# Traditional Leadership Systems and Gender Recognition: Zimbabwe.

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## Abstract

*Africa in general and Zimbabwe in particular have been thriving under traditional leadership systems that were mainly dominated by men since time immemorial. These systems controlled human behaviour, resource utilization and the general political and religious domains. These leadership systems were also to some extent, responsible for the pathetic conditions of women even up to this day. This paper therefore sought to discuss traditional governance systems with a view to understanding governance best practices and how gender equality may be incorporated meaningfully. The study noted that women have always been part of the traditional leadership though they have been behind the scenes. Wherever they were on the drivers' seat, they excelled. It was also observed that democratic governance could be improved by way of integrating the best out of both the traditional and modern systems of leadership and governance.*

**Key words:** Traditional leadership, Gender, Colonialism, Governance and Globalisation

## *Introduction*

Ever since time immemorial, formal leadership in Africa, Zimbabwe included has been a domain for men only. It was believed that men were the only people with a capacity to govern and make decisions.

Besides, they were considered the heads of families and so assumed to be stronger and wiser than women. This however, seems to be changing with time. This study therefore sought to analyse the traditional leadership system in Zimbabwe, how it has helped development efforts, and how women have been slotted in and ultimately explored their contribution in line with the United Nations Resolution 1325.

The study amongst others looked at some of the factors that have facilitated the recognition of women into the traditional leadership positions, their challenges and of-course, some of the general failures by the traditional system. At the end of it all, there will be a discussion on the overall position regarding traditional leadership and women in the developing world. The study is based on the African Renaissance theory which is founded on African values and norms which are the building blocks of African life (Mutunhu 2011). According to the theory, it is believed that Africa has now discovered its destiny and seen light at the end of the tunnel and so would want to make use of all the available opportunities in as far as its re-birth is concerned.

Africa would want to make a new entry on the contemporary world arena free of any blackish spots; being able to consider women for any available leadership opportunity.

The theory to some extent is guided by the Afro-centric theory which calls for the inclusion of cultural values in the areas of leadership and management (Teffo 2006). The theory succinctly advocates for social change which is time and place relevant. The study hopes to answer questions around the exclusion of women in traditional leadership circles.

## *Traditional Leaders*

Traditional leaders are hereditary local neighbourhood leaders who are selected through rules of succession. These have been in existence since time immemorial as they have been the governing structures on the ground that were solemnized by the spirit mediums of the local areas in consultation with the local elders and the generality of the community. Resultantly, they commanded profound respect among rural communities. While traditional leaders may be found throughout Africa, their selection differs according to the traditional norms and contemporary laws of respective countries. Some authors posit that there are instances when, in the same country, traditional leaders are appointed differently citing Cameroon which has two distinct regions with different selection procedures; where in one region, leaders are appointed by the executive while in another, they inherit power. In Zimbabwe, traditional leaders are selected by their families but eventually get confirmed and endorsed by the executive and in Kenya; the same leaders are appointed by the executive and get remunerated like other civil servants.

Similarly in Botswana traditional leaders have been stripped of their powers and exposed to abuse by the executive that defines authority for the recognition, selection, acknowledgment, remuneration and removal of traditional leaders at will (Sharma 2003). According to Roy (2003a), traditional leaders in Ghana are accorded their responsibilities and are participants in the national development planning teams.

One thing that they are not allowed to venture in is politics; which is a no-go arena. Traditional leadership in Africa in general and Zimbabwe in particular seems to have been neglected till recently in the 1990s, except in historical studies, when political leaders wanted to gain political mileage out of their influence and respect and use them for political expedience.

In Zimbabwe, traditional authorities were incorporated into government system based on the Westminster model and exist through the Traditional Leaders Act of parliament. Most traditional authorities' legitimacy is derived from their history and culture, which are usually supported by divine references (Lutz and Linder 2004). Where the leaders are selected within their communities as per traditional norms, they are highly respected, listened to and in some cases, almost worshipped. Traditional societies still understand the roles that are played by traditional authorities so much so that they treat them with high esteem and value their word. Traditionally, leaders' respect was largely derived from their wisdom, the ability to make popular decisions and their personal appearance and or etiquette. However, this in the majority of cases was built and nurtured by one's wife(s)'s ability to care for the social and moral needs of the spouse. In other cases, the wife's control over the husband could be displayed when a wife influenced a decision while in their bedroom. This was one of the few cases when a woman could co-govern in local matters.

The discussion on traditional leadership can only be understood in its proper phases as it mutated from pre-colonial to colonial and then into post-colonial era. During the pre-colonial phase, traditional leaders had enormous powers and authority over land and their subjects who were but comfortable as they understood their terms of references. Besides, they had very little choice; could not run away as the systems were almost the same and that they could not leave their family graves which they valued so much.

