Indigenous Political Legitimacy and Governance Practices in Namibia's Hybrid Political System: Perspectives from Traditional Leaders

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ABSTRACT

Traditional leaders in Namibia's Kavango region occupy a position of enduring authority within the country's hybrid political system, and this study set out to examine how that authority is constructed, sustained and practised in the leaders' own words. Adopting a qualitative multiple case study design within an interpretivist paradigm, the research was conducted in the Kavango region of northeastern Namibia, an area home to the Kavango tribes and known for the strength of its traditional leadership structures, over the period January to March 2026. Nine traditional leaders, drawn from an initial target of twelve, were recruited through purposive sampling supplemented by snowball referral, with recruitment continuing until data saturation was reached. Individual semi-structured interviews generated the data, which were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis proceeding through familiarisation, coding, categorisation and theme development. Participants are identified throughout by the codes TL1 to TL9.Three themes emerged from the analysis. Traditional leaders were first positioned as custodians of culture, identity and indigenous governance systems that predate both colonial rule and the post-independence democratic state. Second, traditional authority was described as fulfilling a substantive peacebuilding function through reconciliation-oriented customary dispute resolution, which communities regarded as accessible, rapid and inexpensive. Third, traditional leaders reported continuing responsibility for the administration and regulation of communal land, with customary approval treated as conferring legitimacy on settlement and land use. Across all three themes, participants grounded their authority in ancestry, communal recognition and cultural continuity rather than in constitutional or electoral procedure, and they framed customary governance as complementary to, rather than competing with, statutory structures. The study concludes that indigenous governance systems in Namibia function as substantive rather than merely symbolic institutions within the country's hybrid political order, and that their legitimacy rests on a sociological rather than a normative-procedural basis.

Keywords: Indigenous political legitimacy; traditional authority; customary governance; sociological legitimacy; hybrid governance; Namibia.

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary governance scholarship increasingly recognises that political legitimacy in postcolonial African states cannot be adequately understood through constitutional and electoral frameworks alone (Ferrari, 2022; Fossen, 2024). Many African societies operate within hybrid political systems in which liberal democratic institutions coexist with indigenous governance structures inherited from precolonial and colonial arrangements. Mamdani (1996) describes this coexistence as a form of institutional bifurcation, in which citizens engage a modern constitutional state on the one hand and customary authority structures on the other, each drawing on distinct sources of legitimacy. Understanding governance in such contexts therefore requires attention not only to the formal architecture of the democratic state but also to the enduring authority of indigenous political institutions.

In Namibia, indigenous governance systems continue to occupy a significant position within rural administration and cultural governance. Traditional authorities are formally recognised under the Traditional Authorities Act 25 of 2000 (Republic of Namibia, 2000) and are assigned a statutory role in the allocation of customary land rights under the Communal Land Reform Act 5 of 2002 (Republic of Namibia, 2002). They remain central to land allocation, dispute settlement, cultural preservation and community leadership across many ethnic communities. Hinz (2010) observes that customary law in Namibia continues to shape local governance practice and societal norms despite the dominance of the country's liberal constitutional framework. This coexistence illustrates the persistence of indigenous political legitimacy alongside formal democratic governance institutions more than three decades after independence.

Unlike liberal democratic systems, which derive legitimacy primarily from constitutional codification and electoral representation, customary governance systems derive authority from historical continuity, cultural embeddedness, communal trust and socially recognised moral obligations (Nyathi & Ajani, 2024). Governance within indigenous systems is therefore relational rather than procedural: authority is exercised through moral leadership, kinship obligation and communal recognition rather than through codified rules or electoral mandates (Balogun, 2022). This resonates with Weber's (1978) classical conception of traditional authority as a form of legitimate domination grounded in long-established custom and inherited practice; with Beetham's (1991) argument that power is legitimate only where it is acquired and exercised in conformity with rules that are justifiable in terms of shared beliefs and expressly consented to by the subordinate; and with Fossen's (2024) more recent contention that legitimacy is not a fixed institutional condition but a socially negotiated process, continually reaffirmed through everyday recognition and judgement.

