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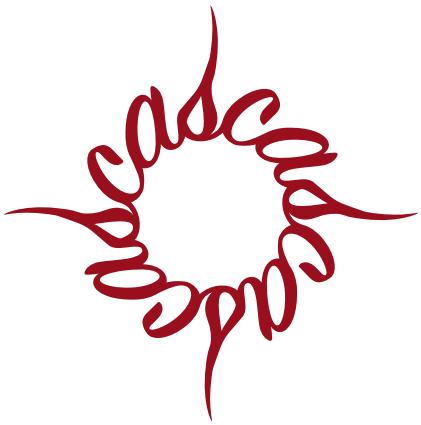

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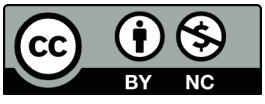

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Ali Mazrui as a Writer

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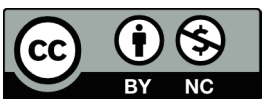
Abstract

In October 2014, the news of the death of Ali Mazrui spread quickly in New York and around the world, marking the loss of an extraordinary mind. Mazrui was born in Kenya in 1933. His major intellectual contribution is his interpretation of Africa as a product of what he called 'the triple heritage – Africa's indigenous values, Islam, and the Western legacy'. Indeed, he was the first African in history to do a nine-hour global television series, shown in many countries in a blaze of controversy and publicity, especially in the US and UK, translated into several languages, and seen by millions worldwide. The television series is called *The Africans: A Triple Heritage* (Mazrui 1986a). A quick online search reveals that his ideas continue to inspire and influence people even today. By the time he died, Mazrui had also authored 58 books and 679 academic articles. This essay explores Mazrui as a prolific writer, examining the motivations for his extensive writing, the themes he addressed in his writing, and his unique writing style. By delving into these aspects of Mazrui's scholarship, we can deepen our understanding of his diverse interests and intellectual expression as well as uncover inspiring and valuable insights into his enduring relevance.

Keywords: Ali Mazrui, triple heritage, Africa, writer, legacy



1. Introduction

The Japanese have a saying, *Tora wa shishite kawa wo nokosu; hito wa shishite namae wo nokosu*, that can be translated roughly into English as 'When a tiger dies, it leaves its skin; when a person dies, they leave their name'. This proverb emphasizes the idea of legacy. Ali Mazrui died in 2014, but his legacy persists. In a sense, therefore, he had not died after all. He only changed his address (Adem 2015a; 2015b). Or, alternatively, as Mazrui (quoted in Adem 2021: vi) put it: 'As long as the deceased is remembered by name, he is not completely dead; in fact, he combines death with life'. It is still only appropriate to ask: How could we explain Mazrui's continued relevance? In our view, a part of the answer is his extraordinary common sense and rare insight that enabled him to penetrate the hidden operation of historical forces. In other words, he was able to predict or anticipate some of the major events and social theories of our time (Adem 2017; 2024b). The other part, which is the major concern of this essay, pertains to Mazrui's skill as a writer—his advanced linguistic sophistication, his considerable power of articulation, and his high level of proficiency in writing.

Some scholars have indeed sought to examine aspects of Mazrui's evolution and development as a writer. Omari Kokole (1998) was the first to share what he thought and what others said about the pros and cons of the style and scope of Mazrui's writings. After Kokole, Alamin Mazrui (2011) analyzed Mazrui's approach to translation studies in Africa, and Chris Wanjala (2017) examined how Mazrui's conceptualization of the artist is different from that of Wole Soyinka, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Chinua Achebe, and Alex La Guma. Others have also attempted to understand why and how Mazrui wrote in the first place (Adem 2018); how he combined Africa's literary and orate techniques to explore political science (Mugo 2018); how he used literature for raising issues about governance in Africa (Nyong'o 2018); how he formulated political ideas through fiction (McLaren 2018); and how he was not a detached and emotionally distant writer (Thuynsma 2018). However, our study is the first of its kind to examine Ali Mazrui's writing style itself and seek to relate it explicitly to the persistence of his influence, even after his death.

But who were the readers of Mazrui's works? Among which readers have his works been mostly appreciated? Was there any difference in the appreciation for his works received before and after his death? These are all important questions we wish to briefly address below before we proceed further. Initially, it was mainly Westerners who were more stimulated by Mazrui's scholarly works (see, for instance, Spiro 1967: 91, Bull 1977: 74, Miller 1990: 65). However, this does not mean that Ali Mazrui was uniformly embraced by the West. On the contrary, some prominent Westerners were sharply critical of him (see, for instance, Molotsky 1986, Horowitz 2013). There are also ideological, methodological, and cultural reasons why some leading African scholars were critical of Mazrui's scholarship (see Adem 2014, Kariuki 2018, Makinda and Leahy 2025). In a sense, Kofi Annan (see Mazrui 2001f: Appendix 4), the former Secretary General of the UN, was perhaps right when he described Mazrui as 'Africa's

gift to the world'. But it is our hope, as Adem (2024c) has argued, that many more Africans would realize that Mazrui was also Africa's gift to Africa! In any case, the three thick volumes that were published under the 'Mazrui and His Critics' series (Mazrui and Mutunga Eds. 2003; 2004, Adem *et al.* 2013) also attest that Mazrui's ideas have inspired more active discussions about Africa in the West than in Africa itself.

After his death in October 2014, Mazrui's scholarship appears to be receiving far greater attention both within and outside Africa (see, for instance, Adem *et al.* Eds. 2016, Bandarra *et al.* 2022, Sindjoun 2023, Adem 2024a; 2024b; 2024c, Makinda and Leahy 2025, Adem 2026). In recognition of Mazrui's contributions to academic debates and policy discourse, universities are also naming after him their centers (for instance, University of Johannesburg in South Africa), their professorships (for instance, University of Michigan in the USA), and their fellowships (for instance, the UAE in the Middle East). In addition, the African Association of Political Sciences launched in October 2023, on the occasion of its 50th anniversary, a biennial lecture 'to honor and celebrate the memory of Ali Mazrui, a person who worked tirelessly towards, and achieved so much, in realizing the goals of Political Science in Africa and beyond'. Many symposia and roundtables have similarly been held in both Africa and the US since his death, and many more are scheduled for the coming years. In short, Ali Mazrui's legacy endures.

The most influential political writer of the twentieth century, George Orwell (2001: 37), lamented in 1938:

> It is unfortunate that political books nowadays are almost invariably written either by fools or by ignoramuses. If a writer on a political subject manages to preserve a detached attitude, it is nearly always because he does not know what he is talking about. To understand a political movement, one has got to be involved in it, and as soon as one is involved, one becomes a propagandist.

Ali Mazrui was a political writer. He also often got involved in politics, often provocatively. *The New York Times* befittingly titled his 2014 obituary 'Ali Mazrui, Scholar of Africa Who Divided US Audiences, Dies at 81' (Martin 2014). *The Washington Post* similarly described him as a 'controversial scholar' (Schudel 2014). *The Guardian* (UK) described Mazrui as a 'Kenyan political thinker who was unafraid to confront contentious issues' (Rajab 2014). And *The Times* (2014) referred to him as the 'African political scientist who sparked controversy…'.

On why Mazrui loved controversies, he sometimes used to invoke the old saying in Kiswahili: *Wanaokubaliana kwa kila jambo hawana uzungumzi mirefu*, which can be translated as 'Those who agree on everything have not much to converse about' (IGCS 2000). Yet it is still fair to ask: had Mazrui resolved the Orwellian dilemma stated above? In our judgment, Mazrui had indeed managed to reconcile

his close involvement in politics, manifested in part in his unlimited access to some of the shakers and movers of politics of Africa and beyond, with a sense of balance betrayed in his intellectual discourse. On Mazrui's unlimited access to the corridors of power, the renowned American journalist Amy Goodman (2009) put it to him in this way five years before he died:

> You have had many experiences in your life…you met with the founding President of Ghana, Kwame Nkrumah, in New York as well as other places; you were driven out of Uganda by Idi Amin; you met with Jomo Kenyatta and you are the Chancellor of a university by that name in Kenya; you met the Queen of England; you sat in a tent with [Muammer] Qaddafi; and you just had tea with the Indian Prime Minister [Manmohan Singh].

A measure of Mazrui's success in maintaining a balanced perspective may be the reactions of some of Africa's leaders, especially those who were outraged by his critiques of their governments or policies, despite the audience he was given at the highest level. For example, Mazrui (as quoted in Adem et al. Eds. 2013: 209) said this about his relationship with the leaders of Uganda, Tanzania, and Kenya:

> [Milton] Obote was sometimes tempted to detain me or expel me [from Uganda]; Idi Amin eventually wished he had eliminated me; and Julius Nyerere was in recurrent debates with me. [Daniel arap] Moi does not know what to do with me.

The series of critical or negative reactions from different sides of the political class to some of Mazrui's central ideas, too, attest to his pragmatism, realism, and his moral courage. Mazrui never valued political correctness. His perspective was thus informed without being insane. By 'insanity', what Orwell apparently meant was not objectivity, which is always elusive, but the deliberate distortion, or even corruption, of 'facts' for political or non-political purposes. We can therefore probably say that Mazrui managed to be less delusional and less insane.

2. Why Mazrui wrote

Many know that Ali Mazrui loved to write, but few knew why he did. The reasons, as Mazrui himself (1974: 100) put it, included:

> ⋯this tremendous urge to communicate…This is why I write at all, why I write so much, and why I write on such varied subjects. I have a constant urge to try and share with others what I think are glimpses I have had...When I want to communicate any particular thought that has occurred to me, a) I want to work it out, and b) I want to communicate it to others. I

> have to work it out. I work it out in the writing. Having worked it out, I want somebody else to know what occurs to my mind, to my being.

Mazrui seemed to be echoing above what the English author E. M. Forster (1927: 152) said was his reason for writing: 'How do I know what I think until I see what I say'. Apart from the psychological explanation of the root of his interest in writing, Mazrui offered what may be described as the ancestral root of his passion for writing. Mazrui (2008a: 6) said:

> …writing in my case is almost like a compulsion. I believe I have inherited this compulsion to write from my father who was a pamphleteer in the Swahili language and Arabic…He used to say that there were two areas of life in which he had not tried to emulate the Prophet Muhammad – my father did not try to marry as many wives as the Prophet had done, nor did my father limit himself to producing only one book as the Prophet had done.

Regarding the scale of Mazrui's writing, he authored 58 books and 679 academic articles (Adekeye and Adem 2024). In addition to writing, we must interject that another thing Mazrui loved was interactions with the mass media. His interest in the media was greatly enhanced by his experience in Spain in the 1950s, when he went there as a student tourist. Mazrui (1992: 5) had thus said:

> As an African student in Valencia, I was such an unusual sight that the local press took interest - and arranged to have me interviewed. Perhaps that was the beginning of my flirtation with the Western press!

More generally, what were Mazrui's goals in writing? What were his deeper motives in writing? In formulating tentative answers to these questions, we would rely upon the variables George Orwell (1981: 312-316) had singled out long ago for answering a similar question about himself: political purpose, historical impulse, aesthetic enthusiasm, and sheer egoism (personal ambition). Although the priority accorded to each variable varied from time to time and subject to subject, all of these motives were evident in Mazrui's writings, too.

2.1. Political purpose

Mazrui wrote for something; he wrote for someone. The entire body of his writings and his other intellectual outputs are purpose-oriented in the normative and political sense of that term. A portion of this body of work could be regarded as a polemic in which the goal was to implant in the reader's mind an idea or a point of view. Although Mazrui's writings threw light on different aspects of cultural, socio-

political, and/or economic phenomena, the driving force behind them was sometimes not pure research or, as Mazrui (1963: 122) once put it, ‘an adventure in abstraction to sharpen the mind’. His steadily changing themes and the corresponding political realities of the times affirm the presence of such a sense of political purpose in which he would identify a public issue that was capable of generating debate, relate that issue to his own convictions in a dialectical manner, and proceed to highlight them.

2.2. Historical impulse

Mazrui aspired to present ‘reality’ as he thought it should be presented or re-presented. The telling titles of his books and essays bear testimony to his historical impulse. He enjoyed deconstructing the received truth (see, for instance, Mazrui and Adem 2013). Although historical impulse and political purpose could overlap from time to time, the former is concerned with the (re-)presentation of ‘reality’ and the latter with changing it desirably. When Mazrui (1967c: 91-92) argued in ‘Ancient Greece in African Political Thought’ that ‘it is easier to prove that ancient Egypt was African than to prove that ancient Greece was European’, Mazrui was engaged in deconstructing a ‘received truth’. He was re-(presenting) history as he thought it should be represented. In the same vein, Mazrui (1967c: 91-92) reminded us: ‘[t]he fact that the rest of Europe was Hellenized did not in itself make Greece European—any more than the fact that Jamaicans are anglicized need to convert England into a West Indian Island’.

2.3. Aesthetic consideration

Mazrui’s aesthetic sensibilities, evident in his writings from quite early on, partly explain why his writings are refreshingly readable. As Colin Leys (1968: 51) put it: ‘Ali Mazrui is incapable of writing a dull paragraph’. Mazrui’s literary sophistication has been widely recognized; it has also, at times, puzzled observers. In this vein, Chaly Sawere (1998: 275) noted:

> Many have commented on Mazrui’s unusual and often artistic use of the English language in his political and theoretical works. Others have noted his even more unusual tendency to quote or recite poetry in the middle of a solemn policy analysis or discourse on foreign affairs…Is there a frustrated poet in Mazrui, the social scientist? Did he end up in the wrong department at university?

Indeed, a reviewer of Mazrui’s (1971) only novel, *The Trial of Christopher Okigbo*, also observed in the *New York Times* (17 September 1972, Section BR, p. 48): ‘Despite the seriousness of [the questions in the novel], there is something detached and playful about [it]…The novel becomes its own best proof that important political questioning and art are not mutually exclusive. [The novel] is a fine and unusual piece of fiction’. One cannot help but arrive at the conclusion that there was ‘a frustrated

poet' inside Mazrui, also, after reading, for instance, a closing paragraph of Mazrui's (1982: 328) analysis about the process of conflict resolution:

> Out of the blood of Burundi, the agony of Uganda, the scars of Nigeria, the stains of Chile, the ashes of Bangladesh, the racism of the United States, the pained frustrations of Czechoslovakia, the silenced voice of [Russia] and the sheer exhaustion and lack of imagination of the United Kingdom, a new world order might one day emerge.

Mazrui wrote with such simplicity and grace. He is a challenging writer to imitate because his simple writing style is rooted in a rich foundation of erudition. In short, there is no doubt about the powerful presence of the aesthetic element in the works of Ali Mazrui, who seemed to be always mindful of how he wrote, at least as much as why he wrote and what he wrote about.

2.4. Personal ambition

How do we know if ambition provides a major impetus to a piece of writing? In the social sciences, where a seemingly detached (and 'objective') style of writing is the convention, it is hard to readily identify the influence of egoistic consideration on intellectual development. This motive is nevertheless always there. No scholar is indifferent to considerations of how his or her intellectual output would be received. Perhaps it could even be argued that an element of egoism is ultimately connected to human nature.

If egoism influences at least a part of intellectual activity, such influence is bound to be more discernible in some spheres of activity than in others and is more or less visible at one time and in one person than in another. The presence of such a motivating force in Mazrui's approach to writing is abundantly clear, owing to the semi-autobiographical style that Mazrui so often used.

The semi-autobiographical style of writing also possesses decisive advantages in several respects. Sometimes this style could be forced upon the writer, but, in Mazrui's case, it too seemed to have a deeper root indeed. Early in his career, he had advocated the personalized and semi-autobiographical approach to the study of political science. Mazrui (1973: 101) argued, for instance:

> Because political consciousness is so intricately bound up with the growth of a person's general awareness, political scientists should perhaps devote more time to using their own lives as data for the growth of the study of political consciousness.

For further elaboration of what has been discussed in this and the next section, please see Adem (2018). Let us now use a different framework of classification to make sense of Mazrui's writings. We

will focus on their shifting themes in the last fifty years of his life.

3. A taxonomy of Mazrui's writings

Mazrui had a special liking for and a gift for classifying different concepts, events, and processes with striking originality. The irony was that his scholarship itself defied classification. But we shall try to classify Mazrui's writings below by breaking them into the following overlapping categories: historical, unmasking, ironic, reformist, rebellious, and revolutionary (Hacking 2000: 19-20).

Historical scholarship is an explicitly non-evaluative discourse about the object of narration. A good example of this is Mazrui's 'Africa Entrapped: Between the Protestant Ethic and the Legacy of Westphalia', a chapter in a book edited by Hedley Bull and Adam Watson (Mazrui 1984: 289-308). In this essay, Mazrui narrates the historical evolution and the predicaments of the African state in a seemingly detached way. Historical narrations form the bulk of Mazrui's early writings, especially those whose subject matter was Africa.

The second category of Mazrui's works is concerned with refuting a hegemonic idea and undermining its authority by exposing the function it serves. In other words, it unmasks. 'Ancient Egypt in African Political Thought' (Mazrui 1967b) represents this type of scholarship. In his writings, Mazrui sought to unmask the hidden structures of power relations. We would also classify Mazrui's (2001c) 'Pretender to Universalism: Western Culture in a Globalizing Age' in the same category.

Thirdly, we have ironic scholarship, which not only narrates the historical object but also suggests that the object would have been different if it had been conceptualized differently (see, for instance, Mazrui 1969b: 665; 1986b: 128; 1996).

Then there is Mazrui's reformist scholarship, which perceives the existing state of affairs as a product of social, cultural, and political forces. But it also states, usually implicitly, that something needs to be done about it (Mazrui 1980b: 84-87).

The fifth type is rebellious and revolutionary scholarship, which sees constructed 'reality' as not only undesirable but unacceptable. Much of Mazrui's later work, particularly on U.S. foreign policy, reflects this revolutionary stance—shifting from ideas to action aimed at challenging or dismantling accepted truths (Mazrui 2001a; 2001b; 2005).

In short, much of Mazrui's writings in the first half of his active professional life show historical, unmasking, and reformist orientations. In the second half, increasingly rebellious and even revolutionary tendencies are clearly discernible in them.

4. The image of Mazrui as a writer

In the role he assumed and in his intellectual orientations, Mazrui had rightly been described as having multiple personalities (Sawere 1998). In his approach to writing, too, Mazrui combined several features,

including the following.

4.1. The master semi-autobiographer

In Mazrui's writing, the semi-autobiographical style has a respectable place. It is a style of writing which is somewhat akin to what Laurel Richardson (1994: 519) has called 'a form of evocative writing … the narrative of the self'.

It is clear that this form of evocative writing had animated Mazrui's writings. What is less apparent is its philosophical foundation. And yet there are some clues we could get from Mazrui himself. The style seemed to have emerged partly from the influence of some political writings Mazrui had read early in his career. The works Mazrui (1972: 28) mentioned in this respect include Jomo Kenyatta's (1959) *Facing Mount Kenya*, M. Kariuki's (1963) *Mau Mau Detainee*, Kwame Nkrumah's (1971) *Ghana: The Autobiography of Kwame Nkrumah*, Tom Mboya's (1963) *Freedom and After*, Waruhiu Itote's (1967) *'Mau Mau' General*, and Donald Barnett and Karari Njama's (1966) *Mau Mau from Within*.

Mazrui's critical interest in the form and content of these writings is worth emphasizing. In a section of one of his books bearing the subtitle of 'Biography and Culture', Mazrui (1972: 28) had, for instance, described Kariuki's book as a work which '[i]n many ways...compares favourably with that political classic of African autobiography, Nkrumah's *Ghana: The Autobiography of Kwame Nkrumah*'. The semi-autobiographical style subsequently became not only a recognizable feature of Mazrui's writing, but also, we could even say, one aspect of his methodology (Mazrui 1973: 101).

4.2. The master comparativist

Mazrui used the comparative method effectively. He often compared what appeared incomparable at first. His analysis, therefore, has many similes – comparisons of dissimilar objects. The best example of this is Mazrui's (1995a) 'The African State as a Political Refugee'. For Mazrui (1972: xiii), a comparative analysis must show how the phenomena are interrelated either directly, derivatively, or by analogy. In this vein, Mazrui (1966) argued that Nkrumah shared a striking similarity with Czar and Lenin. Other examples include the postulated link between the impeachment of Warren Hastings and the Nuremberg Trials (Mazrui 1993), David Livingstone, Albert Schweitzer and Rudyard Kipling (Mazrui 1991b), Malcolm X and Ras Tafari (Mazrui 1990), the Meiji Restoration and the Legacy of Ataturk (Mazrui 2001e), the African state as a Political Refugee (Mazrui 1995a), Boxer Muhammad Ali and Soldier Idi Amin (Mazrui 1977b), the Bolsheviks and the Bantu (Mazrui 1976b); the Baganda and the Japanese (Mazrui 1976c), and so forth.

The relationship between each of the above elements, which are compared, is not readily apparent. A question that therefore arises is: How could one develop the sharpness for making this form of penetrating comparative analysis? Or, as Kokole (1998: 12) put it, how do we explain Mazrui's power

to ‘x-ray’ ideas? This type of imaginative comparison requires, among other things, deep empirical knowledge about the relevant subjects across a broad range of fields and the capacity to critically analyse and synthesize it. Additionally, what is required, and Mazrui seemed to have possessed in abundance, was a knowledge that is conveyed not merely through the outer five senses but, and most significantly, knowledge acquired through what John Locke (1997: 120-122) had called reflection, that is, knowledge conveyed through inner senses.

4.3. The master metaphorist

Metaphor is another heuristic tool that Mazrui used effectively to help us understand the essence of one thing by referencing another through comparison and analogy. Quite early in his long career, Mazrui (1970: 113-114) had asserted:

> [L]ike creative literature, political analysis has to resort at times to the use of … metaphor. The strength of metaphor lies in its transphenomenal comparative utility. It brings forth the associations of one category of life to illuminate a different area of observation.

But Mazrui’s uniqueness lay not so much in his use of metaphor, which is technically the equation, not a comparison, of two objects, as in the exceptional clarity of the message he portrays through them. Just like comparisons, metaphors are used by Mazrui for the purposes of clarification and/or persuasion. In his discussion of oratory, Mazrui (1977: 65-66) thus related the essence and uses of comparative imagery and concluded: ‘[a]n effective use of comparative imagery could help decide a case’. Indeed, in some cases, Mazrui’s entire analyses revolve around a central metaphor. This is evident in works such as ‘The African State as a Political Refugee’ (1995a), *The African Condition* (1980a), and ‘Exit Visa from the World System: Dilemmas of Cultural and Economic Disengagement’ (1981).

4.4. The master verbal gymnast

Another common feature of Mazrui’s scholarship is his tendency to challenge popular maxims or received truths by turning them on their head and demonstrating why an alternative perspective is equally — or even more — plausible. When he introduced the concept of ‘shifts in cultural paradigms’, Mazrui (1995b: 340-341) was using this device to introduce a new dimension to the notion of ‘paradigm shift,’ which was initially articulated by Thomas Kuhn for explaining how large-scale changes took place in scientific thought. Mazrui (1995b: 340-341) argued thus: ‘paradigmatic changes are caused not merely by great minds like those of Copernicus, Newton, Darwin, and Einstein, nor only by great social movements like Islam and the Protestant Reformation, but also by acculturation and normative diffusion…’. It is helpful to note that in thus formulating his concept of shifts in cultural paradigms,

Mazrui did not seek to repudiate Kuhn's notion of shifts in scientific paradigms.

Similarly, Mazrui (2001b: 1) had sought to broaden Bertrand Russell's well-known suggestion that 'civilization was born out of the pursuit of luxury': 'civilization was born out of the pursuit of creative synthesis. The synthesis may be between ethics and knowledge, between religion and science, between one culture and another. The central dynamic is creative synthesis'.

4.5. The master jargon-buster

Mazrui showed distaste for jargon in his writings. Bewildering abstractions were alien to him; his discourse was simplified without being simplistic. He was also a genius in converting the most abstract philosophical or theoretical concepts into comprehensible statements and understandable observations. The fancy words never tempted him. Mazrui wrote with specificity and concreteness in addition to simplicity and elegance. Clarity of expression was one of Mazrui's greatest gifts. Quite simply, he wrote to communicate rather than to impress. Incidentally, anyone who has read Orwell's (1989) popular works such as *Animal Farm* and *1984*, would readily see why Orwell, too, was regarded as a jargon-free writer. Indeed, Orwell (1968: 127-140) addressed this subject head-on in his 'Politics and the English Language,' in which he disapprovingly noted 'the mixture of vagueness and sheer incompetence' in the prose of many English writers.

4.6. The master-inventor of words

A distinguishing mark of Ali Mazrui was his genius in coining words (neologism) or combining or formulating familiar words in an unfamiliar way. He has bequeathed to us hundreds, if not thousands, of such words, including Tanzaphilia (Mazrui 1967a), which are both colourful and expressive.

A recent book (Adem 2021: 135-267) has 132 pages of an inexhaustive list of such Mazrui words in a chapter titled 'Analytical Categories'. The entries range from Afrostroika to Pax-Africana and from Black Orientalism to Lumpen Militariat. Does this also not make Mazrui the ultimate philologist? Asked whether he invents these paradoxes or discovers them, he responded that both the processes of invention and discovery were involved (Adem's correspondence with Mazrui, 25 September 2012).

4.7. The master-classifier

Mazrui often invented a word or combined old words in a new way in order to do another thing he was so good at: classify. He is usually good at breaking down an abstract concept, dissecting it, and classifying it in an intelligible way. He had a knack for originally classifying different concepts, events, and processes. Nothing was unclassifiable for Ali Mazrui; almost everything must be classified (see Adem 2021: 135-267).

4.8. The master of paradox

Even a cursory reading of Mazrui's writings shows that paradoxes and ironic statements, too, have a familiar presence in them. In his 1979 BBC Reith Lectures, Mazrui (1980a: 2) said this on why he uses paradox as a mode of analysis:

> Platonists, Hegelians and Marxists also use paradox as a tool for studying reality, but they call it the 'dialectic'. Qualities which are seemingly contradictory are reconciled. Reality is a unit of opposites.

Mazrui's fascination with paradox is legendary. A recent book on Mazrui (Adem 2021) has 56-page-long entries of Mazrui's paradoxes.

4.9. The master of implicative closing

Mazrui often raised controversial issues and asked controversial questions. Also, more often than not, his conclusions were equally controversial, even though from time to time he used implicative closing as a safety valve in this type of situation. Implicative closing has a moderating effect on an otherwise infuriating idea. By allowing Mazrui to refrain from rounding off a piece of writing with a neat final judgment and suggest it rather than formulate one, this approach lets the reader infer the conclusion. Mazrui continued to use this approach fairly consistently, but it was at the dawn of his career that he indirectly told us why. In 'Sacred Suicide', a chapter in one of his books, Mazrui (1969a: 319) first asked: 'Did Jesus Christ commit suicide?' Then, he opened the paragraph by admitting that this was not a typical question:

> A startling question! A question which, to Christians and Muslims alike, verges on blasphemy. Some might even assert that it is blasphemy. But that would be an exaggeration. There is a spiritual impotence in inquiry which saves it from sinning. Only answers have the capacity to blaspheme. And we have yet to answer the question 'Did Jesus Christ commit suicide?'

