

# Towards understanding the contextual role of traditional leadership in the establishment of cyber communities amongst rural people in South Africa: The case of Dr J.S. Moroka Municipality

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## Abstract

ICT policies instituted over a number of years by the South African government have failed manifestly in establishing cyber communities amongst rural people in South Africa. The authors of this paper argue that for rural South African communities to reap the benefits of 'cyber citizenship' and Information and Communication Technologies for Development (ICT4D) initiatives, it will be necessary for communities to enable themselves and to take ownership of initiatives to participate in the anticipated South African information society. The authors argue that the success of ICT4D initiatives depend very strongly on an understanding of the interaction of such initiatives with the social context at the local community level. One of the significant aspects of the social context at community level is the role of traditional leaders in these communities. This paper examines the role of traditional leadership, with specific reference to the literature on traditional leadership in South Africa and the literature on the role of traditional leadership in ICT4D initiatives, as well as

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empirical findings from a case study that serves as an example of a 'typical' rural community in Mpumalanga, South Africa.

**Keywords:** cyber communities; ICT4D; information society; rural; South Africa; traditional leadership

## Introduction

The importance of a thriving African information society in underpinning an African renaissance has been strongly argued (Britz, Lor, Coetzee and Bester 2006, 29). The potential benefits for rural South Africans to join an envisaged South African information society through involvement in cyber communities have long been realised by role players such as government, civil society and even business. However, the South African telecommunications policy instituted to achieve such objectives, in spite of having been introduced more than a decade ago, has not delivered, especially in terms of benefits to rural South African communities.

Given the reality that a top-down approach by government has failed, we argue that the empowering approach for rural communities would be to take ownership of cyber initiatives themselves. This means that the dynamics of the social contexts of such communities have to be understood and harnessed in order to achieve success. (For the purpose of this paper notions related to the information society, cyber communities and Information and Communications Technologies for Development (ICT4D) are used interchangeably, as they all imply enablement of communication and information use through technology.)

This article forms part of the reporting on a study that was conducted on a rural community in Mpumalanga, South Africa. The study examined from a grounded approach the contextual dynamics in the community that would impact on the successful establishment of cyber community initiatives within the community. Some of the factors contributing to the context included social welfare, stakeholders, leadership, economics, technology and governance.

In this article, the findings relating to the role of traditional leadership in rural communities as discussed in the literature, and substantive findings within the Dr. J.S. Moroka Municipality, as a typical example of a South African rural community, will be presented. The paper therefore examines at the substantive level the specific themes and issues related to traditional leadership that emerge from the literature and from the study within the specific community, and it reports on how the findings in the international literature correspond with ICT4D initiatives in developing areas. The article concludes with some implications that need to be considered in relation to the role of traditional authorities in communities where there is a need for empowerment through the adoption and use of ICT.

The article has been structured as follows: (1) Some context is provided on traditional leadership in South Africa, with some definitions of concepts relating to traditional leadership; and the legitimacy of traditional leadership in RSA and the current realities in

terms of leadership at the local government level are discussed. (2) This is followed by a broad discussion of the role of traditional leadership in ICT for development initiatives, as covered in the literature; (3) we then describe the empirical research conducted in the Dr. J.S. Moroka area, which serves as an example of the situation in a typical South African rural community; (4) the findings of the study on traditional leadership are critically discussed; (5) finally, some conclusions are drawn from the study.

## The context of traditional leadership in South Africa

In South Africa, the situation with regard to traditional leadership is currently fraught with political sensitivities. This is because of the history of the intersection between issues of traditional leadership and various political developments in South Africa over time (Oomen 1998, 87).

The discussion in this section focuses firstly on some of the terminology used in the context of traditional leaders (specifically the notions of traditional authorities and traditional institutions); secondly on issues related to the legitimacy of traditional leadership, given its problematic history during colonial and apartheid years; and thirdly on issues related to the current situation, where there are various local authorities interacting at the local government level.