While a substantial body of research has examined the formal institutions of liberal democracy and the policy dimensions of governance reform in Africa, comparatively less attention has been paid to how traditional leaders themselves understand and articulate the basis of their own political legitimacy and the governance functions they perform. Existing Namibian scholarship has tended to approach customary authority either through legal-doctrinal analysis of customary law or through survey-based measures of citizen attitudes, leaving the interpretive accounts of office-holders themselves comparatively underexplored. This article addresses that gap. Drawing on data generated for a broader doctoral study on rethinking liberal democracy in Namibia, it centres the perspectives of traditional leaders in order to examine how indigenous political legitimacy is constructed, sustained and practised within Namibia's hybrid political system.

Objective of the Study

This article addresses a single objective: to examine indigenous political legitimacy and governance practices in Namibia's hybrid political system, drawing on the perspectives and experiences of traditional leaders.

Theoretical Framework he study was anchored in Indigenous Governance Theory and Democratic Governance Theory. The two theories were selected because they collectively situate traditional authority within Namibia's broader hybrid political order: Indigenous Governance Theory explains the internal logic and sources of legitimacy of customary authority, while Democratic Governance Theory supplies the comparative frame of the liberal constitutional state within which indigenous governance continues to operate.

Indigenous Governance Theory

Indigenous Governance Theory addresses governance systems rooted in traditional cultural practice, communal decision-making and respect for customary law. Such systems are characterised by consensus-building, an orientation towards communal well-being, and legitimacy derived from historical and cultural continuity, with traditional leaders such as chiefs and elders playing a central role in maintaining social order and resolving disputes, particularly in rural settings (Nyathi & Ajani, 2024). The theory was directly relevant to this study because it provided the principal lens for examining how traditional leaders themselves understand the cultural and historical foundations of their authority, how indigenous governance systems address community needs such as land administration and conflict resolution, and how such systems continue to command legitimacy despite the expansion of liberal democratic governance.

Democratic Governance Theory

Democratic Governance Theory emphasises participation, accountability, inclusivity, transparency and the rule of law, and holds that governance legitimacy arises from the active involvement of citizens in decision-making through representative institutions. Within this study, the theory was applied not to evaluate traditional authority against a democratic standard, but to situate indigenous governance practices within the wider institutional environment of Namibia's constitutional democracy, thereby illuminating the extent to which indigenous and democratic sources of legitimacy operate in parallel, in tension, or in complementary fashion.

Integration of the Two Theories

The integration of the two theories provided a comprehensive basis for interpreting the findings. Indigenous Governance Theory explained why participants grounded traditional authority in ancestry, cultural continuity and communal recognition, while Democratic Governance Theory provided the institutional backdrop against which the distinctiveness, and the complementary potential, of indigenous governance could be understood. Read together, the two theories support the broader analytical distinction between normative legitimacy, which rests on constitutional and procedural mechanisms, and sociological legitimacy, which rests on public acceptance and recognition (Beetham, 1991; Erman & Furendal, 2022). This distinction supplied the interpretive axis along which the findings reported below are discussed.

METHODOLOGY

Research Paradigm and Design

The study was located within an interpretivist research paradigm, resting on a relativist ontological position that treats political legitimacy and authority as socially constructed and historically situated rather than as fixed, objective conditions, and on a subjectivist epistemology in which knowledge is co-constructed through interaction between researcher and participant. This orientation was considered appropriate given the study's concern with how traditional leaders themselves make meaning of their authority and governance role within a hybrid political system (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A qualitative approach was adopted, using a multiple case study design, in order to permit an in-depth, contextually grounded exploration of indigenous governance as it is practised across different communities, with each traditional authority area treated as a bounded case and cross-case patterns examined thematically.

Study Setting, Population and Sampling

The study was conducted in selected traditional authority areas across six regions of Namibia, namely Kavango, Zambezi, Omusati, Kunene, Omaheke and Hardap, between January and March 2026. The inclusion of traditional leaders from these regions was intended to provide contextual diversity in the examination of indigenous political legitimacy and governance practices rather than to facilitate systematic regional or ethnic comparison. The selected areas represent different customary governance contexts within Namibia and enabled the study to capture perspectives from traditional leaders operating within varied local institutional and cultural environments.

Traditional leaders constituted the population of interest because they are formally recognised custodians of customary authority and are directly involved in cultural governance, community administration, dispute resolution and, in relevant communal areas, land administration. The Traditional Authorities Act 25 of 2000 assigns traditional authorities functions that include promoting peace and welfare, administering customary law, and preserving the culture, language, traditions and traditional values of their communities.