These authorities derived their powers from, according to Lutz and Linder (2004:14), 'rights of conquests, control over land, and direct descent from great ruling ancestors, or membership in a particular ruling family'. The coming of colonialism ushered in a new dispensation in as far as leadership, authority and accountability are concerned. The colonialists according to Ribot (1999) literally turned all the traditional leaders into puppets to stir their mode of governance. Ray and Reddy (2003) cite various cases in Cameroon and Northern Ghana, where colonialists randomly selected individuals as conduits of communication before they were gradually called chiefs. Elsewhere in Congo, Beke (1999) says Belgians are also on record for imposing chiefs on nations that had no traditions of chieftaincy. This was meant to channel oppression through these figures so that local nations could be divided. Those who resisted were either dethroned or punished. Then there was the post-colonial phase whereby most independent states failed to recognise traditional leadership roles. In fact, most governments associated most traditional authorities with former colonisers and therefore treated them as such. Those who were recognised and those who retained their authority became apologetics of the new governments so that they could survive the new politics of the day.

It is now interesting to note the differences that exist between the original pre-colonisation traditional authorities and the modern-day authorities largely perpetuated by globalisation, changes in governance systems and the definition of new geographical boundaries post-1884-5. It is also important to realise that there is still some resistance within the male traditional leadership on the appointment of females arguing it as uncultural. This was observed in Botswana when a woman was selected to take over from her father.

However, upon her appointment, it was revealed that she had been considered for her looks and audacity that resembled that of her late father. The argument by other commentators is that '*she was allowed to rule due to her assumed male qualities and not as her right as human being'* (Kamga 2009:14).

## *Traditional Leadership Roles*

While some quarters question the role and place of traditional leadership in modern democracies, they often ignore the existence of the same concepts in the form of monarchies and royal families in United Kingdom, Netherlands, and United Arab Emirates, Lesotho, Thailand, Japan and Spain though they may have no direct role in legislative/judicial matters. They are being maintained for sentimental purposes. Pwiti and Mvenge (1996) who have written widely on this area posit that traditional leadership systems were in place to maintain respect for and the survival of cultural sites. This was managed through the sustenance of taboos, restrictions, myths and ceremonies, and these measures were effective in ensuring the survival of heritage and cultural practices. Traditional leadership systems promote responsible and controlled utilisation of resources. A sacred shrine at the site of Domboshava, Great Zimbabwe, Ntabazika-Mambo and Mutota Ruins present an example of how taboos and restrictions worked as effective tools for managing cultural landscapes. In the same vein, the communication between spirit mediums and God was also facilitated by the traditional leadership systems, which mobilised most of the material resources needed for the ceremonies and the organisation itself.

Historically, traditional leaders had an important responsibility that stretched from social, economic, moral to political. They catered for the welfare of the people by providing with land for agriculture and grazing which was core in the lives of the people economically.

Traditionally, especially in Zimbabwe, there was a programme called '*Zunde Ramambo'* (Chief's granary) which provided for the poor and orphans. The same facility also helped in times of droughts and other emergencies. The security of the local communities and defence against external aggression was also a responsibility of the traditional authorities. Most kingdoms had their defence armies to attend to the needs of their people in times of foreign intervention by cattle rustlers, women grabbers or land invaders. For order to prevail, people needed to be united. Unity also meant that tasks and other developmental work could be undertaken easily and effectively. It was therefore the role of traditional leaders to inspire unity amongst people.

Similarly, traditional leadership controlled most of the developmental projects. These have the powers to determine the views of the people on the ground regarding the need for change or development. Culturally, it is believed that they are the only agencies who can convince the ancestral spirits to accept or adopt any new concepts or ideology in the area. They also serve as the intermediary between the people and the government. No wonder why donors and government agencies seek permission from these for any developmental work. The development of Dande dam in Mashonaland Central province, Zimbabwe was retarded after the traditional leadership had objected to the idea.

To some extent, this could also explain why in 2007, the whole government was taken for a ride by Rotina Ronica Mavhunga, who claimed to be a Spirit medium and that she had discovered 'pure diesel' in the Chororodziva hills area in Chinhoyi. In a feat of confusion and excitement and in the wake of a serious shortage of fuel in the country for over six years then, the desperate government had no option but to fall into the trap by a 'traditional leader'.

Honestly, when no one learned person could believe that, all the scientists, engineers and a platoon of service chiefs and technocrats in government joined hands to form a committee to manage oil extraction for the nation.

In 1999, a traditional chief in Mashonaland East province led his people into the commercial farming land demanding to be resettled in a bid to de-congest the communal areas amongst other reasons. Elsewhere, prior to the Zimbabwe's independence, Chief Tangwena led his people in the bloody resistance of the compulsory acquisition of his traditional Gairesi land by the colonialists. This is how traditional leadership works advocating for its people's desires. In 2000, Chief Mabhena became so prominent when she led her people in the popular campaign for political change in her area of jurisdiction. Subsequently, her efforts led to the election of Khumalo as a Member of Parliament (MP) in Umzingwane constituency.