### The concepts of traditional institutions and traditional authorities

The discussion in this section is centred largely on the work of Ntsebeza (2003). The 'institution of traditional leadership' is for the purpose of this paper considered to refer to the complex and often ambiguous structures and processes governing the interaction between chiefs and 'commoners' through which traditional societies in Africa have been governed (ibid, 179).

For the purpose of this paper, Ntsebeza's (ibid, 177) definition of a traditional authority is adopted, so that it will be taken to be '(an) all encompassing term to refer to 'chiefs' of various ranks, who have jurisdiction over rural people', thus including everyone from 'paramount chiefs' of large tribes to the headmen of smaller tribes.

The strength of the institution of traditional leadership at the local level versus the weak performance at the central government level is a significant issue in Africa (Oomen 1998, 77). In many previous instances in South Africa traditional leadership has constituted the only viable 'structures' in rural areas (ibid, 89 and 92). This has unfortunately led to the situation where, both under colonial rule and the apartheid government, the traditional institution of rule over local people in the form of chieftaincy was converted into an extension of the administration of the central rulers, with material rewards given to compliant chiefs in exchange for their loyalty to the central rulers (Van Kessel and Oomen 1997, 564). The system was further perverted by the apartheid government through their appointment of loyal ('subordinate') chiefs (ibid, 563), which broke the normal conventions of lineage (Ntsebeza 2003, 177). Because these

authorities were obviously not democratically founded, there was no accountability to subjects. All authority and power was seated in a single person, the 'chief', and those in favour with the chief that were appointed. These chiefs, during the apartheid years, controlled 'landownership, administration and management' with no clear distinction between these roles and responsibilities, thus becoming the core, in tribal areas, to the control exercised by the central (apartheid) government (ibid, 174–176).

At a later stage during the freedom struggle, some traditional leaders supporting the freedom struggle considered the terms 'chief' and 'paramount chief' as representative of the language of the oppressors, and instead opted for the wider terms 'traditional authority' and 'traditional leader' (ibid, 178).

### The legitimacy of traditional leaders

The legitimacy of traditional leaders has therefore been questioned (Beall and Ngonyama 2009, 4), with the argument being that traditional leadership has been manipulated by both colonial and apartheid rule to legitimise these regimes. The situation where traditional leaders shifted their allegiance from their subjects to the apartheid regime, with the (selfish) purpose of attaining increased and perpetual political power therefore came at the cost of legitimacy (Van Kessel and Oomen 1997, 563). The recognition by the apartheid government of 'subordinate' chiefs, if these persons supported the regime, inevitably also led to confusion regarding who the actual legitimate leaders were (ibid, 563 and 577). The way in which many chiefs manipulated their income through spurious taxation, as well as dubious labour practices in which subjects were expected to provide free labour to chiefs, further eroded their credibility (ibid, 567). Leaders were accorded express powers to maintain law and order, control of access to pensions and other resources (e.g. financial resources for education and licensing rights for businesses), and the power to allocate tenure rights on communal land (Bank and Southall 1996, 412) at the local level as part of clearly defined hierarchical structures (Peires 2000, 101). Especially during the later years of the previous regime some interest groups accused the chiefs of being corrupt servants of oppressive state systems (Bank and Southall 1996, 418). As a result of these issues, and also because of the liberation movement's shift to a more urban resistance movement, traditional leaders were largely marginalised during the later years of the struggle against apartheid. The views of the members of the liberation movements were so negative on the role of traditional leadership that the expectation was that traditional leadership, being the 'puppets of bantustan rule', would not survive a regime change (Van Kessel and Oomen 1997, 561, 565).

It should, however, be stated that not all chiefs supported the apartheid regime, and some actively resisted this regime, at the cost of exile and even death. A notable example of a traditional leader who put his weight behind a liberation movement (the African National Congress/ANC) is Albert Luthuli (ibid, 563–564).