In the above case, Mazrui was merely making a statement in an upside-down way by using the *erotesis* as a rhetorical device (also see Mazrui 1968; 1976a: 82).

Mazrui also occasionally used *enthymeme*, a rhetorical device that excludes either the premise or conclusion—or a part of them—simply because they are so obvious.

In addition, there was something in Mazrui's style that made his observations appealing even to those with whom he disagreed. This included the fact that he showed great modesty and sensibility towards

the ideas of others. He never seized upon an opportunity and rushed to humiliate his opponents.

When Mazrui believed the situation so required, however, Mazrui was good, to put it metaphorically, at punching his opponent hard in the nose. This was, for instance, his response to William R. Ochieng (IGCS 1996), a fellow (Kenyan) scholar, after Ochieng had seemingly made fun of Mazrui's old age:

> You say that when I retire, I will be asked about the contributions I have made to intellectual thought. That such a question is asked at all would be a compliment, whatever the answer! Would such a question be asked of William Ochieng? And if asked, what would the answer be?

5. Mazrui's style of writing

Every writer is unique in some ways, even though some are more so than others. It is almost impossible to read more than a few lines of what Mazrui wrote without knowing he wrote it. This was due to how he wrote, structured his sentences, and used linguistic devices. To us, therefore, Mazrui is a unique writer in a unique way.

Mazrui had mastered the usage of different sentence styles. But, in general, he liked simple and short sentences. In this, he was closer, among Africa's great writers, to Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Chinua Achebe than Wole Soyinka. One never saw in Mazrui's prose intricate, syntactically complicated, hyper-hypotactic sentences. He was also easily distinguishable by his calmly rhythmic and grammatically and structurally similar sentences. 'If a man is to survive, a woman has to bear arms', Mazrui (1989: 170) once concluded. He concluded after observing that what has been the most persistent characteristic of war in all societies, across all time, traversing all cultures, is not the motivating variable, or technology, or climate but its masculinity.

Mazrui followed a definable style of writing, using a pattern that proceeded from general to specific in the selection of words and arrangement of incidents. Sometimes, he sequenced his thoughts in order of their importance. On other occasions, Mazrui developed a point and left it there for a moment until he returned to it later. This structuring technique seemed particularly suitable for his semi-autobiographical style of writing.

Let us now look more closely at some of the figures of rhetoric (rhetorical terms) Mazrui used in order to persuade and/or make his writing more effective.

Mazrui used *alliteration*, the beginning of a piece of writing with the same letters, which added memorability to his writings. More particularly, Mazrui frequently used alliteration in the titles of his writings. In his prose, he also utilized beautifully constructed, parallel and balanced comparisons, consisting of two or more parts, divided by a pause, each part having a generally equivalent significance. Sometimes sharp contrasts, or *antitheses*, highlighted these constructions. These are all fitting for a

scholar who was so fascinated by contradictions and paradoxes in society. Mazrui's (1985a: 839) comparison and contrast of Islam and Christianity in Egypt and Ethiopia illustrate this style: 'In Egypt, Islam has dominated the Coptic Church. In Ethiopia, the Coptic Church has dominated Islam'. Here is another example in which Mazrui (1969a: 231) compared Moise Tshombe and Patrice Lumumba in what was then known as Congo: 'If Lumumba lacked competence but possessed a Pan-African conscience, Tshombe had the competence but entirely lacked the conscience. Tshombe had the right skills but the wrong views, Lumumba the right views but the wrong skills'. In these constructions and many others, Mazrui combined two or more phrases, clauses, or sentences that are structurally the same and grammatically parallel. He seemed to enjoy the sense of balance, symmetry, and rhythm displayed in the parallel structure of his sentences.

One advantage of parallel construction is that with its rhymes and rhythms, it is pleasant to read and sounds orderly. In 'Uncle Sam's Hearing Aid', Mazrui (1985b: 183) thus wrote: 'Unfortunately, the United States is better at using English for transmitting its message than it is at using the language to listen to the whispers of the rest of humanity'. And in *The African Predicament and the American Experience*, Mazrui (2004: 21) wrote: '[Woodrow] Wilson was a visionary in international relations but, paradoxically, a bigot in interracial relations'.

Then there was the use of three, Ali Mazrui's magic number. Mazrui's (1986b) flagship concept is, of course, the Triple Heritage. He loved the *tricolon* and often used it masterfully. For instance, Mazrui (2001d) wrote: 'Africa invented languages; Asia sacralised languages; Europe universalized languages'. Similarly, Mazrui (2008b: 83) observed: 'the most successful Semitic religion is Christianity; the most successful Semitic language is Arabic; the most successful Semitic people are the Jews'. For maximum effect, he sometimes combined tricolon with alliteration and rhyme. The advantage of using the tricolon is that it makes the phrase more unforgettable and perhaps even more believable. He was also aware that tricolons are most memorable when the last element is longer.

Even the major themes in some of the courses Mazrui had taught came in triads. An example is a course Mazrui taught in 2007 at Cornell University, titled 'Government and Politics in Africa: Continuity and Change'. (One of the authors of this essay served as an associate instructor for the course.) In this course, his African Triadigm (defined as a paradigm within which reality is viewed in three dimensions) included the following 12 triads: The Triad of Time: Precolonial, Colonial and Postcolonial Africa; The Triad of Change: Traditional, Modern and Postmodern; The Triad of Demography (A): Black, Arab and Immigrant Africa; The Triad of Demography (B): Race, Ethnicity and Clan; The Triad of Religions: Indigenous, Islamic and Christian; The Triad of Languages: Indigenous, Arabic, and European; The Triad of Laws: African, Islamic and Western; The Triad of Allegiance: Nation, State, and Continent; The Triad of Partyism: Single Party, Multi-Party and No-Party; The Triad of Order: Tyranny, Anarchy, and Democratic Order; The Triad of Ideologies:

Nationalism, Liberalism, and Socialism; and The Economic Triad: Agriculture, Mining and Manufacturing.

Wole Soyinka, the renowned Nigerian writer, criticized what he saw as Mazrui's excessive use of tricolon and alliteration, accusing him of *paroemion*—a rhetorical device marked by overuse of alliteration. Soyinka (1991: 180) thus wrote:

> 'Victim?' I certainly am, at least from Mazrui's response. Villain? Could be. But victor? Permit me to demur. The winning of a literary prize does not signify any form of victory. Over what? And over whom? *Alliterative devices, even for the polemic purpose of holding attention, should not be abused in this way*' (Italics added).

Soyinka was referring to Mazrui's (1991a: 166-167) attempt to place Soyinka's criticism of *The Africans*, a TV series by Mazrui (1986a), in 'a broader continental context' and 'apply the alliterative triad of victim-victor-villain to Wole Soyinka himself, not only as a TV critic but also as a man of letters generally'.

Again, Mazrui (1980/81: 11) combined tricolon and alliteration when he argued that three trends gained momentum in the 1970s, which profoundly affected the Muslim world: the politicization of Islam, the petrolization of Islam, and the plutoniumization of Islam.

Some of Mazrui's prose also gained an illusion of logical progression through the rhyming *anadiplosis* he occasionally employed. Beyond this effect, the rhetorical device also added aesthetic beauty to his writing, as the following example from Mazrui's (1981) 'Africa between the Meiji Restoration and the Legacy of Atatürk' demonstrates:

> Allegiance to clan and tribe is less modern than allegiance to the nation; allegiance to the nation is less modern than allegiance to the continent; allegiance to the continent is less modern than sensitivity to the needs of the human race.

Relatedly, Mazrui (1984: 298) appeared to be fond of using *anaphora*, the repetition of the words in the first part of a sentence, for the purpose of emphasis.

6. Conclusion

We began this essay about Mazrui by invoking George Orwell. But how did Mazrui himself assess George Orwell as a political writer? Mazrui had indeed written about Orwell. Ironically, one of the authors learned about it a year after he co-edited a volume titled *Black Orwell: Essays on the Scholarship of Ali A. Mazrui* (Adem and Njogu Eds. 2018). The discovery took place when he was researching at

the University of Michigan for another book on Mazrui (Adem 2021). What was it, then, that inspired us to describe Ali Mazrui as Black Orwell? The background story, in brief, is as follows.

In 2006, Ali Mazrui wrote an essay titled 'Black Boswell: A Biographer's Pilgrimage'. It was a tribute to a Ugandan colleague, Omari Kokole (1954-1996), who, by the time of his death, was serving as the associate director of Mazrui's Institute of Global Cultural Studies at Binghamton University, New York. Kokole was also writing Mazrui's biography. It was therefore this ongoing project that prompted Mazrui to suggest that Kokole was playing Africa's James Boswell to Mazrui's Samuel Johnson. But the Ugandan social scientist Kokole died before his project was completed. Derivatively, we decided to describe Mazrui as the Black Orwell, considering that the two writers, Orwell and Mazrui, shared some similarities, including their status as political writers and their effective writing styles.

Mazrui wrote about a wide range of subjects. This also included, as we indicated above, George Orwell himself. Mazrui's (1969c) sharp observation about Orwell's approach as a political writer was indeed as profound as it is vintage Mazrui:

> George Orwell belongs to that school of literary activity that has conscripted literature to the service of social causes. Orwell used literature not only as a medium for social criticism but sometimes as an oracle of doom. He called upon the imagination to issue an ultimatum to man. Man must mend his newly-acquired ways – or lose the privacy of selfhood. There are at least four broad ways of subjecting society to a critical literary analysis of this kind. The first is direct. It involves looking at the particular country, by name, here, and now. The second approach is to invent a fictitious land elsewhere on the globe and then work out the behaviour of the natives of that land in a way that would serve as a social criticism of a real country elsewhere. A third approach is to shift the country not geographically but temporally, not by a change of space or name but by a change of time. In this latter sense, you place the society under criticism in a different period of history. Putting it somewhere in the past is one possibility. This particularly works well if the writer wants to deflate the pride of his own age in history by demonstrating that either the age has not made much progress in the last so many generations, or that the age has actually taken a downward trend in its evolution. An alternative way of shifting the context of social realities is to place society in the future. This would be something like Orwell's *1984*. In such cases, part of the motivation behind the shift is to indicate the likely logical culmination of trends already observable here and now. Futuristic anti-Utopias tend to be concerned with the unhealthy consequences of some contemporary developments. The fourth approach to social criticism of this kind is what one might call the Walt Disney approach. There is, in this case, a utilization of the animal world as a method of caricaturing human behaviour. It could be argued that George Orwell uses all

> four approaches in his social criticism. But three are the most manifest. He used the concrete 'Here-and-Now criticism' of England in, say, *The Road to Wigan Pier*, the futuristic criticism of a brave new world to come in *1984*, and the Walt Disney technique of animal counterparts to human types in *Animal Farm*.

Elsewhere, Mazrui (1980a: 32) wrote:

> George Orwell converted the year 1984 into a symbol of doom, a horrifying model of negative utopia. But for much of Africa, it was 1884, rather than 1984, which was the symbol of doom. The Berlin Congress opened in 1884 to help seal the fate of the continent [of Africa] for at least another century.

Mazrui had not told us how comparable he was as a writer to George Orwell or any of his peers. But there is no doubt that Mazrui knew he was a brilliant and effective writer. On his proficiency as a speaker of English, however, Mazrui (IGCS 1996) had been more candid. He said with his characteristic playfulness: 'I speak better English than the Queen of England (though her accent is better. So is her Latin)!'

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Regulating Tradition:
A Sociological Analysis of Herbal Medicine Reform in Ghana

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Abstract

This study critically examines the challenges of regulating traditional herbal medicine in Ghana, highlighting the epistemic tensions between indigenous healing systems and biomedical regulatory frameworks. Drawing on Comtean theory, it explores how traditional practitioners, whose knowledge is rooted in experience and community validation, are regulated by the biomedical standards of professionalism. The study identifies key barriers to pharmacovigilance, including informal 'one-man business' models, a lack of standardised formulations, and fragmented oversight. It further questions the state's attempt to professionalise traditional medicine through higher education, revealing that broad, non-specialised curricula and structural constraints lead many graduates to pursue careers outside herbal medicine. These findings underscore the limitations of policy models that privilege scientific rationality over indigenous epistemologies. The study argues for a more inclusive regulatory approach that valorises traditional knowledge, fosters epistemic pluralism, and enables meaningful integration into Ghana's health system. Effective regulation must reconcile diverse ways of knowing to ensure safety, legitimacy, and sustainability in traditional medicine practice.

Keywords: regulating tradition, indigenous knowledge systems, traditional medicine reform, sociological analysis, health systems integration

1. Introduction

Traditional medicine constitutes a vital pillar of health and well-being across societies worldwide, encompassing a spectrum of culturally embedded, spiritually informed, and empirically grounded practices that are passed down through generations (Ozioma and Okaka 2019). Indigenous healing knowledge in the African context has historically underpinned community health, offering holistic approaches that integrate the physical, emotional, and spiritual dimensions (Falodun 2010, White 2015). In Ghana, traditional medical practices remain deeply ingrained in the cultural identity and social cohesion of the people. However, the country is experiencing rapid socio-political and technological shifts driven by globalisation, health sector reforms, and efforts to scientifically validate indigenous therapies (Opoku 1978, Owoahene-Acheampong and Vasconi 2010).

These transformations raise critical questions about the evolving role of traditional medicine and how it is being preserved, reconfigured, or institutionalised in response to modern pressures. Ghanaian scientists and policymakers have increasingly sought to formalise traditional healing systems by integrating them into national health strategies to meet the growing complexity of healthcare needs in a post-colonial context (Addae-Mensah 1992, Addae-Mensah *et al.* 2011, Agyei-Baffour *et al.* 2017, Kwame 2021, World Health Organisation [WHO] 2024). This process involves regulatory oversight, standardisation, and the alignment of indigenous practices with biomedical frameworks, often shaped by dominant ideologies and modernisation discourses (Langwick 2015).

Auguste Comte's sociological theory of social statics and social dynamics offers a compelling lens through which these developments can be analysed. Comte posited that societies are governed by enduring structures (statics) and transformative forces (dynamics); this dual framework helps understand how traditional medicine in Ghana retains its foundational principles while adapting to contemporary socio-economic and political realities (Allan 2005, Giddens and Sutton 2013). Regulatory policies, in this view, function as instruments of change, recasting indigenous knowledge to align with the bureaucratic and scientific imperatives of the modern state (Banerjee 2002, Banerjee and Mitra 2012).

This study examined the epistemic, institutional, and policy challenges in regulating traditional herbal medicine in Ghana. Based on the findings, it proposed a more inclusive and context-sensitive regulatory framework that reconciles indigenous knowledge systems with biomedical standards for effective health system integration. The findings revealed four main themes that collectively examine the regulatory challenges of traditional herbal medicine in Ghana through a Comtean epistemological lens. The first theme explored professionalism and knowledge gaps in traditional medicine practice, highlighting the experiential and community-rooted nature of practitioner expertise. The second analysed the prevalence of informal 'one-man business' models and their implications for regulatory oversight and pharmacovigilance. The third delved into the structural and epistemic barriers to

pharmacovigilance, emphasising the limitations of biomedical regulation in capturing the pluralistic realities of traditional healing systems. The final theme questioned the state's efforts to professionalise traditional medicine through higher education, revealing how curriculum design and career trajectories reflect deeper epistemic tensions. Together, these four themes argued for a regulatory framework that valorises indigenous knowledge and reconciles diverse ways of knowing within Ghana's health system. The following sections present the literature review, methodology of the study, and findings and conclusions.

2. Literature review

Understanding the transformation of traditional medicine regulation in Ghana requires a broader sociological lens that accounts for the interplay between economic, socio-cultural, and political forces. Sociological theories offer various interpretations of social transformation ranging from linear progression to complex and reflexive interactions (Comte 1896, Giddens 1984, Beck 1992, Kaya 2014). Auguste Comte, widely regarded as the father of positivism, presented a distinctly linear and evolutionary model of societal change. His theory posited that societies progress through three intellectual stages: theological, metaphysical, and scientific (Comte 1896). This perspective on evolution reflects a teleological movement towards rationality and scientific governance, in which institutional reforms must align with the dominant stage of thought to ensure social cohesion and progress. This section reviews the key literature on social transformation, with a particular focus on Auguste Comte's theory of social statics and dynamics, and situates Ghana's evolving health governance within this framework.

2.1. Comte's theory of social statics and dynamics

Auguste Comte, widely considered the founder of sociology, developed a dual framework for analysing society: social statics, which examine the enduring structures that maintain social order, and social dynamics, which explore the forces that drive progress and transformation (Coser 2010). Comte argued that sociology must study both the anatomy and physiology of society, its stable institutions, and its evolving processes (Comte 1896). Statics involve the interdependence of social institutions such as family, religion, and governance, whereas dynamics focus on historical development and the transition from theological to scientific modes of thought. Comte emphasised that progress must be harmonised with order and that pathological outcomes arise when the balance between the whole and its parts is disrupted. He rejected individualism as the basis of social analysis, asserting that the family, not the individual, is the fundamental social unit. This insight is particularly relevant in Ghana, where traditional medicine is deeply embedded in kinship networks, communal practices, and spiritual beliefs.

2.2. Economic transformation and the rise of capitalism

The emergence of capitalism has been a defining force in modern economic transformation (Sachs 1999). Unlike traditional production systems, which prioritised subsistence and customary needs, capitalism is characterised by expansion, innovation, and capital accumulation (Scientia Educare 2025). Giddens and Sutton (2013: 20-22) posited that capitalism thrives on the revision of production technologies and application of modern science. However, science itself is not neutral; it is shaped by cultural and political contexts (Alesina and Giuliano 2015). In Ghana, the formalisation of herbal medicine reflects this tension: while regulatory frameworks demand scientific validation, the epistemic foundations of traditional healing remain qualitative and holistic (Kim 2007, Shankar *et al.* 2007, Craig 2011). Comte's dynamic theory helps interpret this shift. The transition from customary healing to regulated pharmaceutical production represents a movement from metaphysical to scientific knowledge systems. However, the persistence of informal practices and entrepreneurial models among traditional medicine practitioners (TMPs) reflects the static resilience of indigenous economic structures.

2.3. Socio-cultural change and epistemic tensions

Socio-cultural change encompasses shifts in religion, communication, and leadership, all of which influence the trajectory of traditional medicine. For example, religion can act as both a conservative and innovative force. Weber's Protestant Ethic thesis illustrates how religious values can catalyse economic change (Giddens and Sutton 2013: 20-22). In Ghana, spiritual beliefs underpin many traditional healing practices, complicating efforts to standardise and regulate them (Asare-Danso 2005, Tabi *et al.* 2006). Communication technologies also play a transformative role. Moreover, record keeping enhances institutional memory, and the Internet accelerates information exchange and stakeholder mobilisation (Banerjee 2002). Charismatic leadership is another driver of change (Paulsen *et al*. 2009). Charismatic TMPs often serve as cultural custodians and community influencers, shaping public perceptions and policy engagement. Comte's static–dynamics framework accommodates these complexities. While cultural institutions provide stability, charismatic leaders and technological innovations introduce dynamic shifts that reshape societal norms and expectations.

2.4. Political organisation and institutional reform

Political organisation constitutes a third pillar of social transformation, shaping development trajectories through policy decisions, institutional mandates, and governance structures. In Ghana, chiefs, governments, and regulatory agencies have played a pivotal role in formalising traditional medicine practices through a series of institutional reforms. Key policymaking bodies such as the Traditional and Alternative Medicine Directorate (TAMD) under the Ministry of Health, regulatory institutions like the Traditional Medicine Unit at the Food and Drugs Authority (FDA), and oversight bodies including the

Traditional Medicine Practice Council (TMPC) have contributed to this evolving landscape. Higher learning institutions, such as the Herbal Medicine Department at the School of Pharmacy, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), and Institute of Traditional and Alternative Medicine at the University of Health and Allied Sciences, have further supported professionalisation efforts through education and research.

The establishment of the Centre for Plant Medicine Research in 1975 marked an early milestone in institutionalising traditional medicine, and the FDA's regulatory role continues to shape standards for herbal medications. The Traditional Medicine Practice Act (Act 575) (Republic of Ghana 2000), enacted in 2000, provided a legal framework for regulating practitioners and practices. Although the Ministry of Health could not constitute the TMPC immediately, a secretariat was established in 2004 to prepare the grounds for its operationalisation. The TMPC was formally constituted and inaugurated in 2010, representing a significant step towards institutional regulation and legitimacy. However, as Giddens and Sutton (2013: 20-22) argued, globalisation increasingly challenges the autonomy of nation-states, making regulatory reform a domestic and transnational concern. Comte's theory reinforced this by emphasising the need for coordinated institutional harmony across epistemic domains. When political systems impose biomedical standards without engaging indigenous knowledge systems, the results include regulatory dysfunction, practitioner resistance, and epistemic dissonance. The successful integration of traditional medicine requires inclusive policy frameworks that respect cultural contexts and knowledge pluralism (Gyasi *et al.* 2017, WHO 2024). It is further emphasised that pharmacovigilance must be contextually grounded, incorporating local epistemologies to ensure safety and legitimacy. Comte's emphasis on institutional harmony remains instructive, but contemporary regulation must also accommodate epistemic diversity to avoid practitioner resistance and systemic incoherence (Sato 2012).

2.5. Synthesis and relevance to Ghana's traditional medicine sector

The reviewed literature shows that transformation is a multifaceted process shaped by economic imperatives, cultural shifts, and political decisions. In this context, political and economic questions are intricately linked, as each domain profoundly shapes and is shaped by the other (Giddens 1995). Political decisions, such as regulatory reforms, budget allocations, and health policies, directly influence economic outcomes. Conversely, economic conditions, including poverty, inequality, and employment, affect political legitimacy and stability. In Ghana, this interdependence is evident in the regulation of traditional medicine, where political will and institutional design determine the viability of economic models for practitioners. Development often depends on the alignment of political and economic planning; however, the failure to integrate both leads to stalled progress. Economic crises often precipitate political upheaval (Alesina *et al.* 1996, Przeworski and Limongi 1997), whereas stable

governance fosters investment and growth (Przeworski and Limongi 1997, Mahdavi *et al.* 2019). In the context of health systems, international political dynamics, such as donor priorities and trade agreements, also shape domestic economic capacities.

Thus, any effort to regulate traditional medicine must navigate this political–economic nexus, ensuring that policies are not only technically sound but also economically viable and politically inclusive. Comte's theory provides a structured lens to analyse how Ghana's traditional medicine sector is being reshaped, retaining its cultural foundations (statics) while adapting to regulatory pressures and modernisation (dynamics). This duality is essential for understanding the challenges of professionalisation, pharmacovigilance, and policy implementation in a sector in which tradition and science must co-exist.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research design

This study employed a qualitative research design grounded in interpretive sociology to explore the regulatory transformation of traditional medicine in Ghana. It was guided by Comte's theory of social statics and dynamics to understand how enduring cultural practices and institutional reforms interact within the evolving landscape of health governance. The design was particularly suited to capturing the lived experiences, perceptions, and institutional logics that shape regulatory implementation and practitioner identity.

3.2. Study site and context

The fieldwork was conducted in Accra and its surrounding municipalities, where regulatory institutions such as the FDA, TMPC, TAMD, and herbal medicine associations are located. Data were collected from the Herbal Medicine Department of the KNUST School of Pharmacy in Kumasi. These institutions were purposively selected for their strategic roles in policy formulation, enforcement, and practitioner engagement. The study also drew contextual insights from national policy documents, regulatory guidelines, and institutional reports to triangulate the field data.

3.3. Participants and sampling

The participants included regulatory officers, policy actors, and TMPs operating within the herbal pharmaceutical space. Purposive sampling was used to identify individuals with direct experience in regulation, manufacturing, and policy implementation. A total of 25 in-depth and key informant interviews were conducted:

- Five regulatory officers from the FDA, TMPC, and TAMD;
- Ten TMPs affiliated with recognised associations;

- Three policy advisors and institutional stakeholders;
- Three students and two faculty members from the KNUST Herbal Medicine Department; and
- Two research scientists from the Centre for Plant Medicine Research.

The participants were selected based on their expertise, institutional roles, and willingness to reflect on the challenges and transformations within the sector.

3.4. Data collection methods

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, allowing for flexibility in probing participant narratives while maintaining thematic consistency. Interviews were conducted in English and, where necessary, supplemented with local language interpretations (the native Ga language of the Greater Accra region and Akan, which is widely spoken in Southern Ghana) to ensure clarity and depth. Field notes and audio recordings were transcribed and anonymised to ensure confidentiality. In addition to the interviews, a document analysis was conducted on regulatory frameworks, training curricula, and policy statements to contextualise the empirical findings. The documents included:

- The Centre for Plant Medicine Research Act 2011 (Act 833),
- Public Health Act, 2012 (Act 851),
- FDA herbal medicine guidelines,
- KNUST Herbal Medicine Department curriculum outlines, and
- Traditional Medicine Practice Act 2000 (Act 575).

3.5. Data analysis

A thematic analysis was used to identify recurring patterns, contradictions, and insights across the data. Coding was both deductive, guided by theoretical constructs, and inductive, allowing emergent themes to surface from the participant narratives. NVivo software was used to organise and manage the data, ensuring analytical rigor and traceability. The themes were clustered around key dimensions of transformation: practitioner professionalism, regulatory enforcement, epistemic tensions, and institutional sustainability. These were then interpreted through Comte's dual lens to assess how tradition and modernity co-exist, collide, or evolve within Ghana's traditional medicine sector.

3.6. Ethical considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the University of Ghana Ethics Committee because the collected data were part of my Ph.D. fieldwork between 2019 and 2022. Participants were briefed on the purpose of the study, and informed consent was obtained before the interviews. All data were anonymised, and participants were assured of their right to withdraw at any stage without consequence. The study adhered to the principles of confidentiality, respect, and academic integrity.

4. Findings and discussion

This section presents the core findings from the fieldwork, organised around four interrelated themes that illuminate the regulatory transformation of traditional medicine in Ghana. Drawing on Comte's theory of social statics and dynamics, the discussion interprets these findings as manifestations of negotiated change, where enduring cultural practices (statics) interact with institutional reform (dynamics).

