

# Bridging Custom and Bureaucracy: Examining Collaboration Between Traditional Rulers and Municipal Authorities in Local Development in Ghana

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## Abstract

This study explores the collaborative dynamics between traditional rulers and the Asante Akyem Central Municipal Assembly in Ghana's local development landscape. Employing a descriptive cross-sectional design, it draws on surveys, interviews, and focus group discussions to assess joint efforts in education, infrastructure, sanitation, and recreation. The findings indicate that while both actors share development goals, collaboration remains fragmented, often shaped by informal relationships rather than institutional frameworks. Moderate cooperation occurs in land provision and school advocacy, while physical development and recreation see limited synergy due to role ambiguity and weak coordination. Challenges include lack of formal mechanisms, resource constraints, and political interference. Nonetheless, traditional leaders contribute significantly through community mobilization and cultural legitimacy. The study recommends formalized partnerships, inclusive planning, and capacity-building to enhance integrated governance and effective service delivery.

**Keywords:** Traditional rulers, municipal governance, collaborative governance, local development, public service delivery

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## Introduction

In Ghana, the governance landscape is characterized by a unique duality in which formal decentralized state institutions coexist with traditional authorities rooted in customary law and indigenous governance systems. This dual-governance system is both a legacy of precolonial societal organization and a postcolonial recognition of the enduring relevance of chiefs and traditional rulers in community life. Although the 1992 Constitution of Ghana and subsequent legislation, such as the Chieftaincy Act (2008), clearly separate traditional authorities from partisan politics, they acknowledge the important socio-cultural, spiritual, and developmental roles of chiefs, particularly at the grassroots level.

The decentralization framework, institutionalized through the Local Government Act (Act 462, now Act 936), seeks to promote participatory governance and efficient local service delivery. At the district and municipal levels, this is achieved through assemblies that serve as the highest political and administrative authorities within their jurisdictions. However, despite this formal structure, it is evident that traditional rulers continue to play significant roles in education, sanitation, infrastructure development, and cultural preservation. In many rural and peri-urban settings, they are often the first point of contact for development partners and serve as intermediaries between citizens and the state (Asiama, 2012). This traditional involvement in public services has been increasingly acknowledged in recent studies, which argue for formalizing collaboration as a strategy for effective decentralized development (Ibrahim et al., 2024).

The relevance of collaboration between traditional rulers and municipal assemblies lies in the potential synergy their partnership can generate for effective development outcomes. Chiefs wield considerable influence due to their spiritual authority, control over land, and ability to mobilize communities. On the other hand, municipal assemblies possess legal mandates, access to public funds, and technical expertise. Together, these two governance actors could provide a comprehensive and culturally grounded framework for service delivery. However, as observed by Yol (2010), the absence of clear institutional mechanisms and mutual distrust often undermines this potential. Recent empirical studies reinforce this concern, pointing to the lack of clearly defined

collaborative processes and persistent legislative ambiguities that hinder consistent engagement between traditional authorities and local government structures (Boateng & Afranie, 2020).

The existing literature on decentralized governance in Ghana tends to focus on the performance of District Assemblies, with limited empirical analysis of how they engage with traditional leaders in practice. Brooks (2012) notes that while traditional rulers remain active in development, the lack of formal collaboration frameworks with municipal structures often leads to fragmented and inefficient interventions. As a result, critical development sectors such as education, sanitation, and physical infrastructure remain poorly coordinated between these actors. More recently, research has emphasized the importance of harmonizing statutory and customary roles to improve collaborative governance at the local level, especially in contexts marked by institutional pluralism and competing mandates (Tseer & Sulemana, 2022).

This study responds to this gap by systematically examining the extent and nature of collaboration between traditional authorities and the Asante Akyem Central Municipal Assembly in the provision of public services. Specifically, the study investigates areas of joint planning, implementation, and monitoring across four key domains: education, physical development projects, sanitation, and recreational activities. The central research objective guiding this article is to “examine the level of collaboration between traditional rulers and the Municipal Assembly in the provision of education, physical development, sanitation, and recreational activities.” The rationale is that understanding these collaborative relationships can inform policy reforms aimed at improving the integration of customary and formal governance systems in Ghana’s development trajectory. To guide this inquiry, the study poses the following research question: To what extent do traditional rulers and the Municipal Assembly collaborate in the delivery of education, physical development, sanitation, and recreational services within the Asante Akyem Central Municipality?

### **Conceptual and Theoretical Framework**

This study is grounded in a multidimensional framework that incorporates theoretical insights from Dual Governance Theory, the Collaborative Governance Framework, and the Institutional Pluralism Model. These perspectives collectively provide a lens for understanding the complexity of interactions between traditional authorities and municipal assemblies in the Ghanaian local governance landscape.