Traditionally, like anywhere else the world-over, the traditional leadership system has always served as mediators, judges and advisors whose verdicts were respected and taken with high esteem unlike the present day politician's rulings which are plagued with corruption, inconsistencies and biases. Where people could not make acceptable judgements, traditional leaders could resort to the spiritual sphere for advice. This is unlike the present leadership that has completely or at least in public, abandoned the traditional belief system and rely on simple reasoning and intellectual strength, which at the end of the day raises lots of questions and doubts. Traditional leaders were also responsible for peace, stability and for resolving disputes. Their ability to adjudicate in times of conflicts and social disputes played an important role in minimising chances of wars and or conflicts. This therefore meant that they had to be impartial, fair and effective in their judiciary systems if they really wanted to enforce community order.

According to Rukuni (1998), management of communal grazing areas and other natural resources could only be improved by strengthening village-level traditional leadership institutions. Rukuni argued that the people who used the resources on a daily basis were the best to manage their resources free from foreign interference. This argument could be interpreted as bringing social cohesion and development in communities where the resources bring in development and or royalties like they do in Bafokeng, SA. Daneel (1996) observed the following:

"*In Zimbabwe, as in many places, chiefs have a connection to the land in the eyes of the public, and are often seen as the traditional custodians of the land. They protect the land through upholding the ancestral rest-day, which protects soil fertility; preparing rain rituals; get divine environmental protection through the animals, which protect species diversity; and finally, preserving holy graves*".

In other words, Daneel summed it all. In most situations in Zimbabwe, traditional leadership systems have also served to reduce crime rate and juvenile delinquency through community programmes and restrictions that eventually keep the would-be perpetrators away from the crime scenes. In other situations, they use lineages, totems and relations within the communities to curb crime and at the same time uphold '*ubuntu/unhu*'. This is also made possible by the way in which the rural settlements are designed where communities of the same lineage or totem are grouped around the same area thereby maintaining relations. The idea of grouping people of the same ancestry has also made easy delivering customary justice as the proceedings are cheaper, simpler and graspable.

The strong belief in cultural traditions within African communities also earns traditional leaders respect as these are also believed to be administrators of such institutions like the rain-making celebrations, acceptance of the dead from the wilderness ceremonies '*kurova guva*', concepts very much respected and honoured by Africans. In the majority of cases and traditionally, chiefs and even village heads were known to be elderly personalities whose wisdom could not be questioned unlike the current political leaders who can assume office even at tender ages without having acquired any socio, political and economic knowledge. These elected political leaders do not normally consult community elders but their political peers who might also be immature leadership-wise.

Traditional leaders in most of the countries where they still exercise their roles are also into tourism development. In 2009, Chief Mukuni Ng'ombe of Zambia established a shrine in his area that was aimed at promoting cultural tourism. The tourism venture also covers some of the Zimbabwean chiefs who fall under part of the Mukuni chieftaincy that has roots in Zambia and some of the chiefs include the following: Wange, Nekatambe, Mvutu, Mutshana and Nelukomba. This venture comes along the same lines as those of the Great Zimbabwe settlement, which today serves as a tourist attraction.

In view of some indications to the effect that traditional leadership systems are getting eroded, and that the present political leadership is usurping traditional leadership powers, there was a Regional Exchange Visit for Traditional Leaders from SADC Region held in Lusaka 2005. During this gathering, the chiefs adopted a resolution to uphold their role and position in local governance.

It amongst others advocated for the following; fight for the recognition and restoration of the traditional leadership institution: judicial, political, cultural, economic, promote unity among traditional leaders at all levels and work towards accountability and political space for effective participation in governance and development (Stefiszyn, (2007).

### Traditional Leadership in Zimbabwe

In the debate about traditional leadership systems in Zimbabwe or anywhere else in the world, the focus is usually directed at the chiefs and their sub-chiefs (Headmen). However, it must be corrected that, that perception is as accurate as it is supposed to be as this traditional concept of governance is part of the oldest governance system, which has the largest number of governing participants. These range from the highest paramount chief, the chief, headmen, kraal-head, village-head, and the family or clan head. Within the same structures, there may be other titles that may be subordinate to the ones cited above. These can be the chief's messenger, the chief's council members, the chief's wives, the clan's eldest nephew, the aunts and the uncles. Nowadays, the inclusion of the latter category into the traditional leadership system appears unusual but these are the core group of the leadership circles. Let me also however hasten to highlight that historically, women have been oppressed and dominated by the patriarchal society so much so that they are quite distant from the core of the traditional leadership and decision-making circles.

In light of the traditional leadership concept in Zimbabwe, the law provides for the recognition of this position in society albeit restricted and subservient to the modern court system. It has also been established that the responsibilities and roles ascribed to respective traditional leaders differ depending on the following: region, culture, age, customs, precedence and capabilities.