4.1. Professionalism and knowledge gaps in traditional medicine practice

Regulators emphasised that efforts to elevate traditional medicine to national and global standards critically hinge on the professionalism and technical competence of practitioners. However, this sector continues to grapple with significant knowledge gaps in medical practice, pharmacological safety, and regulatory compliance. Many producers lack formal training in good manufacturing practices, clinical validation, quality assurance protocols, and essential skills to ensure public safety and build trust in traditional herbal therapies. Concepts such as batch manufacturing records, analytical method validation, and good manufacturing practices are unfamiliar to many, particularly those without formal training in biomedical standards. Regulatory officers reiterated that limited scientific literacy among TMPs made enforcement difficult.

In this context, regulators explained that this challenge is compounded by structural constraints, particularly the capital-intensive nature of drug manufacturing. Without adequate financial resources, producers struggle to establish the infrastructure necessary to meet regulatory requirements. Consequently, institutions like the FDA, which are mandated to enforce safety standards, face a dilemma: how to uphold public health without undermining livelihoods in a sector that the government increasingly views as a vehicle for 'poverty alleviation'.

Mr. Jacob, head of the Herbal Medicine Unit of the FDA at the time of data collection, observed that traditional medicine is seen as a tool for economic empowerment. Although socially progressive, this policy orientation inadvertently led to regulatory problems. In prioritising income generation and job creation, enforcement regimes are often relaxed, allowing substandard practices to persist. The result is a fragmented implementation landscape in which the push for professionalism is not matched by adequate capacity building, investment, or accountability mechanisms. In an interview conducted on 17 June 2022 at the FDA Head Office, he stated:

> The government is using it (traditional medicine) as a poverty alleviation scheme. Therefore, everybody is allowed to manufacture something, which poses a problem for regulation. For example, when we take so many years to train about 10 companies to maturity, and they meet standards that can be compared with other countries, 10 other

> companies would spring up. It takes a lot of effort to train them. Therefore, there's always a huge gap between a few companies that are doing well and a lot that are not even in the middle but at the bottom. So, that is a huge challenge for regulators.

Emphasising the gravity of these gaps, Bosman, a faculty member at the Herbal Medicine Department of KNUST, explained in an interview conducted on 22 February 2020:

> The practitioners do not understand the regulations and issues involved. We are possibly pushing herbal medicine to an international standard, which requires a lot of education and knowledge. That is our challenge. If we are imparting knowledge and the industry cannot imbibe it, this is a very serious issue. To be able to communicate with our clients, they must understand the language we are speaking. And I know and believe there's a big gap in that.

4.2. Informal 'one-man business' models

This study identified the traditional medicine sector in Ghana as a transitional social system, caught between the metaphysical reverence for indigenous healing and the scientific rigor demanded by modern pharmacology. In this space, the dominant operational model remains highly informal and individualistic and is often described as a 'one-man business'. This does not seem to be unique to Ghana's context as scholars allude to the widespread occurrence of this phenomenon in Africa; African social practices have continued to solidify the cultural and spiritual values expressed in beliefs about illness and healing practices over thousands of years (Bodeker 1999, Mji 2019). In this context, Mr. Jojo from the TMPC bemoaned the concentration of roles in individual practitioners. In an interview on 12 March 2022, he stated that the same practitioner most often acts as 'the developer, researcher, doctor, nurse, manufacturer, quality control manager, production manager, marketing manager… he is everything'. This concentration of roles within a single individual reflects not only entrepreneurial zeal but also systemic gaps in institutional support, professional training, and regulatory enforcement. From a Comtean perspective, this model illustrates the persistence of pre-scientific modes of organisation within a sector that is increasingly expected to conform to empirical standards. The absence of specialisation and formal structures undermines the sector's ability to evolve into a scientifically regulated domain. Moreover, high rates of illiteracy among practitioners and the lack of foundational knowledge in chemistry, pharmacology, and clinical safety pose significant barriers to scaling production and ensuring public safety.

However, practitioners argue that their experience has shaped the way they perceive their practice. Therefore, assessing them using the standards of biomedical professionalism is not a fair assessment because the two groups of practitioners differ by training and orientation. While the law mandates that

only qualified individuals should engage in drug manufacturing, enforcement remains aspirational. Regulatory bodies like the FDA are constrained by the dual imperative of safeguarding public safety and supporting livelihoods in a growing industry that the government views as a tool for poverty alleviation. This tension creates a permissive environment in which informal practices persist, and the call to practice is often driven more by economic necessity than by a professional ethic of care. In Comtean terms, the sector requires a shift towards the 'scientific stage' of social development, where knowledge, specialisation, and institutional coordination replace charismatic individualism. This transition demands not only regulatory reform but also targeted capacity building, credentialing systems, and incentives for collaborative practice. Without these factors, the informal one-man model will continue to dominate, limiting the sector's potential to meaningfully contribute to national health and innovation agendas.

According to regulators, the lack of professionalism among practitioners in the herbal medicine industry translates into how they perceive their practice. Most practitioners tend to perceive their practice as a form of business that they need to own and manage alone, even when they have no expertise in handling the concerned areas. On 12 March 2022, Mr. Jojo emphasised:

> The law also mandates us to know the calibre of people in the manufacturing space, and we are working on it. We are not there yet. We want to look at qualified persons. If you do not understand chemistry, pharmacology, and similar subjects/disciplines, it becomes difficult to manufacture medicine on a large scale for consumption. The law mandates us to look into that.

The Centre for Plant Medicine Research (the Centre) also plays a critical role in supporting practitioners in navigating the difficult terrain of the regulatory environment. Koku, a research scientist at the Centre, explained the importance of the Centre's collaborative activities. On 10 March 2020, he stated:

> We think that the way to encourage herbal medicine is to support herbalists. If we support herbalists and they produce preparations in the right way, then people will use herbal medicine, and by extension, we will fulfil our mandate. Through this intervention, most of their products pass the analysis test. When the products do not pass, we educate the herbalists so that they can improve their production.

4.3. Pharmacovigilance challenges in traditional medicine

Pharmacovigilance (i.e. the systematic monitoring of drug safety after distribution) is a cornerstone of

modern regulatory frameworks. In Ghana, this process extends beyond manufacturing and distribution to include storage conditions, shelf-life stability, and post-market surveillance through hospitals, clinics, herbal shops, and toll-free reporting lines. While this system is well developed for allopathic medicines, its application to traditional herbal products remains fraught with complexity. From a Comtean perspective, this regulatory challenge reflects the broader tension between evolving scientific institutions and the residual metaphysical or theological modes of knowledge. Comte's theory of societal progression (from the theological to metaphysical to scientific stages) offers a compelling lens for understanding why traditional medicine, rooted in holistic and qualitative paradigms, resists full integration into the empirically driven frameworks of pharmacovigilance.

While these models offer flexibility and autonomy, they also pose challenges for quality assurance and pharmacovigilance. As Harilal (2009) observed, even globally visible systems like Ayurveda and Unani are rarely regulated as drugs but as dietary supplements, precisely because of the difficulty in validating multi-ingredient formulations. Regulatory agencies often require labels to explicitly state that such products are not intended to treat diseases, reflecting the epistemic gap between traditional healing and Western scientific standards. Large manufacturers, wary of regulatory hurdles, tend to focus on single-ingredient formulations, avoiding the complexity of formula drugs that defy reductionist testing protocols. This dilemma is echoed by Kim (2007), Shankar *et al*. (2007), and Craig (2011), who argued that Western science has a quantitative orientation and is ill suited to the qualitative, experiential, and culturally embedded nature of traditional medicine. The holistic ethos of indigenous healing, in which efficacy is often judged through community validation and long-term use, clashes with the demand for randomised trials, molecular analyses, and standardised dosing.

The FDA's mandate to ensure product stability, such as maintaining potency at 30°C, protecting from sunlight, and ensuring a two-year shelf life, is technically sound but practically difficult to enforce. The lack of infrastructure, expertise, and financial resources among herbal producers means that many products fall short of these standards. Moreover, the informal nature of the sector, as previously discussed, complicates post-market surveillance. Without robust data systems, adverse effects may go unreported or misattributed, undermining the essence of pharmacovigilance. This regulatory inertia is not unique to Ghana. Globally, even advanced agencies hesitate to regulate traditional medicine fully, not because of neglect but because of the ontological and methodological mismatch between scientific regulation and traditional epistemologies. In Comtean terms, society has not yet fully transitioned to the scientific stage in this domain; instead, it remains suspended between metaphysical reverence and scientific rationalism.

To move forward, regulatory frameworks must evolve not by diluting scientific standards but by creating hybrid models that respect traditional knowledge while ensuring public safety. Therefore, designing context-sensitive pharmacovigilance protocols that incorporate community feedback and

ethnographic data is crucial. Through such integrative approaches, pharmacovigilance in traditional medicine can become both scientifically credible and culturally resonant. While the FDA has established reporting mechanisms, including toll-free lines and designated clinics, these systems are underutilised, rendering post-market surveillance underdeveloped. Practitioners often exit the market without notice, making it difficult to track adverse effects or ensure product continuity. This fragility highlights the need for sustained institutional support and community-based pharmacovigilance. Comte's emphasis on systemic harmony underscores the importance of integrating surveillance into the broader health governance architecture. Without dynamic feedback loops, regulation risks becoming reactive rather than preventive.

4.4. Epistemic tensions in policy modelling

The experiential grounding of TMPs fundamentally shapes their epistemic orientation. Their practice is informed by lived experience, community transmission, and holistic engagement with healing systems (Bonsi 1980, Rasmussen 1998, Tabi *et al.* 2006, Marsland 2007, Wane 2011, Wood 2013). Thus, assessing their 'professionalism' through biomedical standards rooted in specialisation, empirical reductionism, and institutional regulation creates a mismatch in expectations. As Comte's positivist framework suggests, epistemic systems evolve through distinct stages: theological, metaphysical, and scientific. Traditional medicine, situated within a metaphysical and experiential paradigm, cannot be seamlessly evaluated using the scientific metrics of biomedicine without producing epistemic dissonance. This tension is evident in the state's attempt to professionalise traditional medicine through formal education, particularly at the Department of Herbal Medicine at KNUST. While the programme aims to train medical herbalists for modern health systems, its structure mirrors the traditional model of encompassing authority. Students are exposed to a wide array of complementary and alternative medicine practices, including introductory studies in acupuncture, homoeopathy, and other imported modalities. These are studied alongside pharmacognosy, pharmacology, pharmaceutics, and microbiology. However, the absence of specialisation within the four-year curriculum dilutes professional identity and complicates career trajectories.

The fieldwork at KNUST conducted in February 2022 for one month revealed that students struggle to define their post-graduation paths. The programme's breadth, while intellectually enriching, leaves many students uncertain about their niche within the health sector. Some students opt for careers in public health, biomedicine, or research, diverging from their intended roles as medical herbalists. One participant who had completed the course and was retained at the department to do national service noted her intention to pursue a postgraduate degree in public health, citing limited opportunities and structural constraints within the herbal medicine industry. Others expressed an interest in biomedical training or international studies, further illustrating the pull away from traditional practice.

Moreover, the pathway to licensure presents additional hurdles. Graduates must complete a year of national service before qualifying for a one-year internship at the Centre for Plant Medicine Research, after which they may sit for the licensure examination. This delay, coupled with the capital-intensive nature of herbal product manufacturing, discourages many individuals from entering the field. As one medical herbalist, Ama (interviewed on 10 February 2022), explained, the lack of financial support and infrastructure makes it nearly impossible to establish a manufacturing enterprise, despite the programme's emphasis on production. Mr. Joe, a regulatory enforcement officer at TMPC, echoed these sentiments on 21 March 2022:

> With herbal doctors coming out now, we consider a lot of them to be well trained. They should have bridged the gap between regulation and the industry, but not many of them are into manufacturing. They would understand the issues that we have discussed, but they are not going into them, so we lack qualified and competent people in the industry.

These findings underscore a critical epistemic tension in policy modelling. The state's regulatory ambitions, while well intentioned, fail to account for the ontological and epistemological foundations of traditional medicine. By imposing biomedical structures onto a pluralistic knowledge system, the policy risks alienating practitioners and undermining the traditions it seeks to elevate. The Comtean analysis revealed that scientific regulation must reconcile diverse epistemologies to avoid systemic incoherence. This calls for a more inclusive and context-sensitive approach that valorises indigenous knowledge while creating pathways for meaningful integration into the broader health system. Sources such as Sato (2012), Gyasi *et al*. (2017), and the WHO (2024) support the argument that the successful integration of traditional medicine requires epistemic humility, stakeholder engagement, and policy frameworks that reflect the lived realities of practitioners.

5. Conclusion

This study examined the regulatory complexities surrounding traditional herbal medicine in Ghana through a Comtean lens, revealing how epistemic dissonance undermines efforts to professionalise and integrate indigenous healing systems into formal health structures. The findings revealed a complex interplay between traditional medicine practice and the regulatory ambitions of the Ghanaian state, which is characterised by deep epistemic tensions. At the heart of this tension lies a mismatch between the experiential and holistic nature of traditional healing and the scientific rationality that underpins biomedical regulation. Drawing on Comtean theory, which traces the evolution of knowledge through theological, metaphysical, and scientific stages, the analysis demonstrated that policy modelling in this domain often fails to accommodate the pluralistic epistemologies that co-exist within Ghana's health

landscape.

The analysis began by unpacking the knowledge gaps and informal models that characterise traditional practice, highlighting the limitations of biomedical metrics in capturing the richness of experiential and community-rooted expertise. It then explored the pharmacovigilance challenges inherent in regulating non-standardised formulations and practices, showing how scientific regulation often fails to accommodate the pluralistic nature of traditional medicine.

The study further questioned the state's attempt to professionalise traditional medicine through higher education, particularly at KNUST, where the curriculum's breadth and lack of specialisation create fragmented career paths and dilute professional identity. These findings underscore a central argument: policy modelling rooted in biomedical rationality cannot succeed without epistemic humility and contextual sensitivity. Therefore, scientific regulation must engage with metaphysical and experiential paradigms instead of overriding them. The effective regulation of traditional herbal medicine demands more than institutional oversight; it requires a reimagining of professionalism, valorisation of indigenous knowledge, and commitment to epistemic pluralism. Only by bridging these paradigms can Ghana build a health system that is not only safe and accountable but also inclusive, culturally resonant, and truly transformative.

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Decentralised Presidentialism and the 'Independence' of the Judiciary in Ghana's Public Governance

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Abstract

In September 2025, relying on Article 146(9) of Ghana's Constitution, Ghana's president removed the country's Chief Justice (CJ). Unusually, the act of the president did not draw criticism from the religious bodies and traditional political figures, as stakeholders of democratic governance. However, the opposition party raised concerns about a breach in the principle of separation of powers and suggested a need to revise the constitutional provision that empowers the president to appoint the CJ. Using the case of the CJ, I discuss decentralization by exploring three mutually related questions: First, how can the CJ whose appointment heavily depends on the president of Ghana, manage his or her function as a major branch of government in a way that moves beyond presidentialism to emphasize the importance of separation of powers and checks and balances? Second, how can the CJ draw on the support of the mainstay institutions of public governance? Third, what role does the CJ oath play in ensuring effective decentralization of power? Addressing these questions, the purpose of this paper is to argue that both the independence of the CJ and the support the office draws from the public is intimately aligned with the CJ's fidelity to his or her oath of office.

Keywords: chief justice, decentralization, Ghana, judicial independence, presidentialism

1. Introduction

At the core of decentralization of power in a democratic country like Ghana is about the separation of powers and checks and balances. However, as I shall soon explicate, in September 2025, the president of Ghana, depending on two main conditions of Article 146(9), misbehavior and incompetence, dismissed the country's Chief Justice (CJ). Three main issues have animated public discourses on this unprecedented act by Ghana's president, since the country's re-democratization in the 1990s. First, since the constitution does not explicate in detail the conditions of misbehavior and incompetent for the dismissal of the CJ, a section of the public is concerned that the president could arbitrarily adduce any reason to both politicize and dismiss a CJ. Second, the fact that the president appoints the CJ undermines the independence of the judiciary (GhanaWeb 2025). Third, the NPP, in particular, has squirmed over what they considered as the conspicuous silence of the Christian community and traditional political figures over the subject and urged them to intervene (Afful 2025). Ultimately, therefore, the dismissal of the CJ has reignited discussions about the effectiveness of Ghana's quest for decentralized power in public governance (Osei 2020). Meanwhile, as I shall soon discuss, what has not received adequate attention is the political significance of the silence of the Christianity community (and of course other religions) and traditional leaders. This is because, as I shall expand further, the source of power and justice of the CJ, and to whom the CJ's is expected to execute his or her task have hardly been discussed. Also, left undiscussed is the centrality of the oath of office of the CJ as the source of legitimacy and determinant of the behavior of the CJ. In other words, successful critique of both the perceived vagueness of Article 146(9) and the excessive power of the president (presidentialism) are conditioned on two main factors: First, whether CJ operates in accordance with the oath of his or her office, and second, whether he or she has the support of the public, especially the religious constituency, as major stakeholders and vanguards of public governance.

Consequently, contributing to the general subject of decentralization of power, specifically from the case of the removal of the CJ, I explore three mutually inclusive questions: First, how can the CJ whose appointment heavily depends on the president of Ghana, manage his or her function as a major branch of government in a way that moves beyond presidentialism to emphasize the importance of separation of powers and checks and balances? Second, how can the CJ draw on the support of the mainstay institutions of public governance? Third, what role does the CJ oath play in ensuring effective decentralization of power? Addressing these questions, I argue that both the independence of the CJ and the support the office draws from the public is intimately aligned with the CJ's fidelity to his or her oath of office. In other words, because justice and power ultimately rest with citizens, the perceived vagueness of Article 146(9) in relation to the independence of the judiciary is significantly addressed by the pre-emptive role of the CJ's oath of office, upon which the public measures her actions and offers support, accordingly.

Putting the discussion into a broader context, in April 2025, Ghana's re-elected President John Dramani Mahama (who previously served as the country's president from January 2013 to January 2017) suspended Gertrude Araba Esaaba Sackey Torkornoo following the establishment of a prima facie case in response to three separate petitions seeking her removal from office (Naadi 2025). Later in September 2025, based on the recommendation of a committee that found grounds for stated misbehavior against the CJ, the President, acting in accordance with Article 146(9) of the country's 1992 Constitution, removed the CJ from office. The backlash following the dismissal of the CJ was predictable, given the charged political atmosphere and the historical tensions between the executive and judiciary. The opposition party, the New Patriotic Party (NPP) and other civil society organizations, particularly the Ghana Bar Association, mounted a spirited defense of the CJ. They argued that the removal of the CJ may signal to investors about a (potential) democratic backsliding in Ghana which could similarly disrupt the country's economic fortunes. They also flagged the perceived vagueness of the use of misbehavior to advance their case against the president's action.

The fears of the NPP were not unfounded. Ghana's nascent democratic governance since the country's independence in 1957 has occasionally witnessed contention between the judiciary and the executive head. For example, Kwame Nkrumah is reported to have dismissed the then CJ, Sir Kobina Arku Korsah in December 1963 because the CJ acquitted three men suspected of plotting to assassinate Nkrumah (Austin 1975). In 1970, Busia is also said to have interfered with the judiciary through his "No court, no broadcast" mantra. This was after Mr. Sallah, who had been appointed as manager in the Ghana National Trading Corporation (GNTC) in 1967, appealed to the court and successfully won a case against the legal basis of Busia's dismissal of him and other 568 government workers (Frimpong and Agyeman-Badu 2018). During the revolutionary era of Jerry John Rawlings, three judges were allegedly killed, leading to the refinement of the 1992 Constitution as, inter alia, an effort at protecting the sanctity of the judiciary from executive interference. In 2002, it was also alleged that the former president of Ghana, J.A. Kufuor had re-empaneled the Supreme Court to overturn the court's earlier decision in favor of Mr. Tsatsu Tsikata over the legality of the fast-track high court.

So, whether under military and/or civilian regime, the independence of the judiciary, as an important arm of public governance, is said to have been compromised. Since the re-democratization of Ghana in the 1990s, the judiciary has emerged strongly as a major institution in fostering the rule of law, with the Supreme Court constitutionally serving as the arbiter of last resort. The significance of the judiciary has often beckoned the religious institutions to act as stakeholders defending the quasi-independence of the judiciary. Specifically, the Ghana Catholic Bishops Conference, whether under a military regime or not, has registered unrelenting criticism of the political class for subverting the ethos of democratic governance.

However, it is notable that in the case of the country's CJ, the Conference was conspicuously silent

in openly coming to her defense. In June 2025, the Conference issued a communique that outlined important issues for the president to consider. These issues were about a need for the Minister of Education to reinstate the representation of Religious Bodies on the Ghana Education Service Council; Building on the outcome of the 2025 National Catholic Education Forum as a basis of forming partnership between the church and state to ensure the promotion of ethical and moral values in schools; revisitation of a legislation to make the office Metropolitan, Municipal, and District Chief Executives an elective one; accelerating the passage of the Human Sexual Rights and Family Values Bill, and a call on the president to update the church on the state of the country's national cathedral. Similarly, the Ghana Pentecostal Council, established in 1969 (but registered in 1971) as an ecumenical mouthpiece of Pentecostals in public governance, did not openly comment on the subject. The chiefs and other traditional leaders were also decidedly silent.

Taking the unusual silence of these major stakeholders of democratic governance as a context and what may be read as the fault lines of presidentialism (Prempeh 2007) in compromising the decentralization of power, I argue that the controversial issues about Article 146(9) in consolidating the independence of the CJ and the support the office draws from the public is intimately aligned with the CJ's fidelity to his or her oath of office. It is the oath, upon which the public tend to depend on to measure the issues of misbehavior, as well as the independence of the judiciary. I condition my response to argument on the principle that, whereas presidentialism and the content of Article 146(9), which Ghana's president operationalized to dismiss the CJ, at face value may be potentially obstructive to separation of powers and checks and balances, constitutionally concentrating significant power in the hands of the president is necessary in holding power from recklessly sprawling to top undermine effective centralized governance. This means that the CJ is expected to signal virtue in the exercise of the CJ's function. As I shall argue, using the case of the Family Bill, it was what the Christian community perceived as the CJ's deficit in signaling virtue that readily exposed her to a deficit of public support for her cause against the president.

Informed by the above, the central argument of my paper is that at the core of the independence and ultimate legitimacy and the support the CJ draws from the public against any potential pitfalls of presidentialism, is the CJ's fidelity to the his or her oath of office—to which is to function at the pleasure of citizens, from whom justice emanates and to whom it must be served. It is the oath of his or her office as an important extraction of what constitutes the people of Ghana (the 1992 Constitution) that serves as the guardrail for the CJ to ward off the conundrums of presidentialism. Specifically in the case of CJ Torkornoo, as I shall soon discuss, the silence of the various stakeholders of democratic governance is significantly about what a section of the public considers as her interference with the work of the legislature over a Family Bill. I will engage extant literature and the fecundity of an interdisciplinary perspective to advance my argument. Structuring the paper to reflect its composite perspective, I discuss

how the Christianity community has, since the birth of the modern state in Ghana during the colonial period, served as vanguard in ensuring that those vested with power to govern the public do not act arbitrarily. Meanwhile, challenging the nuances of local politics, I discuss the impact of ideological globalism in reshaping the umpire role of the CJ in fostering the interdependence the two arms of government (specifically, the President as head of the Executive and the Speaker of Parliament as head of the Legislature) in Ghana. The rest of the sections allow me to contextually discuss how Ghana's overwhelmingly supported Family Bill designed to hem the country against the impact of ideological globalism fractured the issues of power as exercised by the three arms of government, and the support of the Christian community and traditional leaders for the CJ. Finally, I focus the discussion on the centrality of oath as the legitimate basis of public office holders, as well as a pre-emptive coping strategy in overcoming the frustrations associated with decentralization and unpredictability of public office holders.

2. The Christian community and politics in Ghana

Political power in Ghana is entangled, drawing in the religious community as arbiters of democratic governance. It is the apolitical arbiters, specifically the Christian community (including other religious bodies), who consider it a duty to ensure that public officers are functioning in accordance with their oath of office. Thus, the support that these non-politically aligned institutions offer to the heads of the various arms of government and its concurrent role in ensuring checks and balances are a function of the centrality of public oath. In this section, therefore, I indicate the novelty of the religious figures not publicly staking their role in defense of the novel case of the CJ as a necessary subject of understanding the composite nature of Ghana's public governance. Since Ghana's independence, the religious bodies have hardly remained quiet in the face of multidimensionality of injustice. With Christianity constituted as a transcendental religion that offers and identifies their ultimate loyalty to God, since the colonial times, the missionary pioneers of the faith have held their freedom of religious conscience against the kings and the colonial governors. Holding themselves as the moral conscience of society, both in the colonial and postcolonial eras, the country's religious figures have sometimes risked their freedom to challenge excesses in public governance (McCaskie 1995).

The church continued with its mission of defending the freedom of conscience in postcolonial Ghana. This was against the fact that the political independence of Ghana resonated with the Africanization of the church. Already, Nkrumah had a drive to ensure that the institutions of governance were decolonized by filling public offices with Ghanaians. He also had a vision of forging the minds of the younger generation towards nationalism, which resulted in his establishment of the Young Pioneer Movement and his ideological center in Winneba in the 1960s. This did not favor foreign missionaries who criticized what they considered as Nkrumah's reckless forays into the arena of religious freedom. For

example, the Right Rev. Richard Roseveare, Anglican Bishop of Accra, accused Nkrumah of deploying the Young Pioneer Movement as a means of promoting and concretizing atheism or godlessness in the nascent postcolonial country (Pobee 1976). This did not sit well with Nkrumah who expelled Roseveare as an agent of imperialism. That, however, did not stop the church from criticizing excesses (*ibid*.).

Similarly, when Ghana subsisted under the military regime of Jerry John Rawlings, the Christian Council condemned the reported cases of the regime's abuse of human rights. The church refused to abide by the regime's passage of the Religious Bodies Act of 1989, which was intended to indirectly bring religious communities under state control (Dovlo 2005). Carrying on what it considers as both a historic and moral role of ensuring good public governance, the church has since the turn of the millennium stood out in protecting the moral frontiers of the country. Specifically in relation to ideological globalism that some Western political figures, including United Kingdom's David Cameron and America's 46th President, Joseph Robinette Biden Jr., the church has refused to identify with the cultural revolution that seeks to legalize minority sexualities (Prempeh 2021).