Dual Governance Theory emphasizes the coexistence of parallel but interconnected governance systems within the same jurisdiction—namely, the formal (statutory) and informal (customary) authorities. In many African contexts, this duality reflects the historical layering of colonial administrative structures over pre-existing traditional institutions. Ghana’s local governance arrangement typifies this dual structure, where statutory district assemblies operate alongside constitutionally recognized traditional authorities (Asiama, 2012).

This theoretical perspective asserts that each system derives its legitimacy from different sources: while the municipal assembly derives authority from the national constitution and decentralization statutes, the traditional authority is legitimized through lineage, custom, and community allegiance. Despite their differing bases of authority, these institutions often have overlapping functions, particularly in land management, dispute resolution, and community development. Recent studies demonstrate that this institutional duality can lead to both complementarities and friction in land governance, depending on the clarity of roles and the extent of mutual trust (Ibrahim et al., 2024).

Dual Governance Theory suggests that sustainable development in such contexts depends on the capacity of both systems to coordinate efforts, respect boundaries, and share resources effectively. Without such coordination, governance inefficiencies, policy conflict, and community disengagement may ensue (Brooks, 2012). This is affirmed by recent research which argues that informal institutions like chieftaincies play pivotal roles in project success but are often excluded due to legislative ambiguity and administrative gatekeeping (Dotsey et al., 2024).

**Collaborative Governance Framework (Ansell & Gash):** This framework focuses on formal, consensus-oriented, and deliberative processes through which public agencies engage with non-state actors to carry out public functions. It assumes that effective collaboration depends on factors such as trust building, institutional design, shared incentives, and the presence of facilitative leadership.

In the context of this study, traditional rulers are seen as non-state actors with the potential to enrich municipal governance through their unique community knowledge, legitimacy, and influence. However, the framework also acknowledges that collaboration is not automatic; it must be intentionally structured and continuously negotiated. Recent scholarship shows that collaboration between chiefs and local governments often remains ad hoc due to lack of institutionalized protocols, even when chiefs actively support sanitation, education, and infrastructure projects (Boateng & Afranie, 2020).

This framework is particularly useful in understanding why certain development domains (such as sanitation or education) exhibit higher levels of collaboration than others. It highlights how preconditions—such as historical relations, mutual trust, and leadership openness—influence the success or failure of collaborative efforts between municipal assemblies and traditional rulers. Tseer and Sulemana (2022) emphasize the importance of well-defined roles in conflict-prone traditional areas to enhance cooperative mediation structures (Tseer & Sulemana, 2022).

Institutional Pluralism Model refers to the existence of multiple governance systems that are simultaneously operational within a shared space, each guided by its own norms, procedures, and actors. This model recognizes that plural institutions may collaborate, compete, or operate in isolation depending on contextual dynamics and structural arrangements (Yol, 2010).

The Institutional Pluralism Model is particularly relevant in analyzing how Ghana's municipal governance system must constantly negotiate its space with the culturally embedded authority of traditional rulers. In this regard, collaboration emerges not simply as a matter of administrative efficiency but as a negotiated process shaped by power relations, socio-cultural expectations, and institutional histories. This complexity is evident in empirical work demonstrating that successful collaboration is often dependent on contextual adaptation, flexible policy arrangements, and respect for traditional legitimacy (Ibrahim et al., 2020).

This model encourages the recognition of traditional authority not as an obstacle to modern governance but as a parallel institution capable of contributing to developmental outcomes if properly engaged. It also calls attention to the risks of institutional friction, role ambiguity, and coordination fatigue when plural institutions are not clearly integrated into policy and program structures. Emerging research supports this by documenting how collaborative projects led by chiefs improve service delivery outcomes in infrastructure and education but are hampered by weak legal frameworks (Osei-Tutu et al., 2019).

Together, these three theoretical frameworks offer a comprehensive lens for analyzing the nature, quality, and constraints of collaboration between traditional rulers and the Municipal Assembly. While Dual Governance Theory provides the structural context, the Collaborative Governance Framework focuses on interactional processes, and the Institutional Pluralism Model accounts for normative and cultural complexity. This integrated lens has been recommended in recent studies that emphasize the need for co-governance between local government authorities and traditional leaders for sustainable community development (Anderson & Larbi, 2022).

## Review of Literature

This section reviews relevant scholarly literature that examines the collaborative relationship between traditional rulers and municipal authorities in Ghana's local development efforts. The review focuses on thematic areas corresponding with the study's objectives: education, infrastructure, sanitation, and recreational services. It draws from empirical and conceptual insights to establish the foundations for understanding traditional-municipal collaboration, highlight documented practices and challenges, and identify gaps in the literature that the present study seeks to address.

