Power Struggles in Dual Systems of Government: Conflict Challenges between Elected and Traditional Leaders in Greater Giyani Local Municipality

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Abstract

In post-apartheid South Africa, traditional leaders and ward committees are expected to work harmoniously to deliver services to citizens from heterogeneous cultures. However, conflicts between traditional leaders and ward committees are undesirable because they negatively impact rural development. In the past, unresolved conflicts between community leaders have led to various development challenges in different communities and threatened the existence of the dual governance system. Against this background, an exploratory study on the negative impact of leadership conflicts on rural communities was conducted in Greater Giyani Local Municipality. Therefore, the objective of this study was to understand the impact and implications of such conflicts on various aspects of governance,

community development, and social cohesion. Key informant interviews and focus group discussions were used to collect data from 33 purposively selected participants. Data were analysed using thematic content analysis and ATLAS Ti 8, revealing various consequences of leadership conflict. The results showed that conflicts between traditional leaders and ward committees lead to property damage, serious negative psychological impacts, poor economic development, increased hostility and division, and low investment in these societies. These findings highlight the potential of community leadership conflict to disrupt development initiatives, hinder effective service delivery, and impede the implementation of policies and programmes.

Keywords: *Community development, conflict consequences, dual government systems, power struggles, social cohesion*

Introduction

In many regions of the world, the coexistence of traditional and elected systems of government has led to complex power dynamics and conflicts that have far-reaching implications for local governance. The Greater Giyani Local Municipality in South Africa is no exception. The conflict between traditional government structures rooted in centuries-old customs and the modern democratic system centres on the legitimacy and lack of clarity of their roles. For example, ward committees (WCs) elected through democratic elections argue that they have a broader mandate to represent the population and distribute resources equitably (Osuchukwu & Udeze, 2015; Fisher & Rucki, 2017). In contrast, traditional leaders (TLs) may claim a historical or cultural legitimacy that transcends elections. The result is often a power struggle where both sides contend for influence and control over resources, making such conflicts a recurring issue in dual government systems (Osuchukwu & Udeze, 2015). This article delves into the intricate web of challenges and consequences that emerge when WCs and TLs vie for authority, influence, and control over resource allocation within this dual government framework (Ayee, 2013; Osuchukwu & Udeze, 2015). By shedding light on the intricacies of this ongoing dynamic, this study sought to understand the impact and implications of such conflicts on various aspects of governance, community development, and social cohesion.

Literature review

In South Africa, as in other countries around the globe, TLs and WCs are expected to cooperate in preserving and maintaining cultural traditions, community development, and service delivery (Rukuni et al., 2012; Soyapi, 2014; Shanka and Thuo, 2017). However, disputes among community leaders have been observed to have negative impacts and hinder progress and development. The term "community leader" is used to refer to individuals who hold a position of authority within the community, including elected officials and traditional leaders, and is used interchangeably throughout the study. Although literature evidence indicates that there are widespread non-violent conflicts compared to violent conflicts, these conflicts impact development negatively regardless of their form (Reddy, 2018). One explanation for the poor performance is that resources that could have been used to address development needs are diverted to conflict resolution.

In some isolated cases, the spiralling disagreement between the two leadership groups escalates or rescales into a violent conflict (Soyapi, 2014; Reddy, 2018). Unfortunately, the conflicts that draw our attention are those that result in loss of life or property; disputes that silently fracture communities are never mentioned (Rautenbach, 2014; Osuchukwu and Udeze, 2015). These non-violent conflicts are often not talked about as openly as violent conflicts, as they tend to be more subtle and less visible, making them easier to overlook or play down. As a result, these disputes persist and gradually erode the social fabric of the community without receiving the necessary attention and resolution. Therefore, the conflict between these community leadership institutions frequently remains unresolved, leading to a continuous cycle and hindering subsequent development. Given the proximity and influence these institutions hold within communities, it becomes imperative to address and prevent the consequences arising from these conflicts.