3. The politics of cultural revolution and ideological revolution

The above context positions the religious bodies as key agents, who consider it as a duty to deploy public oath as a pre-emptive resource, to measure the fidelity of the heads of the various arms of government in protecting Ghana's frontiers against ideological globalism. This is because, as I shall soon discuss, it was the politics of minority sexual rights that significantly exposed the umpire role of the CJ and the indifferent attitude of religious bodies to her case with John Mahama. Contextually, in 2007, a group of activists from the LGBTQ+ community identified Ghana as a place where they could organize a conference. However, the Ghanaian religious constituency challenged it and called upon the then NPP's president, J.A. Kufuor to disallow such a conference on the country's soil. After the NPP, the NDC's John Atta Mills, who regrettably died in office before finishing his term, called the bluff of David Cameron, the former Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, who threatened to cap aid given to countries that failed to liberalize minority sexual rights. Atta Mills enjoyed the full support of the religious constituency. Under his immediate successor, who continued from where he left and won to continue for the next four years, the conversation about same-sex rights took a different dimension. During the term of Mahama, following what the religious community read as his oscillated position on the subject, they formed a coalition to advocate against LGBTQ rights. This was a consequence of the President's insistence on his appointment of Nana Oye Lithur (now Nana Oye Bampoe Addo), who, contrary to what the religious constituency considered an aberration, declared her stance in support of minority sexual rights (GhanaWeb 2013). Nevertheless, the politics around sexuality crystallized under the government of the NPP's Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo. It also became the basis for determining the loyalty of the three arms of government to the social contract (generally embedded in the 1992

Constitution) they hold with citizens.

By way of context, Nana Akufo-Addo tried in vain three consecutive times to serve as Ghana's president. However, after the NDC's Mahama had served his first term (in addition to completing that of his immediate predecessor), Nana Akufo-Addo won as the country's President in the December 2016 elections. He also won a closely contested presidential election in December 2020. However, his victory was not without a major transformation in Ghana's public governance. The first major seismic political transformation was that the country's parliamentary elections, held concurrently with the presidential elections, produced a hung parliament. Both the NPP and the NDC had 137 seats apiece. It was Andrew Asiamah Amoako, a defected former MP of NPP representing the people of Fomena Constituency in the Ashanti Region, who aligned his support with the NPP that gave the party the slimmest majority position in the House. On top of a hung Parliament, during the election of the country's Speaker of Parliament, the NPP's incumbent, Prof. Mike Oquaye, who re-contested the position, lost to the NDC's colossus political figure, Alban Bagbin.

Ghana's political governance entered an unprecedented phase of decentralized power in public governance. Power was (un)equally shared between the heads of the executive and the legislature who hold their position as elected figures—the president is directly elected by the electorate, while the Speaker of Parliament is indirectly elected by the representatives of the electorate. However, comparing the CJ and the Speaker, it could be argued that the Speaker is directly elected by the electorate's representative, while the CJ is indirectly elected by the electorate's representative through vetting. This distinction raises important questions about legitimacy and accountability: While the Speaker is elected through political negotiation among elected MPs, the CJ's appointment—though also involving Parliament—relies heavily on Executive nomination, which could compromise judicial neutrality if political interests dominate the process. Nevertheless, as I will discuss, the CJ is sufficiently protected by the Constitution and the oath of her office to serve as an arbiter when the two other arms of government are in conflict. The following section, therefore, discusses what was expected of the CJ's office in mediating the altercation between the president and the speaker of parliament.

4. Presidentialism and the speaker of parliament

Ghana's public governance structure presents a complex balance, where executive power is constitutionally vested in the President, while legislative oversight is exercised under the leadership of the Speaker of Parliament. The President, in whom the constitution has invested what is generally read as 'so much' power to act on behalf of the people, had a duty to govern. He has a duty to ultimately decide on the exception, guided by the constitution in determining the frontiers of Ghana's local and trans-local relations. Whereas the people's representatives, headed by the Speaker, are clothed with constitutional power to scrutinize government's policies and budget, partisan politics tends to frustrate

the law-making process. On top of that, several Ghanaians, sometimes depending on their political affiliation, tend to cast the image of the legislature as deeply corrupt. The dictum that 'the minority would have their say, while the majority would have their way,' potentially works in support of the ruling party. This had been the case when Ghana's ruling party absolutely controlled parliament, as in the case of Rawlings' first civilian rule and /or much of the country's politics since 2001.

However, under Nana Akufo-Addo's second term, as already mentioned, the dynamics of power had significantly changed. The hung parliament emboldened the NDC opposition party with the Speaker favorably (or alleged to be) disposed to the party's side to psychologically act as a direct parallel source of power to that of the President. The NDC had both sufficient numbers and a necessary Speaker to court in converting their 'say' into action. In addition to the existing challenging political climate, the Government of the NPP was faced with an economic challenge, partly as a result of the oversized effect of the coronavirus pandemic that held the world captive beginning from December 2020 to May 2023. Specifically, in the case of Ghana and many developing economies, the pandemic exposed the poor health structures that had characterized the country's public governance.

In the face of a difficult economic challenge, the government's social interventions of providing free hot meals and water to some deprived communities across the country did not measure up to the expectations of dissenting politicians and citizens. So, a group of young men and women leveraged the digitalized space to mobilize against what they considered systemic injustice against the poor. Labelling themselves as #FixTheCountry Movement, led by outspoken leaders including Oliver Barker-Vormawor, young men and women succeeded in getting the court's approval to go on a street protest as a democratic right (Prempeh 2024). Translocating themselves from the online space, therefore, several young men and women, and some elderly persons protested on the streets of the country and its diaspora, asking the political class to fix the country of corruption and leadership ineptitude. They also demanded a constitutional reform to foster a significant decentralization of political and economic resources (*ibid*.).

While the President and his party faced significant trouble negotiating with the young men and women, a group of foreign diplomats in Ghana were reported to have supervised the opening of an LGBTQ recreation center in Accra (Prempeh 2023). There were also pockets of stories about individuals involved in same-sex advocacy across some of the regions of the country (*ibid*.). Already, concerned about the surging political tension and economic difficulties in the country, several of the protestant religious figures who, in 2012, had initiated the formation of a coalition reinvested in their determination to fend Ghana off LGBTQ politics. Knowing that merely calling on the political class would not deliver to them the desire to see that Ghana's frontiers are not opened to the influence of cultural revolution, the group also appealed to the country's Parliament. As I have already said, the legislature was headed by a political figure who belonged to a party other than the ruling party. More than that, the religious identity of the key stakeholders of Parliament potentially had an impact on the legislative outcome. For instance,

the Speaker and his deputies, who are from the NPP, are all Catholics. As Catholics, they, alongside other Catholic Parliamentarians, had joined the International Catholic Legislators. They were also determined to ensure that both the protestant understanding of the family and the Catholic theology of the family as the subsidiary unit of society were upheld in public governance.

Also, by this time, several of the Pentecostal Churches in Ghana were reaffirming their beliefs in support of marriage as a divine-cultural mandate. The Church of Pentecost (CoP), Ghana's largest Pentecostal denomination, for example, had re-articulated its tenets to include marriage as a union between a biological man and a biological woman. This was because, while the CoP started in Ghana in the late 1930s, the church is currently represented in more than a hundred countries, including the Western world, where same-sex unions have been legalized. Also, the chiefs in the various traditional areas, acting as the custodians of Ghana's cultural frontiers, were agitated by the growing pressure the Western leaders were putting on the political class over LGBTQ issues.

With the support of the country's two main stakeholders of development, the religious community and chiefs, and led by MPs from both the NPP and the NDC, a private member Bill was sponsored on the subject. The Bill, known as the Human Sexual Rights and Family Values Bill, incensed a group of academics from the country's public universities and civil rights leaders, specifically, Center for Democratic Development, Ghana (CDD-Ghana), who considered themselves pioneers of human rights, challenged the Bill. In the end, the Bill, which began in 2021, went through all the due process accorded to the passage of a Bill and was passed in Parliament in February 2024 (*ibid*.).

Meanwhile, all this while, the NDC and the religious community had both charged Nana Akufo-Addo of having an oscillating mind on the subject, which was very much unlike his predecessors, especially J.A. Kufuor and Atta Mills. Akufo-Addo, in his interviews with the Gulf news channel, Al Jazeera (Africanews 2024) and on Peace FM (UTV Ghana Online 2021) is reported to have indicated that the criminalization of minority sexual rights has been impeded by an inadequate public advocacy in favor of it. The religious community had, therefore, expressed doubts in the president's willingness to uphold what they rated as the sanctity of the family. Perhaps, the apogee of what was read as the president's unwillingness to identify with the religious community was evidenced by the visit of the US's vice president. The US Vice President, Kamala Harris, as a result of the ill-health of Joe Biden, undertook international diplomatic mission trips to Africa. As part of her global diplomatic mission, she visited Ghana and two other African countries, Zambia and Tanzania, in March 2023. Ghana was chosen because the country is celebrated as the beacon of hope for the rest of the continent. Besides serving as the first black country, Ghana has a long history of relationship with the US.

Nevertheless, several members of the religious constituency were concerned about the ideological undertone of the Vice President's visit. But as if to confirm the concerns of the religious people, in her open speech to the people of Ghana, an American journalist among a coterie of journalists asked a

question that exposed the president of Ghana. The question was about the rights of women and minority groups. In response, Kamala Harris talked about the rights of all people, including those of the LGBTQ community. Responding to her, Ghana's President indicated that a bill about the subject was in the offing. And he would decide the final document when it was brought to him. Signaling the much-talked-about problems with presidentialism, the Speaker of Parliament reminded the president that he (the Speaker) also has taken an oath to duly represent the concretization of the cultural aspirations of citizens into law. The discussions that characterized the visit of US's Vice President exposed the fault lines of the preparedness of the three arms of government to uphold both the oath they had taken to defend the Constitution and sovereignty of Ghana.

5. Presidentialism, the CJ and the human sexual rights and family values bill

When the Human Sexuality Rights and Ghanaian Family Values Bill was finally passed in February 2024, Ghana's President hinted that he was unable to sign the Bill because someone had raised a legal dispute against it, as the Supreme Court, the domain of the CJ. That came as a surprise to a cross-section of Ghanaians who knew about matters of public governance. There were speculations all over the media landscape, both social and electronic, that the president was hiding behind the court to escape from his responsibility. Meanwhile, soon after the president had indicated a legal tussle over the Bill, it was reported that two individuals had taken the Bill to the Supreme Court. These individuals were a broadcast journalist and legal practitioner, Richard Dela Sky and Dr. Amanda Odoi, a Research Fellow at the University of Cape Coast, Ghana (GhanaWeb 2024a).

To challenge the jurisdiction of the Judiciary, the Speaker's lawyer, Thaddeus Sory, indicated that it was constitutionally premature for the Bill to be challenged as the president had not yet assented to it to become a law (GhanaWeb 2024b). In other words, the argument was put forward that since the Bill was not yet a law, the work of Parliament on it was incomplete. So, for the Supreme Court, headed by the Chief Justice, to have admitted the petition against the Bill constituted an interference with the work of the legislative arm of government. But, for whatever reason, the CJ held onto the case from May 2024 until it came up again in November 2024. All this while, the religious figures, as well as chiefs, pleaded with the CJ to dispose of the case to quell the simmering tension over it. The CJ and the government's Attorney General acted legally to ensure that the substantive case was hardly discussed. In other words, a peripheral issue about the financial implications of the bill became a reason for the case to be adjourned.

In November 2024, however, a few weeks before the country's presidential and parliamentary elections, Haruna Iddrisu, the NDC's Member of Parliament for Tamale South in the Northern Region of Ghana, hinted that four MPs had acted against the law in their bid to re-contest as MPs. According to Haruna Iddrisu, four MPs, three of whom belonged to the NPP and one from the NDC, had decided to vary the political party's ticket as they sought re-election to parliament. This got to the Speaker's

attention, who commented on it. But before the case could be discussed further, the then majority leader appealed to the jurisdiction of the Supreme Court for interpretation. Leveraging her jurisdiction, the CJ immediately empaneled on the subject and eventually, the bench led by her ruled in favor of the NPP. This caught the attention of a section of the public who charged the CJ with biases against the NDC.

To fend off growing criticism, the CJ announced that the case of the Human Sexual Rights and Family Values Bill would be determined on 18 December. Because by 18 December, the outcome of Ghana's general elections, held on 7 December, would have been known, the Speaker also deferred the opening of Parliament to 16 December. The surging tension variously affected chiefs as major stakeholders' public governance. An example was how a section of Ghanaian citizens belligerently responded to Asantehene's call for the Speaker to foster peace and tolerance during the 58th congregation of the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi. Indeed, since Ghana's re-democratization in the 1990s, the Asantehene has staged himself as a major stakeholder in fostering law and order. It was he who successfully mediated a longstanding chieftaincy conflict in Dagbon. Yet, because a section of Ghana's youthful constituency treated his comments as favorable to the CJ and the NPP, they took to social media to register their displeasure with the Asantehene. It could be argued that the negative rebut that the Asantehene's comments elicited was not a good signal. The question in all this was why the CJ had to overlook a basic principle of public governance to admit a case that arguably did not have the merit to be admitted at the Supreme Court? Why did the CJ apply the power invested in her in a manner that a cross-section of citizens interpreted as having failed to uphold the oath of her office in the public sphere?

6. Philosophy of power and Ghana's public institutions

The above could constitute many of the contexts anchoring the challenges that saddled Ghana's CJ that also signaled public distrust in the judiciary. This does not rule out the possibility of a political undertone from the NDC. However, as I stated in the introduction, a possible nexus between the consequences of ideological globalism and the 'silence' of both the chiefs and the clergy in the CJ's case cannot be ignored. This is because it also points to how power is applied in governance. The application of power to ensure law and order is central in public governance, because, whether under colonialism or not, the gathering of people in the public sphere is seamlessly about the judicious application of power to ensure law and order. When people meet outside of the domain of direct kinship ties, they step into a public where they interact with individuals and institutions that are significantly categorized as the world of 'strangers.' From the perspective of socio-psychology, in the world of strangers, the fact that one is unlikely to meet a stranger again is also a reason for one to potentially act without the concern of affection towards a stranger. In Ghana, for example, the charge against colonialism in the case of a non-settler colony was routed through the framing of the government as an alien institution (Agyeman-Duah

1987).

Already, the colonial administrators had fenced off their domain of power from where they governed the people away from the people. Colonialism was therefore far from being democratic. The reason for this is also because the base of colonialism was significantly about the economic interest of the colonizer. The non-kinship ties between the British colonizers and the colonized significantly impacted the economy of affection in governance. So, by every means possible, including the politicization of law to violently dispose of the colonizers, colonial rule was largely built on the architecture of violence (Fanon 1963). However, since the Gold Coast (now Ghana) was a non-settler colony, the extent of colonial physical violence was comparably less conspicuous than the settler colonies.

In effect, inter alia, the struggle against colonialism in Ghana was largely through diplomacy. But more importantly to my argument, by the time Nkrumah appeared on the scene in the late 1940s, he was very much influenced by the Gandhian non-violent principle in the fight against colonialism (Addo-Fening 1972). Assimilated and adapted as positive action, government public institutions held in the hands of the British and other Europeans were framed as significantly alien. However, at independence, the colonial architecture of governance became the foundation upon which postcolonial governance was constituted. Except to say that, the harm of presenting government institutions as alien had stuck with Ghanaians. That this was potentially the case was that the idea of 'we are Ghanaians' was socially constructed against the Othering of Europeans as oppressors. It, therefore, served the political strategy of Nkrumah's entangling of political liberation and economic prosperity as coterminous (Mazrui 1963).

Meanwhile, the vision of economic prosperity to refine the 'Ghanaianism' did not materialize as expected. To be sure, soon after independence, ambitious projects were undertaken, schools were built, while laws were passed to curtail re-tribalization. But Nkrumah's interference with religion as a pre-political institution ultimately reinvested the alienation of the government's institution from the psyche of Ghanaians. Since then, the systemic problems that had held the country since independence have reinvested deep-seated re-tribalization in public governance. Public trust in public institutions of governance, including the judiciary, has progressively waned (Bob-Milliar and Lauterbach 2021). This comes against the background that public institutions function on the trust of citizens. At the same time, the contract between citizens and holders of major public institutions is not based on affection, but law, which is negotiated through a social contract.

7. The CJ's judicial oath and the contours of power

Taking law and affection into context, the legitimacy and strength of the CJ is not to be perceived as acting in favor of the appointing officer, rather fidelity to her oath of office. The subject of oath occupies an important place in political philosophy because human actions can hardly be predicted in advance. Hannah Arendt observed that oaths serve as a means of allowing the public to cope with the

unpredictable consequences of plural initiatives of the human capacity to make and keep promises" (Arendt 1998: 237). Also, Friedrich Nietzsche rightly observed it is through the mediation of oaths that the public can discern between actions of public officers that are by accident from those that are pre-meditated. Oaths allow the public to view the future as the present and anticipate it, to grasp with certainty what is end and what is means, in all, to be able to calculate, compute – and before he can do this, man himself will really have to become reliable, regular, necessary, even in his own self-image, so that he, as someone making a promise is, is answerable for his own future (Nietzsche 2007: 35-36).

Bringing the subject of oath to the embattled CJ, she is reported to have declared the impartiality of the court with the assertion that, 'the law is the law.' Certainly, some scholars have hinted that the CJ was biased against the NDC, but in favor of the NPP (Kpessa-Whyte and Tsekpo 2024). Nonetheless, without prejudicing her dismissal, I draw on Arendt and Nietzsche in asserting that the issue of power works in tandem with the logicality of the vows one takes; it is upon vows that one assumes the right to act on behalf of the governed. The same is true of the fact that power, as defined by Ghana's Constitution, ultimately belongs to citizens. The CJ, therefore, unequivocally is expected and ought to act in the interest of the people, not the appointing officer. This also means that both the CJ and the appointing officer hold a delegatory authority. As a CJ, the power that enables her office is performed through the due process of her appointment. As part of exercising power on behalf of the citizens, the CJ is appointed by the President of Ghana, acting in consultation with the Council of State and with the approval of Parliament. From this performance of power, the CJ is directly elected by the people through their elected representative in Parliament. In addition to that, the CJ is clothed with power through the wearing of the judicial oath, which is stated as follows:

> I, [……] having been appointed (Chief Justice/a Justice of the Supreme Court/a Justice of the Court of Appeal/a Justice of the High Court of Justice, etc.) do (in the name of the Almighty God swear) (solemnly affirm) *that I will bear true faith-and allegiance to the Republic of Ghana as by law established; that I will uphold the sovereignty and integrity of the Republic of Ghana; and that I will truly and faithfully perform the functions of my office without fear or favour, affection or ill-will*; and that I will at all times uphold, preserve, protect and defend the Constitution and laws of the Republic of Ghana (So help me God) [Italics mine].

It could be distilled from the judicial oath the foundation upon which the CJ's power to act is configured and, on whose behest, power is to be exercised. Given the vital role the CJ plays in faithfully standing her grounds against any infractions of power by both the executive (as appointor) and legislative head (as co-equal), the CJ draws help from God, as stated in her oath, to execute her task. The CJ is also clothed with adequate power that legitimizes public expectations for her to defend the

sovereignty of Ghana against any external interference that comes across, as discussed, in the form of ideological globalism. The CJ, as head of the judiciary, undertakes justice as its ultimate responsibility. The Constitution that ensures the functional performance of the CJ' oaths hems her from interference, which also indicates that in the exercise of judicial power in Ghana, the Judiciary, in both its judicial and administrative functions, including financial administration, is subject only to this Constitution and shall not be subject to the control or direction of any person or authority, including the President nor Parliament nor any person acting under the authority of the President or Parliament.

Taking both the oath and broader constitutional provision as mutually constitutive in framing the power of the CJ, the CJ is sufficiently and adequately protected and shielded from needless and reckless interference to act independently in the interest of the people of Ghana. Also, the CJ is necessarily mandated to serve as the ultimate arbiter in upholding what constitutes the people of Ghana, especially when the two other arms of government are in contention. As it turned out in the case of the Family Bill, the CJ could have elicited the support of the religious community by ensuring that her visibility and voice in the matter was more in favor of citizens, represented by their religious and political figures. Instead, as discussed, in the case of the Family Bill, the general public perceived the CJ to have acted in favor of the NPP, reinforcing the general public tagging of the Supreme, where she heads a panel of justices, as "the Unanimous FC" (GhanaWeb 2024c). Alleged to have aided Nana Akufo-Addo to avoid signing the Family Value Bill, the CJ also courted the disaffection of the religious and traditional political figures, who consider themselves as protectors of the family as a pre-political institution, as well as the moral conscience of society. All of this stems from the fact that, at the core of the Bill was a reason for the religious ecumenism that staged its unyielding presence as defenders of the frontiers of Ghana's family and sexual morality against what they read as the eroding effect of Western ideological globalism. With Ghana's hung parliament drawing two important arms of government, the President and the Speaker of parliament, into a potential constitutional crisis staged over a Bill that had overwhelming support from citizens, the CJ was by virtue of her oath expected to have acted judiciously in serving the interest of citizens, not the president. This was because the plea from both citizens and the religious and chiefly figures for the CJ to have served as a credible arbiter in the melee of a surging constitutional crisis was not a plea for her favor. Rather it was to remind her of her oath of office and also a constitutional mandate for her to signal virtue, by acting fearlessly to secure the interest of citizens. That the CJ draws her ultimate source of power from her faithfulness to her oath and Constitution betrays the simplistic notion that justice lies at the bosom of the judges. Justice lies at the bosom of judges only to the extent to which judges remain faithful to the Constitution of the country, and the extent to which judges are seen to offer enough signal that they represent the interests of citizens, as enshrined in the Constitution.

The centrality of the Constitution in drawing both the boundaries of authority and functions of the

CJ to citizens emerges from the fact that the Constitution is precisely because, in simple terms, the Constitution is about what constitutes the people, their beliefs, aspirations and vision. Resultantly, the CJ's uncalculated involvement in the Family Bill turned the gavel of the support of the religious bodies and chiefly figures against her. It fractured and complicated the issues of presidentialism and the logicality of public oaths in drawing the boundaries of power in public governance.

8. Conclusion

The complicated case of Ghana's CJ brings out a context that is both philosophically oriented and practically informative about public governance. Whereas analysts may not be wrong to read the case as an attempt by the current president of Ghana to undermine the office of the CJ, it is also the silence of the chiefs and clergy that cannot be glossed over. In this article, therefore, I have argued that effective of checks and balances, and separation of powers (including Article 146(9),) as the epitome of decentralization are conditioned on two main things: First, the loyalty the heads of the various arms of government pay to the oath of their office and second, the support they draw from major apolitical institutions of public governance. The two conditions are sufficiently necessary because it is significantly difficult to pre-empt the actions of major public holders, prior to their induction into office. Meanwhile, the complementary functions of the heads of the three arms of government holds the key to ensuring that the public sphere is secure and orderly structured for citizens to engage in their daily transactions. Armed with legislative protection and material support, these key public holders are expected to unambiguously signal virtue to elicit the continuing support of the governed, to whom power and justice ultimately belong. The virtual signaling, reflecting the moral and philosophical basis of the constitution, significantly determines the boundaries of misbehavior for all other major public officers. The canon of measuring misbehavior is intimately aligned with and informed by the fidelity these public officers openly demonstrate toward their oath of office. The centrality of public oath is precisely because, as an extract of the constitution, it embodies the commonly shared vision of the governed. It also serves the anvil upon which the legitimacy and concurrent support of public office holders rest. Bringing all this to bear on the CJ, the CJ oath demands that in dispensing her role, she is to be seen to signal virtue. Specifically, as it turned out in recent Ghana, from the perspective of the Christian community, she was expected to have dispensed her role in accordance with her oath of office by protecting the pre-political family values of citizens. As I have stated, the Christian community and traditional leaders did not consider the CJ to have demonstrated enough virtue signaling in protecting the frontiers of Ghana's family values. This means that whereas the constitution indicates that both justice and power ultimately belong to the people, the religious community and a large section of the general public did not consider the CJ to have held her grounds in defense of Ghana's family values against ideological globalism. All of this reaffirms my argument that efficient decentralization of power (including issues about Article

146(9) and the support major public officers enjoy from the public are significantly conditioned on the fidelity these public officers hold to their oath of office.

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Clientelism and Reproduction of Corruption in Autocracies: The Making of Uganda's *Pax Musevenica*

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Abstract

It is not merely what is visible that defines politics in much of Africa; rather, it is the hidden and unspoken layers that demand attention. To grasp the forces shaping the democratic façade in Uganda—and across the continent—we must unravel the informal and often invisible threads that sustain clientelistic relations. In this study, I examine the subtle yet powerful dynamics that construct networks of trust within which anti-democratic practices endure and flourish. These undercurrents are essential for decoding power operations that extend beyond formal institutions. Clientelism is framed as a political evil perpetuated by 'big men' exploiting vulnerable 'small people'; nonetheless, in Uganda, it constitutes a normalised, reproduced, and routinised system embedded within the state. I explain how clientelistic relations are tolerated and reproduced by the populations they exclude, transforming marginalisation into legitimate political transactions. Drawing on content analysis and autoethnographic reflections from over a decade of service in Uganda's public sector, this study unpacks the cultural logic and informal networks that sustain regime survival. It examines how public goods—jobs, services, and political representation—are converted into private favours. Ultimately, this work invites a reconsideration of how exclusion persists not through the absence of participation but through its reproduction.

Keywords: clientelism, corruption, autocracy, exclusion, *Pax Musevenica*

1. Introduction

Contemporary autocrats typically rely on clientelistic transactions to electoral victories (Kitschelt and Wilkinson 2007, Levitsky and Way 2002; 2010). They entangle state institutions in regime politics to dominate and manipulate electoral outcomes. However, this political configuration is not confined to autocratic systems. Corstange (2018) demonstrates that clientelism is a highly adaptable political strategy, functioning effectively in competitive and non-competitive electoral settings. This flexibility challenges the assumption that clientelism is unique to authoritarian rule. In a counterfactual world in which democratic polities were entirely immune to clientelist practices, electoral accountability would rest exclusively on programmatic platforms and policy-based appeals. Nevertheless, the persistence of vote buying, patronage networks, and personalised political exchanges—even in established democracies, where such practices are often reframed as constituency service—undermines this ideal. Rather than being restricted to authoritarian contexts, clientelism emerges as a resilient mechanism of political mobilisation that thrives when institutional constraints are weak or unevenly enforced. Its capacity to navigate authoritarian control and democratic competition underscores its role as a cross-regime tool for securing electoral advantage (*ibid).*

State-based or political clientelism has long constituted a major obstacle to democratisation, privileging narrow groups of beneficiaries over a broadly excluded majority (Shefter 1994, Seffer 2015). In many of the world's electoral autocracies, clientelism has permeated the security apparatus and become a main source of power (Tripp 2010: 128). Although clientelistic practices are known to facilitate exclusion (Hicken 2011), the ways in which clientelism manifests and how the majority becomes implicated in its exclusion remain puzzling (Scott 1985; 1998, Bayart 2009). Thus, services conventionally understood as public goods become conduits for clientelistic relationships. Ultimately, as Bayat (2019) argues in his work on *'quiet encroachment'* and informal urban politics, particularly in the Middle East, this condition aligns with the notion that marginalised groups are simultaneously included and excluded—relying on patronage networks to secure access to basic services.