However, according to www.mlgpwud.gov.zw, in Zimbabwe traditional leaders particularly chiefs' roles are wide and involving. First and foremost, a traditional leader is a head of the community under his/her jurisdiction who then is supposed to supervise headmen and village heads. Through the traditional leadership structure, Chiefs oversee the collection of village levies, taxes, rates and charges payable in terms of the Rural District Councils' Act. Like it has been alluded to above, the chiefs are responsible for the use and conservation of all the natural resources inclusive of land and water (over cultivation, overgrazing, and indiscriminate abuse of flora and fauna and illegal settlements).

In every jurisdiction, there is a clear structure which rises towards a Chief. It is this chief who is the ultimate traditional leader who is charged with the responsibility to nominate headmen for appointment and approving village heads nominated by Headmen. According to the Zimbabwean laws, the guardian and defender of all public property is the chief who ensures that all the roads, telephones, dip-tanks and wells amongst others are kept in good order and safely. Again, like everywhere else, traditional authorities are also charged with the role to arbitrate and resolve disputes relating to land. These adjudication processes in the entire area of jurisdiction is conducted through established village and ward assemblies that are manned by traditional and local leaders.

After independence in 1980 which was the post-colonial phase of the three eras under discussion in this study, the government only allowed traditional leaders to arbitrate on domestic disputes and sit or chair village development committees. In 1980 the Zimbabwe Constitution reserved ten seats for chiefs in its unicameral parliament who were elected by members of the Council of Chiefs comprising traditional leaders from each province.

From the start they came under strong (then) Prime Minister's control and as a result chieftaincy in Zimbabwe lost some of the legitimacy it commanded based on the basis of its public accountability function. The suspicious relationship was witnessed when the government issued out subsidized vehicles to selected chiefs in 2004, prioritized them in the allocation of prime land during the 2000 land reform programme, availed boreholes, electricity and in some cases houses. All these facilities were availed just before major electoral plebiscites and have made traditional leadership positions more lucrative and attractive than before. In the eyes of some, they have since ceased to be traditional positions given the swag now associated with being a chief.

Colonial governments changed the nature of chieftaincy by giving them specific administrative responsibilities, incorporating them into the modern ruling apparatus and, hence, politicising them. In the post-colonial era, this has also been the strategy of many democratic, autocratic, military and one-party states. As chiefs have become, in many cases, glorified local officials or civil servants, their traditional role has become an imaginary story. In this paper, I continue to argue that the present regime has over-glorified the traditional leaders not because they have initiated development or that they deserve that glory but simply because somebody wants to abuse them for political expedience as usually seen pre and during national elections. Unfortunately, traditional leaders fail to realise the nature of the abuse because of poverty and semi-literacy and easily fall into the trap. They are used to oppress their subjects, they are used to deprive their people of the basic requirements that are supposed to come from the government as a matter of right, and they are used to kill their kith and kin, all in the name of politics.

Generally throughout Africa, traditional leaders are not selected due to their good leadership qualities like what politicians do, instead, they learn from the day of selection except for those who would have been exposed to some form of leadership prior to their selection. Traditional leaders, though ancient, their governance styles change with time and bring with them new concepts like computerization of their systems, community business ventures and the acceptance of lawyers in their courts. In Zimbabwe's Guruve district, Chief Chisunga and Chief Chapoto's communities are into CAMPFIRE joint business ventures that earn them annual royalties. Communal Areas Management Programme For Indigenous Resources (CAMPFIRE) is a project that helps to manage natural resources and the people around in a sustainable manner.

Under this concept, it is purely the traditional leadership that is in charge though lately, with the mutation of local governance, the Rural District Council leadership of the likes of Councilors is getting involved. In the majority of cases, this is not to say that they are wiser than the traditional leaders, but the financial incentive that comes out of it has lured the hearts of these leaders. In 2007 the government of Zimbabwe established an Employee Share Ownership Scheme or Trust (ESOS/T) to allow employees and communities to benefit from local natural resources under the Indigenisation and Economic Empowerment Act (Chapter14:33), which was passed by parliament in 2007, (GoZ, 2007).

This concept was copied from South Africa, where the Bafokeng people are into a joint venture with some platinum mining conglomerates that remit royalties for the local development. According to South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) and www.uneca.org, the Royal Bafokeng region is one of the most developed areas in the rural world with modern facilities.

According to Molotlegi (2004) Traditional systems of governance have changed dramatically over the centuries, adapting and responding to new formations, macroeconomic shifts, colonial invasions, and oppressive regimes because people understand the mechanisms by which their traditional leaders are chosen, how to exert influence over that process, and what options exist to sanction leaders who do not act in their best interests.