Surprisingly, therefore, in the post-1994 democratic dispensation, the ultimate outcome of the role of traditional leaders was not the expected abolition of traditional leadership; instead, traditional leadership was not only surviving, but getting significant

government support, largely owing to political considerations, described by Van Kessel and Oomen (1997, 561) as the phenomenon of ‘shifting alliances’. On the other hand, supporters of traditional leaders have argued that the legitimacy of traditional leadership is still significant for its socio-cultural foundation, implying that the legitimacy relates to the allegiance of those subjected to traditional rule (Beall and Ngonyama 2009, 4). However, there have been some questions as to whether these claims of legitimacy might not be originating largely from the traditional leaders themselves. Whether the basis of legitimacy of traditional leadership is founded in government or in culture and tradition ultimately remains unclear (Van Kessel and Oomen 1997, 576 and 585).

It has been concluded (ibid, 585) that the legitimacy of traditional leadership under the new dispensation would depend largely on the ability of traditional leadership to become ‘non-partisan’, rather than once more being manipulated by the government of the day.

### **The post-1994 situation and current issues at local government level**

Traditional leadership is formally recognised in the post-1994 South African legal framework (Oomen 1998, 86). The new democratic dispensation in South Africa has resulted in the explicit recognition of traditional leadership in terms of the *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 108 of 1996*, as well as other acts passed as part of legislation. These include the *Council of Traditional Leaders Act, 10 of 1997*, the *Council of Traditional Leaders Amendment Act, 85 of 1998*, the *National House of Traditional Leaders Act, 22 of 2009*, the *Traditional Leadership and Governance Framework Act, 19 of 2003*, and the *Traditional Leadership and Governance Framework Amendment Act, 41 of 2003*. These acts regulate the interaction between traditional authority and other spheres of democratic government. In general, these acts recognise the existence of traditional authority, and a community could apply to be subjected to traditional authority. In addition, the composition of traditional councils is regulated, the roles and functions in traditional leadership structures are described, and the establishment of ‘houses’ for traditional leaders where bills related to traditional issues can be debated are provided for. The legislation does, however, make it clear that the democratically elected power structures (especially at the provincial level) still hold decision-making powers over the establishment of traditional communities, the composition of the traditional councils and, ultimately, the recognition of persons as being the legitimate traditional leaders for a specific traditional community.

It is in the spirit of the acts to foster collaboration between the traditional and democratic authorities, with the traditional authorities being given the opportunity to collaborate with local government on various issues of interest to the community. Examples include legal matters, government initiatives (policy, planning and projects) in the traditional community, and community development in all its various dimensions.

There has been some success in collaboration at the local level – for example the promotion of development in Greater Durban (Beall and Ngonyama 2009, 1). In this

instance, the success was ascribed to commitment to the project by ‘coalitions’ of leaders with strong links in traditional structures, government and the ruling political party.

Bank and Southall (1996, 421) have also reported instances where traditional leaders and other interest groups (e.g. youth) have managed to find a new power balance (notably in instances where all parties have previously failed to deliver, e.g. on services) and have started to collaborate on local projects. However, some tensions have also been evident where there is a duplication of administrative duties between traditional leaders and other democratic structures of government (Oomen 1998, 90). In general, the relationship between these parties have been found to be competitive rather than collaborative (Peires 2000, 110). Incidentally, these conflicts are not unique to South Africa – an example of similar tensions would be the situation in the Pacific Islands and Micronesia (Haglegam s.a., 7; Meller 1984, 759–772).