Interestingly, much of the existing literature on clientelism focuses on instrumental exchanges, vote buying, or informal networks. This work extends that focus by showing how clientelism becomes embedded within the cultural fabric, shifting from a political strategy to a normative and depoliticising social routine. The argument that clientelist practices evolve into 'unquestioned social routines' that constrain political imagination is particularly innovative. By bridging political sociology and cultural theory, the analysis foregrounds the often invisible and internalised dimensions of authoritarian control.

In Uganda's *Pax Musevenica*, opposition funding has routinely been treated as the providence of President Museveni's regime (Rubongoya 2007). Rubongoya shows how Museveni's regime consolidated power by controlling the political space, including opposition financing, civil society, and public institutions. Within this system, the boundaries between government, regime, and the president's

private capacity to dispense resources remain blurred. While the regime has succeeded in consolidating control over most societal structures, pseudo-elite analysts often persuade the public that the opposition can tap into presidential mercy to access funding for their operations—the president (the patron) is the constant owner of the state's resource envelope. Moreover, members of the intelligentsia act as brokers within clientelistic networks, facilitating and benefiting from the systems they critique (Bayart 2009).

This concern has effectively entered the realm of judicial notice in Uganda, as exemplified by recurrent discursive questions in public spaces: 'Why do they (the opposition) accept salaries from Museveni?' 'Why don't opposition Members of Parliament (MPs) provide social and public services to their constituencies?' 'How do you expect service delivery in your constituency when you voted for the opposition?' Such questions reflect the deep entrenchment of clientelistic logic within the political consciousness of the Ugandan public. The presumption that access to state resources is contingent upon political loyalty to the ruling regime underscores the normalisation of a patronage-based political order. Within this framework, opposition figures are not perceived as alternative representatives within a pluralistic system but as outsiders to the state's distributive machinery, rendering their claims to legitimacy suspect in the eyes of constituents. This logic reinforces a hegemonic narrative in which the state is coterminous with the regime, erasing distinctions between public office and partisan allegiance. Consequently, the expectation that opposition MPs should provide services without access to state resources further entrenches an unequal political field, where service delivery is viewed less as a constitutional right and more as a transactional reward for political compliance. This discursive terrain reflects the regime's consolidation of power and illustrates how authoritarian logic permeates everyday political reasoning, which this paper seeks to elucidate.

Interestingly, opposition elites who succumb to patron–client exchanges often become co-opted into the grand project of regime survival. New entrants into political contestations are routinely confronted with questions such as the following: 'Are you looking for opportunities from the regime?' 'Are you seriously seeking change?' 'Can't you see that all opposition formations are part of Museveni's machine?'

This article explores the complex dynamics of clientelistic relations within electoral politics and examines how such practices manifest and are perpetuated over time. The first section sets out the problematisation of the subject. The second section outlines the definitional and theoretical foundations of clientelism. The third addresses key methodological directions and associated challenges. Subsequently, the fourth situates clientelism within the broader context of a neo-patrimonial state. The fifth focuses specifically on the nature of clientelistic relations in Uganda. The sixth section offers a critical analytical discussion, and the final section presents the conclusions.

2. Clientelism and its theoretical underpinnings

The term *clientelism* is frequently used to describe the practice in which politicians distribute resources to voters in exchange for political support (Kincaid *et al*. 2023). This framing often casts political actors as either dominant 'big men' or vulnerable 'small men' (Bayart 2009). Kincaid *et al*. (2023) offer greater definitional clarity by identifying the conditions under which clientelism tends to manifest. First, clientelism involves a relationship in which the client is expected to provide political support to the patron, typically through campaigning and voting. Second, there must be a mutual understanding of the motive for the exchange—whether driven by the promise of reward or the threat of punishment—alongside the expectation that both parties will fulfil their roles, either immediately or over time. Third, the relationship is characterised by a significant power imbalance, with the patron occupying a dominant position.

However, Kincaid *et al*. (2023) note that such asymmetry is not always straightforward. In some cases, the client may wield considerable powerful—for example, as a wealthy entrepreneur—while the patron may be a local politician with reciprocal expectations. These instances illustrate that, although traditional definitions assume a top-down transactional model, a more nuanced understanding must account for societal expectations, mutual obligations, and the reinforcement of hegemonic structures. Mutual dependence on material and immaterial exchanges creates a dynamic platform for interaction between patron and client. Over time, these clientelistic relationships become embedded in the social fabric as informal, routinised systems of control, leading to cultural reproduction and normalisation.

Blundo and de Sardan (2006:5) observe that clientelism is often difficult to distinguish from related practices such as favouritism, nepotism, or *string-pulling*, as well as from more formalised political compensation. For many, the state's reliance on clientelistic trust networks to recruit individuals to influential positions is not inherently problematic. Nevertheless, when a regime remains in power for an extended period, this reliance risks becoming exclusionary, limiting access to opportunities for the wider population. In such contexts, the allocation of opportunities increasingly follows clientelistic lines, entrenching socio-political inequality and systemic exclusion.

One of the 'unemployed poor youths' interviewed during the 2019 doctoral fieldwork (Okot, pseudonym) offered the following reflection:

> Imagine a situation in which certain ministers have continuously rotated within government cabinet positions for over 30 years. How do other people access power? When these crony-controlled ministries are hired, the initial recruits are their sons, daughters, or close relatives. This might not be a problem if it were temporary, but the network of cronies continues to expand over time, while the number of excluded citizens continues to increase. These cronies care only

about their circles and show no concern for the provision of essential social services required for basic human survival.

Similarly, a respondent featured in NTV's mini-documentary *The Rise and Fall of Abdallah Kitatta* posed a powerful rhetorical question: 'Don't you know that power is superior to the law? The people who have fenced off their land are those with power...'[1].

These sentiments highlight the deeply embedded nature of clientelism in Uganda's political landscape. As Blundo and de Sardan (2006) suggest, clientelism and its associated dynamics can be conceptualised as concentric circles, with the most basic and familiar practices at the core. These foundational forms are gradually incorporated into more sophisticated strategies by political actors shaped by specific contexts. Over time, this process produces a routinised informality, in which clientelist norms become naturalised features of everyday governance and power relations.

Context of clientelism in a neo-patrimonial state

Patronage-based corruption can be understood as an integral component of political systems dominated by cronyism. The terms *clientelism* and *cronyism* are often used interchangeably and are closely linked to corruption, patrimonialism, and neo-patrimonialism. Médard (1982) observed that the concept of neo-patrimonialism enables the analysis of interconnected phenomena—corruption, clientelism, patrimonialism, nepotism, and tribalism—that have traditionally been studied in isolation (see also Green and Ward 2004: 11). Originally coined by Shmuel Eisenstadt[2], *neo-patrimonialism* describes a hybrid political order resulting from the fusion of African traditional (patriarchal) governance systems with modern state institutions. This hybrid framework has become a widely used lens for analysing the damaging impact of informal dominance in contemporary political regimes. Robinson (2009:70) attributes the persistence of systemic clientelism in governance to the effects of neo-patrimonial politics, an observation that captures the political context of Uganda.

Political clientelism is deeply embedded in state bureaucratic and administrative structures that often function in top-down arrangements. This hierarchical framework introduces patriarchy as a central feature of a regime's complex relationship with the state. Bose (2012) reminds us that clientelistic forms of corruption are as old as the governments themselves, although some commentators may trace them even further, arguing that corruption is inherent to human nature. However, clientelism is a socially

[1] NTV Panorama: The rise and fall of Abdallah Kitatta. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-fdqDIoyguY, accessed on 10 April 2025>

[2] In his work *Traditional Patrimonialism and Modern Neo-Patrimonialism*, published in 1973, Eisenstadt introduces us to the conception in the studies of Latin America, South Asia, and middle East. His conception of Neo-patrimonialism did not include Africa, but it has since been successfully explaining African political regimes.

constructed phenomenon, with the state acting as the principal architect shaping its extent and limitations, which, in turn, provides regimes with a mechanism to legitimise their rules.

This raises critical questions: Why do patrimonial political systems persist in modernising states? How do they function within formally bureaucratic institutions? Clientelism, often considered a subset of patrimonialism, typically reflects a pattern of social exchange between patrons (those in power) and clients (private citizens or lower-level officials) (Green and Ward 2004: 21). Ironically, scholarly research demonstrates that clientelistic and patrimonial relations frequently coexist with the legal-rational bureaucracies of the modern state, fostering conditions conducive to state predation. For instance, Della Porta and Mény (1997) highlight the connection between clientelism and corruption in the liberal democracies of Western Europe and Japan. While analytically distinct, clientelism and corruption are rooted in systems of exchange, instrumental friendships, and strategic networking. According to Della Porta and Mény, one example includes politicians buying votes to attain public office only to later demand kickbacks or to engage in grafts as compensation. In patrimonial states, such practices contribute to personal rule, which, in turn, distorts bureaucratic efficacy, undermines democratic governance, and restricts meaningful regime changes.

A defining characteristic of institutions shaped by clientelistic regimes is the use of patronage, clientelist alliances, and sometimes systemic intimidation to secure support (Decalo 1998: 48–49, see also Kandil 2016). According to Kandil, these regimes first dismantle the social institutions of prior administrations—often branded as corrupt or illegitimate—and then construct new loyalist institutions such as trade unions, professional bodies, political parties, and religious organisations. These newly formed entities serve as channels for recruiting individuals into tightly controlled political networks. Initially operating alongside older systems, patronage-based networks eventually consolidate power by constructing control mechanisms designed to eliminate opposition (Puddington 1988: 1). Over time, parts of the previous networks are absorbed, whereas many independent clients are marginalised or rendered obsolete.

To consolidate popular support, regimes often mobilise grassroots networks grounded in ideological rhetoric and embedded within highly structured patron-state institutions. This process often involves the establishment of de facto single-party systems, reminiscent of Uganda's post-1986 political landscape and Rwanda's post-1994 context. As Kandil (2016:58) explains, in such systems, the locus of power rests with a mass-mobilising ruling party charged with directing all aspects of social life. The regime's success lies in its ability to penetrate war-weary and marginalised communities, embedding itself in the everyday political consciousness of the populace (Nordlinger 1977: 18). Key regime actors occupy critical governmental and administrative positions, ensuring the complete consolidation of political power. This strategy serves as a barrier to dissent and the emergence of alternative political forces (Arendt 1951: 419–420). In such configurations, the military is transformed into an administrative arm

of the regime rather than functioning as an independent institution—a phenomenon Odom (1978:41–44) notes is 'not something separate from and competing with it'.

While Kandil distinguishes between two strategies—mass mobilisation through patriarchal institutions and the assertion of bureaucratic authority—authoritarian regimes often apply both simultaneously. Risk-averse rulers frequently reinforce their control by manipulating bureaucratic processes, including constitutional amendments and the reinterpretation of constitutionalism. Uganda's constitutional trajectory since independence exemplifies the use of bureaucratic manipulation as a tool of regime entrenchment. This method reflects a broader anti-dissent posture and may indicate either political inexperience or strategic reluctance among state actors. As Nordlinger (1977:114) notes, such regimes often assume that 'their control of state institutions is sufficient to accomplish their goals'. In the pursuit of survival, they combine extensive control over the state apparatus with a proliferation of political appointments for loyalists, expanding their political support base through a carefully constructed web of patrons.

3. Research methods and methodological challenges

This qualitative study employs a combination of content analysis and autoethnography. It draws on a range of academic literature, media sources, and books on clientelism, which have been analysed and synthesised alongside the author's personal representations as a Ugandan government civil servant for over a decade and interviews with anonymised respondents. Given the sensitive nature of this topic, it is imperative to use pseudonyms to ensure the anonymity and protection of participants when presenting their narratives and representations.

The selection of these methods is guided by the methodological difficulties inherent in studying patron-client relationships. While clientelism is deeply embedded in everyday political practices, it often remains elusive because of its subtle and informal nature. It is frequently perceived as a destabilising force that reinforces patrimonialism, state informality, inequality, and institutional insufficiency (Pellicer and Wegner 2023). Owing to the covert character of clientelistic interactions, researchers tend to rely on indirect evidence or secondary targets, as direct interviews with participants can be interpreted as accusations or moral indictments. The secrecy surrounding these practices means that perpetrators are observed more often than questioned, limiting the collection of direct empirical data.

Consequently, researchers must broaden their analytical lens to consider how public resources and goods—employment opportunities, justice, and social services—are distributed along clientelistic lines, even when formal meritocracy is compromised. This task was necessary and challenging. Patrons often operate under the guise of mistrust by selecting clients they deem loyal and trustworthy. However, obtaining reliable evidence on either side of this relationship remains challenging. Thus, much of what is understood about clientelism comes from the perspectives of those outside these exchanges—

unsuspecting citizens, observers, and whistleblowers—whose interpretations inform our understanding of the phenomenon.

According to Nichter (2018), citizens are not merely passive recipients but active collaborators in these political exchanges. In Africa, the trade of goods and services between politicians and voters is a common component of electoral politics. This is reflected in the author's personal experience.

> I remember that I was in Primary Five at Nyakagyeme Primary School when the National Resistance Movement's (NRM) Brigadier Jim Muhwezi (as he was then known) visited my village. During the 1996 parliamentary campaign, he donated 100 iron sheets and 50 bags of cement to a local church. He did the same for all parishes in Rujumbura Constituency. He won the election by a large margin and remained influential in Rukungiri District until 2015, when he lost the Forum for Democratic Change (FDC)'s Fred Turyamuhweza. Muhwezi was re-elected in 2021 and currently serves as the Member of Parliament for the constituency. However, as a political entrepreneur, he was not free from corruption scandals, some of which led to prosecution.

When material or symbolic exchanges are seen as legitimate aspects of the political process, any disruption in political continuity risks destabilising these established clientelistic networks. In these instances, beneficiaries may view the pursuit of accountability or reform as a threat to progress. Many clients, particularly those at the grassroots level, do not perceive these transactional exchanges as morally questionable. Conversely, they view them as legitimate channels for community development and survival.

The entangled nature of patron–client relations produces multiple protection layers. These relations form intricate networks in which 'everyone is connected to everyone'. This interconnectedness makes empirical investigations and reform efforts exceedingly difficult. These entanglements are particularly evident in the recruitment, deployment, and promotion of public and civil servants, awarding and execution of government contracts, and struggles of oversight institutions to disentangle the clientelistic ties that constrain effective governance.

4. Clientelism in Uganda

Clientelism is evident in most functions of the state and government in Uganda. Under *Pax Musevenica*, the term Bazukulu—literally translated as 'grandchildren'—was used figuratively to signify the expansion of crony-based trust networks. Some observers argue that government recruitment adheres to this system as an informal selection criterion. Consequently, some public officials have found the adjective 'cadre' appended to their professional titles, such as cadre judges, police officers, military

officers, and Resident District Commissioners (RDCs), among others. The use of *Bazukulu* implicitly excludes those outside the inner circle, demarcating the boundary between those who can and those who cannot be trusted. Individuals closely aligned with the patronage network are perceived to have a greater influence on decision-making processes.

However, for some political commentators, *Bazukulu* is a patronising trope that masks a claim to youth inclusion. For instance, Ugandan political analyst Ahahwe argues that the *Bazukulu* talk is patronising, and patronage kills innovation. The country should not be swayed—it should pay attention to the young people[3]. This dual construction of the term Bazukulu complicates the distinction between genuine youth inclusion and symbolic clientelism. To further illustrate this mechanism of inclusion and exclusion, the roles of RDCs, recruitment into security forces, and the decentralisation process are explored in subsequent subsections.

4.1. RDCs as the clientelistic machinery of the regime

Resident District Commissioners (RDCs) are part of the regime's hybrid civil security architecture and operate under direct presidential authority, extending patronage control to the grassroots level. Their influence is now so normalised that their power across all districts is largely unquestioned and supported structurally by the National Resistance Movement (NRM). The RDCs are appointed—and can be removed—at the discretion of the president without the need for consultation. This architecture enables RDCs to coordinate district and regional security committees despite being funded by the national consolidated fund.

Although their official duties include overseeing the implementation of government programmes, monitoring public resource use, ensuring district security, and mobilising political support for the regime, RDCs are expected to demonstrate unwavering loyalty to the president. In practice, many RDCs serve or retire security officers or failed NRM electoral candidates, who are absorbed into the system through political appointments. Some vivid examples of active or retired security personnel who have served as RDCs include: Lt. Col. Edith Nakalema, Former RDC Appointee before heading to the State House Anti-Corruption Unit. She is a career UPDF officer and was central in enforcing government directives during COVID-19; Lt. Joe Walusimbi, Former RDC for Masaka who served in the UPDF before being deployed as an RDC; Maj. James Nuwagaba, RDC in Kabale District known to have active ties with the UPDF while serving administratively; Capt. Peter Lokwiya, RDC for Moroto District (as of past years), formerly a serving UPDF officer deployed in civil administration; Col. (Rtd) Fred Mwesigye who Formerly served as an RDC and was an army MP. Although retired, his appointment stemmed from a

[3] Conrad Ahabwe. September 25 2018. Quoted Godbar Tumushabe. Museveni's 'Bazukulu' Term Intended to Divert Youths – Analyst. <https://www.pmldaily.com/news/2018/09/musevenis-bazukulu-term-intended-to-divert-youths-analyst.html, accessed on 15 April 2025>

military-political background. However, some of the NRM politicians who lost elections and were assigned RDC roles include Sheikh Kassim Kamugisha, who lost the Kabale Municipality seat and was appointed Deputy Resident City Commissioner (RCC) for Nakawa, and Major (Rtd) Godfrey Katamba, who lost the Rubabo County NRM primary and was appointed Deputy RDC for Katakwi. Marysent Abiine Ariyo — lost in the Rukungiri Woman NRM primaries–now Deputy RDC for Rukungiri; Micheal Kyakashari, who lost the Rukungiri LC5 chairperson race, was appointed Deputy RDC for Hoima; John Bosco Tumwesigye, who lost the Rubanda Town Council LCIII Chairperson race, appointed RDC for Rubanda District; and Zadock Tumuhimbise, who lost the Butanda LCIII Chairperson race, is now Deputy RDC for Rukiga District.

In addition to their formal responsibilities, RDCs often serve a covert role in enforcing regime control by suppressing dissent, disseminating propaganda, and surveying the security apparatus to prevent insubordination. Thus, the office of the RDC functions as a regime-personalised institution through which opposition mobilisation at the grassroots level is curtailed.

Despite its partisan and centralised nature, the RDC office is often seen as the most authoritative administrative entity at the district level. This is despite the existence of a Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) responsible for managing district finances and administration and an elected Local Council V (LC5) mandated to handle district governance through its committees and headquarters. This arrangement reflects the blurred lines between the administrative hierarchy and political patronage within Uganda's decentralised governance structure.

4.2. Security recruitment

When examining the cultural dimensions of Uganda's security sector, attention must be paid to the timing and purpose of security recruitment drives, particularly those aligned with electoral cycles. Recruitment into the police and military in the lead-up to elections has become a normalised practice. Newly recruited, young officers—well-trained in violent Public Order Management, particularly in techniques of crowd control and suppression of dissent—are immediately deployed to test their capabilities during electoral periods, often while under probation.

A respondent—whose anonymity is protected—recounted his experience as a police officer trained in 2005. Before the 2006 elections, they were transported from the Masindi Police Training School to Kampala to manage electoral and post-electoral security operations. As new recruits entered the police force for the first time, they were expected to follow orders without question owing to their probationary status. This provisional employment meant that officers could be dismissed with or without recourse to a disciplinary hearing because policing the elections was considered part of their training. Consequently, they found themselves patrolling opposition strongholds, often arresting civilians indiscriminately.

The induction process remains largely the same regardless of whether cadet officers or lower-ranking recruits are involved. Following elections, continued employment and prospects for favourable deployment or swift promotion are contingent on loyalty to political directives. Many cadets are already connected to powerful patrons—often referred to informally as 'big dads'—even before their selection and recruitment. This is particularly true of those brought into force through direct links to state houses or security command structures.

The recommendations and influence of the RDCs during recruitment also carry significant political weight. As beneficiaries of the regime's patronage, RDCs are expected to reciprocate by ensuring loyalty within the forces they help recruit, particularly by maintaining control over public order and clearing the streets of political opposition.

4.3. Decentralisation

The decentralisation system introduced shortly after President Museveni's NRA Guerrilla War served a dual purpose. First, as Sasaoka and Nyang'oro (2013) observed, decentralisation was designed to extend clientelistic patronage to the grassroots level. Second, it provides a channel through which patronage-based public services can be distributed, consolidating the regime's grip on power. Amaza (1998), one of the revolutionaries from the 1981–86 struggle, describes this arrangement as a political consolidation project, referencing the relationship between the National Resistance Council (NRC) and the National Resistance Movement/Army (NRM/A). Tushabe (2013:152) similarly critiques decentralisation in Uganda, arguing that it remains a veiled mechanism for power consolidation and control, masked by claims of democratic governance.

President Yoweri Museveni was not the first Ugandan leader to deploy decentralisation as a tool for clientelistic governance. In 1974, Idi Amin introduced ten provincial governments and increased the number of districts from 19 to 37, an early example of prebendalism, a pattern widely observed in African political systems (Van De Walle 2007). Under Museveni, the creation of new districts has become a hallmark of political rewards, a means of reciprocating loyalty, and securing continued political support. Tushabe (2013:156) refers to this approach as the ink politics of giving,' in which Museveni—formerly the Chairman of the High Command during the liberation struggle—projects himself as a benevolent, paternalistic figure. Like Amin, Museveni's administration facilitated the establishment of a five-tier local government system—formerly Resistance Councils (RC1 to RC5), now Local Councils (LC1 to LC5)—which created layers of patronage networks that have proven electorally advantageous (Green 2010).

However, unlike Amin's regime, the Museveni government has exponentially increased the number of districts, reaching at least 121 by 2024 (see Table 1 for a historical overview of local administrative units from the 1950s to 2024). While this massive administrative subdivision is often justified as a

strategy to bring services closer to people, empirical evidence does not always support this claim. Green (2010) notes that Ugandan government officials argued that district creation improves local service delivery in areas such as education, roads, water, and electricity. Nevertheless, his research found no clear correlation between the creation of new districts and improved service outcomes in Africa.

Under the NRM regime, service delivery is frequently framed as a reward for loyal political constituencies or a mechanism for weakening opposition strongholds. As noted by the President and Secretary-General of the Uganda Local Governments Association, most newly created districts suffer from chronic understaffing, with average human resource levels of just 55% of full capacity and, in some cases, as low as 10% (Green 2015: 18). This institutional fragility is compounded by dwindling central government funding, which is becoming increasingly thin across a growing number of districts. Consequently, even the construction of a single classroom block can prove difficult, undermining the developmental goals that decentralisation purports to achieve.

None of these outcomes is particularly surprising, given the substantial evidence suggesting that Uganda's district creation is driven more by political and electoral motives than genuine developmental needs. Table 1 below presents the gradual fragmentation of the LAUs, which is interpreted as a potential mechanism for reinforcing clientelistic networks.

Table 1: Fragmentation of Local Administrative Units as Political Districts

Year/Date	Number of districts
1959	16
1962	17
1968	18
1971	19
1974	38
January 1979	40
May 1979	22
August 1980	33
15 March 1991	39
20 March 1997	45
28 November 2000	56
1 July 2005	69
1 July 2006	80
1 July 2009	87
1 July 2010	111
1 July 2016	115
1 July 2017	121
July 2024	135

Source: Ministry of Local Government Facts sheet, Uganda Government[4]

[4] The MOLG Facts Sheet. <https://molg.go.ug/sites/default/files/MoLG%20-%20%20Fact%20Sheet.pdf, accessed on 10 April 2025>

The problem associated with decentralisation in Uganda is that projects are designed to systematically extend political patronage through the transmission of *Pax Musevenica's* model of state capture and regime consolidation.

Office allocation within a patrimonial-bureaucratic system is deliberately politicised. Under the *Pax Musevenica* order, government positions are often assigned overlapping—or in some cases, identical—functions to facilitate the seamless exercise of power across multiple offices. For instance, at the district level, while there is an elected Local Council V (LC5) Chairperson, their roles and responsibilities are frequently shared or undermined by other state-appointed actors, notably the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) and the Resident District Commissioner (RDC). RDCs are presidential appointees and their tenure and conduct are at the discretion of the regime. These appointments, particularly those of the RDCs, are often used as rewards for political loyalty to the ruling party.

Even for elected officials such as LC5 Chairpersons, the flow of government funding to their districts may be jeopardised if they are perceived to hold political views contrary to those of the regime. As Kandil (2016) notes, authoritarian regimes often manipulate the institutional landscape, dissolving some agencies, diminishing others, and creating new ones, all with the backing of executive power to maintain dominance.

The regime also applies pressure to prevent bureaucrats from building stable power bases that could pose a threat to its authority (Arendt 1951: 40-44). It exercises significant discretion over appointments within the bureaucracy, and internal transfers are frequently based on the imperative to suppress dissent, rather than on administrative needs. Interestingly, while these processes begin with the patron, over time, middle managers develop their own networks of influence, perpetuating the patron-client dynamic in a decentralised form.

There remains an unresolved tension as to whether these middle-tier bureaucrats operate purely in service of the patron's ambitions, or whether they pursue their own agendas to maximise access to patronage resources. Despite these internal contradictions, the regime consistently retained its dominant role within a broader clientelistic framework.

4.4. Clientelistic employment in uganda

The Inspector General of Government (IGG) has reported that approximately 85% of Uganda's public and civil servants were hired through corrupt means[5]. In an in-depth interview, one notable respondent revealed that state banditry is perpetuated through interconnected institutional networks, making it extremely difficult to hold perpetrators accountable. He asked, for instance, that 'if a town clerk in a

[5] S. Nakirigya. MONITOR, March 04, 2025. '85% of Uganda's Civil Servants Hired through Bribery, says IGG Kamya.' <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/85-of-uganda-s-civil-servants-hired-through-bribery-says-igg-kamya-4951310, accessed on 10 April 2025>

local council or municipality is a relative of a cabinet minister or a senior government official, how can any meaningful progress be made in pursuing accountability for corruption?'

As another respondent noted, 'Sometimes, when a junior officer raises a complaint against a high-ranking state official, they may be pressured to withdraw the complaint or risk dismissal'. This deep penetration of patronage undermines institutional independence and fosters an excessive dependence on the central patron. Although this trajectory has historically contributed to the collapse of authoritarian regimes, Uganda's *Pax Musevenica* has mastered the strategic use of patronage as a survival mechanism.

Charles (not his real name) recounted his attempt to join the police as a cadet officer, disillusioned by the blatant favouritism evident in the recruitment process. He observed that several candidates with poor academic qualifications were selected, whereas those with demonstrably stronger credentials were excluded. In his view, as long as those in power continue to assert dominance, their patronage networks continue to expand, further marginalising those excluded from the system.