*Traditional Authorities and Their Developmental Role:* Traditional rulers in Ghana continue to play central roles in community development, particularly in rural and peri-urban areas where state capacity remains limited. Their influence is rooted in cultural legitimacy, control over land, and the ability to mobilize community members. Scholars such as Anderson and Larbi (2022) have highlighted the evolving relevance of traditional authorities in contemporary governance systems. These leaders, while not formally part of state institutions, often facilitate education promotion, infrastructure access, and conflict resolution. As such, they have become indispensable actors in development practice at the local level. Yet, their developmental role is often constrained by limited formal authority and ambiguous policy frameworks. While their influence can enhance legitimacy and participation, their exclusion from planning and budgeting processes frequently undermines strategic collaboration with local government bodies.

*Municipal Authorities and the Imperative of Collaboration:* Municipal Assemblies in Ghana are the official entities responsible for local governance and development under the Local Governance Act (Act 936). They are mandated to lead planning, service provision, and public expenditure within their jurisdictions. However, their success in service delivery often depends on collaboration with non-state actors—including traditional authorities. Adu-Ampong (2017) shows that while municipal agencies often share development interests with chiefs, actual coordination mechanisms tend to be informal and episodic. This pattern is especially visible in sectors such as tourism and recreation, where traditional leaders organize events while municipal bodies provide

logistical and financial support. Despite these joint efforts, lack of institutional clarity continues to result in fragmented planning and uncoordinated outcomes.

*Education and Sanitation: Collaborative Opportunities and Weaknesses:* Evidence suggests that traditional rulers significantly support educational initiatives by donating land for school construction, advocating for school attendance, and mediating school-community relations. These roles are confirmed in studies such as Anderson and Larbi (2022), who document the mobilizing influence of chiefs in improving educational access in rural settings. However, there is scant evidence of sustained institutional collaboration between chiefs and local education authorities. This absence often leads to misaligned interventions, resource duplication, or implementation delays. Similarly, in sanitation and environmental health, traditional leaders have historically led communal clean-up activities and enforced sanitation norms through customary practices. Agyemang-Badu et al. (2023) report improved health outcomes in Ghana's Sunyani Municipality when traditional and municipal actors engaged in coordinated sanitation strategies. Nevertheless, as Mensah (2020) observes, such collaboration is often undermined by inadequate logistical support, political interference, and lack of structured engagement platforms. Without intentional partnership frameworks, joint sanitation efforts remain vulnerable to inconsistency.

*Recreation, Culture, and Community Engagement:* Recreational and cultural activities are another domain where traditional rulers and municipal authorities intersect. Traditional events such as festivals, sports, and heritage celebrations serve as platforms for community engagement, intergenerational knowledge transfer, and tourism promotion. Arthur and Dawda (2015) document how such events in the Sissala East District fostered unity and complemented municipal campaigns. Municipal authorities frequently support these efforts through security arrangements, event sponsorship, and facility maintenance. However, as Adu-Ampong (2017) notes, this cooperation is rarely guided by formal institutional arrangements, limiting the continuity and strategic value of such engagements.

*Challenges to Collaboration: Informality, Power Imbalances, and Institutional Gaps:* The literature consistently identifies challenges impeding effective collaboration between traditional and municipal authorities. A central concern is the informality of these relationships. Boateng and Afranie (2020) argue that in the absence of formal agreements or collaborative structures, such as joint development committees or liaison offices, coordination remains personality-driven rather than institutionalized. This limits accountability, scalability, and policy coherence. Additionally, traditional rulers often lack budgetary authority and are excluded from statutory planning frameworks. Power asymmetries and administrative opacity further restrict their influence in municipal decision-making processes (Anderson & Larbi, 2022). Where attempts have been made to involve chiefs, they are often treated as symbolic actors rather than strategic partners in service delivery.

#### Gaps in the Literature

While the reviewed literature affirms the relevance of traditional rulers in local development, empirical studies specifically investigating how traditional and municipal authorities collaborate across distinct development sectors remain limited. Much of the existing work focuses on the roles of each institution in isolation, with less attention to the modalities, structures, and effectiveness of their joint initiatives.

Moreover, limited research examines collaboration in recreational service provision, a key dimension of community development often overlooked in governance studies. There is also insufficient inquiry into whether chiefs are involved in project monitoring and evaluation, or how their participation affects community perceptions of municipal legitimacy. The current study addresses these gaps by systematically examining the nature, extent, and challenges of collaboration between traditional rulers and the Asante Akyem Central Municipal Assembly across four development domains: education, sanitation, infrastructure, and recreation. It contributes to literature by offering empirical evidence of how customary and statutory systems interact in practice and proposes actionable pathways for institutional synergy.

#### Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive research design. A descriptive approach was appropriate because it enabled the researcher to examine and portray the current state of collaboration between traditional rulers and the Municipal Assembly in the Asante Akyem Central Municipality. The design also allowed for the identification of patterns, relationships, and challenges associated with joint public service delivery. The aim was not to manipulate variables but to explore the existing levels of interaction between two key local governance actors based on field data and stakeholder responses (Yol, 2010).

