

Traditional Rulers as Agents of Public Service Delivery: A Study of Education, Infrastructure, Sanitation, and Recreation in Asante Akyem Central Municipal Assembly, Ghana

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Abstract: *Traditional rulers remain influential in Ghana's decentralized governance landscape, yet their developmental roles are often overlooked. This study explores how chiefs in the Asante Akyem Central Municipal Assembly contribute to public service delivery—specifically in education, infrastructure, sanitation, and recreational activities. Guided by a mixed-methods design, the study combined surveys, interviews, and document analysis to gather data from community members, officials, and traditional leaders. Findings reveal that chiefs actively facilitate school projects, community sanitation, physical infrastructure, and youth development through informal authority and resource mobilization. The study concludes that traditional rulers are pivotal partners in local development. It recommends their formal integration into governance processes to enhance collaboration, accountability, and sustainability in public service delivery.*

Keywords: chieftaincy, community development, public service delivery, sanitation management, recreational services, educational infrastructure.

INTRODUCTION

Across many African societies, traditional rulers continue to perform vital governance and development functions that complement the roles of modern administrative institutions (Igbokwe-Ibeto & Nel-Sanders, 2024; Manboah-Rockson, Adjuik, & Gyader, 2024). In Ghana, traditional authorities—popularly known as chiefs—remain influential figures in both rural and urban settings, acting as custodians of culture, mediators of disputes, and facilitators of development (Asiama, 2012). Despite operating outside the formal political and administrative systems, their embeddedness in community life and history has endowed them with legitimacy and moral authority that often surpass those of elected officials (Brooks, 2012). This persistent relevance has gained renewed scholarly and policy attention, especially under decentralization and hybrid governance reforms in Africa (Brooks, 2011; Logan, 2008; Msila, 2022). More recent analyses confirm that traditional leadership continues to serve as a cornerstone of local governance, trusted by communities and playing critical roles in dispute resolution, land administration, and development planning (Mawere et al., 2022).

The 1992 Constitution of the Republic of Ghana acknowledges the significance of chieftaincy and its institutions, safeguarding their existence and affirming their place in national governance. Under this constitutional framework, chiefs are expected to stay apolitical yet are permitted to play advisory and developmental roles in their communities (Chieftaincy Bulletin, 2009). Chiefs in Ghana act as custodians of communal lands, traditional customs, and heritage, and they preside over non-criminal civil matters such as land disputes and family conflicts (Asiama, 2012). They also serve as mobilizers of communal labour and local development resources, leveraging their influence to advance the welfare of their people. The decentralization agenda of the Ghanaian state, like many in Africa, emphasizes bottom-up development and participatory governance that can be strengthened through collaboration with traditional institutions (Durokifa, Uwizeyimana, & Enaifoghe, 2022). Scholars now argue for formal integration of traditional leadership into legislative frameworks to enhance inclusive development, especially in areas under chieftaincy control (Monama & Mokoele, 2024).

This article explores the involvement of traditional rulers in the provision of four key development sectors: education, physical infrastructure, sanitation, and recreational activities. These sectors are often regarded as foundational for local development, and their adequacy or absence directly affects the socio-economic well-being of communities. While prior studies have acknowledged the symbolic and ceremonial roles of traditional leaders, fewer have systematically examined their contributions to the practical, service-oriented aspects of local governance. Even where studies exist, such as those by Yol (2010) and Brooks (2011), they often focus more on political symbolism than measurable development outcomes; yet recent analyses stress that traditional rulers can shape

service delivery directly through coordination and local legitimacy (Shikwati, 2021); (Matose, Tsawu, & Malandu, 2024).

This study responds to this gap by focusing on the Asante Akyem Central Municipal Assembly, a locality with a vibrant chieftaincy structure and visible traditional participation in community development. Through a detailed exploration of how traditional rulers contribute to the provision of educational infrastructure, oversee physical development projects, organize sanitation campaigns, and support recreational programs, the article illuminates the indispensable role traditional leaders play in shaping local development outcomes. The central research question guiding this study is: How do traditional rulers contribute to the provision of education, physical infrastructure, sanitation, and recreational services within the Asante Akyem Central Municipal Assembly?

Furthermore, the article draws from role theory and Mintzberg's managerial roles framework to interpret the activities of chiefs in their communities. These theoretical lenses help to conceptualize traditional leadership beyond its cultural and spiritual roles, positioning it within the domain of development administration. By investigating the mechanisms, impacts, and challenges associated with traditional rulers' involvement in service delivery, the study contributes to debates on hybrid governance, especially where the duality of formal and informal institutions persists in sub-Saharan Africa (Amoateng & Kalule-Sabiti, 2011). This dualism in governance has become increasingly recognized in recent literature as a necessary feature of inclusive, grassroots-led development planning (Louw, 2021).

Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

The developmental activities of traditional rulers in Ghana can be effectively understood through a dual theoretical lens—Role Theory and Henry Mintzberg's Managerial Roles. These frameworks help clarify how traditional authorities function in governance structures without formal political office and offer insights into their behavior, responsibilities, and influence within local communities (Igbokwe-Ibeto & Nel-Sanders, 2024). Recent research affirms that traditional leaders' influence in African governance remains critical, especially in contexts of hybrid political systems where they maintain legitimacy and act as effective intermediaries for community development (Balasuriya, 2023).

Role theory provides a foundational understanding of the behaviors and expectations associated with individuals occupying defined social positions. According to Oladesu (2013), every individual in any given social context assumes a "focal role," which is shaped by the surrounding "role set"—the group of people or institutions with whom the individual interacts. In the context of chieftaincy in Ghana, the chief is the focal actor, surrounded by a set that includes queen

mothers, divisional chiefs, elders, linguists, and community members. Each of these actors interacts with the chief in ways that inform his decisions and responsibilities, thereby reinforcing societal expectations.

The chief's role, according to Oladesu (2013), mirrors that of a central figure whose responsibilities are negotiated among various stakeholders. This conception is evident in the Asante chieftaincy structure, where the Asantehene acts as the central decision-maker, advised and supported by Gyasefu (elders), the Asantehemaa (queen mother), paramount chiefs, divisional chiefs, and village leaders. These traditional structures mirror the organizational hierarchy found in formal institutions, and they facilitate the execution of development activities through collective decision-making and distributed authority. Similar traditional governance hierarchies have been observed in other African contexts, where role expectations continue to guide the actions of chiefs as community managers and conflict mediators (Yaro, Nuru-Deen, & Kipo-Sunyehzi, 2024).

Furthermore, Myers (2008) notes that social roles are based on commonly known norms that guide acceptable behavior. When traditional leaders accept these norms and conform to the expectations of their communities, they gain legitimacy and the ability to mobilize people and resources. In situations where these expectations are not met, there may be community resistance or internal conflicts. Therefore, the effectiveness of traditional rulers in promoting development depends significantly on their performance of culturally sanctioned roles that align with the aspirations of their communities. This legitimacy remains powerful in rural governance, where traditional authorities are trusted more than elected officials in certain circumstances (Mawere et al., 2022).

Role theory also emphasizes that individuals incur both social rewards and costs depending on how well they adhere to or deviate from expected roles. For traditional rulers, successful engagement in education, sanitation, or infrastructure development enhances their standing, while failure to act can lead to public dissatisfaction and erosion of authority. This dynamic accountability mechanism, embedded within the traditional role set, acts as a form of grassroots oversight in the absence of formal institutional checks.

The second theoretical framework applied in this study is Henry Mintzberg's (1990) model of ten managerial roles. Mintzberg categorizes managerial responsibilities into three broad areas: interpersonal, informational, and decisional roles. These categories resonate strongly with the functions performed by traditional rulers in Ghana, particularly in relation to local development.

Under the interpersonal category, traditional rulers act as figureheads, leaders, and liaison officers. As figureheads, chiefs perform ceremonial functions such as hosting visitors, attending public events, and presiding over communal gatherings. These symbolic roles are vital for maintaining visibility and affirming their legitimacy (Mintzberg, 1990). As leaders, chiefs direct and motivate

community members, especially in mobilizing support for communal projects such as school construction or sanitation campaigns. As liaison officers, they build networks with NGOs, district assemblies, religious bodies, and diaspora communities to attract resources for development (Mintzberg, 1990).

In the informational category, chiefs perform the roles of monitors, disseminators, and spokespersons. As monitors, they gather and evaluate information on community needs by attending local meetings and reviewing reports from sub-chiefs. As disseminators, they share vital information between the municipal assembly and the local populace. As spokespersons, they represent the interests and concerns of their communities in external forums, including regional traditional councils and government agencies (Mintzberg, 1990).

The decisional category of Mintzberg's model includes the roles of entrepreneur, disturbance handler, resource allocator, and negotiator. In this domain, traditional rulers identify community needs and initiate new development projects such as building schools, health posts, and sanitation facilities. As disturbance handlers, they mediate conflicts, resolve land disputes, and ensure harmony, which is a prerequisite for effective development. As resource allocators, they collaborate with elders and unit committee members to prioritize the use of community resources. Finally, as negotiators, they engage in discussions with government officials, NGOs, and private investors to secure funding or technical support for local projects (Mintzberg, 1990). This dynamic managerial role has been documented in other African states, affirming the relevance of Mintzberg's framework in analyzing traditional leadership in modern governance contexts (Monama & Mokoele, 2024).