This clientelistic approach to employment undermines merit-based recruitment, weakens formal institutions, and reinforces the belief that the 'big man' or patron can resolve all problems. In his analysis of bribery and patronage in Uganda's electoral politics, Bernard Sabiti (2011) notes that many parliamentarians and local politicians derive their legitimacy from their proximity to *Pax Musevenica*, a political order in which access to public services is filtered through loyalty to President Museveni. Even in cases where the government fails to deliver the promised public goods, blame is often redirected towards lower-level politicians, shielding the president from public criticism. As Sabiti (2011:17) reports, during campaigns, it is common to hear statements such as, 'The President promised to tarmac this road since he came to power, but the MPs have failed to remind him'. In such narratives, Museveni is portrayed as well-intentioned but surrounded by ineffective subordinates. During the 2011 parliamentary elections in the Kisoro District (Bufumbira South), where Sabiti himself stood as a non-partisan candidate, he observed that successful candidates needed to praise Museveni, either explicitly or implicitly. Phrases such as 'He [Museveni] is a great man, but the ministers and MPs make him look bad' are often used as strategic political tools to capitalise on presidents' entrenched patronage networks.

A more troubling example of clientelism and regime entrenchment is reflected in the arrest of opposition politicians—Robert Kyagulanyi Sentamu, Francis Zaake, Gerald Karuhanga, and Kasiano Wadri—on 14 August 2018. These individuals were detained by military personnel and charged in court martials, a judicial body meant solely for military officers. In response, Dr. Besigye, a prominent opposition figure, questioned the legality of subjecting civilian opponents to military justice, highlighting that this constituted state criminality. He argued that the militarisation of politics and the use of military courts to suppress dissent were symptomatic of a deeply corrupt and authoritarian

regime[6]. This was a subtle manifestation of clientelism. Besigye's concerns were echoed by the former MP Robert Centenary, who argued that security forces in Uganda act as extensions of the ruling regime's clientelistic machine, often disregarding common law. The security forces allegedly planted evidence against opposition politicians to justify state repression, citing the torture of MPs Zaake and Kyagulanyi and their subsequent prosecution for charges of treason[7].

4.5. Contesting power in *Pax Musevenica*

Fair political contestation—if one avoids calling democracy outright—is difficult to achieve in Uganda because of the regime's control over the monopoly on violence and access to state resources. According to Philip (not his real name), it is only on rare occasions that popular opposition candidates are able to secure electoral victory within such a constrained process. Betty Nambooze, a Member of Parliament, argues that President Museveni consolidates his regime through what she describes as *tokenism*—a concept she uses to refer to superficial gestures such as the nominal opening of political space for multiparty participation. However, she asserted that even when these symbolic tokens are extended, political power remains tightly centralised and controlled by the state. Nambooze questioned the credibility of the political competition under violent conditions[8]. Her point underscores the dominance of the NRM over the political landscape, particularly through the deployment of state security organisations such as the army, police, and Resident District Commissioners (RDCs).

A striking example of a state's coercive tactic is the manipulation of criminal evidence against opposition figures, a strategy often implemented by the regime's trusted security and judicial networks. Media reports have documented widespread instances of torture and fabrication of charges against politicians who hold views that diverge from those of presidents[9]. Around 14 August 2018 Robert Kyagulanyi Ssentamu (then a Member of Parliament) was arrested for allegations of possessing firearms and ammunition supposedly reserved for the Ugandan army. He was later re-arrested—alongside several other opposition MPs and civilians—in Arua District, Northern Uganda, and charged with treason. His case was eventually dismissed by a military court martial, who had no legal basis for trying him as a civilian. The blatant fabrication of evidence and subsequent framing of the accused exposed the darker dimensions of state clientelism and the criminalisation of dissent in Uganda.

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[6] NTV Uganda. 17 August 2018. Besigye condemns the treatment given to MPs arrested in Arua. <https://eagle.co.ug/2018/08/16/besigye-calls-for-immediate-release-of-arua-chaotic-suspects/, accessed on 3 February 2026>

[7] New Vision TV. 15 August 2018. Bobi Wine Charged with Treason. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fjgSblMbJQk, accessed on 17 September 2025>

[8] XL Television Talk Show, 'Betty Nambooze Live: *Kuluno Awanda Muliro Gwenyini*.' <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UZwRIS8DsBE, accessed on 21 December 2025>

[9] Julius Ocungi. 16 August, 2018. Bobi Wine Charged, Airlifted to Makindye. Monitor. <http://www.monitor.co.ug/News/National/Bobi-Wine-Makindye-Court-Martial-Arua-Municipality/688334-4715578-9vb79az/index.html, accessed on 20 July 2025>

Furthermore, the role of women in consolidating patronage politics warrants critical examination. Frustrated political analyst Charles Rwomushana controversially referred to women in the Ugandan Parliament—especially those affiliated with the ruling party (NRM)—as 'political prostitutes' who, in his words, have 'paraded their consciences in the marketplace for Museveni to consume'[10]. He argues that many female legislators operate dogmatically, following the directives of Museveni and the NRM hierarchy, without critical thought or independent judgement. Namukasa, a female gender studies student at Makerere University, echoes this concern, suggesting that these women are not isolated anomalies but are symptomatic of broader societal issues faced by women in Uganda's patriarchal and corrupt political system. In this context, women may unconsciously perpetuate their own marginalisation while appearing to participate in governance.

5. Discussion

An examination of clientelistic politics under *Pax Musevenica* reveals a deeply entrenched system in which patronage, personal loyalty, and a regime-preserving mechanism dominate the state's bureaucratic, security, and administrative institutions. The term *Bazukulu* encapsulates the dual functions of symbolic youth inclusion and strategic exclusion. The purpose of embracing the younger generation was to discretely define the boundaries of trust and loyalty within *Pax Musevenica*'s power network. This symbolic language constructs a moral and political hierarchy in which proximity to the president, or a revolutionary patron, is the principal determinant of political opportunity and access to state resources.

Three key institutions epitomise the clientelist machinery of *Pax Musevenica*: the RDCs, security forces, and decentralisation structures. The RDCs operate as administrative monitors and enforcers of the regime, suppressing dissent and orchestrating political control at the grassroots level. This reflects the personalisation of state power, with administrative and coercive roles intertwined with cement presidential dominance and limited bureaucratic autonomy or local democratic agency.

Security recruitment, particularly around elections, highlights how the regime uses force to maintain order and inculcate loyalty among new entrants to the security apparatus. Cadet officers and probationary constables were induced into the ethos of obedience during their probationary period. Thus, elections become a rite of passage that trains officers to suppress dissent rather than uphold public services, blurring the distinction between state and regime security.

[10] Charles Rwomushana (8 March 2017) insisted on referring to female legislators as 'self-centered prostitutes' who do nothing in the fight for maternal health but only clap and stamp in the Parliament with the hope of being appointed ministers. <http://www.monitor.co.ug/News/National/MPs-call-action-Rwomushana-TV-remarks/688334-3850518-pto5te/index.html, accessed on 15 July 2025>

Decentralisation, rather than fostering democratic participation or improving service delivery, has been instrumentalised to expand patronage networks and reward loyalty. The exponential creation of new districts echoes similar strategies employed under Idi Amin, serving electioneering objectives and creating fresh arenas for political co-optation. Nevertheless, this has resulted in inefficiencies and poor service delivery, with financial and human resources diluted across numerous districts that lack accountability or strategic planning.

Uganda's public service sector is characterised by systemic clientelism, where recruitment and promotion are heavily shaped by political and familial allegiances. As indicated earlier, the Inspector General of the Government's finding that 85 % of public servants are appointed through corrupt channels exposes them to the rot at the heart of institutional operations. This model undermines meritocracy, drives inefficiency, and cultivates a culture in which loyalty to the regime overrides competence—deepening dependency on the president and eroding the development of independent bureaucratic institutions.

Furthermore, overlapping and redundant institutional roles—such as those of the CAO, RDC, and LC5—illustrate a deliberate strategy to fragment authority and forestall the emergence of genuine democratic power centres. This aligns with Kandil's (2016) analysis of state-led institutional fragmentation to preclude alternative centres of power and Arendt's (1951) argument regarding the ruler's dispersal of authority to neutralise threats.

The regime's reliance on militarised responses during elections exemplifies the subversion of democratic processes. The deployment of courts-martial against civilians, as in the case of Robert Kyagulanyi, signifies a legal aberration and the normalisation of state violence against political opposition. These actions form part of a broader strategy to criminalise dissent via state agencies, including the police, judiciary, and military.

Prominent political figures such as Betty Nambooze and Kizza Besigye, as highlighted earlier, emphasise that reforms like permitting opposition parties are effectively hollowed out by the overwhelming presence of state machinery. Elections, therefore, are neither free nor fair but take place in a political environment tightly orchestrated to produce regime-friendly outcomes.

The instrumentalisation of women in politics also presents a troubling pattern of gendered clientelism. Although increased female representation is touted as a democratic progress, the co-optation of female legislators into regime structures undermines their autonomy. This reflects a broader problem in which representation is equated with loyalty and gender empowerment is reduced to mere visibility rather than substantive agency.

Ultimately, the complex interplay between instrumental relationships and the self-perpetuating nature of clientelism creates a dual matrix that sustains existing power structures and embeds them deeply within the cultural fabric. Over time, political exchanges that were once conscious and strategic

have evolved into unquestioned social routines. This emergent culture discourages critical engagement and restricts public political imagination. Individuals become passive participants and resign from parochial thinking in which systemic issues are rendered invisible or perceived as immutable. In this way, culture itself becomes a silent yet powerful instrument of depoliticisation, reinforcing the status quo under the guise of everyday normality. Therefore, clientelism obscures the prospects for reformists, even in the aftermath of a successful regime change. How can mobilisation from below challenge and dismantle an autocratic regime's power in a political system saturated with clientelist practices? In instances where mass movements succeed, how might emerging political formations resist the re-embedding of client–patron relations rooted in the trust networks of the deposed regime?

6. Conclusion

The case of clientelistic politics in *Pax Musevenica* reveals a political strategy and a deeply embedded governance system that fuses state functions with regime preservation. At its core lies a tightly managed architecture of loyalty and control, wherein political proximity to President Museveni governs the distribution of opportunities, authority, and security. The invocation of *'Bazukulu*' symbolises this paradox of inclusion and exclusion—welcoming youth into the political narrative while reinforcing trust, loyalty, and dependence on the patron.

This analysis demonstrates that clientelism in Uganda is not an incidental aberration but a deliberate, institutionalised, and self-reproducing framework. The roles of the RDCs, the militarisation of elections through targeted recruitment, and the strategic manipulation of decentralisation illustrate a state apparatus reengineered to serve the ruling elite's political interests rather than the public good. The distinction between public administration and political loyalty collapses as meritocracy is replaced by patronage, and democratic neutrality gives way to partisan enforcement.

The resultant bureaucratic dysfunction—evidenced by overlapping mandates, politicised appointments, and endemic recruitment corruption—exposes the trade-off between state capacity and regime survival. Public institutions are transformed into gatekeepers, rather than accountable governance agents. The weaponisation of law, the judiciary, and security forces against political opponents underlines a broader authoritarian tendency in which dissent is not simply discouraged but criminalised.

Even gender representation, often heralded as a democratic advancement, is subsumed in the clientelist matrix. When women's political inclusion is contingent on loyalty rather than autonomy, it merely reinforces a patriarchal and patronising system, masquerading as empowering.

In sum, the entrenchment of clientelism under *Pax Musevenica* reflects a broader governance crisis and its cultural reproduction—one in which legitimacy is rooted not in democratic participation or institutional competence, but in routinised personal allegiance to the president, combined with civic

resignation. As long as survival politics, eclipse services, and patronage displace institutional integrity, the prospect of genuine democratic consolidation remains remote. Challenging such a system requires more than just reform; it demands a reimagining of statehood based on transparency, justice, and a deliberate cultural shift towards a depersonalised public authority.

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Lishe Practices and Perceptions of Nutrition in Mothers in the Morogoro Region of Tanzania

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Abstract

Child malnutrition is a major public health problem in Tanzania that significantly contributes to infant mortality. To address this issue, the Tanzania Food and Nutrition Centre (TFNC) has developed a nutritional food for weaning children called Lishe. Local processors have adopted this product and sold it as a supplementary food. In this study, a questionnaire was administered to 15 women with small children in Village A and 13 in Villages B and C in the rural Morogoro district of Tanzania in March and August 2025 regarding their preparation and purchasing of Lishe. Their opinions on Lishe and its impact on their children's health was also investigated. The results indicated that the majority of women were familiar with Lishe. Among them, 60–70% learned about Lishe from health service workers, while the remaining women learned about it from friends and relatives. Most of the women (80%) in Village A and 30.8% women each in Village B and C prepared Lishe themselves, while in the latter villages, several women purchased Lishe from shops. Regarding impact, 60–70% of respondents across all villages believed supplementary foods positively impacted their children's health. This study suggests that while traditional diets can enable a balanced nutrition, more advocacy regarding children's diets is needed to improve child nutrition in Tanzania.

Keywords: weaning food, nutrition, perception, Tanzania, Lishe

1. Introduction

Child malnutrition is a major health issue in Tanzania and contributes significantly to infant mortality. Thirty percent of children under the age of five are chronically malnourished (Ministry of Health (MoH) *et al*. 2023), similar to the average for sub-Saharan Africa (31.5%) (The United Republic of Tanzania 2023). Although chronic malnutrition in Tanzania has improved from 42% in 2010 and 34% in 2015 to 30% in 2022, regional disparities are currently widening (MoH *et al*. 2023). In the Morogoro region, the rate of child malnutrition remains around the national average at 31% (*ibid*.). The prevalence of undernutrition in the Morogoro region in 2018 was a significant concern, with 26.4% of the population stunted, 12.1% underweight, and 3.8% wasting (Mohamed and Nyaruhucha 2022). The purpose of this study was to identify factors that influence the purchase and use of a nutrient-rich mixed porridge supplementary food and the perception of women with children under 5 years of age towards their nutrition, surveying opinions on balanced diets in three rural villages in Morogoro, Tanzania. Ultimately, the aim of this study was to provide policy suggestions on child malnutrition.

While research on the nutritional value of mixed porridge is plentiful (Makame *et al.* 2023, Tebele *et al*. 2020, Løvdal *et al*. 2025, Guilamba *et al*. 2025), studies on its consumption behaviour remain scarce (Chege *et al*. 2022). There appears to be a notable gap in the literature on how mothers in Africa prepare porridge for their infants at home as a form of supplementary feeding. Given the critical role of complementary feeding practices in infant nutrition and the prevalence of home-based food preparation, this study on the preparation of a nutritious porridge food product by the mothers of young children in Tanzania is both important and unique in the context of infant nutrition in Africa.

2. Lishe

Lishe is a nutritional weaning food traditionally consumed in Tanzania, typically combining staple grains, such as maize, rice, sorghum, and millet, fortified with soybeans, pumpkin seeds, and sardines. In Tanzania, traditional weaning foods are typically comprised of porridge made from traditional grains, such as maize, millet, cassava, and sorghum, to which legumes, vegetables, and sometimes dried sardines, depending on the region, may be added. In Dodoma, a rural district of northern Tanzania, weaning foods were initially made only from traditional millet, with additional ingredients added subsequently (Mabilia 1996). The university laboratory that runs a processing company for Lishe, which makes a commercial version of this porridge flour, describes the product as an advanced iteration of this traditional, indigenous African weaning food. The current version of Lishe was specifically developed to address the issue of child malnutrition in Africa.

In 1973, the Tanzania Food and Nutrition Centre (TFNC) was established to address the nutritional challenges faced by infants and young children, who require a balanced diet that includes protein, energy, fruits, and vegetables. To address this, the TFNC has developed a nutritious weaning food primarily

composed of carbohydrates and proteins. They also trained mothers to prepare weaning food using local staple ingredients, including maize, sorghum, and rice for carbohydrates and peas and beans for protein. Lishe is promoted by health service workers, targeting the mothers of young children, who are advised on how to prepare Lishe at home (see section 5.4).

Around the 1990s, with the prevalence of HIV/AIDS, medium- and small-scale enterprises (SMEs), mostly owned by women, recognised the potential of this weaning food and began to commercialise it. The TFNC played a crucial role in this process by providing guidance on the optimal composition of the porridge, ensuring good processing and hygiene practices for these enterprises. The SMEs adopted the suggested formulation and sold it as a supplementary food called "Lishe," which stands for "nutrition" in Swahili. Thereafter, the United Nations and USAID, among other international organisations, became aware of Lishe's potential to address child malnutrition while also generating income for women-owned businesses. Subsequently, national institutions such as the Small Industries Development Organization (SIDO) and Morogoro municipality became involved, offering extensive support to women-led SMEs. This support includes training and funding for women in skills such as product processing, business accounting and organisation, and leadership, with the goal of improving women's livelihoods and empowering them (Kato 2021). As a result, individual women as well as women's groups began selling Lishe in their neighbourhoods across shops and supermarkets, as well as via social media platforms, such as Facebook and Instagram. Lishe became a staple commercial food product in the Morogoro region. In all three of Morogoro town's supermarkets, several shelves were dedicated to Lishe products, with roughly 60% of them produced locally in 2025 in Morogoro. The brief but successful history of Lishe demonstrates how this product has quickly transitioned from a homemade traditional food staple to a widely commercialised product.

3. Research area

Morogoro is Tanzania's fourth most populous region with 3.2 million people (The United Republic of Tanzania 2022) and is characterised by its rich vegetation, including the Uluguru mountains. Strategically positioned at the crossroads between northern (Dodoma) and southern Tanzania, it serves as a key commercial hub. The presence of several universities also contributes to the rich ethnic diversity of the region, giving rise to a rich mixture of foods, dietary habits, and cultural factors. In this study, surveys were conducted in three villages: Village A, B, and C, in the rural district of Morogoro. Located approximately 1.5 hours by car from Morogoro town, Village A is located to the east, while Village B and C are adjacent to each other to the south, along the road to the Morogoro rural district office. Village B had a history of gold and ruby trading until 2010 and remains an economically active area, featuring a street of permanent shops and a relatively big weekly market.

Figure 1. Map of Tanzania
Source: Created from MapChart https://www. mapchart.net/ world.html.
Note: DSM, Dar es Salaam region; MG, Morogoro region

4. Research aims and methods

A questionnaire survey was administered in March and August 2025 to women with small children across Village A (n = 15), B (n = 13), and C (n = 13). In each village, research assistants randomly selected participants for interviews. In Village B, some of the interviewed women lived along the main street with shops. Additionally, some women from both Village B and C were randomly selected from those who attended the weekly market located in Village B. Women with small children were targeted for the questionnaire because Lishe is mainly used as baby food, followed by individuals with illnesses and nutrition-conscious adults. The questionnaire was comprised 42 questions: (1) demographic information (six questions), (2) dietary habits (six questions), (3) nutritional knowledge and practices (six questions), (4) preparation and use of Lishe (12 questions), and (5) general health and nutrition (12 questions). The questionnaire was semi-structured, with open-ended questions in the final part for questions on the opinions of mothers regarding nutrition among children in the community.

5. Findings

The responses revealed distinct demographic patterns in age and education across the three villages. While almost half of the female respondents (47%) were 30–40 years old in Village A, a similar number of respondents (46.2% and 53.8%) were below 30 years old in Village B and C (Table 1). The majority of women in all three villages had completed primary education (73.3% in Village A, 92.3% in both Village B and C). However, Village A showed a great diversity in higher education levels, with 26.7% of women having schooling beyond primary education, including certificate education (13%) and secondary education or diploma (6.7% each) (Table 2).

Table 1. Age group analysis across villages

Village	Age group	%
A	Below 30	20.0
	30 - 40	46.7
	40 - 50	33.3
B	Below 30	46.2
	30 - 40	30.8
	40 - 50	15.4
	50 - 60	7.7
C	Below 30	53.8
	30 - 40	46.2

Source: Authors' research

Table 2. Respondent education levels by village

Village	Education Attainment	%
A	Primary education	73.3
	Secondary education	6.7
	Vocational training	13.3
	Diploma	6.7
B	No formal education	7.7
	Primary education	92.3
C	Primary education	92.3
	Secondary education	7.7

Source: Authors' research

Table 3. Household size by village

Village	Household size	%
A	1-3 members	6.7
	4-6 members	60.0
	7-9 members	26.7
	10 or more members	6.7
B	1-3 members	7.7
	4-6 members	61.5
	7-9 members	30.8
C	1-3 members	15.4
	4-6 members	69.2
	7-9 members	15.4

Source: Authors' research

Table 4. Occupational qualification

Village	Occupational qualification	%
A	Farmer	80.0
	Phamasist	6.7
	teacher	6.7
	Other	6.7
B	Farmer	38.5
	Business	46.2
	Other	15.4
C	Farmer	67.2
	Business	7.7
	Food processor	15.4
	Business	15.4

Source: Authors' research

In all three villages, the majority of households had four to six members, with 60%, 61.5%, and 69.2% in Village A, B, and C, respectively. Households with 7–9 members comprised 26%, 30.8%, and 15.4% of Village A, B, and C, respectively. While those with 1–3 members accounted for 6.7%, 7.7%, and 15.4% in Village A, B and C, respectively (Table 3). Regarding occupational status, a significant contrast was observed between villages: the majority of women in Village A and C identified as farmers (80.0% and 67.2%, respectively), while the largest group of women in Village B (which is located in a commercial area) worked in a commercial business (46.2% of respondents) (Table 4).

5.1. Dietary habits

Meal frequency showed that most women in Village A and B (60.0% and 61.5%, respectively) consumed three daily meals, whereas in Village C, women consumed one, two, or three meals per day (30.8% each) (Table 5).

Regarding breakfast, tea and cassava (53.3%) were the most commonly consumed foods in Village A; cassava (76.9%), banana (69.2%), tea (61.5%), and porridge (53.8%) were the most common in Village B; and porridge (76.9%) and banana (53.8%) were the most common in Village C (Table 6).

Table 5. Meal frequency

Village	Frequency a day	%
A	Twice	40.0
	Three times	60.0
B	Once	7.7
	Twice	23.1
	Three times	61.5
	Four times	7.7
C	Once	30.8
	Twice	30.8
	Three times	30.8
	Four times	7.7

Source: Authors' research

Table 6. Breakfast composition

Village	Composition	%
A	Tea	53.3
	Porridge	40.0
	Cassava	53.3
	Banana	46.7
	Pancake	26.7
	Mandazi	20.0
B	Tea	61.5
	Porridge	53.8
	Cassava	76.9
	Banana	69.2
	Pancake	23.1
	Mandazi	23.1
C	Tea	30.8
	Porridge	76.9
	Cassava	46.2
	Banana	53.8
	Pancake	15.4
	Mandazi	23.1

Source: Authors' research

In Village A, B, and C, Ugali (stiff porridge) and vegetables were the major components for lunch and dinner. In Village A and B, these dishes were universally consumed for lunch, with Village A consuming high levels of fish (80%) and Village B consuming even higher levels of meat (92.3%). Both meat and fish were consumed relatively less frequently in Village C, with a consumption rate of 53.8% for each (Tables 7 and 8). However, despite being reported as common at mealtimes, meat was consumed infrequently (once or twice a month). Fish was eaten more often but still did not constitute a daily staple. Perceptions of what constitutes a common food item may differ from the actual frequency

of consumption.

Table 7. Lunch composition

Village	Composition	%
A	Rice	13.3
	Ugali	100.0
	Vegetables	100.0
	Meat	46.7
	Fish	80.0
	Beans	46.7
B	Rice	7.7
	Ugali	100.0
	Vegetables	100.0
	Meat	92.3
	Fish	100
	Beans	7.7
C	Rice	7.7
	Ugali	76.9
	Vegetables	69.2
	Meat	53.8
	Fish	53.8
	Beans	7.7

Source: Authors' research

Table 8. Dinner composition

Village	Composition	%
A	Rice	86.7
	Ugali	86.7
	Vegetables	86.7
	Meat	46.7
	Fish	80.0
B	Rice	92.3
	Ugali	76.9
	Vegetables	76.9
	Meat	84.6
	Fish	76.9
C	Rice	69.2
	Ugali	69.2
	Vegetables	92.3
	Meat	53.8
	Fish	92.3

Source: Authors' research

5.2. Nutritional knowledge and practices

There appears to be a significant knowledge gap regarding what constitutes a balanced diet (*mlo kamili* in Swahili). Sixty-seven percent of women in Village A and all women in Village B and C reported that they were not aware of what the balanced diet consisted of. Among these, 73.3% in Village A and all women in Village B and C reported that they did not consider nutrition when planning meals, with "often" or "rarely" each accounting for 8% in Village A. This finding suggests that the concept of a balanced diet is largely unfamiliar. This may be the result of a lack of not education on nutrition in primary schools or in health centres. Consequently, the majority of women (80%) in Village A and all women in Village B and C expressed a desire for education on balanced diets.

Despite a lack of formal education on nutritional practices, the actual meal preparations of these women may have been more balanced than they thought. Eighty per cent reported consuming vegetables on a daily basis, with 33% of women in Village A also consuming fruits on a daily basis, compared with all respondents in Village B and C who consumed vegetables on a daily basis and fruits several times a

week. This is reflected in the fact that in Village A, 40% of women do not consider their diet healthy and 40% are unsure, while 92.3% and 61.5% in Village B and C, respectively, consider their diet to be healthy.

5.3. Lishe preparation and use

The results indicate that most women (86.7%, 92.3%, and 61.5% in Village A, B, and C, respectively) were familiar with Lishe. The majority of participants (60–70%) learned about Lishe from health service workers, followed by friends and relatives. In Village A, the majority (80%) prepared Lishe themselves, whereas the number was lower in Village B and C at only 30.8% each. A minority (one, three, and two households in Villages A, B, and C, respectively) purchased Lishe from shops. In Village B one shop sold Lishe, from which respondents in both Village B and C reported buying the product.

Maize and groundnuts were the most commonly used ingredients when preparing Lishe in Village A and B. In Village A, both ingredients were used by 80% of respondents, while in Village B groundnuts were used by 69.2% of respondents and maize by 76.9%. Other ingredients included millet (73.3% in Village A vs. 46.2% in Village B) and rice (60% in Village A vs. 15.4% in Village B). In Village C, maize and millets were used by most women (38.5%), followed by ground nuts and rice (30.8%) (Table 9). Meanwhile, although not all respondents mentioned the components of the porridge, two respondents each in Village B and C reported preparing simple porridge made of only maize and sugar or salt for children. Furthermore, some respondents mentioned feeding their children this porridge only twice a day, a practice considered nutritionally insufficient for meeting a child's dietary needs.