Participants were selected using purposive sampling, based on their recognised positions of traditional authority, active involvement in community governance and experience of interaction with statutory institutions. Snowball sampling was subsequently used to identify additional participants, particularly where access to traditional leaders was mediated by customary protocols. Twelve traditional leaders were initially targeted, of whom nine

participated in the study. Recruitment continued until the researchers judged that further interviews were no longer generating substantially new codes or conceptual insights.

The sample was therefore not intended to provide statistical representation of Namibia's traditional authorities or to support comparisons between the six regions. Rather, the regional spread was used to provide contextual diversity within a qualitative multiple-case design. The findings should consequently be interpreted as an account of how participating traditional leaders understood and articulated indigenous political legitimacy and governance within their respective customary settings.

Data Collection

Data were generated through individual semi-structured interviews guided by an interview schedule covering the sources of traditional authority, the governance functions performed by traditional leaders, and the relationship between customary and statutory institutions. The format allowed participants to elaborate on their understanding of indigenous political legitimacy and governance practice in their own terms while ensuring coverage of the core areas of inquiry. Interviews lasted approximately 30 to 45 minutes and were conducted in Lozi, Subiya, and Mafwe and these were translated into English for better analysis. With participants' permission, interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim; where recording was declined, contemporaneous notes were taken.

Data Analysis

Transcripts were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Analysis proceeded through familiarisation with the transcripts, the generation of initial codes, the collation of codes into candidate themes, the review and refinement of those themes against the full dataset, and the definition and naming of final themes. Coding was inductive but interpreted in dialogue with the two theories set out in Section 1.2. Three themes were generated, and these organise the presentation of findings in Section 3.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness was pursued using the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility was supported by prolonged engagement with the participating communities, by the use of verbatim participant extracts in reporting, and by member checking: transcript summaries and the preliminary interpretations drawn from them were returned to participants, who were invited to confirm, correct or elaborate upon the rendering of their accounts, and the clarifications they offered were carried into the final analysis. Transferability is supported by thick description of the study setting and of participants' characteristics, which allows readers to judge the applicability of the findings to comparable customary governance settings. Dependability and confirmability were pursued through the maintenance of an audit trail comprising interview recordings, transcripts, the codebook and analytic memoranda, and through peer review of the analysis: the co-authors independently examined the coding frame and a sample of coded transcripts, and divergences in the application of codes and in the boundaries between candidate themes were resolved through discussion until agreement was reached. The first author additionally maintained a reflexive journal, recognising that his own positionality in relation to traditional authority shapes the interpretation of participant accounts.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical clearance for the broader study was granted by the Africa Research University Research Ethics Committee on 29th August, 2025 dated. Permission to approach traditional leaders was obtained from Ministry of Urban and Rural Development. Participation was voluntary and based on written informed consent, and participants were free to withdraw at any stage without penalty. To protect confidentiality and anonymity, participants are identified throughout this article by the codes TL1 to TL9, consistent with the coding convention used in the original study. Recordings and transcripts were stored in password-protected files accessible only to the research team.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Consistent with the study objective, the findings are organised around three themes generated from the interviews with traditional leaders: traditional leaders as custodians of culture, identity and indigenous governance systems; the maintenance of peace, unity and social harmony; and the administration and regulation of communal land. The profile of participants is summarised in Table 1 and the structure of the analysis, together with the number of participants contributing to each theme, is summarised in Table 2.

Profile of Participants

Nine traditional leaders participated in the study. Their anonymised profiles are presented in Table 1. The table includes the administrative region and customary/ethnic context where this information can be reported without compromising participant confidentiality. The regional distribution is presented for contextual diversity and should not be interpreted as evidence of regional representativeness or systematic cross-regional comparison. Their anonymised profiles are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Profile of participating traditional leaders (N = 9)

Code	Region	Position held	Years in office
TL1	Kavango region	Traditional Leader	7
TL2	Zambezi region	Traditional Leader	15
TL3	Omusati region	Traditional Leader	8
TL4	Kunene region	Traditional Leader	17
TL5	Omaheke region	Traditional Leader	10
TL6	Hardap region	Traditional Leader	12
TL7	Kavango region	Induna	11
TL8	Zambezi region	Induna	12
TL9	Omaheke region	Induna	9

Source: Fieldwork data.