Under the new post-1994 dispensation judicial powers were, however, removed, pensions were controlled by other government structures, and the land tenure processes were changed (although still with involvement of these chiefs). The traditional leaders have also become largely paid by government, rather than receiving income from the assets and persons under their control (Peires 2000, 106). These measures have to ensure that traditional leaders cannot stifle the growth of democracy through the control of scarce resources and associated corrupt practices (Bank and Southall 1996, 426). The removal of these powers left traditional leaders with the perception that their roles at the local level have become ‘insignificant’ and ‘marginalised’ (Peires 2000, 107). This has led to tensions between traditional leadership and other formal governmental structures, especially the elected local councillors, about paradigm, approach and areas of jurisdiction (Oomen 1998, 90; Peires 2000, 110). Traditional structures nevertheless still have significant moral grounds on which to exert authority on local matters. Their physical presence and ‘traditional legitimacy’ also still count strongly in their favour (Peires 2000, 113).

The lines of communication between traditional leadership and local and provincial government often prove to be problematic, and this has an impact on the potential of chiefs to initiate developmental projects (ibid, 105). The ownership of such projects is usually vested in formal government, so that good interpersonal relations at the local level are necessary for successful collaboration between the authorities involved. <pse check preceding sentence> In addition, the only possible recourse for dissatisfied traditional leaders who need to demonstrate power, is to withdraw their support from such projects in order to allow these to fail (Peires 2000, 106).

## **Traditional leadership and ICT for development**

### The concept of leadership in relation to ICT projects in developing areas

It is important to understand the different leadership groupings that figure in global ICT4D-related literature. These include the generic term of ‘community leadership’

(Jacobs and Herselman 2005, section 5), which would often also include leaders of groups within the community such as women, youth and others, traditional leaders (Byrne and Sahay 2007, 80; Dagron 2003, 6), and political and governmental leadership within formal structures of government. Obviously, there is significant political interaction between these different sets of role players, with goals and objectives, as well as approaches and spheres of influence often being in conflict (Peires 2000, 105-111). The ICT literature does recognise the phenomenon of a hierarchical system maintained in traditional communities, in which the community attaches significant importance to the decisions of traditional leaders (Nnadi and Gurstein 2007, 4).

These various groups are usually consulted when a technology project is initiated in a rural area (Byrne and Sahay 2007, 80; Dagron 2003, 6). However, the perceptions that 'outsiders' have of the significance of traditional leadership and those that 'insiders' have may differ significantly, and this has an impact on the integration of ICT4D projects in the community social context. For example, if technology projects instituted in communities in some way erode the power of traditional leadership, this may be detrimental to the design and use of any ICTs in such a community (Nnadi and Gurstein 2007, 4).

### Community leadership and project acceptance

The importance of the acceptance of ICT projects by community leadership is highlighted by various authors (Jacobs and Herselman 2005, section 5; Mosse 1995, 570).

Examples exist of instances where traditional leaders who perceive externally initiated ICT projects as a threat, have successfully neutralised such projects through ensuring community non-participation (Mosse 1995, 571). Thus, the significant impact of traditional leaders on community attitudes should be understood (Nnadi and Gurstein 2007, 4). In addition, failure to understand the particulars of the social dynamics of community leadership in a particular community may lead to the failure of project initiatives (Mosse 1995, 571).

The importance attached by, *inter alia*, community leaders to a project determines the eventual success of the project (Dagron 2003, 5). If community leaders have a positive attitude towards the outcomes of a project, this will generally result in better involvement of the community overall, as it leads to their encouragement of others within the community to participate, thus enhancing the project's chances of success (Pade, Mallinson and Sewry 2006, 104)

The roles and responsibilities on such projects need to be clarified upfront (Dagron 2003, 5).

### Means of improving the potential success of ICT-related projects

ICT4D projects benefit from explicit demonstrations of the positive results emanating from such projects to traditional leaders (Cecchini and Scott 2003, 82). This is in contrast to the normal scepticism engendered by, for instance, empty political promises and the short-term involvement of donors and developmental agencies (Figueiredo, Câmara and

Sabin 2006, 2). (A suggested way of demonstration would be at the regional level, to groupings of community leaders.) A related approach might be to ensure that the project addresses a focused community need (Nnadi and Gurstein 2007, 1).

