

The Evaluation of the Contribution of Traditional Authorities in The Implementation of Public Policies for Local Development: The Case of the Municipality of Bocoio (2022–2025)

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the role of traditional authorities in the implementation of public in Angola, emphasizing their historical, cultural. And social relevance. It was found that, although they operate in community administration, conflict mediation, and identity preservation, their space in local governance remains marginalized. The mixed-methods approach (interviews, questionnaires, and observation) showed predominantly symbolic power, with a lack of resources and formal competencies for effective participation. A clear legal framework. Ongoing training, and co-governance mechanisms are proposed to strengthen collaboration among the state, civil society, and traditional leadership. The integration strengthens state legitimacy and inclusive, sustainable governance for development.

Keywords: Public policies; Urban management; Sustainable development; Cacuaco.

INTRODUCTION

Research problem

Local development in African contexts remains uneven and fragile due to marked territorial disparities, governance constraints, and diverse social fabrics. This study asks: How do local governance arrangements, including traditional authorities and civil society participation, influence the effectiveness and sustainability of local development initiatives in Angola's municipalities?

Explicit research questions

1. Is there a measurable association between traditional authorities' engagement and the success of local development projects (e.g., in infrastructure, service delivery) in Bocoio municipality (2022–2025)?
2. To what extent does resident participation and social dialogue predict perceived policy legitimacy and project sustainability at the local level?
3. What is the relationship between local institutional capacity and policy outcomes when controlling for territorial asymmetries (e.g., population density, distance to provincial capital)?
4. How do community stakeholders (traditional authorities, local associations, youth groups) narrate the drivers of local development, and which themes recur across interviews?

Analytical framework and methods

- Quantitative analysis: testable hypotheses using inferential statistics. For example:

- Chi-square tests to examine associations between categorical indicators of traditional authorities' involvement (absent, consultative, co-management) and indicator of project success (success, partial success, failure).
- Pearson or Spearman correlations to assess relationships between measures of social participation (e.g., meeting frequency, diverse stakeholder representation) and outcomes like citizen satisfaction or service delivery performance.
- Multivariate models (e.g., logistic or linear regression) to control for territorial asymmetries and institutional factors and to estimate the independent effect of local dialogue on policy outcomes.
- Qualitative analysis: thematic analysis of interviews and policy documents, with illustrative quotes to anchor findings. A coding scheme will identify themes such as legitimacy, trust, social recognition, participation quality, and legitimacy of traditional authorities.
- Illustrative quotes (sample placeholders to be updated with data):
 - a) "The legitimacy of decisions comes from the daily trust the community places in its elders, not from formal elections."
 - b) "We only see improvements when local actors, not just officials, walk the streets with us and listen."
 - c) "Co-management with traditional authorities helped align projects with daily realities, reducing delays."

Context and scope

The article draws on original data from the Municipality of Bocoio (2022–2025) and builds on bibliographic references in English and Portuguese. While the dissertation was written in Portuguese and translated for this article, the analysis remains grounded in local narratives and observable project metrics.

Contribution and policy relevance

By explicitly testing the link between local dialogue, traditional authority legitimacy, and development outcomes, the study informs more inclusive, people-centered governance. It demonstrates how policy effectiveness emerges from the interaction between formal institutions and socially recognized authorities, rather than from technical capacity alone.

Development

Analyzing the role of traditional authorities requires a dual lens that blends history with customary and idiosyncratic elements shaping African communities' social and cultural foundations. Traditional authorities operate as central mediators between the state and local communities, helping to sustain social order, resolve conflicts, and safeguard ancestral cultural values (Mamdani, 1996). Florêncio (2010) clarifies that "traditional authorities" encompass individuals and institutions endowed with political power responsible for regulating how social production is organized within traditional societies. This perspective demonstrates that these authorities go beyond ceremonial duties, exerting direct influence on governance, community integration, and local development processes. The present study treats traditional authorities as leaders and institutions who wield power and influence in communities rooted in customs, traditions, and ancestral values. These leaders—often called village chiefs, elder/regent figures, or traditional kings—possess competencies that extend beyond politics to encompass social, religious, and judicial dimensions. Acknowledging the significance of these leadership structures is essential to understanding how they can meaningfully contribute to implementing public policies aimed at local development (Olowu & Wunsch, 2004). In sum, traditional authorities are multi-faceted actors whose legitimacy rests on lineage, ritual authority, and community authority, shaping governance at the local level and offering potential for policy co-creation that respects cultural heritage while advancing development goals.