Mintzberg's framework thus provides a valuable lens for understanding how chiefs, though not formally part of the bureaucratic machinery, perform multifaceted leadership and managerial roles that contribute significantly to public service delivery.

Combining Role Theory and Mintzberg's framework reveals that traditional rulers function as informal but powerful development managers. Their roles are not limited to symbolic leadership but encompass a spectrum of administrative, communicative, and strategic functions akin to those of modern managers. This theoretical orientation justifies a focused inquiry into how chiefs contribute to tangible development outcomes in education, physical infrastructure, sanitation, and recreation—especially in districts such as Asante Akyem Central where state capacity is often stretched.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The literature on traditional authorities and local development in Africa, particularly in Ghana, reflects a complex interplay between indigenous institutions and modern governance structures. While traditional rulers are often characterized by their symbolic and cultural functions, there is growing recognition of their active roles in public service delivery. This review explores the contributions of chiefs to education, physical development, sanitation, and recreation—four core pillars of community development—as well as the scholarly debates surrounding their involvement. Recent studies affirm that traditional authorities remain central to community-level governance and development planning in hybrid systems, where formal government institutions are weak or inaccessible (Yaro et al., 2024).

Traditional Authorities and Public Service Provision

Traditional authority in Ghana refers to a structure of leadership rooted in cultural, historical, and legal legitimacy. It has survived colonialism and modern state formation and has adapted to contemporary governance arrangements. As Asiamah (2012) notes, traditional rulers are the custodians of land, customs, and community resources. Their position allows them to initiate, support, or influence local development projects even in the absence of formal political office. Traditional rulers are not passive relics of the past; rather, they play ongoing and strategic roles in areas such as community mobilization, dispute resolution, and social services.

In Ghana, the Chieftaincy Act 2008 (Act 759) and Article 270 of the 1992 Constitution formally recognize the institution of chieftaincy and protect it from political encroachment. The Chieftaincy Bulletin (2009) emphasizes that traditional authorities have a mandate to preserve communal interests, support developmental goals, and act as moral and cultural leaders. These legal frameworks form the basis for their legitimacy in participating in governance and service delivery, including education, sanitation, infrastructure, and recreation. Legal recognition alone is not enough; traditional authorities must constantly negotiate their relevance through active development engagement and community legitimacy (Mawere et al., 2022).

Brooks (2011) argues that traditional rulers provide a unique conduit for development due to their proximity to and influence over community members. Chiefs often possess a deep understanding of local needs and priorities, enabling them to design and implement contextually relevant initiatives. The ability to mobilize communal labour and encourage local participation is a particular strength of traditional institutions. Despite this, however, the role of traditional leaders is often underappreciated or inadequately incorporated into formal development planning by municipal authorities.

Chiefs and Educational Development

Education is a fundamental domain in which traditional rulers exert significant influence. Chiefs often advocate for the construction of schools, provision of teaching materials, and sponsorship of needy students. Yol (2010) found that in rural Nigeria, traditional rulers were instrumental in facilitating the establishment of schools, thereby increasing access to education in underserved communities. A similar pattern can be observed in Ghana, where chiefs support the siting of schools on communal lands, lobby NGOs and philanthropists for educational support, and sometimes organize scholarship schemes for brilliant but needy students.

The Daily Graphic (June 5th, 2013) reports that the reign of Okofo Sobin Kan II, the Dompooasehene, led to significant improvements in education within the Adansi North District. This example illustrates the ability of chiefs to champion educational development and influence public opinion in favour of schooling. Chiefs also play a cultural role in promoting education, for instance, by using festivals, durbars, and other community events as platforms to advocate for school attendance and discipline among youth. New research confirms that traditional leaders continue to drive educational access, especially in underserved rural regions where state presence is limited (Monama & Mokoele, 2024).

Asiama (2012) emphasizes that the ability of chiefs to rally community members around educational goals stems from their historical roles as custodians of knowledge and tradition. Even though they are not educators themselves, their leadership and moral authority can catalyze community investment in education infrastructure and learning outcomes. However, challenges such as limited financial resources and lack of formal authority over education policy sometimes constrain their effectiveness.

Chieftaincy and Infrastructure Development

Physical projects such as roads, water systems, health posts, and community centers are essential for local development. Chiefs have traditionally led the way in initiating and facilitating such projects. According to Brooks (2012), traditional rulers can identify infrastructural needs more accurately than distant government officials due to their proximity to the grassroots. They often act as intermediaries between the state and the community, advocating for projects and securing land for public use.

As highlighted in the original study, traditional rulers in Asante Akyem Central have facilitated the construction of boreholes, markets, and community buildings through communal labour and external partnerships. This confirms Yol's (2010) finding that traditional rulers in Nigeria mobilized communities to undertake physical projects, often with little or no external funding.