The Great Giyani Municipality has a significant population that is culturally and linguistically diverse (Great Giyani Municipality, 2018), and traditional leadership structures are strongly represented (Mashau and Mutshaeni, 2014; Maluleke, 2015). A significant portion of land owned by the state is under the care of traditional authorities (SALGA, 2013). The strained relationship between WCs and TLs is evident, for example, in their unwillingness to cooperate even though the municipality has a legal mandate for the entire land under its jurisdiction (SALGA, 2013). For example, it took years of negotiations to convince

the Mabunda community to release a portion of their land near the Giyani commercial centre for residential development by the municipality (Mengistead & Hagg, 2017). The provided statement highlights the complex nature of land allocation and development decisions. Therefore, the objective of this study was to understand the impact and implications of such conflicts on various aspects of governance, community development, and social cohesion.

The South African Constitution acknowledges and protects the institution of traditional leadership, granting it a formal status within the legal framework (Great Giyani Municipality, 2018). It also recognises the role of TLs in local decision-making processes, especially in rural areas (Rautenbach, 2014; Reddy, 2018). At the same time, it upholds the basic principles of democracy, including the establishment of municipal committees as mechanisms for citizen participation and local government accountability (Osuchukwu & Udeze, 2015).

Conflicts often arise when the roles, powers, and authorities of TLs and WCs overlap or conflict. Although both sets of leaders are expected to engage with the community, they may have different approaches and priorities (Rautenbach, 2014; Reddy, 2018). This can lead to mixed messages or competition for influence. This overlap of roles can create friction and inefficiencies in local governance, affecting the overall performance of leaders. Cooperation and a clear delineation of responsibilities are essential to mitigating these challenges and ensuring effective governance. When traditional and elected leaders work together harmoniously, their complementary strengths can benefit the community, but conflicts and overlapping roles can hinder progress. Thus, the objective of this study was to understand the impact and implications of such conflicts on various aspects of governance, community development, and social cohesion.

Methodology

This study used a qualitative approach that included key informant interviews (KIs) to provide a comprehensive look at the impact of leadership conflict on aspects of governance, community development, and social cohesion.

Description of the Study Area

The present study covered the rural part of the Greater Giyani Local Municipality in Limpopo Province, South Africa. Giyani is located about

185 km from Polokwane (formerly Pietersburg), 100 km from Thohoyandou, and 550 km from Pretoria. The municipality covers an area of 2967.27 km², with only one semi-urban area, Giyani, that belongs to the B category of South African municipalities (Greater Giyani Municipality: 2008). It was established under the 1996 Constitution of the Republic of South Africa and the Municipality Demarcation Act of 1998 (SALGA, 2013) and is one of five municipalities in the Mopani district. The municipality is divided into 31 wards and has 62 council members (Greater Giyani Municipality: 2017). It has 10 traditional authority areas consisting of 93 villages, all of which are Tsonga. The boundaries of the districts and the boundaries of the traditional communities do not coincide.
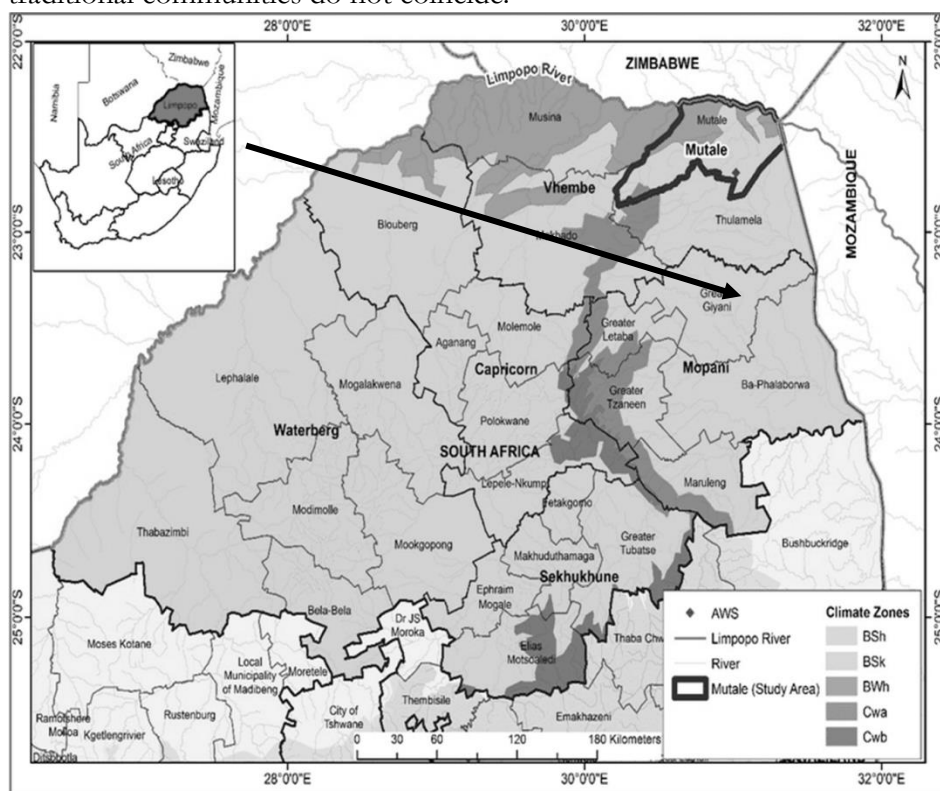