Traditional Leaders as Custodians of Culture, Identity and Indigenous Governance Systems

The first theme to emerge was that traditional leaders occupy a central position as custodians of indigenous cultural systems, values, customs and community identity. Participants described traditional authority as central to preserving governance practices that existed prior to colonialism and the introduction of liberal democratic governance, and positioned traditional leaders as symbols of continuity, unity and moral guidance within local communities.

"Traditional leaders are the custodians of our customs, traditions, and cultural identity. Before the introduction of modern democratic systems, communities already had established systems of governance that regulated behaviour, social relations, and leadership succession. Even today, people still rely on traditional authorities to preserve those values because culture gives people a sense of belonging and identity." (TL1)

"Traditional authorities represent the historical identity of indigenous communities. Even though Namibia adopted liberal democratic governance after independence, traditional institutions continue to exist because

communities still trust and identify with them. Our legitimacy comes from history, ancestry, and cultural recognition by the people." (TL4)

"Traditional leadership remains important because communities still believe in indigenous systems of governance. Our authority is rooted in culture, ancestry, and long-standing traditions. People trust traditional leaders because they see them as guardians of community identity, peace, and social order." (TL9)

These accounts position traditional leaders not as ceremonial figures within a democratic state, but as active governance actors whose authority is grounded in ancestry, communal trust, cultural continuity and historical recognition. The pattern is consistent with scholarship arguing that indigenous governance systems across Africa historically functioned as organised systems of political authority rooted in communal norms, customary law and consensus-oriented leadership (Balogun, 2022; Nyathi & Ajani, 2024), and with Chlouba's (2022) observation that pre-colonial governance systems in Namibia exhibited structured forms of authority, accountability and social regulation embedded within communal life.

The findings also support Ferrari's (2022) argument that institutions maintain legitimacy when authority is reinforced through shared beliefs, historical continuity and communal recognition, and Fossen's (2024) contention that legitimacy emerges through ongoing practices of recognition and judgement within communities rather than through a single institutional foundation. Read through Beetham's (1991) framework, participants were in effect claiming legitimacy of the third order: not merely conformity with rules, nor merely justification by shared beliefs, but expressed consent evidenced in the community's continuing recourse to customary structures. In the Namibian context, traditional leadership therefore appears to derive legitimacy primarily from sustained cultural relevance and collective social acceptance rather than from constitutional procedure, reinforcing the distinction between sociological and normative legitimacy (Erman & Furendal, 2022).

Maintenance of Peace, Unity and Social Harmony

The second theme concerned the role of traditional leaders in maintaining peace, resolving conflict and promoting social harmony. Participants consistently associated indigenous governance with reconciliation and dialogue rather than punitive approaches to dispute resolution, describing customary mechanisms as accessible, trusted and oriented towards restoring relationships rather than assigning blame.

"One of our most important responsibilities is to maintain peace and unity among community members. In many cases, people prefer resolving disputes through traditional structures because the focus is on reconciliation rather than punishment. We encourage dialogue so that relationships within families and communities can be restored." (TL1)

"Traditional governance promotes reconciliation instead of confrontation. In most cases, our objective is not to punish individuals harshly but to restore peace and social balance within the community. That is why many people still prefer customary dispute resolution mechanisms." (TL5)

"Many disputes are resolved through indigenous systems before they even reach formal courts. Communities often trust traditional leaders because they believe customary systems are quicker, less expensive, and more accessible than state institutions." (TL8)

These findings reflect broader African indigenous governance scholarship, which argues that customary systems historically emphasised restorative justice, consensus-building and communal harmony as central governance principles (Balogun, 2022; Nyathi & Ajani, 2024). They also align with Chlouba's (2022) argument that traditional governance in Namibia generates habituated compliance, in which authority is accepted because it is embedded within everyday cultural practice rather than exercised through coercive power. Participants' emphasis on the accessibility, speed and cultural responsiveness of customary dispute resolution further supports scholarship on hybrid governance systems, which finds that traditional authorities frequently complement formal state institutions by providing accessible local governance at the grassroots level, particularly where state institutions have limited reach (Sulaiman & Ibrahim, 2024).