The Chief's policies are reviewed through general meetings, village councils and by other interested special groups minus community women. The other reason for trying to understand traditional leadership is to deeply appreciate how these traditional authorities comprehend modern institutions, constitutions and the varying desires of their subjects. This is all about governance which is about how power is exercised, and how vital decisions in society are made. Interestingly, while Mungwini (2007) posits that the Zimbabwean government has instituted a variety of measures towards the empowerment of traditional leaders, especially women leaders, the author also realises that the same constituency is now being used by a resourceful regime to oppress innocent people and coerce them into voting for a specific political formation ahead of their choices. Some of these traditional leaders, according to Mungwini (2007) have either threatened their subjects with expulsion from their villages, denied them relief food in times of hunger or even mobilised idle youth to assault their subjects. To achieve this hegemony, the regime has made use of material incentives like provision of vehicles, houses, financial allowances, social amenities and special recognition in society.

## Post Independence Traditional Leadership in Zimbabwe

Traditional leadership or Chieftainship in Africa and Zimbabwe included can be controversial, sensitive and at times dangerous for it has now been commercialised and now a source of income rather than a platform for leadership and development for the generality of the masses. In Zimbabwe, post-independence, there has been a new trend probably owing to the effects of globalisation whereby women are gradually climbing on the leadership ladder contrary to the previously held position. However, these developments are in direct defiance of the desires and wishes of the present male Chiefs who are opposed to the appointment of female leaders.

Since Zimbabwe's political independence in 1980, there have been five substantive female chiefs appointed, three of them from Matabeleland and two from Mashonaland region; Chief Ketso Mathe of Gwanda, Chief Sinqobile Mabhena of Umzingwane and Chief Nonhlanhla Sibanda of Insiza all from Matabeleland South province while chiefs Charehwa and Chimukoko, both hail from Mutoko, Mashonaland East region.

The traditional leadership system in Zimbabwe has drastically changed especially in the areas to do with their comprehension of democratic principles. This has been to some extent aided by the selection and appointment of a younger and educated generation. Most of the current traditional leaders just like political leaders are now learned, also use modern technology to govern and most importantly, apply international democratic principles though at a local level. Traditional leadership through its wide consultation with community elders and even lawyers or some interested organizations, try to uphold human rights and give the subjects room to consult with other pressure groups or seek other legal assistance.

There are however cases where traditional leaders have been used by some political parties to torment their subjects and deprive them of the rights to legal aid, medication after assaults, independent political opinions and the rights to receive foreign visitors in their homes. This is quite prevalent during political campaign periods in areas like Mutoko, Uzumba-Maramba-Pfungwe, Bindura, Shamva, Mount Darwin, Rushinga, Muzarabani, Guruve, Hurungwe, Bubi-Mguza and Buhera amongst others (Dodo, Nyoni and Makwerere 2012).

Traditional leaders have a national body that governs their operations and activities as per the constitutional requirements. The Zimbabwe Chief's Council (ZCC) takes that responsibility and it also represents the generality of the traditional leadership in the national legislature where their contributions are supposed to be tabled for national governance purposes. This Council is duplicated at provincial level and down to the districts for wider coverage of the people's concerns. This follows a governance policy that was announced after Zimbabwe's independence in 1980 that ushered in a new dimension to the traditional leadership system in rural areas. Apparently in 1982, government created Village Development Committees (VIDCOs) that were intended to be conduits of government initiated development projects through Rural District Councils (RDC). However, they became a major source of conflict at the village level as they were interpreted by traditional leadership as usurping their power. Of importance according to Mukamuri (1995), was that immigrants who had taken up leadership during the war of liberation when the locals were busy with the war, occupied most of the VIDCO positions.

### *Traditional Leadership Failures*

Whilst the entire argument could have been for the positive role of the traditional leadership system in Zimbabwe, there are also cases where it has equally failed.

Some of the failures have been attributable to structural challenges whilst others are due to constitutional deficiencies. However, these failures have at the end of the day tainted all the other good practices. In various African countries, traditional customary law is informed by culture and traditions which usually view violence against women as normal. This normalcy becomes part and parcel of communities' and national behaviour. This practice has also affected the provision of education to women and girls thus leaving them behind economically, politically and socially.

Traditional leaders have often been attacked for nurturing traditional policies that discourage the provision and availability of health services to the generality of the people. Though this controversial issue has also been embraced by some Christian religious sects like the 'apostolic', traditionalists often believe that the use of some herbs is enough to protect children from diseases. These traditional authorities have also retarded development through their 'backward' perception towards modern-oriented community transformation. They have also dismally failed to adapt to modernity and continued to clutch on to archaic ideology in as far as justice, economy and marriages are concerned.

This has been noted from the traditional mechanisms of justice delivery systems which have often failed people and lack proper appeals and review mechanism. Economically, women have been discriminated against so much so that they have failed to rise to the same levels as their male counterparts. This has been perpetuated by the fact that traditionally, women were not allowed to own valuable assets as they were considered to be either their husbands or fathers' properties. In terms of marriages, women have not been allowed to express their love feelings towards men no-matter how much they loved them.

