



## GRASSROOTS GOVERNANCE? CHIEFS IN AFRICA AND THE AFRO-CARIBBEAN

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## SUMMARY

Traditional leadership is a factor that has been significantly overlooked in evaluations of rural local government in much of contemporary Sub-Saharan Africa and in many parts of the Afro-Caribbean. This oversight continues to result in lost opportunities for rural local government. This interdisciplinary and intercontinental volume responds to this perception and seeks to establish a base line for best practice in rural local government and traditional leadership (also called chiefs) in Africa and elsewhere that policy practitioners, political leaders, traditional leaders, researchers, and other citizens can use.

Case studies from Ghana, South Africa, Botswana, Lesotho, other Commonwealth countries in West, East and Southern Africa, as well as Jamaica (with its heritage links to West Africa) are the bases of the analyses of traditional leadership and rural local government. Case studies are analyzed within country and regional contexts. The question of how to integrate, or indeed reconcile, traditional leadership into democratic systems of local government is addressed. The prevalence, importance, and contribution of traditional leadership to the culture of local governance are examined. The importance of traditional leadership's involvement in the administration of land at the local government level is scrutinized. The development and management implications of having traditional leadership participate in rural local government are explored. Drawing comparisons between the case studies, the book discovers lessons and trends. Some initial implications of this for Canadian chiefs are considered, especially in the realm of the use and creation of Houses of Chiefs as an instrument of governance.

## PREFACE

The Working Group on Local Government Management and Development of the International Association of Schools and Institutes of Administration (IASIA) was officially established in 1997 following the interest generated in the subject area in the breakaway sessions during three conferences. The objective of the group is to focus on key trends and developments in the local government sphere in both developed and developing countries. It is generally accepted that certain distinct thematic issues have to be addressed during the lifespan of any working group of IASIA. The themes, which directed the activities of the group for the past four years, were Democratization, Decentralization and Development, Intergovernmental Relations, Metropolitization/Unicity Development and Rural Local Government and Traditional Leadership. The thematic issues, which are generally addressed through country reports, comparative studies, and theoretical appraisal, are presented at the annual conferences of IASIA. This publication has developed out of the activities and deliberations focusing on the theme, "Rural Local Government and Traditional Leadership."

Local government is the second or third sphere of government, which has been established to develop closer linkages between the government and the local citizenry. It also seeks to ensure that the local citizenry have a sense of involvement in the political process that regulate their daily lives and ultimately improve their quality of life.

The weak economic and political position of the rural populace and their institutions highlight the difficulties of sustaining a viable local government system, particularly in the developing countries. The central, state (provincial) government, and the non-governmental sector have a pivotal role to play in providing the required assistance and support to capacitate rural local government institutions. Intergovernmental relations are one of the issues that have to be taken cognizance of in any consideration of how strong structures of representation and, furthermore, accountability could be established and sustained within the rural areas. Another aspect that has to be addressed is financial considerations and, more importantly, the capacity to generate revenue. The importance of assistance from the central, state (provincial) government, and the non-governmental sector is also critical in this process. The key questions that have to be addressed include, *inter alia*, how to establish and sustain local structures of representation and accountability; the impact on development service, intergovernmental relationships (with central/provincial and civic and community-based organizations); and what strategies are in place to facilitate rural development and poverty alleviation. The majority of the developing countries have acknowledged

that the rural areas have been neglected, and consequently have embarked on the required political, administrative and fiscal measures to address these issues. Some of the measures that have been taken to date include, the ushering in of policies and concomitant legislation to strengthen rural structures, increased sources of funding, human resources capacity development, and the incorporation of traditional leadership in rural governance.

On a global level, traditional leadership is generally hereditary and not subject to the universal adult suffrage electoral process. Traditional leaders broadly exercise governmental functions ranging from the provision of services to the preservation of law and order, and to the allocation of tribal land generally held in trust. Subject to their relationship with the national government, they do tend to have some form of local government in place to address the needs of rural communities. In this context, the policy issues that have to be addressed include, *inter alia*, the extent to which the institution of traditional leadership retains popular legitimacy and how it should be accommodated in a formal local government system; what their role is in municipal service delivery and development initiatives; and how their capacity can be developed to facilitate efficient and effective local governance in the rural areas. The issue of formal recognition and protection of the institution of traditional leadership has to be given serious consideration. Despite the fact that traditional authorities are responsible for a large number of functions, there has not been much capacity-development or even allocation of the required human, financial, and technical resources to ensure efficiency and effectiveness. Consequently, much has to be done to ensure that traditional leaders and structures are empowered to actually function as local government and, furthermore, as facilitators of development at the local level. A complementary relationship has to exist between traditional leadership and local democracy, thereby ensuring maximum development of the rural areas.

This publication addresses some of the policy issues highlighted above in seventeen Sub-Saharan and Afro-Caribbean countries, with particular reference to recent trends and developments. It is hoped that this publication would prove to be relevant, insightful and a valuable source of information to practitioners, academics, researchers, and students alike. The Working Group would like to record its sincere appreciation to Prof. D. Ray, attached to the University of Calgary in Canada for his leadership, positive enthusiasm and commitment in the completion of this study and the publication of this book. The Working Group would also like to gratefully acknowledge the leadership and vision of Dr. Mohan Kaul, the President of IASIA, Prof. Ian Thynne

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