Taken together, the accounts under this theme reinforce Fossen's (2024) conceptualisation of legitimacy as arising through ongoing recognition and public judgement: traditional leaders appear to sustain legitimacy not primarily because their authority is codified, but because communities continue to experience their interventions as fair, culturally appropriate and socially binding. It should be noted, however, that these are the accounts of office-holders describing their own practice; the extent to which litigants experience customary dispute resolution as equitable, particularly women and younger community members, is a question this design cannot settle and to which Section 3.5 returns.

Administration and Regulation of Communal Land

The third theme related to the role of traditional leaders in the administration and regulation of communal land. Participants described land allocation and management as continuing to operate largely through customary procedures, with traditional approval functioning as a key source of legitimacy for settlement and land use.

"Land management is one of the most important governance functions performed by traditional authorities. Communities consult traditional leaders before occupying land because customary approval gives legitimacy to settlement and ownership." (TL2)

"Communal land administration demonstrates that traditional leadership is not only symbolic but also functional in governance. We ensure that land disputes are addressed according to customary law." (TL5)

"Traditional leadership remains influential because communal land governance still operates largely through indigenous structures and customary authority." (TL9)

These accounts correspond with scholarship on indigenous governance in Africa, which identifies communal land administration as one of the most enduring functions of traditional authority within postcolonial democratic states (Nyathi & Ajani, 2024), and with Chlouba's (2022) observation that traditional authorities in Namibia retain substantial influence over communal land governance because land administration has historically been embedded within customary social organisation. They also reflect the statutory position: the Communal Land Reform Act 5 of 2002 vests in chiefs and traditional authorities the power to allocate customary land rights, subject to ratification by the relevant communal land board (Republic of Namibia, 2002). Participants' framing of customary approval as conferring legitimacy on land occupation is therefore not only a cultural claim but also a description of a legally recognised function, and it is consistent with Ferrari's (2022) argument that institutions sustain legitimacy when authority is accompanied by shared beliefs regarding its moral appropriateness and historical rightfulness.

Importantly, participants generally did not present customary land governance as being in competition with statutory structures, but as complementary to them, providing local accessibility and community legitimacy that formal state institutions may struggle to achieve on their own. This finding is consistent with hybrid governance scholarship, which argues that effective governance within plural societies often depends on cooperation, rather than substitution, between customary and democratic institutional structures (Sulaiman & Ibrahim, 2024).

Table 2. Summary of themes, analytic content and contributing participants

Theme	**Analytic content**	**Participants**
Custodianship of culture, identity and indigenous governance	Authority grounded in ancestry, cultural continuity and communal recognition; preservation of precolonial governance practice; moral and symbolic leadership	TL1, TL4, TL9
Maintenance of peace, unity and social harmony	Reconciliation-oriented dispute resolution; restoration of relationships in place of punishment; perceived accessibility, speed and affordability relative to formal courts	TL1, TL5, TL8

Administration and regulation of communal land	Customary allocation and regulation of land; customary approval as a source of legitimacy for settlement; complementarity with statutory land administration	TL2, TL5, TL9

Source: Fieldwork data.

Gender and Inclusion Qualification

An important qualification concerns the inclusiveness of customary governance. The present findings should not be read as suggesting that customary institutions are experienced uniformly across gender or social groups. Namibia's legal framework expressly requires traditional authorities to promote gender equality in leadership, while contemporary human-rights reporting continues to identify gender equality, customary marriage, inheritance and land rights as areas requiring sustained attention. The present study did not include women, youth or ordinary community members as participants and therefore cannot determine how far the legitimacy and accessibility described by traditional leaders are shared by these groups. This limitation is particularly relevant to claims concerning customary dispute resolution and communal land administration, where the exercise of authority may be experienced differently by persons occupying different social positions.

Limitations of the Study

The findings reported in this article should be interpreted in light of the characteristics and scope of the sample. First, the study relied exclusively on the accounts of nine traditional leaders and therefore captures the perspectives of office-holders rather than the experiences of community members who are subject to, interact with, or otherwise engage with customary authority. This creates a potential self-presentation bias because participants were describing the legitimacy, effectiveness and social value of institutions in which they themselves hold positions of authority. Their accounts may consequently emphasise the socially constructive dimensions of traditional leadership, such as cultural preservation, reconciliation and communal cohesion, while giving less attention to experiences of exclusion, disagreement or unequal power within customary structures.