Besides, women were encouraged to be submissive to their husbands so much so that they owned nothing and even inherited nothing in the event that the husband died. Unlike other leadership fields, traditional leaders' cannot form splinter organisations should they feel that their powers and authority are being usurped by the modern institution. The dilemma with the traditional leaders is that the field has been over-politicised to an extent of being given directives by mere District Administrators (DA). Most of these leaders, out of ignorance and growing poverty, have had to bow before the DAs in anticipation of 'favours' in the form of wages and other perks. This lack of an alternative escape route has also helped in the failures of the traditional leadership system.

## *Gender Violence*

Khutsoane (2007:13) defined violence against women as "*any act of violence that results in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary depravation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life*". This type of violence has been attributed to African nations where societies have naturally accepted the oppression of women by male leaders who abuse them as sex objects and apparatus of economic production.

Gender violence in Africa and Zimbabwe included has been coming in various forms; physical, psychological or sexual. The three-pronged dilemma on the part of women has ignited, fuelled and nurtured challenges for women. It is from these and others that forced and arranged marriages '*kuzvarira*' especially perpetrated by religious communities are experienced. In such communities, girls and women have been suffering without any rescue from the relevant institutions. This is evidenced by the fact that no-one has ever been prosecuted for marrying minor girls within the religious circles or raping a woman in a polygamous marriage.

If any, then documentation has been limited. Forced marriage (*musengabere*) is another activity which is practised and which traditional leaders have condoned but without the consent of the involved women victims.

Closely akin to the above is that some women are forced into polygamous marriages largely due to poverty and illiteracy and hope to be sustained by men who are believed to be better learned and more empowered economically and resource-wise. Women are married in polygamous marriages to be assigned to produce food for the families and engage in bearing children. King Mswati (3) of Swaziland is now a proud husband to 14 wives. Traditionally, he marries a new virgin girl every year during the annual Reed Dance, which is constitutionally provided for. In other areas, girls suffer forced female genital mutilation (FGM) all for the sake of trying to beautify them for the gratification of men's sexual desires. It is also practiced in the Chiredzi area where they call it '*chinamwari*'. FMG is also widespread across Africa: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Congo, Cote d'Ivoire, Djibouti, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Kenya, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda, Zambia,

South Africa, Mozambique, Lesotho and Swaziland (Nyirinkindi, 2007). According to Anderson (2008), about 33% of women below 24 years of age in Swaziland have experienced some form of sexual violence by age 18 while the rate of incidence of violence against women in Zimbabwe is 30%, 50% in Zambia and Tanzania respectively, and over 60% in the Democratic Republic of Congo (UNAIDS, 2010). The other critical areas where women have suffered are in the inheritance domain where under African traditional customs, property inheritance is said to be the domain for men only and women are discriminated.

Widows are also forced into *levirate* inheritance against their will. This discrimination has even affected issues about property rights where traditionally, women were not allowed to own land or any other valuable property except a few household items like stoves '*mapfihwa*' and beds '*bonde*'. All this abuse is contrary to the dictates of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the 1966 Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), and the 1993 Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (Vienna Declaration) and the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (UN 1995).

At continental level, the abuse of women by traditional systems is also being controlled through; the 1981 African Charter on Human and People's Rights, the Protocol on Women's Rights in Africa of 2003, the Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality of 2004 and the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD)'s African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM). Similarly, at regional level, Southern African Development Community (SADC) has put in place mechanisms to control and monitor women's abuse like the Declaration on Gender and Development of 1997 and the SADC Plan of Action for Gender (Stefiszyn 2007).

## *Colonialism*

It has been noted in the discussion that traditional leadership systems had firm foundation on which its principles were anchored before the coming of colonialism. Colonialism destroyed traditional common property management institutions by examining the traditional customs and practices of indigenous communities.

The colonialists brought with them several factors that led to the erosion of traditional methods of protection. The legislative documents pertaining to land ownership (Southern Rhodesia Native Regulations (1910), Masters and Servants Ordinance, Pass Laws, the Native Regulations Ordinance, Native Affairs Act (1927), Land Apportionment Act (1930) and the Land Tenure Act (1959)) saw people together with their traditional leaders being moved to reserves, paving the way for white commercial farms. Effectively, solid communities were broken down and split in ways that made it impossible to maintain the required links between families and clans. Some cultural sites became part of these commercial farms, meaning that local people had no access to them, as this was tantamount to trespassing. The Nharira hills, Tsindi and Mhakwe caves, (Pwiti and Mvenge 1996), Ngomakurira, Negomo, Deranji and Baradzanwa hills and Chirorodziva caves are good examples of cultural sites that were affected by the colonial systems of land ownership.