It has also been suggested that projects should support the goals of community leaders and that projects should aim to build leadership capacity in communities (Skoglund s.a., 4). This implies that it is important to understand the needs and viewpoints of community leaders if projects are to be successfully executed (Jacobs and Herselman 2005, section 7).

### Issues around traditional leadership and ICT projects

Skills levels amongst the leaders are an issue – it could either invoke feelings of inadequacy and uncertainty amongst the leaders, which could be detrimental to the progress of any technology project, or alternatively it could lead to individuals attempting to benefit from their skills to the detriment of progress in the community as a whole (Gurstein 2001, 7).

Expecting a community to decide in favour of a particular project before the leadership understands the full implications of the project may result in the leadership adopting a conservative approach and declining the project (Mosse 1995, 571). There is also a risk of ‘private ambitions’ being presented as community needs (ibid, 574).

### **The context of the rural community in the Dr. S.J. Moroka Municipality in Mpumalanga, South Africa**

Dr. S.J. Moroka was identified as a rural area ideally suited to the aims and objectives of this research, because the traditional leadership in the area has to grapple with the typical set of conditions that all of traditional leadership in South Africa has to contend with: the competitive relationship between traditional leaders and other democratic structures; the eroded power base of traditional leaders compared to the pre-1994 South African dispensation; receiving income from government rather than from the assets and persons under their control; the perception that their roles at the local level is ‘insignificant’ and ‘marginalised’; their understanding of the needs and viewpoints of their constituencies; and their leadership being conferred upon them through principles of traditional legitimacy.

Dr. S.J. Moroka is a local authority in a rural area in the Mpumalanga province that has had some exposure to ICT usage and related services on a small scale. The population in the area is estimated at 1 to 2 million people and the surface area is 267 626 hectares. The local government consists of a local authority under the leadership of a mayor and a traditional leader who is a Ndebele king. Prior to the 1994 elections, Dr. S.J. Moroka was governed by traditional authorities, and administrative activities were carried out by the king and the local chiefs. During the apartheid regime, few infrastructural development projects were initiated within this area, as it was subject to the policy of separate development.



The legacy of this era is visible in a number of challenges that are current and continue to face the municipality. These are a shortage of basic services (including roads, health care, education and financial services), insufficient infrastructure, a lack of investment opportunities due to the distance from the economically active parts of the country, a scattered population, and limited availability of skilled labour.

Cultural and ethnic differences have an effect on ease of communication and collaboration towards the provision of services and the execution of projects. As a result, poverty levels are high, with a significant reliance on government for income in the form of pensions and grants.

The comparative sectoral growth as indicated by Stats SA (Global insight 1.50 2003, 172) for Dr. S.J. Moroka, juxtaposed with two other local authorities in Mpumalanga, appears in Table 1.

Table 1: Dr. J.S. Moroka's sectoral growth status (Global insight 1.50 2003, 172)

Sector	Moroka	Nkangala	Nhlanzeni
Agriculture	0.4%	1.5%	1.0%
Mining	0.2%	2.8%	0.5%
Manufacturing	0.2%	4.5%	4.7%
Utilities	4.1%	2.9%	2.0%
Construction	1.6%	1.1%	0.7%
Trade	1.4%	2.7%	1.8%
Transport	3.7%	6.8%	5.9%
Finance	2.9%	8.2%	6.6%
Communication Service	1.6%	0.4%	0.4%

The comparative employment figures for Dr. S.J. Moroka and the same two other local authorities in Mpumalanga appear in Table 2.

Table 2: Dr. J.S. Moroka's employment status (Global insights 1.50 2003, 172)

Labour Force	Moroka	Nkangala	Nhlanzeni
Formal	49.4%	48.1%	18.1%
Informal	14.1%	15.1%	8.2%
Other	6.0%	Unknown	Unknown
Total employed	69.5%	70.0%	26.3%
Unemployment	30%	29.8%	73.7%

From these tables it can be seen that, generally speaking, Dr. J.S. Moroka represents a typical local authority from rural Mpumalanga.