Table 9. Lishe composition

Village	Composition	%
A	maize	80
	soybeans	33.3
	groundnuts	80
	Millet	73.3
	Rice	60
	Other	33.3
B	maize	76.9
	soybeans	7.7
	groundnuts	69.2
	Millet	46.2
	Rice	15.4
	Other	46.7
C	maize	38.5
	soybeans	0
	groundnuts	30.8
	Millet	38.5
	Rice	30.8
	Other	23.1

Source: Authors' research

5.4. Nutrition and health

While the majority of women in Village A (67%) and their household members experienced constipation or diarrhoea, these rates were much lower in Village B (30.8%) and C (38.5%). Regarding nutrition and health overall, 60–70% of all respondents believed nutritious food had a positive impact on health, whereas 20%, 7.7%, and 15.4% in Village A, B and C mentioned it having no impact.

6. Discussion

A limited understanding of the composition and importance of a balanced diet is common among women in Morogoro. This may be attributed to the fact that this concept is not rooted in the local culture. Despite this, the diet of the women surveyed in this region was relatively balanced, consisting in the daily consumption of vegetables and the weekly consumption of fruits, as well as a frequent consumption of fish, including sardines, and beans. Despite a lack of formal education on what constitutes a balanced diet (*mlo kamili*) in the schools or health centres of this region, the traditional diet of this population does in fact appear to give rise to a healthy diet.

However, this perception is challenged by large differences in meal frequency in Village C. Approximately 30% of households in this village reported eating only once, twice, or, for some, three times a day. This limited meal frequency can lead to nutritional deficiencies, highlighting the gap between perceived and actual dietary health. Despite this, Oniang'o *et al*. (2025) highlight that "traditional African diets are rich in whole grains, legumes, vegetables, and fermented foods, offering high nutritional value and health benefits." (p.1). Thus, rural communities in Africa tend to consume indigenous plants, such as cereals, green vegetables, and various kinds of wild fruits, which are themselves rich in micronutrients and have many potential health benefits (Takaidza 2023). However, the latter study did not specify the exact types of vegetables and fruits consumed by the participants and further investigation is required.

The majority of respondents reported that they were familiar with Lishe as a nutritional product, with many learning about it from health service workers. However, the rate of home preparation differed significantly across the surveyed villages. In Village A, a large number of respondents (80%) prepared Lishe themselves at home. In contrast, this figure dropped to only 30.8% in Village B and C, with a few respondents choosing to purchase Lishe from shops instead. To prepare Lishe, the majority used locally available maize, groundnuts, millet, and rice. Overall, knowledge of Lishe as a nutritional food product was found to be widespread across all villages.

Previous studies in Tanzania have highlighted the challenges of complementary infant feeding. For example, in the Maasai community in Kenya, infants are fed almost exclusively maize porridge (Leurer *et al*. 2019). Likewise, in the Mpwapwa district in Dodoma, Tanzania, complementary foods have a low nutritional profile, small portion sizes, and limited variety, even when animal products are included (Kulwa *et al*. 2015), often inadequately meeting daily nutritional needs. This contrasts with the target villages surveyed in this study, where nutritional education provided by health service workers seemed to effectively promote better complementary infant nutrition.

Several respondents in Village B and C made porridge using only maize, a practice that is of concern for proper nutrition, reporting to feed it to their children just twice a day. Although these dietary limitations may be caused by a household's socioeconomic status, it is essential to address these in order

to ensure that infants receive adequate levels of nutrition.

7. Conclusion

This study found that women with young children in the villages of the Morogoro region were relatively well informed about Lishe, a nutritious porridge also sold as a commercial supplementary dietary product, primarily thanks to information disseminated by health service workers. However, the rate of preparation of Lishe at home compared to its commercial version varied significantly between the villages: 80% in Village A compared with only 30.8% in Villages B and C. It is worth noting that this discrepancy likely stems from differences in participant selection. The women interviewed in Village A lived relatively further away from shops, limiting their access to commercial products. Conversely, the women interviewed in Village B and C were either vendors along the main street in the more commercially active Village B or frequent visitors to the village's weekly market. Consequently, women in Village B and C were more engaged in commercial activities and had greater access to shops, including those selling Lishe as a commercial product. This is reflected in the finding that more women in Village B and C purchased Lishe from shops, whereas women in Village A, who lacked such access, were more likely to prepare the recipe manually at home.

More generally, this study also found that the mothers of young children tended to consume a relatively balanced diet, comprised of vegetables and fruits several times a week. Although many of the women surveyed were unfamiliar with the concept of a balanced diet (*mlo kamili* in Swahili), most respondents in Village B and C perceived their diet as healthy. This may be due to the richness of their traditional diet, which itself comprises a combination of crops, vegetables, and beans.

Despite this, there remains an urgent need to improve education on child nutrition, especially among those respondents who prepared porridge comprising maize alone and who only ate twice per day. This is supported by the fact that the majority of respondents expressed a desire for better education regarding dietary nutrition within the surveyed communities. Given the persistently high rate of child malnutrition in the surveyed region, this study highlights the need for continued advocacy on dietary practices and nutrition in children across Tanzania.

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Understanding Community-Based Approaches to Solid Waste Management in Rural Areas of Rwanda: Case Study of Gasaka Sector in Nyamagabe District

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Abstract

This study aimed to understand the different community-based approaches used to engage local communities in solid waste management (SWM). A qualitative research methodology was employed with ten respondents. Primary data were collected through semi-structured interviews, and secondary data were collected from desk reviews of books, reports, journals, and articles. These findings indicate that Gasaka residents have mixed perceptions towards the responsibility of SWM. Many view it as the collective responsibility of producers, the government, NGOs, and waste management companies, whereas others believe it is solely the government's duty. Common strategies used to encourage community participation in SWM include football tournaments, weekly community activities, meetings, and the implementation of paid SWM services. However, efforts to engage the community face several challenges, including low technical ability, limited financial opportunities, and few SWM companies in Gasaka. The outcomes suggest that the local government and other local actors should make greater efforts to increase awareness using local modes of communication, strengthen existing collaboration, and provide technical expertise.

Keywords: community, approaches, solid waste management

1. Introduction

1.1. Study background

Waste generation, treatment, and disposal have been part of human history before the Industrial Revolution. However, in recent years, it has threatened communities and municipal authorities through challenges consistently linked to social and economic development, technology, urbanisation, population explosion, and improved urban living standards (Iraguha *et al*. 2022).

Effective solid waste management (SWM) has several advantages such as preventing epidemics, promoting environmental sustainability, discouraging rodents and disease vectors, conserving natural resources, lowering the prevalence of communicable diseases, eliminating offensive odours, and improving the quality of the environment (Chandrappa and Das 2012).

Many communities have acknowledged the significance of waste management and cleanliness throughout history. For example, the Roman Empire maintained a comparatively high standard of public cleanliness and showcased sophisticated scientific and technological knowledge (Atyadhisti and Sarifudin 2019). Nonetheless, because fewer people were living there, garbage generation was far lower than today.

In the United States, the separation of residential, commercial, and industrial refuse began before 1940, but the definition of solid waste came into everyday use in 1970. Although effective waste management in the US started after World War II, they were relatively primitive because the people carrying out these activities were of low economic and social status (Hickman 2003).

In 2012, Africa generated 125 million tons of municipal solid waste, of which 81 million tons (65 %) originated in sub-Saharan Africa. This amount is expected to increase to 244 million tons by 2025, and half of the waste generated in Africa is assumed to remain in cities. The average waste collection rate for cities in Sub-Saharan Africa is 44% (UNEP 2018).

Like other countries, Rwanda has experienced several changes in terms of population growth, economic development, and urbanisation. This has led to a large amount of waste being generated per day in Kigali, at 600-700 tons per day. Organic materials constitute 70%, while plastics, paper, cardboard, and aluminium metals constitute 30% (Squire and Nkurunziza 2022).

Before the Rwandan Genocide against Tutsi in 1994, there was no effective arrangement governing urban waste management in the country (REMA 2015). Reports indicate that after the genocide, Rwanda began strategic country reconstruction and development in almost all sectors. In the waste sector, the government began implementing policies and laws to guide the implementation of waste management activities. These include the Rwanda Environment Law 2003, Rwanda Environment Law 2018, National Sanitation Policy 2016, Rwanda Integrated SWM Strategy 2022, E-Waste Management Policy 2015, and Regulations for Solid Waste Collection and Transportation (Buregeya 2022).

1.2. Problem statement

According to the National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda's report of 2022, Rwanda's population has increased by 2.3% annually over the last 10 years and is projected to double to 22.1 million by 2050. Based on Rwanda Vision 2050, the country will invest sufficient resources to become an upper-middle-income country by 2035 and a high-income country by 2050 (Republic of Rwanda 2020). This indicates that large amounts of solid waste are expected to be generated from different economic and consumption activities.

Squire and Nkurunziza (2022) stated that Kigali City has well-coordinated waste management practices owing to the efforts of the government, partners, national companies, and local communities. Nikuze *et al.* (2021) focused on the types and amounts of waste generated in Kigali. This study found that 75% of the biodegradable wastes were biodegradable, whereas the others contributed to the remaining percentage. Community participation has been identified as an essential aspect of achieving sustainable waste management in any society. Unlike urban settings, where SWM is often managed by formal municipal services, in rural areas, such services are limited or absent and require community participation, local initiatives, and informal approaches. In addition, in rural areas, SWM faces various challenges, including a lack of formal collection, open dumping, and reliance on individual or household practices. This highlights the need to study community-based approaches to SWM, particularly in rural areas. This study seeks to fill this gap by understanding different community-based approaches designed to affect or increase community participation in SWM in rural communities in Rwanda, specifically in the Gasaka Sector. Understanding these community-based approaches in rural Rwanda provides valuable insights for developing locally appropriate SWM strategies that influence existing community structures and capacities.

In this study, 'community' refers to a group of people living in the same area, characterised by social ties, cultural norms, and collective responsibilities. In Rwanda, communities rely on traditional structures to manage their shared resources. Rural areas differ from urban areas because of their lower population densities, limited municipal services, predominantly agrarian livelihoods, and different socioeconomic dynamics which influence waste generation and management practices.

1.3. Research objectives

Owing to the increase in population growth and the rate of waste generation, especially in rural areas of Rwanda, this study seeks to understand community perceptions of SWM, avail different programs that have been designed to involve communities of Gasaka in SWM, understand the challenges that have hindered such programs from being implemented successfully, and find possible solutions to address such challenges. The Gasaka Sector, located in Rwanda's Southern Province, is a rapidly growing region characterised by a unique intersection of rural and peri-urban dynamics. Bordering Nyungwe Forest

National Park, a critical ecological zone, Gasaka faces increasing environmental pressure from population growth and rising urban solid waste production.

In the Gasaka Sector, as in many rural sectors, waste collection is conducted through collaboration between the local government, private sector, and community actors. Waste is collected from households, businesses, and institutions, and transported to designated landfills or disposal sites. However, formal infrastructure is less developed than in urban cities such as Kigali and Huye.

2. Related literature

2.1. Community perceptions on SWM

Community perception and participation are central to waste management. Scholars such as McDonald (2012) define it as the process by which organisms interpret and organise sensations to produce meaningful experiences or refer to how someone sees the world, while Swesi *et al*. (2019) note that it is the ability to see, hear, and interpret something. In this study, the community's perceptions of waste management were reflected in attitudes that could be developed towards practices at all stages of waste management.

In a study conducted in India by Kumar and Nandini (2013), the community perceived waste management as an issue and a concerted effort of civic agencies, municipalities, NGOs, the government, community members, and rank pickers. The same study also revealed that many residents were unaware of the generation and disposal of solid waste. This has resulted in a large proportion of the population showing no interest in recycling or composting.

In Pakistan, people have sufficient knowledge about waste, specifically its effects on human health and the environment. However, they present different attitudes towards waste segregation and reuse, specifically from stable economic households (Shafique and Clark 2022).

The Philippines, where 77 million people generate an average of 0.3 to 0.7 kilograms of garbage daily, is also facing challenges in waste management, despite having strong institutional and legal frameworks in place (Macawile and Su 2009).

In Rwanda's urban centres, particularly in Kigali and Huye, waste management practices have become formalised and implemented in coordination with districts, companies, or cooperatives responsible for waste collection. For example, in these cities, households and businesses are required to subscribe to waste collection services and waste is collected regularly by private waste companies. The private sector plays an important role in waste collection and transportation. In rural areas, households frequently burn or dump waste along roadsides at night (Rajashekar *et al*. 2019).

2.2. Community-based programs of SWM

Waste management through waste banks is a community approach used in many countries today. It is understood to be a dry waste management system that people operate collectively; it involves the community's active participation in sorting and depositing garbage that still has economic value. Alternatively, it is a campaign to handle waste by buying it through a deposit (Gunartin *et al*. 2020). Depok City in Indonesia adopted this approach to cope with waste management challenges. It was more effective because it provided education on the 3Rs (reduce, reuse, and recycle) method of waste management (Wulandari *et al*. 2017).

Environmental cadres can become agents of change as intermediaries for community empowerment, particularly in managing solid waste. These cadres play roles in the community by implementing practical composting, recycling, and sorting techniques and conducting awareness campaigns among community members to promote behavioural change. In China, environmental cadres are recruited, trained, and deployed nationwide at various waste banks (Xue and Liu 2025).

In a study conducted in Malawi by Kasinja and Tilley (2018), it was found that waste pickers were organised into cooperatives to reduce the level of challenges they faced, including a lack of personal protective equipment, cleaning and storage facilities, and funding to support their operations, alongside negative perceptions of the local community.

Environmental education has been widely recognised in changing behaviour that degrades the environment. Subri *et al*. (2025) argued that this should be achieved through effective communication and learning to make it vital in implementing SWM practices in communities. The importance of environmental education has encouraged new approaches in Ghana, and elders have been involved in environmental education to teach young children the values of being in harmony with nature. In schools, environmental education is conducted through public exhibitions where toys are made from waste materials. Additionally, it is organised in the community to take place during community celebrations such as marriages and circumcision ceremonies. Other platforms used for environmental education include organising musical competitions and places of worship (Sukma *et al*. 2020).

A broad spectrum of community engagement techniques can be implemented to engage communities and other stakeholders. Combining activities such as displaying leaflets, posters, or signs in public places to share information about integrated waste management is essential (U.S. Environmental Protection Agency 2017). The report also indicated that the use of tribal magazines or newsletters was necessary in this century. Furthermore, establishing a hotline that community members can call to provide feedback on the efficiency of waste management services and access pre-recorded key messages is an additional technique considered more effective. Finally, the report found that public exhibitions, public meetings, community fairs, school visits, workshops, waste audits, events such as football tournaments, and work are other techniques seen as beneficial for engaging communities.

2.3. Challenges to community waste management practices

Challenges to community waste management include legal, political, financial, social-cultural, technical, and physical barriers. One of these difficulties is irregular waste collection from residential areas. Second, the lack of collection points as the demand for land increases due to population increase makes it challenging for local authorities to designate land for waste, and there is inadequate access to waste bins (Yukalang *et al*. 2017).

Inappropriate bin collection systems, a lack of data and information, and a limited number of waste collection trucks are some of the technical and physical barriers reported by research conducted in Bawku Municipality, Ghana (Douti *et al*. 2017). Zohoori and Ghani (2017) reported that poor road networks within residential areas, insufficient infrastructure, outdated waste vehicles, understaffing, and a lack of knowledge and science regarding treatment systems by local and national authorities are significant barriers to waste management in developing countries.

In Kinyinya, Rwanda, SWM challenges and their impacts on people's livelihoods have limited knowledge on the importance of the 3Rs; segregation and collection services only among high-income households were hindrances. A lack of knowledge of the waste management hierarchy is a barrier because waste management operators only collect and transport waste to dump sites (Victoire *et al*. 2020).

Financial constraints are core barriers to waste management in developing countries. This refers to the waste fees based on the public's ability to pay for waste management services. However, owing to the public's negative attitude, this has been presented as one of the barriers. There are no clear fees for waste collection in major cities, and there is limited funding for garbage trucks, maintenance, fuel, collection, and disposal. Douti *et al*. (2017) stressed that the financial challenges that hinder waste management in the Bawku municipality of Ghana are shown by the huge expenditures required to provide waste management services. They further attribute this to the unwillingness of users to pay for services, the absence of financial support from many institutions, and the lack of proper usage of economic instruments.

Organizational challenges come in the form of illegitimate institutional frameworks that do not define the roles and responsibilities of different employees and weak organizational structures of waste collectors, as well as other institutions responsible for waste management and poor logistic arrangements. Academics, entrepreneurs, and waste management experts appreciate a good planning strategy when it has a vision to be achieved (Maharjan *et al*. 2019).

Gasaka is challenged by rapid urbanisation, insufficient infrastructure for waste collection and recycling, environmental pressure from landfill use, limited financial and technical resources, and the need for community engagement in waste reduction and sorting.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research area

The study was conducted in the Nyamagabe District, specifically in the Gasaka Sector. Nyamagabe District is in the southwest of Southern Province, with 17 sectors, 92 cells, and 536 villages. According to the National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda (2025), the main economic activity is agriculture, in which over 70% of the population is engaged. The Gasaka sector has a total population of 41,558 inhabitants, covering a total area of 40.42 km², with a population density of 1,028 inhabitants per km². The Gasaka Sector is a rapidly growing region characterised by a unique intersection between rural and peri-urban dynamics. Bordering Nyungwe Forest National Park, a critical ecological zone, Gasaka faces increasing environmental pressure as population growth and urban extension increase its solid waste production.

The Gasaka Sector was selected as a representative rural sector in Rwanda because it faces challenges related to SWM in areas lacking formal municipal services. Its socioeconomic characteristics and reliance on informal waste disposal mechanisms make it an ideal case study for exploring community-based approaches that reflect broader rural contexts in the country.

3.2. Data collection method

Primary and secondary data were collected through semistructured interviews. A qualitative approach was employed using a descriptive research design. This study used ten respondents. Purposive sampling was used to select key informants based on their level of participation in planning and implementing SWM activities in the Gasaka Sector. The data were collected in English and Kinyarwanda. All ten respondents were given codes R1-R10, to protect their identities (See Table 1 below).

Table 1. Demographic information

Respondents' Codes	Sex	Age	Education	Occupation
R1	M	28	A level	Waste management officer
R2	F	29	O level	Shopkeeper
R3	M	32	Bachelor Degree	Restaurant owner
R4	M	28	Bachelor Degree	Project officer
R5	F	38	O level	Waste picker
R6	F	32	Bachelor degree	Farmer
R7	F	23	A level	IT personnel
R8	M	22	A level	Farmer
R9	M	45	Bachelor Degree	Hygiene and sanitation
R10	F	34	Bachelor Degree	Shopkeeper

Source: Authors' interviews 2024.

Note: Level A means three years of upper secondary education. Level O refers to 3 years of lower secondary education.

Among the ten respondents, one was from an NGO, one from the local authority (Sector), two from a waste management company, two from the business community, and four were community members. The age of the respondents was between 22 and 45 years. Of the ten respondents, five had a bachelor's degree, three had an A level (three years of upper secondary education), and two had O level certificates (three years of lower secondary education). From a gender perspective, five respondents were male and five were female. Participants were selected according to two inclusion criteria: involvement in the planning or implementation of SWM activities and participation in community engagement programs related to SWM.

Respondents meeting the first criterion (involvement in SWM planning and implementation) included R1 (waste management officers), R4 (project officers), R7 (IT personnel), and R9 (hygiene and sanitation officials). Respondents meeting the second criterion (participation in community engagement programs) included R2 (shopkeepers), R3 (restaurant owners), R5 (waste pickers), and R6 (farmers). Respondents who fulfilled both criteria by being involved in planning or implementing SWM activities and participating in community engagement programs related to SWM were R4 (project officers) and R7 (IT personnel). This purposive sampling ensured that key stakeholders, including sector officials, NGO representatives, waste management company staff, business community members, and local communities, were represented.

The sample comprised ten purposely selected respondents who were thought to have rich and relevant knowledge about SWM in Gasaka Sector. Although the sector has over 1,000 inhabitants, this qualitative study prioritises obtaining in-depth insights rather than numerical representation. The sample size was determined based on data saturation, which was reached when the interviews no longer generated new themes. The scope of this qualitative study was to understand experiences and perspectives and not to generalise them statistically to the entire population. As a qualitative study, the collected data were analysed via content analysis by coding responses from different respondents and using narrative techniques that involved directly quoting the respondents.

4. Findings

4.1. Community perceptions on SWM in Gasaka

During the interviews, mixed reactions, perceptions, and attitudes were received regarding the Gasaka Sector community's views on waste management programs. When asked who was responsible for waste management in the Gasaka Sector, seven respondents perceived it as the responsibility of producers, the government, companies, and organisations (1). Many respondents understood that SWM was the responsibility of everyone in society. Only a few thought that the government should take full responsibility for SWM in the Gasaka Sector (2).

Table 2. The perception on SWM in the Gasaka Sector

Community perceptions on SWM programs in Gasaka Sector	R1	R2	R3	R4	R5	R6	R7	R8	R9	R10	Total
1. Roles of companies	-	-	x	x	x	x	x	x	-	x	7
2. Gov't to implement all SWM activities	x	x	-	-	-	-	-	-	x	-	3
3. Not willing to pay for or participate in SWM activities.	-	-	-	x	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
4. Job for educated people.	x	-	-	-	x	x	x	x	x	-	6
5. Job for uneducated people.	-	-	x	-	-	-	-	-	-	x	2
6. It is viewed as a job for the poor	-	x	-	x	-	-	-	-	-	-	2
7. A normal business that gives profit	x	-	-	x	-	-	-	-	-	-	2

Source: Authors' interviews 2024.

Note: Related numbers in the table are indicated in parentheses to show different perceptions.

> I think the producers should take full responsibility for the waste they generate; for example, if I buy a water bottle, after using it, I need to dispose of it safely, so that it can be collected easily. The government must take responsibility for developing and implementing policies that support proper waste management and for punishing those who violate these rules and regulations. Companies and organisations should take responsibility for educating the public about the effects of poor solid waste management. (Interviews with R3 on 13/9/2024 and R4 on 15/9/2024).

R5, R6, and R7 elaborated that the producer could assume the role of SWM by calling the waste management company (1) to collect waste in landfills (Interviews 2024). This can be explained further by the fact that waste producers can assume roles in waste management by holding companies responsible for the nature of the service being delivered.

In contrast, other respondents stated that waste management was considered the full responsibility of the local government (2). They believed that the money the government received from taxes should be used to handle issues related to poor hygiene and sanitation. This was confirmed by employees from waste management companies, who attributed some residents' failure to pay for waste management services to this logic. R1 and R9 shared similar views, stating that most community members believed SWM should be the government's responsibility. During our interactions, many respondents expressed that it was the government's duty to plan and implement waste management activities (Interviews with R1 on 13/9/2024 and with R9 on 17/9/2024).

When asked about their willingness to pay for or participate in activities related to waste management, nine out of ten respondents showed positive attitudes toward doing so. R9, a community leader who works in the sector, stated:

> Most Gasaka Sector residents frequently travel to Huye, Kigali, and other major cities.

> They had seen and learned how to pay for waste management. In these cities, households and businesses are required to subscribe to waste collection services, and waste is regularly collected by private waste companies. Therefore, when we ask them to contribute some money, they always respond positively (Interview with R9 on 17/9/2024).

However, R4 refuted the community's willingness to pay for solid waste management (3), citing that the company had failed to collect waste.

> The company sometimes takes a long time to collect waste, which prompts producers not to pay most of the time. You can pay your money, and at the end of the week, no one comes to collect what you have paid for. The community also believes that organisations get a lot of money, and hence they expect these organisations to use the money rather than have the community pay for SWM (Interview with R4 on 14/9/2024).

4.2. Approaches to SWM in Gasaka Sector

During the interviews, weekly community activities and meetings (1) emerged as the most common approach to increasing community participation in SWM.

Table 3. Approaches used for SWM in the Gasaka Sector

Approaches used by stakeholders	R1	R2	R3	R4	R5	R6	R7	R8	R9	R10	Total
1. Weekly Community activities and meetings	x	x	x	x	-	-	-	-	x	-	5
2. Football competitions	x	-	-	x	-	-	x	-	x	-	4
3. Clean-up campaigns	x	-	-	x	x	-	-	x	-	-	4
4. Stakeholders' engagement, churches, schools, NGOs, and residents	x	-	-	x	-	-	x	-	x	-	4
5. Payment for waste management services	x	x	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	x	3
6. Waste segregation	x	-	-	x	-	-	-	-	x	-	3
7. Installing dustbins in public places	-	-	-	x	-	-	-	-	x	-	2
8. Community composting Activities	-	-	-	x	-	-	-	-	x	-	2
9. Executing policies and laws related to SWM	-	-	-	x	-	-	-	-	x	-	2

Source: Authors' interviews 2024.

> In Nyamagabe District, we set aside one hour every weekend for mandatory community services. Although this is only a single hour, it yields meaningful results. During this time, we raise awareness about important issues, assist in cleaning and waste transportation, and engage directly with community members to address their challenges collectively. This regular interaction has proven to be more effective and impactful than relying on the monthly *Umuganda* activity (Interview with R9 on 17/9/2024).

For example, R3, a restaurant owner, supported this point by explaining that every Tuesday, workers clean the premises, gather leftover food, and either feed it to pigs or store it safely for collection by a waste management company.

Football tournaments are another effective strategy for mobilizing villages to participate in SWM efforts. Nyamagabe District office, Gasaka Sector office, SECONYA company (SWM Company), Initiative pour la promotion de la famille et du genre (IPFG), and World Vision organized this tournament. Criteria were set for all villages and sectors to participate in the competition. Before the matches began, young people from all participating villages and sectors engaged in clean-up campaigns to collect and properly dispose of solid waste in their communities. In addition, the educational components during these events reinforced the link between a clean environment and good health (Interview with R9 on 17/09/2024).

Stakeholder engagement has also been proven to be one of the strongest approaches or efforts used by sector offices to increase community involvement. According to R9, school teachers, church leaders, NGOs, the community, and waste management companies play important roles in SWM in the Gasaka Sector.

> Training offered to teachers and pastors on solid waste management helped us increase awareness of waste segregation in the community. It could be difficult for the government alone. For companies or organizations, they provide technical support or logistics when we request it (Interview with R9 on 17/9/2024).

4.3. Challenges hindering the community-based efforts on effective SWM practices in Gasaka Sector

According to the interviews, the greatest challenge facing the Gasaka Sector was low awareness (1) or limited access to information (See Table 4). The second most mentioned challenge was the low level of education (2), followed by limited funding opportunities (4) that were channelled towards waste management programs and single companies operating in the Gasaka Sector. R4 stated that the biggest challenge hindering community participation in SWM in the Gasaka Sector is the low level of awareness, as many people have a low level of education, which makes it difficult for them to understand the effects of improper waste management. R8 attributed a few initiatives that are aimed at addressing the matter of waste management as the reason why there is still the issue of poor waste management among many people.