Not only have traditional leadership systems been negatively affected by rigid management policies in the post independence era, but they have also faced challenges like globalisation, science and technology and the introduction of western cultures (ibid). This has also meant that the traditional leaders who are now respected and listened to in the modern political circles are those considered educated and supportive of the ruling party. Colonialism seems to have 'enlightened' Africans and Zimbabweans in general on the purported 'ignorance and barbarism' of traditional leadership systems so much so that there are efforts to establish a Continental House of Traditional Leaders of Africa (COHTLA), a forum uniting African leaders and urging them to participate in modern democratic governance, conflict resolution, foster good governance and peace-building and economic development.

This is simply a creation of legal pluralism where the traditional system is preserved while the modern system comes on board. In view of this paper's argument, this COHTLA is just a remodel of the Zimbabwe Chiefs' Council discussed above and does not seem to bring in any new concepts other that those being pushed by modern leaders.

There are however some quarters that believe that traditional leadership systems are archaic and should be done away with. These include the likes of South African Govan Mbeki, who said; "*If Africans have had chiefs, it was because all human societies have had them at one stage or another. But when a people have developed to a stage which discards chieftainship….then to force it on them is not liberation but enslavement*" (Stubbs p16).

Another school of thought could be based on the legitimacy of some traditional leaders; those who were appointed by colonialists based on patronage and loyalty are in real sense not genuine leaders. Even this day, there are also some leaders who are being appointed for their support for some personality or some political party. This was evident in the Chiweshe chieftainship dispute in Chiweshe communal area between 2000 and 2005. Apparently, the potential candidate in the house that was due to take the throne was considered politically incorrect and the dispute was fanned by the District Administrators' office as a way of buying time. A similar 'crisis' was also experienced in the Makope chieftainship also in Chiweshe. In this case, the heir to the throne was eventually framed and removed from office. The chief was also considered politically incorrect just like the one in Manicaland in 2005 whose government-provided car was later withdrawn for having a divergent political opinion.

Colonialism also had some traditional leaders who were not conversant with the traditional processes and expectations appointed thereby neutralising the importance of the local traditions. Other perspectives question their inclusion in Parliament arguing that the traditional leadership systems should have their own and parallel systems of governance which should never be tainted with the modern governance systems which are also highly dynamic. This paper, in view of traditional democracy, questions how some of the traditional leaders are being appointed as discussed above. However, the method in which traditional leaders are selected leaves a lot to be desired. The question is, 'should anyone be born into leadership position or be elected according to merit?'

Globalisation has also played a role in destabilising the smooth development of traditional leadership and its systems. From the definition that globalisation is more about the compaction of the world into a tiny community, this has negatively affected the development of traditional systems as the geographical boundaries have been shrunk, new languages developed, alien beliefs and cultures introduced and technology eroded some of the roles previously associated with traditional authorities. It also brought with it the concept of urbanisation where people from different backgrounds, cultures and religions meet. In these set-ups, traditional laws fail to apply effectively. Education, especially western type was also introduced after globalisation and it has placed the generality of the people well ahead of the traditional authorities knowledge-wise and materially so much so that the latter can no-longer give any advice to the subjects or order them to attend their courts.

However, it must be acknowledged that globalisation has also brought with it the concepts about gender equality that has empowered women in most sectors of the society.

There have been global efforts towards empowering women in parliament, economically and even socially. These efforts have eventually led to the appointment of several women chiefs in most parts of Africa.

## *Traditional Female leadership in Africa*

Researches about traditional women leaders may be conducted as if there have never been female leaders in the history of Africa.

Various scholars have written widely on this and have acknowledged that there have been several good female leaders whose kingdoms were naturally eroded by a variety of factors chief amongst them colonialism. The Social Role theory recognises the distinction between the roles by men and women in society (Eagly 1987, Williams and Best 1982). The theory implies that people may raise questions over the capabilities of females in leadership roles. According to this theory, there is a belief that an effective and efficient leader is strong, muscular, and assertive and can endure stress. Therefore, this becomes a role for men as they are deemed to have these traits ahead of women (Peters, Kinsey and Malloy 2004).

However, Loth (1981) argues that in Africa there were matrilineal societies where women had leadership roles in governance structures as advisors, regents, soldiers, army commanders, and bodyguards amongst others. Loth (1987) goes on to cite an ancient Kingdom in Congo were there were female regents and kings such as Donna Veronica and Donna Susanne di-Nobrena and Queen Amina of the Songhai kingdom in Niger during the 15th century. Queen Amina is believed to have been a strong fighter who successfully fought her neighbours and managed to build cities, receiving taxes from other chiefs, and is known for introducing the cola nut in Niger (Loth, 1981).

Elsewhere, women also played important roles in governance as demonstrated by a Senegalese king who, when carrying out diplomatic negotiations with foreigners, would always be surrounded by his wives as advisors (Demanet, 1778) while Queen Lukokesha of the Lunda kingdom in Congo had her own court and played a decisive role in the selection of the king. Mbuya Nehanda of the pre-colonial Zimbabwe and Mekatilili of Kenya waged spirited wars against the British in 1896 and 1913 respectively as they resisted colonial administration. These leaders managed to mobilise with great wisdom and precision their subjects against a common enemy.

