, integrating traditional leaders into DMMU's operational structures to maximize its mission; and incorporating traditional knowledge and practices into national disaster management strategies under the guidance of traditional leaders.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

This dissertation examined the role of traditional leaders in shaping governance of DRR in Africa, as well as their institutionalization in modern governance frameworks and found that they can play an important role in disaster governance particularly in rural areas where they continue to yield a significant amount of influence in governing their communities derived from their authority, cultural legitimacy and close proximity to the people. Even though the role of traditional leaders in national politics remains rather limited in most African countries (Chlouba, 2021), traditional leadership has demonstrated an enduring ability to survive precolonial, colonial, and postcolonial challenges, making them important custodians of survival strategies for rural communities. This resilience and embedded knowledge are crucial for initial disaster response (Tarisayi, 2018). The study sought to address a gap in existing research by combining a quantitative analysis of Afrobarometer data with a qualitative case study of Zambia to assess how trust, engagement, and local knowledge can shape climate awareness and disaster preparedness. When combined, the quantitative and qualitative results offer a comprehensive picture of how traditional leadership can affect DRR in Africa. The cross-country analysis consistently found patterns of higher levels of trust, large levels of contact, and significant influence on climate-related information associated with traditional leaders while the Zambia case study illustrated these dynamics in reality. Chiefs explained their responsibilities for sending alerts, organizing reactions and educating communities. These findings support the idea that traditional leaders can bridge the governance gaps left by the state's limited capability and providing context-specific methods that official DRR systems frequently overlook.

7.1 Summary of Findings

The results of the study directly address the research questions proposed in the introduction, as insights from both the quantitative and qualitative analysis show that integrating and recognizing traditional leadership within disaster frameworks can strengthen their effectiveness. Based on the findings, I address each question below, beginning with the main research question.

7.1.1 Main Research Question

The findings show that traditional leaders have an important role to play in shaping disaster risk governance systems. Shared governance across levels and grounded in local realities is essential to enhance DRR efforts. This study's findings align with this pattern and demonstrate that traditional leaders can complement national disaster frameworks particularly in rural communities where state presence could be limited. The Afrobarometer analysis shows that traditional leaders are significantly more trusted and engaged by the public than elected officials like members of parliament. This trust can be major predictor of climate awareness, which is a necessary precondition for readiness, as citizens are more likely to get their information from traditional leaders. The case study from Zambia shows that traditional leaders contribute to disaster risk reduction directly through land and resource management and particularly through early warning systems through observing insect behavior and mobilizing their communities. Together, this provides evidence to support the argument formalizing the role of traditional leaders in DRR governance.

7.1.2 Secondary Research Question 1

The analysis using the Afrobarometer data shows considerable differences in how citizens perceive traditional leaders in comparison to Members of Parliament across the 34 African

countries that were included in the surveys. Respondents indicated considerably higher trust in traditional leaders more contact with them and viewed them as more responsive to their needs. This trend further extended into climate-related governance where trust in traditional leaders was strongly associated with higher climate change awareness, whereas MPs did not show the same influence.

Traditional leaders hold higher trust, communicate more frequently with citizens, and are more responsive, as such, they can be effective actors in climate and environmental governance. They are better positioned to provide early warnings, promote preparedness behaviors, and mobilize community participation for resilience. Their influence on climate awareness suggests that they can play a key role in educating and shaping how communities understand environmental risks associated with disasters. The lower trust and weaker connection between citizens and MPs limit the extent to which they can mobilize communities and shape environmental perceptions. As such, formally integrating traditional leaders into disaster governance systems is likely to enhance DRR outcomes.

These findings also support H1: Where traditional leaders are perceived as more trusted authorities relative to elected representatives, their formal integration into DRR frameworks will strengthen their influence in shaping climate and disaster risk governance. Across 34 African countries, traditional leaders are trusted more, contacted more often, and viewed as more responsive than Members of Parliament. These patterns show that traditional leaders occupy a key role in mobilizing communities and communicating climate-related information.