The study was conducted in the Asante Akyem Central Municipal Assembly, located in the Ashanti Region of Ghana. Konongo-Odumasi serves as the administrative capital of the municipality. The area was selected for its rich traditional heritage, relatively active chieftaincy institutions, and established municipal administrative systems. The municipality comprises both urban and rural communities, making it an ideal context to explore how traditional rulers and formal institutions intersect in the provision of services. The geographical spread includes communities such as Juansa, Odumasi, Dwease, and Patriensa, each having recognized chiefs who interact with the Assembly.

A multi-stage sampling technique was employed for this study. First, purposive sampling was used to select five communities known to have active traditional authorities and ongoing municipal development projects. Within these communities, stratified random sampling was used to select participants representing chiefs, assembly members, opinion leaders, and ordinary residents.

A total of 150 respondents were sampled: 5 chiefs, 10 assembly members, 20 opinion leaders, and 115 community residents. Data were collected through structured questionnaires, key informant interviews, and focus group discussions. Questionnaires were administered to residents to capture general community perspectives, while in-depth interviews were conducted with chiefs and municipal officials to gain deeper insights into collaborative practices and constraints.

Both qualitative and quantitative data analysis techniques were employed. Quantitative data from the structured questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive statistics, such as frequencies and percentages, with the help of SPSS version 16.0. The results were presented in tables and charts to aid interpretation. Qualitative data from interviews and focus group discussions were transcribed, coded, and thematically analyzed.

The integration of both data types provided a richer and more nuanced understanding of collaboration between traditional and municipal governance actors. Triangulation was employed to validate findings by comparing responses across different data sources and respondent groups (Brooks, 2012).

## Findings and Discussion

### a. Collaboration in Educational Service Provision

Education is one of the key areas where traditional rulers and municipal authorities in the Asante Akyem Central Municipal Assembly intersect in their development efforts. The study findings reveal that chiefs in the municipality play significant roles in supporting educational development, especially in the areas of school infrastructure, community mobilization, and educational advocacy. However, collaboration between chiefs and the Municipal Assembly in education is largely informal, reactive, and dependent on specific circumstances rather than an established framework of partnership.

One major area of traditional involvement is the provision of land for school projects. Interviews with assembly members and traditional authorities revealed that almost all public schools in the municipality were built on land provided by chiefs. In some instances, chiefs not only donated land but also mobilized the community to provide communal labour for the construction of classroom blocks. Such traditional contributions often precede or supplement the Municipal Assembly's input, particularly in rural communities where state resources are limited. Recent studies confirm that traditional leaders often step in to fill governance and funding gaps, particularly in underserved areas (Dotsey et al., 2024).

In terms of advocacy, traditional rulers often use public gatherings, such as durbars and festivals, to promote school attendance, discourage truancy, and emphasize the value of education. Chiefs also support the work of Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs), sometimes serving as patrons or intermediaries between school authorities and parents. Their social capital and moral authority make them effective advocates for school discipline and attendance. This aligns with broader research that highlights traditional rulers as influential community mobilizers who improve parental involvement and student retention (Anderson & Larbi, 2022).

Despite these contributions, the study revealed that there is limited formal coordination between chiefs and the Municipal Assembly regarding planning, budgeting, or monitoring of educational interventions. Chiefs are rarely consulted in the preparation of educational development plans and are not represented on local education oversight committees. This lack of structured engagement reduces the potential for sustainable collaboration and limits the strategic integration of traditional support into formal planning processes. Collaborative governance studies recommend formalizing such roles through mechanisms like liaison units or sub-committee representation to foster durable partnerships (Boateng & Afranie, 2020).



The findings from the survey further support these insights. Table 1 presents the perceptions of community members regarding the involvement of traditional rulers in education.

**Table 1:** *Perceived Roles of Traditional Rulers in Education*

Role of Chiefs in Education	Frequency (N=150)	Percentage (%)
Donating land for school projects	96	64.0
Mobilizing community for school development	81	54.0
Promoting school attendance at public events	67	44.7
Involvement in PTA activities	42	28.0
No involvement in educational matters	25	16.7

*Source: Fieldwork, 2022*

These results show that while a significant proportion of the population recognizes the role of traditional leaders in education, their involvement is primarily material and symbolic, rather than institutional. This gap indicates a missed opportunity to formalize and scale traditional contributions to align with municipal educational priorities.

Asiama (2012) argues that where traditional authority is integrated into local educational governance, outcomes such as school retention and community accountability improve significantly. However, in the case of Asante Akyem Central, such integration remains weak. Yol (2010) attributes this to systemic neglect of traditional voices in policy planning, as well as a modernist bias that often excludes customary actors from ‘technical’ governance processes. Brooks (2012) also notes that, without formalized roles, chiefs may become disengaged or act independently of municipal structures, leading to fragmentation and inefficiencies in educational service delivery.