Figure 1: *South African municipality map showing the location of Greater Giyani Local Municipality in Limpopo province.*

Sampling procedure

The methodology used to collect data for the case study conducted in the Greater Giyani Local Municipality was a purposive sampling of

participants representing youth (six), women (six), ward committee chairpersons (six), prominent people (six), representatives of police (three), and chairpersons of traditional authorities (six). The sample was drawn from two wards of the 31 wards in the municipality. Analysis of the respondent's demographics indicated an issue of male dominance in local municipalities, indicating a potential lack of diversity in leadership positions. Respondents' years of experience in conflict resolution varied from less than one year to more than seven years to be able to collect relevant data from all age groups (Mosera & Korstjens, 2017). Twenty participants had attained secondary education, and only four key informants had tertiary qualifications. Nine participants did not have any formal education but could read and write.

Data collection methods

Data were collected using semi-structured interviews, which are recommended by Mosera & Korstjens (2017). Questions were tailored to the focus groups and key informants being interviewed, allowing the researcher to gather information about the experiences of youth, women, and community committee chairs, police representatives, and chairpersons of traditional authorities (Creswell, 2013). The consolidated matrix scoring was used to identify the typical conflicts between TLs and WCs in Greater Giyani Local Municipality. Key informants, with guidance from the researcher, created an assessment of what they thought the most common conflicts in the area were. The respondents' subsequent reflections on assessing the consequences of conflict against the established criteria were quite revealing. They discussed among themselves examples of why a particular score should be assigned. The scoring was first recorded on the flipcharts. Regular scores were calculated from the various focus group discussions (FGDs) to indicate the severity of the consequences of conflict.

Analysis of the data

After the interviews were conducted, they were transcribed and loaded into ATLAS Ti.23 for coding (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2012). Using ATLAS Ti.23 to code the transcripts allowed the researchers to identify key themes and patterns within the data. By coding the transcripts, researchers were able to identify key discussion topics and determine the most relevant findings. Network diagrams were then created

electronically to display the results (Scales, 2013). Using network diagrams to present the data allowed the researcher to effectively communicate the consolidated results of this current study (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2012). The network diagrams provided a visual representation of the data and allowed the researcher to easily illustrate the key findings (Scales, 2013). Overall, the use of purposive sampling, semi-structured interviews, ATLAS Ti.22, and network diagrams allowed researchers to collect and present meaningful data for the case study in the Greater Giyani Local Municipality.