## Challenges for ICT4D in rural areas

According to a South African Government Report (South African Government 2001, 176–179), a number of problems exist with regard to the use of ICT in rural areas (such as J.S. Moroka) and attempts to deliver services to rural persons through the use of ICT. Awareness of these challenges has led to the central government (the South African cabinet), under the leadership of President Thabo Mbeki, organising visits to various communities to evaluate the extent of the problem. On the basis of consultation with various rural communities (ibid.) a commission, under the leadership of Prof. W. Nkuhlu, was tasked to investigate the concerns. Various problems were identified: a low level of community literacy, a lack of ICT awareness, a lack of desirable results from implemented ICT4D programs, inadequate ICT infrastructure, and the processes involved in policy formulation were not suitable for community needs.

## Research method

The research methodology employed was based on the grounded theory approach which uses the open coding and axial coding techniques (Strauss and Corbin 1988, 280–301). This method allowed for the emergence of central themes and their interrelationships from a qualitative analysis of the interview data.

The following main themes that the participants from the community considered to be important were identified from the findings: social welfare, stakeholders, leadership, economics, technology and governance.

## Findings

### Traditional leadership and the diversity of leadership roles in a single community

An analysis of the responses of participants from Dr. S.J. Moroka indicates that the participants recognise different leadership groups, such as community leaders, church leaders, traditional leaders and political leaders. These groups represent diverse political interests and pose challenges in terms of establishing a common understanding of strategic directions for the community. Hence, leadership in the community has its own dynamics, challenges and conflicts that arise from different opinions, perceptions and vested interests of a cultural and political nature. Sources of conflict could primarily be attributed to a lack of consultation, a lack of participation in the process, vested interests, and inadequate resources or capacity for proper planning.

Interview data confirm that traditional leaders are recognised as legitimate by participants in the area of Dr. S.J. Moroka. This leadership consists of kings, chiefs and other important subjects. They are recognised as community champions and are considered to be dedicated to the interest of community members.

The participants indicated that they are content with the multiple leadership structures in the area, in other words, the leadership they have elected, as well as those leaders they consider to be bestowed upon them by tradition. There are pockets of dissatisfaction in certain areas, but this is due to the lack of service delivery and insufficient consultation about the decision-making processes. The participants were aware of the fact that some of their needs cannot be met on a short-term basis, but will be addressed over a longer period of time, and that patience was required.

### The authority of traditional leadership in the study area

In the rural areas of the study area, traditional leadership is the dominant structure and kings, chiefs and *ndunas* (overseers) play a major role in community governance. They have a specific relevance in terms of community relationships, as many community members associate themselves with known people that they can collaborate with closely. Many in the rural community therefore view the traditional leaders as catalysts for action.

As could be expected, the majority of these leaders have inherited their leadership positions through descendancy, rather than democratic processes (and, by implication their followers are also ‘captive’ in being born within the context of a particular community). These leaders are groomed to be ‘good’ leaders in terms of tradition and the culture of the community.

### Leadership challenges

Leaders have challenges that they need to surmount. An important one is a lack of leadership skills to enable them to fulfil their leadership roles adequately. In the case of traditional leadership, this especially relates to issues that they are not familiar with, which would normally include technology-related projects.

Appropriate leadership structures and processes are not in place to facilitate the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the policies aimed at implementing ICT projects to bridge the digital divide. The potential of these projects to address existing community needs may therefore not be clear to these leaders.

Local government in the area has no strategy or programme that promotes the building of internal capacity amongst leaders. There are a few consultants who are being used to render ICT support services. Even amongst appointed leaders at senior management level, nobody is accountable or responsible for developing and implementing ICT policies, or for driving pertinent strategic ICT initiatives. This could be a symptom of the misplacement of the ICT division within the broader municipality structures. The issue of skills amongst leaders has been raised in the literature (Gurstein 2001, 56-60) – building leadership capacity through projects is recommended (Skoglund s.a.).