7.1.3 Secondary Research Question 2.

The Zambia case study shows that traditional leaders play a critical role in disaster preparedness and resilience through early warning practices, community mobilization, and

environmental stewardship. The chiefs interviewed explained that they rely on traditional indicators such as predicting hazardous events through observing animal and insect behavior such as dragonflies to indicate coming floods or locusts to indicate upcoming droughts and use these to warn and prepare their communities. Additionally, they also guide land use practices, farming decisions, and natural resource management in ways that reduce vulnerability. These roles and responsibilities place them at the heart of local-level DRR, especially in rural areas where they are highly influential. However, their effectiveness is constrained by shortages of resources, capacity, inadequate equipment, and gaps in coordination with formal disaster management agencies. The Zambian chiefs also discussed TK-based activities that are integral to community resilience, including environmental monitoring, drought-coping tactics, and culturally anchored mitigation techniques. However, they highlighted that these practices are rarely documented, formally recognized, or systematically incorporated into national disaster frameworks emphasizing the need to set up repositories to preserve this TK. Clear policy recognition, channels for cooperation between state institutions and traditional authority, and resources to enable chiefs to fully engage in disaster preparedness are necessary for the successful institutionalization of traditional leaders.

The findings also support H2: Formal recognition of traditional leaders within DRR frameworks will be associated with more substantive integration of traditional knowledge into DRR planning and implementation. The Zambian chiefs described leading preparedness efforts, organizing community responses, guiding land use decisions, and acting as key points of contact during disasters. Thus, traditional leadership engagement and strong community participation are closely linked to DRR effectiveness. The case study illustrates how chiefs draw on traditional early warning signs, local environmental knowledge, and culturally grounded adaptation practices.

7.2 Policy Recommendations

Policy frameworks should be reviewed and amended to clearly define the roles and responsibilities of traditional leaders in DRR, as unclear provisions, for example those observed in South Africa's Ugu district, limit their effective participation. DRR frameworks should also formally include traditional leaders in disaster management advisory forums, where their insights, authority, and community knowledge can meaningfully contribute to planning and decision-making (Zamisa & Mutereko, 2019). Countries could also develop targeted capacity-building programs that equip traditional leaders with the skills to engage effectively in modern DRR processes and integrate indigenous knowledge into contemporary strategies (Musarandega et al., 2018). Additionally, traditional leaders should be empowered to mobilize and engage communities in DRR activities, leveraging their authority and respect within the community to foster participation and compliance (Fonchingong, 2018). The findings of this study support such recommendations and suggest that national governments should formally institutionalize traditional leaders within DRR legislation and ensure that they are integrated into disaster committees, early warning systems, and community planning structures. Disaster management units and agencies can partner with traditional leaders to improve communication flows, coordinate preparedness activities, and co-produce culturally relevant and appropriate risk messages to produce sustainable outcomes.

7.3 Limitations

When interpreting the results of this study, it is important to recognize some of the limitations. Firstly, the Afrobarometer dataset does not include direct measures of DRR experiences or disaster impacts. As such, climate awareness served as a proxy measure for local preparedness since the dissertation was looking at climate induced disasters.

The Zambia case study, while rich in insight, reflects the experiences of only three chiefs and cannot be generalized to all traditional systems across Africa. Traditional knowledge varies widely by region and is often undocumented, making it difficult to capture all relevant practices within a single study. However, this limitation is consistent with the methodological constraints outlined in Chapter 6. Elite interviews with traditional leaders are difficult to secure, particularly within a limited research timeframe, and the study relied on the access that was feasible. Despite the small number of participants, the interviews provided valuable depth and context that complemented the broader quantitative findings and offered meaningful insight into how traditional leaders understand and practice DRR.

7.4 Outlook

Overall, this research shows that connecting modern governance systems with long-standing traditional institutions is essential for DRR governance systems. Strategies based primarily only on technical or top-down approaches are unlikely to address local community demands as climate-induced hazards intensify throughout the continent. This study also demonstrates that resilience is strengthened when governance is inclusive, participatory, and rooted in local realities and experiences by emphasizing how traditional leaders influence trust, awareness, and local action. Acknowledging role of traditional leaders and their importance in DRR governance provides a promising pathway to build more resilient communities.

Future research could look at how traditional leaders are supported by international organizations in DRR activities. This study demonstrates that traditional leaders frequently lack the institutional positions and resources necessary to shape DRR governance. Research could look at assessing how donor programs integrate or overlook traditional institutions in their initiatives.

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