Chiefs' capacity to mobilize resources—including voluntary labour and locally available materials—remains a unique advantage in contexts of limited government investment.

However, infrastructural interventions by traditional rulers are not without obstacles. These include bureaucratic delays in land documentation, limited access to funding, and political marginalization. Furthermore, chiefs must navigate the tension between customary land tenure systems and modern legal frameworks, which can complicate project implementation. Nevertheless, the literature confirms that chiefs are not only ceremonial leaders but also proactive contributors to the physical development of their communities (Asiama, 2012; Brooks, 2012). Chiefs also enhance development cooperation through their informal networks and alliances, acting as local brokers for infrastructure aid and partnerships (Balasuriya, 2023).

Traditional Leaders and Sanitation Management

Sanitation and hygiene are critical aspects of community health, yet they are often overlooked in public discussions of chieftaincy roles. Traditional rulers have long been involved in organizing communal clean-up exercises, enforcing local sanitation rules, and ensuring environmental cleanliness. Brooks (2011) notes that chiefs act as stewards of land and water resources, and their involvement in environmental protection and sanitation activities is rooted in both tradition and necessity.

In the Ghanaian context, many chiefs lead “clean-up days,” during which members of the community are required to participate in activities such as clearing gutters, collecting refuse, and weeding public spaces. These practices are often enforced through customary fines or community sanctions, thereby ensuring compliance. Such communal approaches to sanitation reflect indigenous governance mechanisms that prioritize collective responsibility and mutual accountability. This approach has recently been supported in literature emphasizing the effectiveness of traditional authority-led environmental practices in improving rural sanitation outcomes (Matose et al., 2024).

Moreover, chiefs also serve as intermediaries between environmental health officers and the community. In many cases, they facilitate public education campaigns, mediate conflicts arising from sanitation enforcement, and provide land for the construction of public toilets or waste management facilities. These efforts underscore their ongoing relevance in improving public health outcomes, especially in areas with weak state capacity.

Despite their contributions, chiefs often face constraints such as inadequate logistical support and lack of integration into official sanitation planning processes. Their activities are also vulnerable

to political interference and generational shifts in community values, which may erode traditional compliance mechanisms.

Recreational and Cultural Promotion by Traditional Rulers

Recreational activities, including cultural festivals, community sports, and youth development programs, contribute significantly to community cohesion and social development. Chiefs play a central role in preserving and promoting these activities. They organize traditional festivals, oversee the construction of recreational centers, and support local youth groups in sports and the arts.

In Asante societies, for instance, festivals such as Akwasidae are used not only to celebrate cultural heritage but also to bring together community members for development discussions and fundraising activities. These events often provide platforms for launching community projects and recognizing outstanding individuals who have contributed to local welfare. Through these cultural and recreational functions, chiefs reinforce social bonds and promote a sense of communal identity.

Brooks (2012) argues that traditional festivals have increasingly become instruments of community development and external engagement. Chiefs use such events to attract investors, government officials, and development partners to their communities. Recreational infrastructure, such as playing fields, community centers, and event grounds, is often constructed or maintained under the direction of traditional authorities. More recent evidence highlights that cultural gatherings foster social trust and civic engagement, particularly when led by respected traditional figures (Yaro et al., 2024).

However, the promotion of recreational activities also faces several challenges. Chiefs must negotiate with local government authorities for funding and support, and there may be limited interest among the youth in traditional cultural expressions. Yet, by adapting to contemporary forms of recreation—such as sponsoring football tournaments or music events—traditional rulers continue to assert their relevance and influence.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a descriptive survey design that incorporated both quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques. The use of a mixed-methods approach enabled a holistic understanding of how traditional rulers contribute to the provision of education, physical infrastructure, sanitation, and recreational services in Asante Akyem Central Municipal Assembly. According to Babbie (2005), descriptive research designs are suitable for studying current phenomena, identifying relationships, and drawing inferences from field-based observations. The design was

selected because it facilitated the use of structured questionnaires, interviews, and documentary analysis to assess the role of traditional rulers from multiple perspectives.

The study was conducted in the Asante Akyem Central Municipal Assembly, located in the Ashanti Region of Ghana. The municipality comprises numerous towns and villages with a strong presence of traditional authority. Konongo-Odumase serves as the administrative capital. The area is characterized by a mix of urban, peri-urban, and rural communities, where traditional leadership plays a prominent role in community mobilization and governance. According to the Municipal Assembly's Planning Department, the district has a population of over 70,000 people, with mining, livestock, poultry, agriculture and commercial trading as the dominant economic activities. Market days in the area are predominantly Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays.

The municipality was chosen because of its vibrant chieftaincy institutions and the visible involvement of traditional rulers in initiating and supporting local development projects. Chiefs in this area are known to actively participate in education, sanitation, infrastructure, and cultural preservation.