Analyzing the role of traditional authorities requires a double lens: history and customary elements that shape the social foundations of African communities. They function as mediators between the State and local communities, ensuring order, conflict resolution, and the preservation of ancestral cultural values (Mamdani, 1996). Florêncio (2010) defines “traditional authorities” as figures and institutions with political power that regulate the organization of social production in traditional societies. Thus, they go beyond ceremonial roles, influencing governance, community integration, and local development. Recognizing this leadership is vital for public policies that promote development while respecting cultural heritage (Olowu & Wunsch, 2004). This perspective favors the co-creation of policies that are sensitive to local context.

Origin of Traditional Authorities: Traditional African authorities were transformed by colonial rule. Before colonization, they governed local life—social, economic, political. With colonial powers, they were reconfigured to serve the state: in indirect rule (e.g., Britain in Nigeria) or as subordinate structures in direct administration (e.g., France in Senegal). In Angola, regedorias were formal administrative units led by regedores appointed by district/provincial governors, advised by local councils, with some legislative representation. In practice, decisions favored the regime, assigning regedores roles in population control, taxes, labor recruitment, infrastructure, and agricultural policy. These origins shape current tensions and policy implications.

Figure 1 – Origin of Traditional Authorities



Source: Prepared by the author

Historical Context of Traditional Authorities

African political-administrative organization, especially in Angola, features layered leadership and the tension between endogenous (local) and exogenous (colonial-imposed) systems. In the colonial era, attempts to align regedoria borders with medieval “sobados” failed, causing conflicts and social disruption. Portuguese law urged consulting communities before appointing regedores, but consultation was the exception; local communities instead designated trusted leaders to negotiate with the colonial administration, creating a bicéfalo power: an “administrative” chief under state hierarchy and an “original” chief linked to local lineages who sustained communal life with symbolic legitimacy. This resilience helped preserve identity and traditional roles despite external imposition.

Angola: Pre-colonial and Colonial

Before colonization, Angola housed centralized kingdoms (Kongo, Ndongo, Kassanje, Wambu, Vihe, Kwanyama) and looser, kin-based structures. After independence in 1975, a 27-year civil war led to centralized administration (Constitutional Revision of 1978; Law 7/81). Multipartism in 1992 brought new legal milestones

(Law 17/99; Decree-Law 2/07; Law 17/10/2010) regulating provincial, municipal, and local administrations. Despite norms, traditional authorities remained intertwined with state structures. The “heritage” of kingdoms continued to influence local governance and policy implementation (Guedes & Lopes, 2007).

Evolution of Traditional Authority in Angola

Traditional authorities trace legitimacy to pre-colonial power, but colonial codification limited autonomy, subordinating them to the colonial regime (Feijó, 2012). Post-2000, scholars describe a dilemma: symbolic power and community mediation versus limited political power (Neto, 2022). Their contemporary role blends advisory functions with mediation, land management, dispute resolution, culture, and environmental preservation, even as formal political authority remains with the state (Ribot, 2004). They are crucial for local development when dialogue between cultural values and the modern state is balanced (Guedes & Lopes, 2007).

Figure 2 — Municipal Administrator of Bocoio and Sobas of Benguela



Source: Prepared by the author

Public policies at the local level can be classified by Lowi (1972) into: Redistributive policies, aimed at reducing inequalities (e.g., Angola’s Kwenda cash-transfer program, ex-combatant reintegration, youth/women/disabled support). Distributive policies allocate resources without taking rights from others (e.g., PIIM, support to family farming, expansion of technical/professional and university education). Regulatory policies regulate behavior via laws (mining/oil regulation, anti-corruption laws, health and commercial regulation).

Constitutive/structuring policies organize state functioning (administrative/judicial reforms, new municipalities). Economic policies seek stability and growth (PDN, privatizations, fiscal/foreign-exchange policies). Environmental policies cover waste management, reforestation, protected areas.

The text outlines the role of customary authorities in managing public affairs: safeguarding land rights for cultivation, ensuring exiled community members retain parcels, facilitating land loans/buying by outsiders, enforcing access and use norms, and resolving conflicts via onjango at each level if needed. It notes post-independence upheavals, with villages splitting under shifting political/military control, sometimes necessitating administrative Sobas; some elders justify maintaining traditional chiefs during crises, while stability later shifts their relationship with the state. Part 2.8.3–2.8.6 covers public policy formation and strategy: agenda setting, identifying problems, and developing viable action plans, framed in the policy cycle (agenda, decision, implementation, evaluation). 2.8.4–2.8.6 discuss strategies for shaping the agenda, causal analysis, problem gravity, incidence, novelty, proximity, crisis rhetoric, target groups, means vs ends, solutions, and the impacts/advantages of public policies in villages, with reference to Lowi’s typology and development discourse.