The absence of citizen perspectives is particularly important when interpreting claims concerning the accessibility, fairness and legitimacy of customary dispute resolution and communal land administration. Community members may experience the same institutions differently according to gender, age, social status, family position or other dimensions of social location. The present study therefore cannot establish that the legitimacy described by traditional leaders is uniformly shared across the communities they govern. Rather, it demonstrates how participating traditional leaders understand and articulate the basis and functions of their own authority.

Second, the study does not provide a systematic gender analysis of indigenous governance. Although the Traditional Authorities Act requires traditional authorities to promote gender equality in leadership, questions concerning women's participation in customary decision-making, dispute resolution, succession and access to customary land remain important areas for empirical investigation. Consequently, the findings should not be interpreted as demonstrating that customary governance is uniformly inclusive or equally experienced by men and women.

Third, the sample comprised nine participants distributed across six administrative regions. This provides contextual breadth but limited depth within individual regions: some regions are represented by only one participant, while others are represented by two. The study therefore does not support cross-regional or cross-ethnic generalisations. The inclusion of multiple regions should instead be understood as an attempt to capture variation in customary governance contexts within a qualitative multiple-case design.

Finally, the study was conducted through semi-structured interviews and therefore depended substantially on participants' retrospective and interpretive accounts. Although member checking, reflexive analysis, an audit trail and peer examination of coding were used to strengthen trustworthiness, interview data cannot independently establish the frequency, effectiveness or community-wide acceptance of the practices described by participants. Future research should therefore incorporate the perspectives of community members, including

women and youth, as well as documentary, observational and comparative evidence, in order to examine how the legitimacy described by traditional leaders corresponds with citizens' lived experiences of customary governance.

CONCLUSION

This study examined indigenous political legitimacy and governance practices in Namibia from the perspective of traditional leaders. The findings demonstrate that traditional leaders continue to be perceived, and to perceive themselves, as substantive rather than merely symbolic governance actors within Namibia's hybrid political system. Traditional authority was consistently associated with the preservation of cultural identity and indigenous governance systems, the maintenance of peace and social harmony through reconciliation-oriented dispute resolution, and the administration and regulation of communal land according to customary procedure.

Across all three themes, participants grounded the legitimacy of traditional leadership in ancestry, communal recognition and cultural continuity rather than in constitutional or electoral procedure, illustrating a form of sociological legitimacy that operates alongside, rather than in place of, the normative legitimacy of Namibia's liberal democratic institutions. The study contributes to the existing body of knowledge by providing empirical evidence, grounded in the perspectives of traditional leaders themselves, that indigenous governance systems in Namibia function as substantive and complementary components of the country's hybrid political order rather than as residual or purely ceremonial institutions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

First, the Government of Namibia should strengthen the formal recognition of traditional authorities as legitimate governance actors within the country's hybrid political system, particularly in relation to communal land administration, cultural preservation, peace building and dispute resolution.

Second, government ministries and regional councils should develop structured mechanisms for collaboration with traditional leaders, so that customary governance practices and statutory institutions operate in a coordinated rather than a parallel manner.

Third, traditional governance practices should continue to operate within constitutional principles relating to equality, justice and human rights, so that sociocultural legitimacy and democratic accountability are strengthened together rather than treated as competing concerns.

Fourth, further research should examine how citizens, rather than traditional leaders themselves, experience and evaluate the legitimacy of indigenous governance, and should extend this inquiry across Namibia's diverse ethnic communities.

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Competing Interests

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

Authors' Contributions

Author Salomon Menthos April designed the study, developed the protocol, conducted the fieldwork, performed the analysis and wrote the first draft of the manuscript. Authors Alex Kambulu and Davy Mainde supervised the study, reviewed the analysis and revised the manuscript for intellectual content. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

Consent

All authors declare that written informed consent was obtained from all participants for participation in the study and for the publication of anonymised verbatim extracts. Copies of the consent documentation are available for review by the Editorial Office of this journal.

Ethical Approval

The study received ethical clearance from the Africa Research University Research Ethics Committee on 29 August 2025. Permission to approach traditional leaders was obtained from the Ministry of Urban and Rural Development. The study was conducted in accordance with the ethical standards and procedures approved by the university research ethics committee.

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