The target population included traditional rulers, municipal assembly staff, unit committee members, and residents of selected communities. The study employed stratified sampling to ensure representation from each stakeholder group, followed by purposive sampling to select key informants based on their roles in community development.

A total of 100 respondents were selected using this stratified and purposive technique. They included:

- 10 chiefs and sub-chiefs
- 20 municipal and community-level government staff
- 10 teachers and headmasters
- 30 residents from communities with completed development projects
- 30 residents from communities without such projects

This distribution ensured a balanced perspective on the contributions and challenges of traditional rulers.

Table 2: Analytical Focus by Sector

(Source: Authors' Analysis, 2024)

Ethical Considerations

Ethical clearance was obtained from the relevant academic institution. Informed consent was sought from all participants, and confidentiality was maintained. Interviewees were assured of the voluntary nature of their participation, and all data were used solely for academic purposes.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Chiefs and Education Infrastructure/Support

The study revealed that traditional rulers in Asante Akyem Central Municipal Assembly play significant roles in the educational development of their communities. Chiefs act as facilitators, initiators, and custodians of educational progress. Their involvement spans land provision for schools, mobilization of communal labour, facilitation of funding from development partners, and advocacy for student enrollment and retention.

Evidence from interviews indicated that chiefs are deeply invested in ensuring that educational infrastructure exists within their domains. One prominent chief emphasized, "Without education, our future leaders will lack direction. That's why I gave out part of the stool land to build a junior high school here." This perspective aligns with the observations of Yol (2010), who argued that traditional rulers in Nigeria serve as development anchors, often initiating the establishment of schools in rural areas. This role remains salient today, as traditional rulers continue to act as vital mediators in bridging access gaps in underserved regions by leveraging their communal legitimacy (Monama & Mokoele, 2024).

Respondents from the education sector confirmed that several school buildings in the municipality were either constructed or renovated under the direct supervision or initiation of traditional authorities. In some cases, the chiefs went as far as donating building materials, securing funds from NGOs, or using community festivals to raise money for school projects. As Brooks (2011) notes, chiefs' capacity to mobilize voluntary resources gives them an edge in driving grassroots development.

The findings from the study indicate that traditional rulers in Asante Akyem Central Municipal Assembly are pivotal agents in the initiation and execution of physical development projects. These include roads, community centers, water supply systems, health posts, markets, and other infrastructural assets essential for socio-economic advancement.

Data collected from both community members and officials revealed that traditional rulers serve as catalysts in identifying infrastructural needs and in mobilizing support to address them. Their involvement often begins with land allocation, which is critical in a customary land tenure system like Ghana's. Chiefs leverage their control over land to provide space for constructing health facilities, schools, markets, and boreholes, without which these public goods may not be realized.

This finding reflects the argument made by Brooks (2012), who noted that traditional authorities, due to their proximity to the people and control over land, are uniquely positioned to facilitate infrastructure development. In many communities studied, chiefs donated plots of land and acted as intermediaries between the community and governmental agencies or NGOs. For example, one sub-chief narrated: "The health post you see there would not have existed if the chief had not intervened and donated land when the assembly delayed." Similar dynamics have been noted across sub-Saharan Africa, where chieftaincy plays a mediating role in infrastructure negotiations and trust-building (Yaro et al., 2024).

Apart from land donation, traditional rulers mobilized community members for voluntary labour—known locally as communal labour or "nnoboa." Through this, residents contributed time and effort to dig foundation trenches, transport materials, or participate in building construction. According to Yol (2010), such community labour systems have long been sustained through the authority of chiefs and form part of indigenous development models.

In many cases, traditional authorities also acted as negotiators with development partners. Chiefs engaged NGOs, philanthropists, and government officials during festivals and public events, urging them to invest in the community's infrastructure. These interactions often resulted in the provision of boreholes, clinic equipment, or roofing materials for ongoing projects.

The impact of these efforts is evident in both physical structures and public perception. A large proportion of the respondents acknowledged the visible contributions of their chiefs in initiating or sustaining key infrastructure. Table 4 presents respondents' views on specific areas where traditional leaders had a marked developmental impact.

Table 4: Community Assessment of Chiefs' Role in Physical Development

% of Respondents Confirming Chiefs' Involvement

(Source: Authors' Fieldwork, 2024)

The data reinforce the perspective that traditional rulers in Ghana are active facilitators of development. Asiama (2012) describes this type of engagement as “informal administration of development,” noting that while chiefs may not have budgetary allocations, their leadership often drives community momentum. This resonates with newer literature emphasizing how traditional governance bridges the local-state gap in physical development through informal but accountable leadership (Matose et al., 2024).