Recent policy-oriented research underscores the importance of integrating chiefs through consultative platforms and legal mandates to enhance inclusive and context-relevant education systems (Ibrahim et al., 2024).

#### b. Collaboration in Physical Development Projects

The study revealed that traditional rulers in the Asante Akyem Central Municipality play instrumental roles in the initiation and execution of physical development projects, particularly in rural communities where government infrastructure is limited or delayed. Chiefs contribute primarily through the allocation of land, community mobilization, and facilitation of peaceful environments necessary for development interventions. However, collaboration between these traditional authorities and the Municipal Assembly remains largely informal, unstructured, and influenced by individual relationships rather than institutional policy frameworks.

Key informant interviews with assembly officials indicated that most physical development projects—such as road improvements, borehole installations, and market construction—require chief endorsement to proceed. Chiefs serve as custodians of community lands and are frequently consulted, albeit on a project-by-project basis. Their willingness to release land for development is crucial, especially in areas where formal land acquisition processes are cumbersome or resisted by local populations. Chiefs often serve as the entry point for Municipal Assembly officers seeking community acceptance and cooperation. This mirrors findings that land allocation is a central leverage point through which traditional leaders shape public infrastructure outcomes (Ibrahim et al., 2020).

Community focus group discussions also revealed that traditional leaders are perceived as development brokers. In some communities, chiefs initiated self-help projects such as feeder road construction and school renovation, which were later taken up or supported by the Municipal Assembly. In such cases, the Assembly provided technical assistance, equipment, or materials after traditional leaders had demonstrated grassroots commitment. This bottom-up initiation aligns with recent findings that highlight how traditional leaders catalyze community-driven development, often preceding formal government support (Osei-Tutu et al., 2019).

Despite this seemingly collaborative dynamic, the study identified several limitations. The absence of written agreements or memoranda of understanding (MoUs) between the Assembly and traditional authorities often

leads to miscommunication and conflicting expectations. Chiefs reported instances where their suggested development priorities were ignored or downplayed during municipal planning processes. Conversely, municipal officers lamented the lack of continuity in traditional leadership and the occasional politicization of chieftaincy, which sometimes undermined development dialogue.

A significant proportion of survey respondents acknowledged the role of chiefs in physical development, particularly regarding land allocation and project advocacy. Table 2 below illustrates the community's perception of traditional rulers' contributions to infrastructure-related development.

**Table 2:** *Community Perceptions of Chiefs' Role in Physical Development*

Development Role	Frequency (N=150)	Percentage (%)
Donated land for development projects	102	68.0
Initiated or supported self-help projects	88	58.7
Lobbied for government infrastructure projects	70	46.7
Provided conflict mediation for project sites	63	42.0
No role played in infrastructure development	21	14.0

*Source: Fieldwork, 2022*

The table reinforces the study's finding that while chiefs are important actors in physical development, their roles are inconsistently recognized in municipal planning and execution. Asiamah (2012) observed that traditional rulers in Ghana are often viewed as informal actors, and thus their contributions are rarely documented in official development records. Yol (2010) similarly emphasized that the developmental efforts of chiefs tend to be undervalued in formal governance narratives, despite their proven ability to mobilize resources and influence community compliance.

For effective collaboration, the study recommends a shift from ad hoc involvement to structured partnerships. Chiefs should be included in infrastructure planning committees, and their inputs should be formally documented and considered in project feasibility assessments. Furthermore, legal provisions could be established to institutionalize their consultative roles in land use planning and development control mechanisms. Recent evidence supports the formalization of chief-state partnerships in infrastructure delivery as essential for preventing project delays and ensuring social legitimacy (Tseer & Sulemana, 2022).

#### c. Coordination in Sanitation and Environmental Management

In Ghanaian municipalities, the coordination of sanitation and environmental management often involves a hybrid collaboration between traditional authorities and local government institutions. Chiefs frequently mobilize community members for communal clean-up exercises and sanitation campaigns, leveraging their cultural authority to encourage participation. Municipal Assemblies, on the other hand, provide technical expertise, enforce sanitation by-laws, and allocate budgetary support. The collaboration is typically informal, shaped by the willingness of actors on both sides rather than formalized mechanisms.

Recent studies underscore the central role traditional authorities play in co-producing sanitation outcomes. In the Nandom Municipality, traditional rulers were found to have significant influence particularly in implementing and co-managing local development projects, including sanitation, though they were less involved in the co-initiation or financing phases (Bebelleh, 2021). Similarly, in the Sunyani Municipality, environmental management and sanitation were successfully employed as a malaria vector control strategy only when effective collaboration among key stakeholders; particularly traditional authorities and environmental health officers was achieved (Agyemang-Badu et al., 2023).

However, such collaboration is not without challenges. An evaluation of the National Sanitation Day initiative in Edina Traditional Area revealed that although traditional authorities were engaged, the initiative suffered from logistical limitations, political interference, and public apathy, which diluted its impact (Mensah, 2020).