## *Discussion*

What the Local Government is trying to achieve today is exactly what traditional leaders have over the years been attempting to achieve albeit with limited resources. The million-dollar question now is why pushing traditional authorities out as if they have no constituency to attend to? It has been noted that though most governments have put in place mechanisms to preserve and or resuscitate traditional leadership systems, a lot more still need to be done in the form of political will minus political manipulation. The will must also embrace gender equality notions so that over a period, women will have assumed traditional leadership positions at various levels.

In most countries where there are traditional leaders, accountability for traditional authorities is limited because to some extent, their position is inherited for life, so the possibilities of sanctions are limited. However, this does not necessarily mean that simply because they are not elected, they are not accountable, responsive and not transparent to their subjects. Some have represented their subjects effectively and stood for their cultural rights. However, most of these efforts are overshadowed by international treaties and policies that are on paper and adequately funded.

Higher level authorities could help ensure accountability by monitoring the activities of traditional leaders. This comes against the backdrop of various cases whereby traditional leaders especially in Zimbabwe have either deliberately abused office or dismally performed purely out of ignorance. In 2011, a chief in Chiweshe communal areas, Mashonaland Central province attempted to sue one senior politician for marrying during the month of November (apparently, traditionally it is prohibited to marry during this period). However, the chief did not pursue the case out of merit but pure politics and as such over-looked several other legal aspects like the fact that traditional leaders do not rule in urban areas and the commercial farming areas, according to the Lancaster House constitution of 1979. This eventually left the chief in the cold. Similarly, in 2012, another Chief in Chikomba, Mashonaland East province raped a minor girl and bragged that he was immune to prosecution simply because of his traditional position[ii].

In-order to equip traditional leaders with the powers that they deserve for the effective and efficient execution of their duties, it is imperative that governments accept traditional authorities as a legitimate authority for some aspects of the society and parts of the population. This could be achieved by way of integrating the two systems of justice in a formal way though taking cognisance of the complexities and expectations of the people within the traditional domain. This will then go a long way in attending to the flaws that have been reported throughout Africa where traditional authorities openly clash with the elected regimes.

Governments could also consider the fact that traditional courts are also deemed to be fair, cheap and by the community' door step, are culture bound and take more lenient and fair way of dispute resolution which is preferred by the communities rather than going to the modern and elitist courts.

This system is people centered and allows participatory governance. As a result, it cannot be completely taken away from the people. It has also been observed that in most of the cases cited above, women have shown great bravery, intelligence and wisdom in the execution of their responsibilities.

Even where they appeared as advisors to their husband kings, they were equally effective schemers. Women have over the years had their appropriate positions and roles in society. These have to be maintained if not developed so that the dictates of democracy and globalization are satisfied. This probably calls for an integrated approach to African governance system that takes into consideration the best out of traditional and modern systems and also respect traditional and modern values, principles and cultures. After all globalization is a reality and so is African renaissance. Out of over 450 chiefs in Zimbabwe, there are only 5 women chiefs and this makes it very difficult to measure their performance and effectiveness. This is against a backdrop of serious resistance on the part of their male counterparts so much so that whenever they try to score goals, there is water-tight defence by other male chiefs contrary to the Beijing Platform of Action (1995), Zanzibar Declaration[iii] (1999) (UNESCO 2003) and the UN 1325 amongst others.

## *Conclusion*

The discussion noted that the traditional leadership system is an important facet of the contemporary governance system throughout the region. It has also been noted that it has managed to sustain some of the most important traditional and cultural practices that are now being used as reference points and tourist attractions. Few people ever thought that the traditional concept of the circumcision would ever be adopted as an effective preventive strategy for the transmission of HIV/Aids.

The paper has also pointed out some of the weaknesses of the traditional leadership systems and cited the likes of domestic violence, and the failure to adapt to modernity. However, it is the view of this paper that traditional leadership systems be incorporated into the contemporary system of governance for complementarity purpose.

Besides, globalisation forces systems to quickly adapt to new dispensation otherwise traditional leadership systems will be rendered obsolete and irrelevant. Overall, traditional leadership systems will continue to guide the so-called modern governance.

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[i] The author is also a human rights activist who has been a 'political prisoner' for 35 days in 2012 for authoring Political Intolerance, Diversity and Democracy: Youth Violence in Bindura Urban, Zimbabwe. *American International Journal of Contemporary Research* Vol. 2/6 June 2012 (p. 134-143).

[ii] The two cases were reported in the ZBC-run media institutions; The Herald and Radio Zimbabwe in 2011 and 2012 respectively. The chief's rape case is still in the courts of law.

[iii] Pan African Women's Conference for Peace and Non-violence sponsored by UNESCO in Zanzibar calling for the recognition of women's efforts and initiatives to resolve conflicts and promote peace on the continent.