Despite these strengths, some limitations were also reported. Chiefs expressed frustration at bureaucratic delays from the municipal assembly and inadequate funding. In some instances, their initiated projects stalled due to lack of external support. Moreover, not all communities had equally active chiefs, leading to development disparities. This echoes the observations of Brooks (2011), who cautioned that the effectiveness of traditional authorities varies significantly depending on their leadership style, legitimacy, and relationship with formal state institutions.

Nonetheless, the findings support the conclusion that traditional rulers remain vital in the physical development of local communities. Their roles in land allocation, mobilization, negotiation, and project supervision make them indispensable partners in decentralized governance and infrastructure expansion.

Chiefs' Role in Local Sanitation Systems

Sanitation is a foundational component of public health and environmental sustainability in local governance. In the absence of consistent state enforcement and resource allocation, many Ghanaian communities rely heavily on traditional leaders to oversee local sanitation activities. The findings of this study demonstrate that traditional rulers in Asante Akyem Central Municipal Assembly play an essential role in organizing and enforcing sanitation norms through communal practices and indigenous governance systems.

Community-level sanitation activities, such as clean-up exercises, refuse management, and environmental education, were often championed by the chiefs. These leaders acted both as

conveners and enforcers of community-wide “clean-up days,” which were periodically announced through town criers or community meetings. Such communal sanitation days were used to clear overgrown weeds, unclog gutters, and remove solid waste from public areas. As one community member noted: “We always respond when the chief calls for a clean-up day. He has a way of making everyone feel responsible for our surroundings.”

This aligns with the perspective of Brooks (2011), who notes that the moral authority of chiefs facilitates voluntary compliance with community rules, including sanitation-related behaviours. Yol (2010) similarly observed that in many rural African communities, environmental sanitation is one of the areas where traditional rulers maintain strong customary control, especially where state infrastructure is weak or absent. More recent evidence affirms that traditional leaders remain integral in reinforcing community-based environmental practices, especially in informal settlements and underserved regions (Mawere et al., 2022).

In Asante Akyem Central, chiefs collaborated closely with environmental health officers and community-based volunteers. In some cases, chiefs provided land for refuse dumps or latrine construction. They also mediated disputes arising from sanitation enforcement or encroachment on public sanitation facilities. These efforts mirror the role of chiefs as “guardians of communal welfare,” as emphasized by Asiama (2012).

In terms of sanitation enforcement, chiefs employed customary sanctions against non-compliant households. These ranged from community service to public reprimand, which proved effective in upholding communal cleanliness standards. Table 5 below presents data on community members’ views regarding the involvement of traditional rulers in sanitation management.

Table 5: Community Perceptions of Chiefs’ Sanitation Roles

(Source: Authors’ Fieldwork, 2024)

These findings indicate a broad-based appreciation of the chiefs’ proactive engagement in sanitation governance. Chiefs were viewed not just as ceremonial leaders but as hands-on facilitators of environmental cleanliness. However, several respondents mentioned logistical

limitations, including the lack of tools, waste transport facilities, and government support, which impeded the sustainability of sanitation initiatives.

Another challenge mentioned was the waning participation of younger community members, many of whom perceived sanitation work as burdensome or unappealing. Chiefs expressed concern over declining voluntary commitment and suggested that modern incentives or partnerships with local NGOs could help renew interest in sanitation programs.

Despite these constraints, the study reaffirms the view of Brooks (2012) that traditional authority, when effectively engaged, can serve as a vital mechanism for promoting community-based environmental governance. This is increasingly recognized in climate adaptation discourse, where traditional leaders are framed as custodians of sustainable land and water practices (Chia et al., 2023). In the context of Ghana's decentralized policy framework, the role of traditional leaders in sanitation management remains not only relevant but indispensable.

Traditional Authority and Recreation

Recreation and cultural expression are integral components of communal life, particularly in societies where collective identity, tradition, and cohesion are emphasized. In the Asante Akyem Central Municipal Assembly, traditional rulers play an essential role in sustaining these elements by promoting recreational activities, supporting local festivals, and encouraging youth involvement in sports and cultural events. The study findings reveal that these efforts, though often informal and underfunded, have significant socio-cultural and developmental value.

Chiefs were frequently identified as central organizers of traditional festivals, which serve multiple functions beyond cultural preservation. Festivals such as Akwasidae, Aday Kese, and other localized events are used as platforms to celebrate communal achievements, remember ancestors, and raise awareness about developmental issues. As noted by Brooks (2012), traditional festivals have evolved into development forums, allowing traditional authorities to mobilize public support, attract development partners, and reinforce cultural pride.

Respondents indicated that chiefs often collaborate with youth associations, churches, schools, and local artisans to organize drama performances, musical shows, and inter-community sports events. These recreational programs not only provide leisure but also offer platforms for nurturing local talent and strengthening social bonds. For instance, one teacher noted: "During the chief's festival, there is always a football competition. It's something the youth look forward to each year."