In Muls (2018), local economic development theory emerges from the failure of traditional models that center either the state as the main promoter or the market as the sole coordinator. Development is a dynamic process

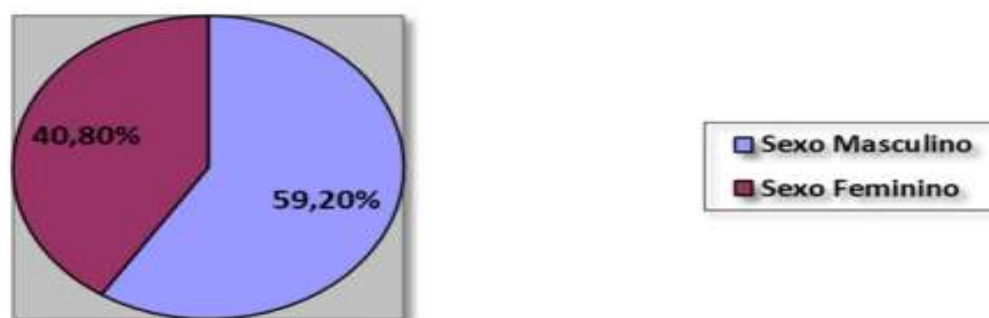
transforming production modes, technology, and social, political, and economic institutions. The old debate between state versus market is superseded by the need for a calibrated mix. Intermediary coordination forms—local organizations, public authorities, and civil society representations—play a crucial role alongside production and regulation in a territory. The central challenge is how to articulate these three intermediaries with the two dominant traditional coordination forms. The analysis shows the Bocoio municipality’s economy is mainly agricultural, with hunting preceding agriculture, and trade as a secondary base.

RESULTS

This section critically interprets empirical data from the study on the role of traditional authorities in implementing local development policies in Bocoio, from 2022 to 2025, acknowledging that numbers require a theoretical and contextual frame to reveal social, political, and cultural meanings (Souza, 2007; Weiss, 1972). Data collection methods—questionnaires, interviews, and direct observation—were progressively refined to better capture institutional and traditional actors’ perceptions, reflecting the flexibility needed in Angola’s sociocultural landscape where formal state norms coexist with traditional governance practices (Feijó, 2012; Rouland, 2003).

Socioprofessional profile of Bocoio Municipal Administration staff shows a male-dominated workforce, yet female participation is notable and approaching balance. Women account for 40.8% of staff, signaling progress toward gender equality enshrined in Angola’s 2010 Constitution; nevertheless, parity should be pursued as a strategic quality in policy-making (aligned with UN governance norms).

Graph 1 – Genders of AMB staff?



Source: Prepared by the author

The workforce is predominantly young (20–35 years; 48.8%), followed by 36–45 (30.6%) and 45+ (28.6%), suggesting substantial youthful capital with potential for learning and innovation (Santana, 2020).

Table 1 – Ages of the employees.

Age	Number of people	Percentage.
From 20 to 35	20	48,8 %
From 36 to 45	15	30,6 %
From 36 onwards	14	28,56 %
Total	49	100 %

Source: Prepared by the author

Length of service indicates 61.2% have over 10 years, implying institutional memory but also challenges for renewal; a mix of experienced and younger staff can balance technical demands with local realities. Education and professional qualifications are generally solid for public-management roles (Licenciados 30.6%; Técnico Médio 46.9%), though 18.36% lack formal training in the area, pointing to a need for ongoing capacity-building.

Overall, a majority recognize substantial contributions from traditional authorities to local development (about 39% see significant impact; 16% see no contribution), highlighting the enduring relevance of traditional legitimacy in mediating state-population relations amidst plural governance.

Graph 2 – To what extent do you consider that traditional authorities contribute to local development?



Source: Prepared by the author

Challenges faced by traditional authorities

The main obstacles are lack of resources, weak legal recognition, conflicts with formal authorities, and insufficient technical training. These findings support prior research in Angola showing symbolic rather than substantive legal powers, underscoring the need for a clear legal framework that defines competencies, responsibilities, and state-traditional power collaboration. Graph 6 shows: 31% (15 respondents) cite lack of resources as the major challenge, 25% cite insufficient legal recognition, 24% cite conflicts with formal authorities, and 20% cite lack of technical training.

Consultation and acceptance of public policies

Pre-implementation consultation with traditional authorities is only partial, challenging participatory governance and policy effectiveness. Yet, their presence increases policy acceptance in communities. Graph 7 reveals: 41% are sometimes consulted, 27% are consulted before implementation, and 14% report they are never invited. This highlights a concern: a portion is not engaged in policy processes.



Source: Prepared by the author

Knowledge and legitimacy

Knowledge of public policies is mainly deemed “reasonable,” signaling integration efforts but persistent structural limits, such as limited formal literacy and restricted information access. Graph 8 indicates: 61.02% say traditional authorities contribute to policy acceptance, 34.68% say they contribute to it to some extent, and 4.08% say they do not contribute. Overall, findings suggest traditional authorities positively influence policy acceptance, though stronger formal incorporation is needed.