## Critical discussion of findings

Traditional leadership still has a significant standing in rural areas such as Dr. J.S. Moroka. Given the socio-cultural basis for this from within the community and the unequivocal support for traditional leadership in current legislative and governmental circles, it should be clear that traditional leadership will constitute a significant entity in rural areas for some time to come, even though the institution of traditional leadership is ultimately non-democratic in its foundations and origins, and the motives of current government in recognising and supporting traditional authority are unclear. These enabling conditions for the continued existence of traditional leadership do create a tension field. On the one hand the legitimacy of traditional leadership in the context of a democratic dispensation would depend on the ability of these leaders to accept the values, structures and processes associated with a free and democratic society; on the other hand, their legitimacy in the rural context still has a large socio-cultural foundation rooted in the age-old institution of traditional leadership. Where do ICT policy and projects fit into this tension field? It would seem that four potential scenarios could play out. Given the chequered history of traditional authority over the past decades, we argue that a crucial dimension in explaining the actions of traditional authority would be whether the authority in a particular area has a loyalty and allegiance to its subjects, or whether it could be considered to be largely an extension of the administration of the central rulers (with an 'internal' focus on self-interests). A second important consideration, from the perspective of this paper, is whether a traditional authority would favour ICT policy and projects, or would oppose it. These two dimensions open up four potential scenarios that are each briefly discussed in the following sub-sections.

### Scenario one: A traditional authority that predominantly has allegiance to its subjects and that favours ICT policy and projects

In this scenario, ICT projects and information society initiatives do have the potential to benefit followers through the democratisation of information and communication. This, in turn, has the potential for the empowerment of followers (especially minority and disadvantaged groups). Through capacity building and learning opportunities such a traditional authority might become convinced of the potential of ICT to also preserve and record socio-cultural aspects of the community to the benefit of community members (an example would be the preservation of indigenous knowledge and practices through recording and communication). This scenario would allow for collaboration between traditional leadership and other local government structures on ICT projects that hold benefits for the community members. A risk that will have to be managed is that ICT4D projects could be too enthusiastically adopted, without sufficient consideration of how these should support community development priorities.

### Scenario two: A traditional authority that predominantly has allegiance to its subjects and that is mainly against ICT4D

In this instance, the influence of the traditional authority may lead to ICT being considered socio-culturally unacceptable in the area under the authority's jurisdiction. This would mean limited potential for the successful implementation of ICT policy and projects in the particular area. Those in favour of ICT projects would need to engage extensively with the traditional authority in order to enable conceptual change regarding technology and its benefits. Those championing ICT projects would have to understand and communicate in a clear and unambiguous way the potential of ICT4D to support community development priorities.

### Scenario 3: A traditional authority that is largely an extension of the administration of the central rulers (largely self-interest driven) and that is predominantly pro-ICT4D

In this instance, ICT policies and projects stand the risk to be viewed by the authority in question as a controllable 'scarce resource' that would enable the entrenchment of existing power relationships for the material and other gain of chiefs and close circles of followers. The involvement of the traditional authority may therefore be driven by short-term material and other gain motives, thus reverting to the dubious practices of the previous dispensations in South Africa. The potential core benefits of ICT would carry little weight, as these are largely democratic in nature and subject-focused. Ironically, the successful adoption and use of ICT by community members may be an emancipator to these communities through enabling them to counter the self-interested motives of the authority. Those implementing ICT policy and projects in such areas may wish to consider adding 'checkpoints' for the actual adoption and use of ICT (after project implementation) and may need to enforce access contractually or otherwise.