Asiama (2012) argues that recreation and cultural development fall within the wider mandate of traditional rulers as guardians of customs and community well-being. This is evident in the active involvement of chiefs in overseeing the construction of recreational facilities, such as community

parks and sports fields. Though these projects often suffer from limited resources, their establishment reflects the intention of traditional rulers to create safe and productive outlets for community engagement. More recent field studies confirm that these recreational efforts play a critical role in youth development, crime reduction, and cultural resilience (Monama & Mokoele, 2024).

The findings also highlighted the use of durbars and festivals to promote social messages. Chiefs used such platforms to address issues such as youth indiscipline, teenage pregnancy, education, and sanitation. In doing so, they reinforced their symbolic and civic roles. Yol (2010) emphasizes that this kind of leadership—blending cultural expression with developmental communication—is critical in shaping communal behaviour and values.

A number of residents associated the recreational efforts of traditional rulers with reduced crime and youth idleness. By organizing structured community events and promoting cultural pride, chiefs were seen as indirectly contributing to social order. Table 6 summarizes the types of recreational engagements attributed to traditional authorities and the level of community acknowledgment.

Table 6: Chiefs' Involvement in Recreation and Cultural Activities

% of Respondents Affirming Chiefs'

(Source: Authors' Fieldwork, 2024)

Despite these positive trends, some constraints were noted. Chiefs reported challenges such as low funding, lack of dedicated public spaces for recreation, and minimal institutional support from the Municipal Assembly. Additionally, generational shifts in interests have led some youth to disengage from traditional festivals, preferring digital entertainment and urban recreational models.

Nevertheless, the study affirms that traditional rulers are instrumental in sustaining cultural identity and promoting recreation, both of which contribute to mental well-being, community solidarity, and local innovation. Their continued relevance in this sector demonstrates the integrative nature of chieftaincy in blending tradition with modern developmental needs.

Implications for Policy and Development

The findings from this study provide compelling evidence that traditional rulers serve as indispensable actors in the promotion and delivery of local development. Their sustained involvement in sectors such as education, infrastructure, sanitation, and recreation—despite limited formal recognition or state support—underscores the depth of their embeddedness in community life and governance. Chiefs in Asante Akyem Central have consistently facilitated school construction, organized sanitation programs, allocated land for health and market infrastructure, and promoted cultural activities that unify and empower local populations. These contributions, while largely voluntary and informal, clearly align with Ghana's decentralization objectives and present a strong case for policy innovation that leverages the strengths of customary authority in public service delivery.

a. Formal Recognition and Integration into Local Governance

Although the chiefs play vital roles in education provision, infrastructure development, and environmental sanitation, they continue to operate outside the core structures of Ghana's formal local government system. Their exclusion from statutory planning platforms such as Municipal Planning Units or District Development Committees restricts their access to resources and limits effective coordination with government actors. This disconnect was evident in the challenges they encountered in sustaining projects due to bureaucratic delays and inadequate external support, despite their high visibility and community legitimacy. The findings suggest that existing policy frameworks should be revised to formally integrate traditional rulers into local governance, not as honorary figures but as strategic partners who possess unrivaled access to grassroots insights, social capital, and community mobilization capabilities. Doing so will institutionalize their developmental roles and enable greater synergy between formal and informal governance systems, as also advocated by Asiamah (2012).

b. Resource Support and Capacity Building

A consistent theme throughout the study is the reliance of traditional rulers on personal initiative and communal effort to drive development. Chiefs who donated land for schools or facilitated borehole construction did so largely from personal or community-sourced resources, without state provision or technical backing. This model, while admirable, is unsustainable and places undue burden on the chiefs and their networks. For their roles to be both effective and scalable, it is essential that policy actors consider mechanisms to provide logistical support to development-oriented traditional leaders. This could take the form of modest budgetary allocations or materials linked to documented performance. Equally important is the provision of capacity-building programs targeting traditional councils. Training in proposal writing, development planning,

project management, and accountability would empower chiefs to interact more effectively with NGOs, district assemblies, and donor agencies, thereby increasing their impact and credibility in developmental efforts.

c. Strengthening State-Traditional Collaboration in Sanitation and Education

The study clearly demonstrates the central role of traditional rulers in organizing sanitation exercises and supporting educational advancement. Chiefs were responsible for initiating clean-up campaigns, enforcing local sanitation bylaws, and advocating for girl-child education. These efforts were recognized by over 70% of respondents as impactful and sustained. Given these outcomes, state agencies such as the Ministry of Sanitation and Water Resources and the Ghana Education Service should actively explore partnerships with traditional authorities to co-deliver community-level interventions. Joint sanitation campaigns, durbars that promote school enrollment, and school infrastructure initiatives anchored by traditional leaders could provide cost-effective and culturally grounded solutions to long-standing challenges in education and public health. By supporting traditional leaders as education ambassadors and sanitation advocates, policymakers can draw on existing communal structures to amplify state efforts and improve service delivery outcomes.