Furthermore, studies emphasize the importance of community-level engagement through education and empowerment. For instance, the success of environmental health interventions often hinges on grassroots education campaigns that resonate with cultural values; a strategy that traditional leaders are uniquely equipped to facilitate (Sumankuuro et al., 2023).

In summary, coordinated efforts in sanitation benefit significantly from the mobilizing capacity of traditional leaders combined with the technical and legal capacities of municipal assemblies. Where collaboration is actively fostered and structurally supported, improved health outcomes and sustainable sanitation systems are more likely to result.

#### d. Joint Support for Recreational and Cultural Activities

Recreational and cultural events represent a vital intersection of tradition and municipal governance, offering opportunities for collaborative community engagement, youth development, and cultural preservation. Traditional rulers, as custodians of culture, organize and oversee festivals, drumming and dancing performances, and heritage events. These activities serve both symbolic and developmental purposes, including tourism attraction, youth engagement, and inter-community solidarity. Municipal Assemblies frequently support such initiatives by providing logistical aid, including security, maintenance of public spaces, and occasional financial support.

Participant narratives from the Asante Akyem Central Municipality underscore the central role of traditional rulers in recreational and cultural life. One respondent explained, *“Festivals bring us together. That is when people return home and everyone, young and old, gets involved. The chief plays a central role in organizing everything.”* Another emphasized, *“Our chief always ensures that cultural events go well because he believes it’s the only time we see ourselves as one people.”* These accounts reflect the unifying power of traditional festivals and their contribution to cultural cohesion, community engagement, and social inclusion.

Beyond festivals, traditional leaders also invest in youth-centered recreation. Chiefs were reported to sponsor football matches, donate trophies and jerseys, and allocate land for the development of sports facilities. As one participant noted, *“The chief sometimes organizes football matches for the youth during festive seasons. He even sponsors trophies and jerseys to encourage them.”* These grassroots efforts—though informal—are instrumental in mobilizing youth and reinforcing community bonds.

However, the study found that formal collaboration in recreational services remains limited. Chiefs are rarely involved in municipal budgeting or infrastructure planning for recreation. Municipal officials admitted that such events are typically seen as traditional or cultural, and thus receive little statutory planning attention. This fragmentation reduces the potential of leveraging cultural capital for broader developmental goals.

To capture public sentiment, community members were surveyed on their perception of traditional rulers' roles in recreation and culture. The results are presented in Table 3.

**Table 3:** Community Perceptions of Chiefs' Roles in Recreational and Cultural Services

Role of Chiefs in Recreation/Culture	Frequency (N=150)	Percentage (%)
Organizing festivals and durbars	94	62.7
Supporting youth sporting and cultural events	71	47.3
Allocating land for recreational spaces	52	34.7
No known role in recreational or cultural services	39	26.0

Source: Fieldwork, 2022

These findings affirm the community's recognition of traditional leaders as key players in cultural and recreational life. Nevertheless, these roles remain largely ad hoc, dependent on individual leadership initiative, and not embedded in formal institutional frameworks.

Scholars such as Boateng and Afranie (2020) have observed that joint cultural events, sanitation campaigns, and disaster management efforts between traditional authorities and Assemblies are often executed without standardized protocols limiting long-term planning and accountability. Similarly, Adu-Ampong (2017), in



studying Ghana's Central Region, noted that although traditional and statutory actors share a broad vision for cultural tourism, actual coordination remains fragmented.

Yet, there are promising precedents. Arthur and Dawda (2015) document how in the Sissala East District, traditional leaders and local authorities successfully co-implemented festivals and sports activities that reinforced civic participation. Drawing from such cases and the collaborative governance framework, this study recommends the institutionalization of recreational and cultural partnerships. These could take the form of joint festival planning committees, district-level cultural affairs budgets, and the formal inclusion of traditional leaders in tourism and youth development programming.

Such reforms would not only enhance the delivery of recreational services but also strengthen ties between statutory and customary authorities while reinforcing participatory local governance.

#### e. Challenges Hindering Effective Collaboration

Despite a shared commitment to community development, collaboration between traditional authorities and municipal assemblies in Ghana faces a myriad of structural and contextual challenges. A key issue lies in the absence of clearly defined legal mandates and procedural frameworks guiding such partnerships. This ambiguity often results in overlapping roles and tension over jurisdiction, particularly in sectors like land management and community mobilization (Yol, 2010). The traditional authorities, though culturally influential, are sometimes perceived as competing for authority rather than complementing formal governance institutions.

Moreover, entrenched mutual distrust has been a significant barrier. Traditional leaders often view municipal assemblies as bureaucratic and dismissive of customary knowledge, while local government officials may consider traditional institutions as archaic or unaccountable (Brooks, 2012). This tension is exacerbated by the lack of formalized communication and planning channels, which limits joint problem-solving and sustained engagement.