Results and discussion

This study examined the consequences of conflicts between TLs and WCs in the Greater Giyani area. It also sought to understand the impact and implications of such conflicts on various aspects of governance, community development, and social cohesion. Data from key KI interviews and FGDs showed that several negative consequences were observed. These consequences can be categorised into two main groups: (a) social challenges and (b) economic challenges. Some of the specific consequences of conflict mentioned include preventing investment, damaging property, delaying project completion, increasing poverty, amplifying hostility and division, and having severe negative psychological effects. These actions reflect the negative impact of conflicts between the two leadership institutions, and the findings are consistent with those documented in previous research studies.

Key outcomes of conflicts between TLs and WCs

Conflict classification	Consequence	Selected verbatim quotes	Cost variable associated wi the consequence	Likelihood score
Social challenges	Severe Negative Psychological Effects	*Since the last time that I was threatened with death, I have not been myself. In short, I am suffering from chronic stress*	failure to complete projects	3
			discourage investment	1
			Increased hostility and divisiveness	2
			high incidence of poverty	1
			severe negative psychological effects	2
			loss of human life	1
	deterioration of relationships between community members	*People have camps, and usually, these camps are associated with leadership. These camps attend their meetings and promote their development*	failure to complete projects	3
			discourage investment	1
			Increased hostility and divisiveness	3
			high incidence of poverty	1
			severe negative psychological effects	4

			loss of human life	2
	Discourages business investment	*Conflicts discourage investment, there is no security to their capital, and it generally puts fear in investors. Without a doubt, several projects are taking years to complete due to these conflicts.*	failure to complete projects	4
			discourage investment	3
			Increased hostility and divisiveness	3
			high incidence of poverty	3
			severe negative psychological effects	3
			loss of human life	4
	Damages to property or crops	*To tell the truth, properties are burned to ashes, and sometimes the intention is to damage the infrastructure and kill people inside*	failure to complete projects	4
			discourage investment	4
			Increased hostility and divisiveness	3
			high incidence of poverty	3
			severe negative psychological effects	3
			loss of human life	4
Economic challenges	Wasteful government spending	*These conflicts are enemies of progress, and the challenges associated with them come in domino form. Conflicts divert human and material resources away from development initiatives*	failure to complete projects	
			discourage investment.	4
			Increased hostility and divisiveness	4
				3
			high incidence of poverty	3
			severe negative	3
			psychological effects	4
			loss of human life	
	Poor development	*These conflicts collapse the economy, nothing works, and the economically active group's energy is diverted towards the conflict situation while economic activities are frozen*	failure to complete projects	4
			discourage investment	3
			Increased hostility and divisiveness	3
			high incidence of poverty	3
			severe negative psychological effects	3
			loss of human life	4

Table 1: *Conflict categorization matrix depicting impact, likelihood, and consequence scores*

Table 1 shows the public perception of the consequences of conflicts between TAs and WCs in the Greater Giyani Local Municipality. The research results show that six social and economic challenges emerged from the participants' responses. Some challenges are interrelated and were grouped. Regardless of the extent of the challenges, the data also suggest that leadership conflicts have more economic than social impacts.
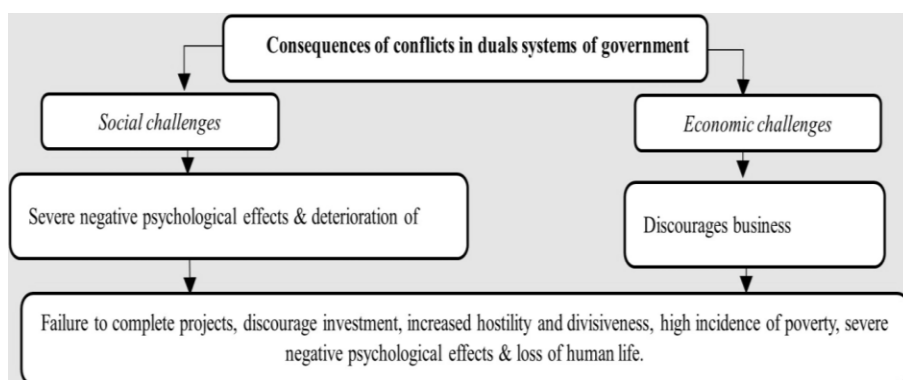
Figure 2: Consequences of conflicts in dual systems of government

The above figure 2 presents a flowchart showing the various consequences of conflicts between TLs and WCs in the Giyani community. The study's results suggest that conflicts influence both social and economic aspects.