Figure 8 – Does the presence of traditional authorities contribute to increasing the community’s acceptance of public policies?



Source: Prepared by the author

DISCUSSION

Results for the Municipality of Bocoio (2022–2025) indicate that traditional authorities (sobas and regedores) continue to play a structuring role in local governance, acting as social mediators, drivers of community mobilisation and facilitators of public policy acceptance. This reading aligns with the literature that highlights the deep social legitimacy of traditional authorities in many African contexts, frequently surpassing formal administrative institutions, especially in rural areas. In Angola, studies in other municipalities suggest similar patterns of persistence of traditional influence even in the face of fractured or imperfect administrative structures.

Juxtaposition with the literature on other Angolan municipalities

In Malanje, Benguela and Huambo, analogous mechanisms of mediation between communities and the state apparatus are observed, with traditional authorities functioning as gateways to public services, conflict resolution, and support for the implementation of local programmes. These findings corroborate the idea that traditional social capital can accelerate or facilitate the adoption of public policies when there is a vacuum in formal governance.

In contexts of institutional fragility, the presence of traditional leadership tends to widen the social legitimacy of policies, provided there are channels for participation and accountability mechanisms that prevent capture by local elites. In Bocoio, the sobas and regedores engage in conflict resolution, village organisation, informal land management and relay government directives, reinforcing the function of a bridge between community and the Municipal Administration.

Conflicts with formal authorities

Although there is cooperation, a persistent tension is observed between formal planning mechanisms and traditional structures. Gaps such as limited prior consultation in policy design and weak coordination between the formal and traditional spheres reflect classic institutional conflicts: practical legitimacy (community participation) versus normative legitimacy (law and official processes).

The literature indicates that, to broaden participation and policy effectiveness, it is necessary to formally recognise the role of traditional authorities without abandoning institutional safeguards. In Bocoio, this tension between local participation and normative compliance suggests that formalising the traditional role can coexist with greater accountability, provided there are clear institutional agreements on consultation, duties and accountability.

CONCLUSION

The present study, by assessing the contribution of traditional authorities to the execution of public policies for local development in the Municipality of Bocoio between 2022 and 2025, allows extracting historically, institutionally, socially, and politically relevant conclusions with practical significance. First, it concludes that traditional leadership constitutes a historically, culturally, and socially important element in African societies, including Angola, playing key roles in informal land administration, resolution of community conflicts, social mediation, and preservation of cultural identity. However, it appears that within the framework of contemporary local governance, traditional authorities are still often marginalized in formal decision-making processes, limiting the harnessing of their potential as strategic actors in local development. This aligns with Englebert (2002) and Oomen (2005), who associate the exclusion of traditional power with weakening the legitimacy and effectiveness of public policies in rural contexts.

Second, the study shows that the nature, organization, and degree of influence of traditional authorities vary significantly between countries and within territories, depending on historical, sociocultural, economic, and legal-constitutional contexts. In Bocoio, leaders adapt to social and institutional transformations, aiming to respond to community needs and influence, when possible, local governance processes. Convergence between democratic local governance and traditional leadership depends on actual development needs, making it unlikely to mobilize popular legitimacy for conflicting projects without generating authority conflicts.

Finally, empirical data reveal a significant deficit of legal and institutional mechanisms granting traditional authorities practical competences: they exert symbolic and social power but lack formal instruments to intervene more structurally in the execution, monitoring, and evaluation of public policies. Overcoming this requires the effective implementation of local authorities, provided they incorporate traditional power as a legitimate partner in governance, as argued by North (1990) and Buarque (2008). The conclusion is that traditional authorities are indispensable social actors for local development, but their contribution remains undervalued and institutionally fragile, requiring a reconfiguration of state-traditional power relations through dialogue, cooperation, and mutual recognition.

Recommendations derived from the study's conclusions stress strengthening, in a strategic and integrated way, the participation of traditional authorities in implementing public policies. The aim is to valorize their historical and cultural role, foster inclusive, transparent, and efficient local governance, and address Angola's contemporary community development challenges. Key proposals:

- Strengthen the legal-institutional framework to create formal coordination mechanisms among local administrations, state bodies, and traditional leadership, ensuring effective interplay between formal and traditional power (Oomen, 2005).
- Continuously build capacity and promote digital literacy through regular training in public administration, conflict mediation, human rights, community management, and sustainable development; implement literacy and digital programs so leaders can follow policies and participate in decisions.
- Ensure adequate material and logistical means (transport, communications, uniforms, administrative supplies).
- Promote co-management involving traditional authorities in participatory management of natural resources, social programs, and community infrastructure.
- Implement participatory monitoring and evaluation by including traditional authorities on program oversight committees.

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