d. Policy Innovation for Cultural and Recreational Development

While education and sanitation are often prioritized in development discourse, the role of recreation and cultural expression in community cohesion and youth engagement is frequently underestimated. This study shows that traditional rulers are deeply involved in organizing cultural festivals, sports competitions, and youth programs that provide not only entertainment but also vital opportunities for identity formation, civic participation, and intergenerational learning. Festivals like Akwasidae, supported by the chiefs, serve as platforms for community mobilization, fundraising, and social messaging. Recognizing the strategic value of these events, district assemblies and cultural affairs bodies should work collaboratively with traditional councils to develop annual cultural calendars, support local sports infrastructure, and incorporate indigenous knowledge into broader tourism and creative arts policy frameworks. Such initiatives can stimulate rural economies, reduce youth idleness, and strengthen community bonds, thereby reinforcing the developmental mandate of traditional institutions.

e. Leveraging Chiefs for Grassroots Monitoring and Accountability

Another critical insight from the study is the informal oversight role played by traditional rulers in monitoring the implementation of development projects. Chiefs are often the first to identify when

projects stall, materials go missing, or contractors underperform. Their proximity to the community makes them well-suited to perform early-warning and feedback functions that enhance transparency and responsiveness. However, their current roles in this regard remain informal and unsupported by policy. Formalizing a complementary role for traditional rulers in local monitoring frameworks would enhance accountability, particularly in infrastructure, sanitation, and education. This role must be carefully defined to prevent overlap or tension with elected officials and to preserve the apolitical and moral standing of the chieftaincy institution. By doing so, Ghana's decentralization agenda could gain a reliable grassroots accountability mechanism rooted in cultural legitimacy.

f. Institutionalizing Research and Documentation

Despite the significant contributions documented in this study, there is a noticeable absence of systematic data on the development roles of traditional rulers in national databases and academic research. This gap in documentation limits evidence-based policymaking and reduces the visibility of traditional leadership in national development discourse. To address this, the Ministry of Chieftaincy and Religious Affairs, in collaboration with academic institutions and civil society organizations, should establish a dedicated platform for tracking, documenting, and disseminating best practices in traditional leadership and community development. This could include the publication of case studies, the development of performance benchmarks, and the organization of knowledge-sharing forums across traditional councils. Such institutional learning will not only inform policy formulation but also provide a resource base for replication, innovation, and policy transfer across districts and regions.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study set out to assess the role of traditional rulers in the provision of education, physical development projects, sanitation, and recreational activities in the Asante Akyem Central Municipal Assembly. Drawing on a combination of quantitative and qualitative data, the research revealed that traditional authorities play multidimensional and indispensable roles in promoting community development. These roles are grounded in their cultural legitimacy, deep-rooted social influence, and ability to mobilize both material and human resources at the grassroots level.

In the area of education, traditional rulers were found to be instrumental in land allocation for school projects, mobilizing community labour, sponsoring vulnerable students, and advocating for educational access; especially for girls. These activities complement formal education sector interventions and highlight the potential of integrating customary authority into national education planning.

With respect to physical development, chiefs were key actors in initiating, facilitating, and overseeing the construction of boreholes, community centres, health facilities, and markets. They engaged both state and non-state actors to solicit resources, reflecting their capacity to function as community brokers and development negotiators.

In sanitation management, traditional rulers led clean-up exercises, enforced environmental by-laws, and collaborated with environmental health officers. Their ability to use moral authority and customary norms to ensure community compliance underscores their critical role in promoting public health and environmental cleanliness.

Concerning recreation, chiefs provided platforms for cultural expression, social education, and youth development. By organizing festivals, supporting sports events, and encouraging communal arts, traditional authorities fostered social cohesion and cultural sustainability. These recreational functions, though often undervalued in formal policy, were deeply appreciated by community members and served as effective tools for social control and civic education.

Collectively, these findings emphasize that traditional rulers are not passive relics of a bygone era but active contributors to the socio-economic transformation of their communities. Their developmental impact though largely informal and under-recognized demonstrates the enduring relevance of customary institutions in Ghana's decentralized governance landscape. These findings are best understood through the lens of Role Theory and Mintzberg's Managerial Roles framework, both of which illuminate how chiefs simultaneously function as focal actors in complex social systems and as de facto community managers fulfilling interpersonal, informational, and decisional roles.

However, the study also uncovered structural limitations, including lack of formal budgetary support, insufficient collaboration with municipal authorities, and generational disconnects affecting youth participation. Addressing these gaps will require policy reforms that formally integrate traditional leadership into development planning and implementation processes.

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