Damages to property or crops

One of the major outcomes of this study is the revelation that conflicts between TLs and WCs often result in damage to property and crops. Various methods can be used to carry out these destructive acts, depending on the type and intensity of the conflict. Some examples of aggressive acts are a) setting buildings and crops on fire; b) using machinery or other equipment to plough up fields, destroying crops and rendering land unusable; and c) damaging infrastructure or defacing property, resulting in financial losses for the affected individuals.

Participants indicated that these destructive acts are often used as a form of intimidation, revenge, or as a means of gaining the upper hand in a dispute. In support of this notion, several scholars have argued that property damage is typically used as a means of asserting power and dominance, with the intent of exerting control and sending a message to the other side (Kim and Conceição, 2010; Mbowura, 2014 Bukari et al., 2017). Overall, this discussion has shed light on the harmful consequences of conflict between TLs and WCs and the motivations of actors to destroy property. The consequences of these actions are undeniably socioeconomic in context: destruction of property and crops can impede progress, weaken community engagement, undermine trust, and exacerbate injustices. Therefore, it is important to address the

underlying issues and work towards inclusive and participatory processes to ensure the effective implementation of development initiatives.

Diversion of human and material resources away from development initiatives

A widely shared belief among participants, which emerged during interviews, was that conflicts between TLs and WCs can significantly hinder development by creating a hostile and unstable environment that disrupts the implementation of essential projects and services. However, participants held different views on how conflict increases government spending. For instance, if the aggressor in the conflict damages properties and crops, the government may need to compensate for losses incurred or intervene in the form of food aid or subsidies to ensure that the affected population has access to adequate nutrition (Hammill et al., 2016; Bukari et al., 2018). This may undoubtedly lead to an increase in government spending as expenditures are required for law enforcement, litigation, compensation, infrastructure repair, humanitarian assistance, security operations, conflict resolution, and diversion of resources from other development initiatives. In the case of Ghana, for example, the internal security experience shows that peacekeeping in conflict-ridden areas drained huge financial resources (Ayee, 2013). Participants from a representative sample of the business community conveyed similar sentiments. They emphasised that when conflicts between TLs and WCs escalate into fist fighting, there is a significant need for medical treatment for the injured. Given this circumstance, the government may bear the burden of providing health services and medicines to those affected, which may strain the health system and increase government spending. Therefore, diverting human and material resources away from development initiatives (Kim & Conceição, 2010).

Impact of conflict on investment

One common belief among participants was that leadership disputes create an atmosphere of uncertainty and fear. In their own words, conflicts discourage investors because they represent high business risk. This view is supported in the literature by scholars such as Fisher and Rucki, (2017), who point out that contending leaders often demand bribes and impose conditions before approving projects. Participants expressed a shared concern that the WCs may identify development

projects that TLs sometimes reject without giving a reason. One of the findings highlighted by the participants was that conflict leads to leaders boycotting key investment meetings, which further delays project implementation. These conflict risks to investment are consistent with previous research by Bray (2009), which suggests that conflict discourages both domestic and foreign investment. This revelation revealed that the conflict further slows down development in rural areas. In one of the FGDs, participants highlighted that conflict discourages investment and creates an atmosphere of fear that prevents projects from being implemented for years. Further support for the above views comes from U.S. President Barack Obama, and research by Hammill et al. (2016) shows that investors are more likely to abandon projects in areas with unhealthy relationships. Overall, this study shows that conflict hinders or delays the achievement of project goals, leading to extended deadlines or even project abandonment.