Recent research has highlighted additional barriers, including a fragmented local governance system that discourages coordination between actors, and administrative bottlenecks that impede responsiveness to community needs. Bebelleh (2021) notes that although traditional leaders exhibit a strong willingness to engage, institutional bottlenecks such as rigid bureaucracies and limited inclusivity in decision-making constrain their full participation (Bebelleh, 2021).

Power imbalances and role ambiguity also undermine cooperation. Chiefs often hold symbolic and moral authority within their communities but lack access to state resources and development budgets, leading to a dependency dynamic that can foster resentment. Ibrahim et al. (2023) further emphasize that weak coordination frameworks and exclusionary governance cultures perpetuate these inefficiencies, especially in environmental management and infrastructure planning (Ibrahim et al., 2023).

Finally, conflicting priorities and limited capacities, particularly at the district level, restrict joint implementation and monitoring of projects. As Owusu and Hlongwana (2021) found in the health sector, successful collaboration requires not just a willingness to engage but also systemic mechanisms that ensure parity, trust, and resource sharing (Owusu & Hlongwana, 2021).

#### f. Opportunities for Strengthening Partnerships

While the challenges are substantial, the evolving governance landscape in Ghana presents several promising opportunities for strengthening collaboration between traditional rulers and municipal assemblies. The first major opportunity lies in policy reform and institutional design. There is growing consensus among scholars and policymakers that clearly articulated legal frameworks can help formalize roles, reduce ambiguity, and foster mutual accountability in local development (Asiama, 2012). Recent research by Anderson and Larbi (2022) supports the notion that developing an operative institutional framework that embeds traditional authorities in local governance processes is key to sustainable development outcomes (Anderson & Larbi, 2022).

Secondly, capacity-building programs aimed at both traditional and formal governance actors can improve technical knowledge, foster mutual respect, and encourage co-ownership of development projects. As Bebelleh (2021) points out, traditional authorities in Nandom have demonstrated strong engagement capacity when empowered with the necessary tools and platforms for participation (Bebelleh, 2021).

A third opportunity is the potential for co-financing and co-management arrangements. Hybrid initiatives in sectors such as education, sanitation, and cultural preservation have shown that when both parties contribute resources and oversight, project outcomes improve. Paolo and Issifu (2021) argue that leveraging hybrid peacebuilding models where both state and traditional institutions co-develop interventions can be extended to broader development areas for stronger communal buy-in and long-term sustainability (Paolo & Issifu, 2021).

Digital governance tools and participatory planning processes also offer innovative avenues for collaboration. Integrating platforms for real-time feedback and inclusive decision-making; particularly in land use, education, and environmental protection can enhance responsiveness and legitimacy. The use of Integrated Financial Management Information Systems (IFMIS) in local governments demonstrates how technology can reduce administrative opacity and improve service coordination (Tetteh & Muda, 2022) (Tetteh & Muda, 2022).

Lastly, shifting socio-political attitudes among citizens and policymakers towards more inclusive governance models can act as a catalyst for reform. With increased recognition of chiefs as development partners rather than ceremonial relics, space is opening for institutional experimentation and mutual learning. As noted by Adzei and Alornu (2022), cross-sector collaboration and community engagement are vital for translating national development policies into meaningful local outcomes (Adzei & Alornu, 2022).

### **Implications for Policy and Practice**

The findings reveal that while traditional rulers and municipal authorities in Ghana do engage in collaborative efforts, these engagements are often informal, fragmented, and heavily dependent on personal relationships rather than structured institutional mechanisms. This limits the effectiveness, consistency, and scalability of joint development initiatives. Drawing from the findings across educational services, physical infrastructure, sanitation, and cultural activities, the following policy implications are proposed under three interconnected themes: formalization and funding of collaborative initiatives, inclusion in planning and budgeting processes, and joint capacity building with integrated communication strategies.

#### **a. Formalization and Funding of Collaborative Initiatives**

A major implication is the urgent need to transition from informal and ad hoc collaborations to formalized, rule-based partnerships. Chiefs are currently contributing to various development sectors including school infrastructure, sanitation mobilization, and land provision largely without formal recognition or institutional mandates. This limits accountability, continuity, and long-term planning.

Municipal Assemblies and traditional councils should be encouraged to enter into Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) or Community Development Agreements (CDAs) that clearly outline roles, responsibilities, timelines, and performance benchmarks for joint initiatives. Such agreements would reduce ambiguity, enhance mutual expectations, and offer a reference point in cases of conflict or leadership transition.

Another critical implication is the provision of dedicated budgetary support. Most contributions from traditional leaders are either personally financed or sourced from voluntary community efforts. To ensure sustainability, Municipal Development Plans should allocate specific budget lines to support initiatives spearheaded or co-managed by traditional authorities. This not only promotes ownership and transparency but also aligns with contemporary principles of participatory and inclusive development finance.