### Scenario 4: A traditional authority that is largely an extension of the administration of the central rulers (largely self-interest driven) and predominantly against ICT4D

Traditional authority could be expected to support governmental ICT policy and projects; however the support could be expected to be superficial and spurious. Community members could be induced by the traditional authority to adopt and participate in ICT initiatives that serve the interests of central government, rather than those that are beneficial to the community. The adoption of policies and projects could potentially be superficial. ICT policy and projects would be afforded low priority by the traditional authority, and if local government has limited capacity for delivery, limited policy and ICT projects would be in existence in the area and no significant impact on community development can be expected.

The last two scenarios are potentially the least beneficial to rural communities and would unfortunately seem to be the most likely ones to play out in the current reality in rural South Africa. Combined with the current lack of capacity of democratic government at the local government level, there is reason to be concerned about the potential of ICT policies and projects to make a significant impact in rural areas where the potentially democratic benefits of information and communication are most needed.

Whether significant success could be achieved in any rural areas would be largely dependent on the visionary leadership of a few individuals in traditional authority (who have the interest of their subjects at heart).

Given the significant presence and current political legitimacy of traditional leadership, it is obvious that those advocating aspects of ICT policy and projects need to engage with traditional authorities. It should also be clear that this engagement has to be highly contextualised, firstly in terms of understanding how it would relate to the context of the specific community and how it would support the prioritised developmental needs of the community. Secondly, the orientation of the traditional authorities in a particular area has to be understood (i.e. subject-focused or government-focused) and this needs to inform the strategy adopted to implement ICT policy and projects in the area.

These scenarios may inform prioritisation in the targeting of traditional rural communities for ICTD projects. Those areas in which scenario one is valid might hold the biggest chance of meaningful success of projects, while policy and projects in an area where scenario 4 applies might have the least potential for meaningful impact. By achieving success in some areas, a higher critical mass of successful ICT policy and projects in rural areas might be achieved, ultimately leading to success based on democratic forces and processes in other traditional areas where the traditional authorities may be impeding progress.

## Conclusions

In order for the vision of an information society in South Africa to become a reality, citizens from all walks of life need to become 'citizens' of such a society. The creation of an information society with cyber communities presents many challenges to the government structures of South Africa. This would per definition include persons living in traditional rural communities, of which the one focused on in this research project is a typical example. The successful creation of cyber communities relies heavily on the creation of structures and processes through policy and appropriate action, to ensure that the needed initiatives (ICT policies and projects) happen at grassroots level. Nevertheless, our study shows clearly that the socio-cultural context of a community and the associated politics determine the potential for the success of such ventures.

Traditional leaders in the rural areas such as Dr. J.S. Moroka embody the cultures, values and norms of the rural communities of their birth. Because of this, their leadership is still considered by many of their subjects to be core to legitimate actions that benefit the community. Nevertheless, most residents of the area accept the reality of diverse leadership structures at the local government level in rural areas, and although some

conflicts exist due to disparate political and cultural agendas, most residents accept the necessity of the diversity of these power structures.

We argue that more extensive involvement of traditional leadership would bestow on the projects a socio-cultural validity that would contribute to the creation of a favourable context to enhance the probability of success of technology projects at the local level. In order to achieve the intended results, capacity building amongst the ranks of traditional leadership would be beneficial in enhancing their understanding of technology and its potential benefits to rural people. Such enhanced capacity would benefit the decision-making capability and understanding of traditional leaders in relation to technology projects. The capacity building of leaders who are subject-focused, rather than an extension of central government, seems to hold the most potential for success.

Peires (2000, 97) expresses the fear that traditional leadership may potentially be excluded from the 'glory' of the African Renaissance. We would disagree: traditional leadership has the potential to play a crucial role in facilitating, through the adoption and use of ICT, the entry of their respective communities into the envisaged South African (and African) knowledge society. This would, however, require enlightened and visionary leadership that commences with being subject-focused and being in touch with the developmental needs of these subjects.

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