Impact of the deterioration of relationships between community members

Another perspective shared by participants was that conflict situations often trigger emotions that lead to societal divisions. According to the key informants who were interviewed, the relationship between them can become so acrimonious that they no longer want to associate with each other; consequently, these conflicts jeopardise the government's attempt to promote cooperative governance. This argument is corroborated by Kristine (2014), who argues that the severity of the conflict is evident by the level of hostility and division in the community. Other subsequent studies (Mahama, 2003; Bukari et al., 2017) indicate that conflict leads to camp formation among CLs. A significant viewpoint arising from this research is that these conditions have the potential to lead to strong polarisation among community members. This perspective becomes apparent in the insights shared by numerous interviewees, who emphasised that individuals tend to align with various groups, and typically, leaders within these groups advocate for distinct development paths.

A crucial insight emerging from this study is that the presence of camps and their association with leadership can have both positive and negative implications. While they can serve as vehicles for expressing diverse viewpoints and fostering local development, it is crucial to manage these divisions in a way that promotes unity, cooperation, and the shared development of the community as a whole. These findings

are supported by the group work model, which states that a heavy load carried by many people is easier and more manageable than if carried by one person (Goedek, 1997). However, some critics of teamwork argue with proverbs such as "too many cooks spoil the broth". Although this may be a convincing argument, a closer look shows that the idea behind such a proverb was never to discourage teamwork. Rather, it was advice against large teams without a common goal, not against the concept of teamwork per se. The policy lessons derived from these insights point to the need to create activities and interest groups that promote social cohesion.

Severe negative psychological effects

The results of both the FGDs and in-depth interviews suggest that conflicts have serious negative psychological effects not only on the CLs but also on the rest of the community members, which underscores the importance of addressing their disputes. This finding is supported by previous literature studies, such as that of researcher Bukhariet al. (2018), who argued that the psychological impact of conflict on victims can lead to high levels of stress and emotional distress and affect their ability to perform their duties effectively (Omisore and Abiodun, 2014). Therefore, recognising the impact on individuals and families can help promote healthier and more constructive relationships. Addressing the root causes of conflict and promoting dialogue, understanding, and conflict resolution are therefore critical to minimising psychological distress for all involved. In addition, providing psychological support and counselling services can help individuals and families cope with the emotional consequences of these conflicts.

Recommendations for policy and practice

For effective conflict management between TL and WC, both parties must understand the consequences of their actions. To limit property and crop damage, this study suggests that both leadership groups should work together to develop mechanisms to prevent and peacefully resolve conflicts, such as through the introduction of conflict resolution training. TLs and WCs should place community well-being and sustainable development above personal or group interests and recognise that persistent conflict impedes progress. In addition, police should promote dialogue and reconciliation between conflicting parties

in rural communities by acting as impartial mediators and fostering community trust. They offer training in conflict resolution, carry out police work at the community level, and set up mediation centres. However, its effectiveness depends on its neutrality, cultural sensitivity, and ongoing commitment to the community. It is important to create an inclusive environment that encourages community participation in conflict resolution processes. This will give both TLs and WCs a real opportunity to work together to create a stable and supportive environment that attracts business, promotes economic development, and improves the quality of life for all members of the community.

Conclusion

This study addresses the impact of leadership conflict in a local community on community development. It examines the impact that both violent and non-violent conflicts in the Greater Giyani Local Municipality have on the livelihoods of community members. The study shows that the conflicts resulted not only in poor service delivery but also in slow development, limited social relationships, damage to property, discouragement of investment, and psychological stress and trauma. It appears that the government has had more success with institutional diversity than with institutional hybridity. Addressing these conflicts and promoting peace is critical for the Greater Giyani Local Municipality to promote sustainable development, attract investment, and ensure the well-being of its leaders and residents.

Conflict of Interest: The authors have no conflict to declare.

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