Funding mechanisms could also include leveraging traditional fundraising channels like communal levies, festivals, and development-focused durbars, integrated within municipal financial planning to support projects such as school rehabilitation, water systems, and sanitation facilities.

#### **b. Inclusion of Traditional Leaders in Planning and Budgeting Processes**

The findings underscore that despite their vital role in community life, traditional rulers are often excluded from formal planning and budgeting platforms. This results in misaligned priorities, duplication of efforts, and community disengagement when development projects are perceived as top-down or externally imposed.

To rectify this, municipal authorities should institutionalize consultative platforms where traditional leaders can meaningfully contribute to the formulation of District Medium-Term Development Plans (DMTDPs). Creating bodies such as Traditional-Municipal Development Advisory Committees (TMDACs) would facilitate routine consultations on needs assessments, project identification, and resource allocation. These committees should operate transparently and be anchored in municipal planning calendars to avoid being merely symbolic.

Moreover, involving chiefs from the outset in project design fosters mutual trust, improves cultural appropriateness of interventions, and enables strategic use of their influence for project implementation. This inclusion also enhances legitimacy, accelerates community buy-in, and ensures that resource allocation reflects local knowledge and developmental priorities.

The recurring example of conflicting sanitation campaigns between assemblies and traditional authorities exemplifies the costly inefficiencies of parallel planning. Integrated planning processes will help synchronize resources, harmonize messages, and increase the efficiency and impact of development projects.

### c. Joint Capacity Building and Communication Strategies

For collaboration to thrive, both traditional and municipal actors must be equipped with the knowledge, skills, and tools necessary to navigate shared governance spaces. The study reveals that many traditional leaders lack formal exposure to planning processes, financial management, or governance tools, while some municipal officers are unaware of the developmental potential embedded in traditional institutions.

Capacity-building programs should therefore be co-designed and jointly delivered by bodies such as the Ministry of Local Government and the National House of Chiefs. These programs must be context-specific, focusing on participatory governance, budgeting skills, local project monitoring, and policy literacy. Importantly, training should include both parties to foster shared learning, mutual appreciation, and a cooperative development ethos.

In parallel, communication strategies must be revamped. Miscommunication, lack of coordination, and parallel information dissemination were highlighted as common barriers. Joint communication channels such as shared community information centers, town hall meetings, and digital notice boards can serve as centralized platforms for development announcements, updates, and feedback.

Traditional leaders, given their high visibility and social capital, should be engaged as official spokespersons in municipal campaigns related to sanitation, education, health, and voter registration. Their endorsement can elevate the credibility of state interventions and inspire widespread behavioral change.

Furthermore, local radio stations and community durbars should be institutionalized as part of a two-way communication system that not only broadcasts municipal messages but also collects community feedback for planning refinement. Communication must be inclusive, multilingual, and anchored in culturally resonant narratives to optimize reach and impact.

The effective integration of traditional rulers into municipal governance requires deliberate, well-structured, and adequately resourced interventions. Formal agreements, inclusive planning mechanisms, and joint capacity development stand out as actionable policy responses that can bridge the gap between customary and bureaucratic governance. These strategies will not only enhance service delivery but also contribute to democratic legitimacy, cultural continuity, and sustainable development in Ghana's decentralized governance system.

## Conclusion

This study has examined the nature and scope of collaboration between traditional rulers and municipal authorities in Ghana, particularly within the Asante Akyem Central Municipal Assembly. Grounded in the dual-governance theory, the collaborative governance framework, and the institutional pluralism model, the research highlights how parallel yet interdependent systems of authority shape the trajectory of local service delivery. These systems, while distinct in origin and operational structure, possess complementary strengths that, if effectively integrated, can produce more inclusive and responsive local governance.

The findings demonstrate that although traditional leaders actively contribute to community development; especially in education, infrastructure, sanitation, and cultural preservation—their involvement is largely informal and episodic. Municipal authorities, while legally mandated to lead development processes, often lack the institutional mechanisms and political will to systematically engage traditional actors. This disconnect results in fragmented initiatives, role ambiguity, and resource inefficiencies that undermine the potential for collaborative governance.

Despite these challenges, the study identifies significant opportunities for deepening partnerships. These include the establishment of formal agreements, institutional inclusion in planning and budgeting processes, capacity development initiatives, and improved communication structures. Traditional leaders, when strategically involved, offer unparalleled access to community networks, social legitimacy, and cultural cohesion all of which are critical for effective service delivery and participatory governance.

The path forward lies not in choosing between customary and bureaucratic governance systems, but in forging a synergistic relationship that draws on the unique assets of each. A co-governance model anchored in respect, equity, and shared responsibility offers a sustainable framework for addressing the complexities of local development in Ghana. Such a model will not only enhance the performance of local government but also uphold the values of cultural continuity, democratic inclusion, and community empowerment.

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