> I think the local government and organisations are trying to raise awareness, but the message does not reach the local population. This is because the channels used to raise

awareness were not accessible to everyone. For example, not everyone owns a radio at home. A simple method needs to be used to raise awareness (Interview with R10 September 17/9/2024).

Table 4. Challenges hindering the implementation of community-based approaches to SWM

Challenges	R1	R2	R3	R4	R5	R6	R7	R8	R9	R10	Total
1. Low level of awareness	-	x	-	x	x	-	x	x	-	x	6
2. Low level of education	x	-	x	x	x	-	-	x	-	-	5
3. High-cost expectations from WM Company	-	-	-	x	-	x	-	-	x	x	4
4. Limited funding opportunities for WM activities	x	-	-	x	-	-	-	x	x	-	4
5. One company managing waste in the sector	x	x	-	x	-	-	-	x	x	-	5
6. Low technical skills in SWM practices	x	-	-	x	-	-	-	-	x	-	3
7. Low salary and motivation of WM workers	-	-	-	x	x	-	-	-	-	x	3
8. Limited execution of WM laws and policies	x	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	x	-	2
9. Lack of huge equipment like trucks	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0
10. Negative perceptions towards SWM workers	-	x	-	-	x	-	-	-	-	-	2
11. Few numbers of waste collection point	-	-	x	-	-	-	x	-	-	-	2
12. Large surface area for one company	x	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	x	-	2
13. Using the wrong channel for awareness	-	-	-	-	-	-	x	-	-	x	2

Source: Authors' interviews 2024.

A key benefit of higher education in relation to SWM is its role in promoting specialisation and developing technical skills essential for the industry's growth. However, a significant challenge in the Gasaka Sector is the limited number of waste management companies. Additionally, the high costs expected by these companies have been identified as a barrier to community participation in SWM, according to R9, a representative of the local government.

> The company is requesting that we pay more money than we have at hand. This leaves both parties off the same page in terms of doing business. They claim that the place given is too large compared to the money given to them (Interview with R9 on 17/9/2024).

> The presence of one company in Gasaka makes frequent waste collection difficult, and the size of the Gasaka town is too large for one company to manage. This, most of the times, makes it easy for the pilling up of solid waste at homes and restaurants (Interview with R8 on 17/9/2024).

The limited implementation of waste management laws and policies (8) in the Gasaka Sector is one of the challenges in this area.

> Many laws in Rwanda address environmental issues including waste management.

> However, even if someone breaks any of these laws, they are rarely punished for doing so. Our government needs to step up enforcing available laws for producers and companies that have shown interest in operating in the industry (Interview with R7 on 15/9/2024).

The lack of personal protective equipment for workers and community members to use during waste segregation and other campaigns was further highlighted as one of the challenges; respondents explained that the unavailability of hard gloves and masks makes them not involve themselves in such activities because their health is a priority (Interview with R5 on 15/09/2024).

4.4. Solutions to address challenges the community-based approaches of waste management are facing in the Gasaka Sector

Respondents suggested that raising awareness is a key tool for changing the mindsets and attitudes of residents in the Gaska Sector (1). They further emphasised that local communication channels should be used to ensure that all residents have easy access to information.

> We will continue to educate people by enhancing their awareness to raise their understanding of what they are supposed to do in their areas. We shall do this by moving from house to house with key messages on hygiene and sanitation (Interview with R9 on 17/09/2024).

Table 5. Solutions to challenges hindering community-based approaches of SWM in Gasaka Sector

Proposed Solutions/Strategies	R1	R2	R3	R4	R5	R6	R7	R8	R9	R10	Total
1. Raising awareness using local channels	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	10
2. Affordable community contribution to SWM services	-	-	-	x	-	-	-	-	x	x	3
3. Strengthening collaboration between government, companies, organizations, communities and other stakeholders	x	-	-	x	-	-	-	-	x	-	3
4. Increasing number of WM companies in Gasaka	-	x	-	x	-	-	-	-	x	-	3
5. Revising the MoU with WM company	x	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	x	-	2
6. Increasing the number of dustbins in residential areas and public places	-	-	-	x	-	-	-	-	-	x	2
7. Enforcing local and environmental laws against violators	-	-	-	x	-	-	-	-	-	-	2
8. Increasing payment of waste pickers	-	-	-	x	x	-	-	-	-	-	2
9. Allocation of waste collection points in each residential area	-	-	-	-	x	-	x	-	-	-	2
10. Training of community on other alternatives of SWM	-	-	-	x	-	-	x	-	-	-	2

Source: Authors' interviews 2024.

The primary SWM company operating in the Gasaka area is SECONYA, which is responsible for waste collection, transportation, and disposal. However, respondents indicated that having only one company creates challenges and difficulties in accessing adequate waste management services (4) across all villages, and results in higher service costs, making waste management expensive for some households.

> It would be great if we had many companies collect waste. We do not have enough places to dispose of waste, and for this reason, if it takes a long time and the only company does not come to collect it, we end up throwing it everywhere to get rid of it (Interview with R2 on 13/9/2024).

R1 and R9 stressed the importance of reviewing the agreement between the local government authority of the Sector and the SECONYA in the Gasaka Sector. The two parties believed that reviewing this agreement would help harmonise the payment structure for waste collection, making fees more affordable and transparent to community members. In addition, the revised MoU aligns the expectations and responsibilities of both the local government and the company, fostering better cooperation and satisfaction among all parties involved.

R4 and R10 proposed increasing the number of dustbins in public and private places, respectively. For example, schools and places of worship do not have sufficient dustbins.

Increasing the salaries of waste pickers has emerged as a means to motivate them (8). Despite

receiving little payment, their enthusiasm for work was high.

> The money I receive here is too small; I cannot take care of the whole family I have, though the children are going to school, and we are eating. However, if the salary is increased, we can work tirelessly to keep our places clean. (Interview with R5 on 15/9/2024).

Establishing a waste collection point in each area was proposed as a strategy to stop nighttime dumping of waste in open places. This was perceived as enabling residents to bring their sorted waste. Another solution proposed by the respondents was to build the technical capacity of the government, organisations, and company staff on how to mobilise money for waste management activities. The respondent explained that there are opportunities for the government, organisations, and companies to obtain support for SWM activities. However, a lack of required skills to access and use them is a hindrance (Interview with R6 on 15/9/2024).

Finally, training community members on other SWM alternatives is the best way to increase community involvement in SWM in the Gasaka Sector.

5. Discussions

5.1. Community perceptions on SWM in the Gasaka Sector

The findings of this research revealed that in the Gasaka Sector, people hold mixed perceptions and attitudes regarding who is responsible for waste management practices, such as raising awareness, waste sorting, and paying for waste management services. It also revealed that people have positive attitudes towards their willingness to pay and participate in waste management programs. These findings align with those of a study conducted by Longe *et al*. (2009) in Nigeria, which showed a high willingness to pay for waste management services by communities across all socioeconomic strata.

The literature explains that, in Ojo, Nigeria, when the local government could not manage waste sustainably, it encouraged residents to raise funds to cover waste management operations. This differs from the findings of this study, in which community members of Gasaka did not start community fund mobilisation by themselves, but were obligated to participate in or pay for waste management services. The findings from this research contradict the work of Okoji *et al*. (2023), who found that waste management programs in the Kwara metropolis in Nigeria failed to bear fruit because of the community's lack of willingness to pay to participate in such activities. In Gasaka, the money paid by producers covers the costs for the waste operation company.

5.2. To understand approaches used to involve or increase community participation in SWM

This study identified football championships as a common approach used by the local government,

organisations, and companies to increase the level of community participation in SWM in Gasaka. Although extensive sports activities can produce a significant amount of waste, starting from single-use plastics and food, which can make the environmental footprint substantial, sports are still seen as one way of helping people learn how to keep the environment clean. The findings also revealed weekly community activities and meetings as the most effective approach to involving the community in waste-management initiatives.

5.3. To assess challenges hindering community participation in SWM programs

This study found that a low level of awareness of waste management programs, a low level of education, limited funding opportunities for waste management programs, the presence of a waste management company with high-cost expectations, and low income and motivation for waste pickers are significant challenges facing a high level of community participation and involvement in SWM in Gasaka Sector.

During the study, the respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the mode of raising awareness in the Gasaka Sector. It was realised that modes of awareness, such as radio stations, TV, and social media platforms, were not conducive to them because many people were unable to access some of these channels of communication, and they were expensive to acquire. This confirms the findings of Debrah *et al*. (2021), who showed that developing countries are faced with challenges such as a lack of sustainability awareness that reaches all residents, a lack of student and teacher commitment, and a lack of resources, which were a few of the barriers to SWM sustainability projects (Debrah *et al*. 2021).

5.4. Possible solutions to address challenges the community-based approaches of waste management are facing in Gasaka Sector

The initial solution proposed by the respondents was to increase the level of awareness of community members using local channels such as house-to-house, evening announcements, and visiting schools so that every ordinary community member could receive the message.

Although product design and knowledge-based solutions are preferred most of the time as solutions to SWM, other options expressed in this research are the technological approach for waste reduction, which does not require high skills, increasing the number of recycling plants for the reuse of waste, and the transformation of biodegradable waste into humidified fertilisers.

6. Conclusion

This research was conducted with the general objective of understanding the different approaches that have been used to include communities or increase the level of community participation in SWM in the rural communities of Rwanda. According to the research findings, the community presented highly positive perceptions of SWM practices together with the people involved in these practices. The findings

highlight that community engagement strategies such as local events, regular clean-up activities, and participatory meetings play an important role in waste management in rural settings. Despite these positive attitudes and initiatives, key challenges were identified, including limited technical capacity, financial constraints, and a scarcity of waste management companies, which hindered the effective implementation and sustainability of SWM programs. This study advocates capacity building, strong collaboration among actors, and youth engagement to ensure continued progress and sustainable waste-management approaches in local communities. By filling the knowledge gap regarding rural community-based SWM in Rwanda, this study provides valuable insights for policymakers, practitioners and researchers. This suggests that sustainable rural waste management depends on leveraging the existing community structures, fostering participatory approaches, and designing context-appropriate interventions. For future research, we recommend a comparative mixed-methods study evaluating community participation and benefits in both rural and urban SWM systems across Rwanda.

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Urban Agriculture and the Politics of Waste: A Systematic Review of Sewer Water Use in Lusaka's Farming Systems

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Abstract

Urban farming in Lusaka, the capital of Zambia, has been progressively shaped by the politics of waste, predominantly through the informal use of effluent for irrigation. This systematic review brings together empirical and theoretical research on the political economy of sewer water usage in urban agriculture schemes with a focus on access, undercurrents of power, governance, and health–ecological trade-offs. Drawing on studies conducted in Lusaka and similar urban settings in the Global South, this review highlights patterns in how wastewater is accessed and disputed, how governance structures influence usage, and how growers circumnavigate related risks. Effluent is a vital survival resource; however, using it exposes growers and customers to health hazards that are ineffectively addressed by public health schemes and extension services. Governance responses continue to be disjointed with civic authorities, traditional leaders, and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) adopting irregular or ad hoc approaches. Thus, effluent is both a livelihood enabler and a marker of marginalisation, exemplifying broader struggles over urban informality, environmental justice, and infrastructure politics. The findings provide a critical understanding of urban informality, ecological justice, and the sociopolitical life of infrastructure in African metropolitan areas.

Keywords: urban agriculture, wastewater irrigation, political economy, environmental justice, informal governance

1. Introduction

Urban farming has emerged as a significant source of revenue in African metropolises, including Lusaka, the capital of Zambia. Swift urbanisation—combined with high levels of joblessness, food uncertainty, and inadequate formal job openings—has made food production inside and around city centres a vital survival tool for numerous residents (Battersby and Watson 2018, Foeken 2006). In Lusaka, urban farming is practiced both within city boundaries and in peri-urban zones, frequently on marginal or unplanned property, and serves as an important supplement to family food security and income (Theresa and Pride 2017, World Bank 2009).

In peri-urban zones such as Meanwood Kwamwena, situated close to the Ngwerere Stream in Lusaka's northeastern periphery, small-scale agriculturalists progressively resort to the use of unprocessed sewer water for farming. The Ngwerere Stream collects large amounts of waste and runoff from local businesses and industrial sources, making it extremely polluted (Chisanga and Silembo 2004). Despite the evident ecological and health hazards, this water source serves as a crucial supply of irrigation owing to the absence of alternatives, particularly throughout the dry season. For countless low-income city farmers, sewer water represents a paradoxical lifeline that is readily accessible and free of charge but is accompanied by health risks and legal uncertainty.

The use of sewer water in town agriculture is not simply a matter of personal choice or requirement; it is deeply intertwined with the issues of amenities, authority, disparity, and ecological justice. Choices regarding who can use such water, how amenities are distributed, and how hazards are handled are formed through a wider political and economic structure (Chumo *et al.* 2025, McFarlane and Silver 2017). In Lusaka, as in countless African metropolises, formal water systems tend to prioritise wealthy suburban and business zones while low-income areas are forced to be inventive, drawing on informal or dangerous water sources (Lwasa *et al.* 2014).

This review sheds light on the political economy of effluent use in Lusaka's urban and peri-urban agricultural structures by systematically probing the existing literature; it questions how power relations, infrastructure shortfalls, and government structures affect the informal use of effluent in agrarian production. Specific care is given to the case of Meanwood Kwamwena, but this review also draws from broader works in similar urban contexts in sub-Saharan Africa to frame the case of Lusaka within regional undercurrents.

A systematic review was deemed suitable because it permits painstaking, transparent combinations of various sources of evidence. Although the literature on urban farming, effluent use, and infrastructure politics in African metropolises continues to grow, these topics have rarely been examined in a combined manner, highlighting their interconnectedness. This assessment aims to fill this gap by plotting the state of knowledge on effluent use in urban agriculture, identifying areas of agreement and controversy, and categorising knowledge gaps that require future research or policy considerations.

The assessment was directed by four essential questions:

1. What is known about the use of sewer water in urban and peri-urban agriculture in Lusaka and in similar contexts? This question aims to synthesise existing empirical evidence on how, where, and why wastewater is used for farming.
2. How do power relations, access, and governance influence wastewater use in farming? This study examines the institutional and political dimensions of water access and explores how informal systems interact with (or are neglected in) formal governance structures.
3. What risks and benefits are associated with informal wastewater use, and how do farmers navigate them? This question examines farmers' lived experiences, including their perceptions of health and environmental risks and the strategies they employ to mitigate them.
4. What are the implications of urban policy and environmental justice? This question considers how the informal use of wastewater relates to broader questions of equity, inclusion, and sustainability in urban development.

By addressing these questions, this study contributes to broader findings about urban informality, ecological governance, and infrastructure fairness; it also responds to calls for additional communally grounded considerations of urban water usage in African metropolises (Gandy 2006, Truelove 2019), predominantly in the context of climate change, increased urban food uncertainty, and expanding socioeconomic disparities.

2. Methodology

2.1. Review type

This study employed a qualitative systematic review to assess the political economy of sewer water usage in cities and peri-urban farming contexts, focusing on Lusaka and similar settings in sub-Saharan Africa. A qualitative systematic review is appropriate for synthesising various kinds of literature such as practical studies, theoretical analyses, and grey literature, particularly in multifaceted, interdisciplinary areas such as urban farming, ecological justice, and infrastructure policy (Gough *et al.* 2017). Although systematic evaluations are mostly associated with the health sciences, they are gradually being utilised in the social sciences to provide clear, replicable, and procedurally rigorous amalgamations of evidence (Harden and Thomas 2005). The present analysis followed the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines, modified to align with this study's qualitative and social science positioning (Moher *et al.* 2009).

2.2. Search strategy

A literature search was conducted across an extensive range of databases to capture both the scope and complexity of coverage. Searches were performed in academic databases, namely Scopus, Web of

Science (WoS), JSTOR, and Google Scholar. These platforms were selected because of their all-inclusive indexing of peer-reviewed journal papers and multidisciplinary exposure, as well as their inclusion of materials on urban research, ecological governance, and development studies .

Grey literature was also incorporated to obtain organisational reports and practical data that might not be published in peer-reviewed formats; it was obtained from institutions such as the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), United Nations (UN)-Habitat, the World Bank, the Zambia Environmental Management Agency (ZEMA), the Lusaka City Council, and Zambia's Ministry of Agriculture. Reports and studies from NGOs and civil society organisations operating in Lusaka—including WaterAid, the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), Hivos, the Stichting Nederlandse Vrijwilligers (SNV), and the Civil Society for Poverty Reduction (CSPR)—were also evaluated as they relate directly to urban farming and water governance.

The following Boolean search terms were tailored to each database or source:

- ('urban agriculture' OR 'peri-urban farming') AND ('wastewater use' OR 'sewer water' OR 'contaminated water' OR 'greywater') AND ('Lusaka' OR 'Zambia' OR 'Southern Africa')
- ('political economy' OR 'access to resources' OR 'infrastructure politics' OR 'environmental justice') AND ('urban farming')

These search terms were iteratively polished to increase awareness and precision, ensuring that appropriate literature would be identified without becoming swamped by irrelevant material.

2.3. Inclusion criteria

The evaluation encompassed literature based on the following conditions:

- *Publication period:* The study included only sources published between 2000 and 2025 to ensure a focus on recent, pertinent developments in urban agriculture and wastewater use.
- *Topic relevance:* The review included studies that specifically address wastewater and sewer water use in urban or peri-urban agriculture.
- *Geographic focus:* Preference was given to studies focused on Lusaka; however, literature from other sub-Saharan African cities with similar urban dynamics was also considered.
- *Conceptual contribution:* Studies were included only if they were about power, governance, access, informality, or infrastructure politics.

2.4. Omission criteria

To preserve the significance and focus of the evaluation, the following kinds of studies were omitted:

- *Materials not written in English:* Non-English publications were omitted due to translation restrictions.
- *Technical focus:* Studies that focused exclusively on engineering, hydrology, or treatment

technology without considering social or political dimensions were omitted.

- *Irrelevance to agriculture:* Literature on effluent not related to agrarian usage was omitted.

These measures guaranteed that, by upholding conceptual and empirical consistency, the study would remain focused on the fundamental research questions.

2.5. Data mining and amalgamation

After the search and screening procedures, the qualified studies were subjected to systematic data removal. A data extraction matrix was established to gather vital information from each source, including the author(s), year of publication, geographic location, study context, research methodology (qualitative, quantitative, mixed methods), main findings, thematic focus, and relevance of the four research questions. This organised approach allowed for comparisons across studies and enabled a rigorous synthesis guided by thematic analysis (Thomas and Harden 2008); this included detecting, encrypting, and categorising recurrent themes across the literature. Four main themes were used to organise the results:

1. Access and control of effluent: How access is negotiated, challenged, or controlled and the role of informal arrangements in the water supply system (Gandy 2006, McFarlane and Silver 2017).
2. Health and ecological threats: insights into the realities of pollution, health consequences, and survival instruments (Drechsel *et al*. 2010).
3. Informal governance and survival mechanisms: The role of local actors, NGOs, and communal structures in handling effluent use is external to formal regulatory frameworks (Chumo *et al*. 2025).
4. Infrastructure and ecological fairness: Effluent usage mirrors deeper disparities in access to facilities and infrastructural omissions in rapidly urbanising areas (Silver 2014, Truelove 2019).

By combining these themes, the study recognised both the empowering conditions and structural limitations that shape effluent use in urban agricultural systems.

2.6. Final sample of studies

The screening procedure yielded a final sample of 24 articles and reports that met the inclusion criteria, which were selected for full evaluation. These comprised 18 peer-reviewed journal articles and six items of grey literature (institutional reports and policy papers). Collectively, these studies provide a balanced blend of empirical evidence, conceptual examination, and practice-based understanding, thus safeguarding academic rigor and policy significance.

Of the 24 sources used, three specifically related to Lusaka, while 21 represented comparative cases from Accra, Nairobi, Lagos, and other sub-Saharan African metropolises; these improved the analysis by highlighting wider regional dynamics. These 24 sources served as the study's evidentiary basis,

providing adequate breadth for detecting cross-cutting themes while staying focused on the political economy of effluent use in urban farming.

3. Results

3.1. Sewer water access and resource disparities

A vital finding across the reviewed literature is that access to effluent for urban farming in Lusaka is moulded by the interconnected topics of infrastructural omissions, informal power, and land tenure uncertainty. In peri-urban agricultural precincts such as Meanwood Kwamwena, and Ngwerere, effluent from streams and drainage canals that is frequently polluted with waste from domestic and industrial sources creates a crucial irrigation source, mostly during the dry season (Chisanga and Silembo 2004, Drechsel *et al.* 2010).

Control of this asset is mostly informal. Research from comparable settings in sub-Saharan Africa shows that access is naturally facilitated through social links, property owners, or informal agents rather than through controlled municipal structures (Jiménez and Asano 2008, Raschid-Sally and Jayakody 2008). For Lusaka, proximity to the Ngwerere Stream is a key factor for access. Families or associations positioned near drainage canals or discharged water from sewer water treatment ponds enjoy a comparative advantage in safeguarding water and frequently divert it by using elementary pipe structures or similar means.

The review also found that land tenancy status affects both manual access and perceived legitimacy of sewer water use. Agriculturalists on customary land or informal plots do not usually have the official support or acknowledgement needed to finance water infrastructure or demand rights over collective water points (Theresa and Pride 2017, World Bank 2009). In addition, wherever informal land markets exist, access to water may be charged for, with landowners or associations imposing informal fees for access; however, such practices remain ill-documented and extremely localised.

Consequently, access to sewer water in urban farming reflects wider disparities in the delivery of urban amenities, with marginalised people forced to depend on hazardous but essential resources. Paradoxically, the infrastructure intended for discarding waste has become a lifeline for underprivileged families.

3.2. Health-related hazards and farmers' survival strategies

The use of unprocessed sewer water poses considerable health-related hazards to both farmers and consumers. Empirical studies have shown that sewer water used in Lusaka's urban farming frequently contains high levels of pathogens, faecal coliforms, parasitic worms, and manufacturing pollutants such as heavy metals (Amoah *et al.* 2007; Chisanga and Silembo 2004). Growers working with effluent risk skin contamination, parasitic infection, and stomach ailments; consumers of fresh vegetables grown with

such water might also be exposed to bacterial infection (Drechsel *et al.* 2010).

Despite these dangers, sewer water remains widely used. This review demonstrates that growers display fluctuating levels of alertness and concern, frequently reconciling alleged dangers with the need to preserve their harvest and revenue. In certain cases, growers report using protective wear or sieving water through improvised devices, even if these procedures are infrequently effective (Scott *et al.* 2004). Others permit irrigation water to 'settle down' before they use it, trusting that this decreases pollution. The expression 'settle down' in this context denotes the practice whereby growers leave effluent in a container, shallow dam, or furrow for a time before using it for irrigation. The belief is that by allowing water to stand still, weightier elements such as sediments, visible dirt, or waste materials will descend to the bottom, leaving purer water on top. Growers frequently assume that this process decreases adulteration, even though injurious pathogens and chemicals generally remain suspended and are not successfully removed.

The sustained use of wastewater similarly reflects policy and service delivery gaps. Public health campaigns and the extension of agricultural amenities infrequently address wastewater-specific dangers, leaving growers to depend on rumours or their own experience (Obuobie *et al.* 2006). Furthermore, the guidelines on the use of polluted water in food production are incomplete, thereby permitting such practices to continue.

This gap highlights how formal city planning is detached from the authenticity of informal living, where one's existence is often prioritised over security, and institutional blind spots add to public health susceptibility.

3.3. Governance, policy, and informality

Governance of wastewater usage in urban farming occurs mainly in an institutional vacuum characterised by overlying dictates, unpredictable guidelines, and weak application. In Lusaka, numerous organisations—including the Lusaka City Council, the Chongwe Municipal Council, the Ministry of Agriculture, and ZEMA—potentially have authority over effluent, land, and food protection, yet harmonisation is notably absent (Theresa and Pride 2017, World Bank 2009).

To address this issue, informal governance apparatuses have been developed. These include landlord-led water-sharing provisions, traditional authorities managing access to customary land, and informal grower associations handling communal infrastructure. Although such schemes offer rudimentary order and reduce conflict, they are not necessarily impartial or transparent. Local authorities are susceptible to social trends, which frequently determine who accesses water and under what conditions, worsening prevailing socioeconomic gaps (Chumo *et al.* 2025).

Similarly, the present study revealed rigidity between informal practices and formal strategic aims. Civic authorities regularly regard the use of effluent in farming as a public health threat or an unlawful

action, leading to intermittent enforcement activities such as crop destruction or removal (van Veenhuizen and Danso 2007). To date, however, these interventions have not addressed the structural drivers of wastewater usage and may further undermine the efforts of vulnerable growers.

There are also instances of practical lenience where civic authorities implicitly admit wastewater usage in acknowledging its role in supporting city food structures. This contradiction mirrors the wider struggle to integrate informal practices into formal governance systems, a common challenge in numerous African cities (Truelove 2019).

3.4. Infrastructure politics and ecological fairness

The informal usage of wastewater in Lusaka is intensely entrenched in the politics of infrastructure, where marginalised city residents are pushed to repurpose waste streams as subsistence resources. This demonstrates what McFarlane and Silver (2017) labelled 'incremental infrastructure', an exercise by which societies create adaptive structures in the absence of formal establishment.

The infrastructure envisioned to dispose of wastewater (such as drainage canals, treatment discharge mechanisms, and stormwater systems) has unexpectedly become the basis of people's livelihoods. This adaptive use highlights deep inequalities. Sewer water is not used because it is ideal; safe water for irrigation is unobtainable or expensive, so growers are often excluded from formal planning for water and hygiene development (Gandy 2006, Silver 2014).

In terms of health and environmental deprivation, the ecological weight of consuming polluted water is borne excessively by low-income adults, who already face perilous living circumstances. These growers are seldom consulted in the formation of city development plans, nor are they remunerated for the dangers to which they are exposed (Drechsel *et al.* 2010).

Consequently, the politics of wastewater usage in Lusaka's urban farming signify a form of ecological unfairness where the right to a healthy environment and to live free from danger is methodically destabilised for marginalised individuals. This situation requires that the process of developing city infrastructure be reconsidered to include the voices and needs of ordinary people.

4. Discussion

The results of this evaluation revealed extremely deep-rooted disparities and informal adaptations that determine effluent usage in urban and peri-urban farming in Lusaka. Although strictly a form of contamination, disempowered farmers convert sewer water into an important living resource. This contradiction reflects the tension between urban transformation and the neglect of the marginalised, where the infrastructure intended to eliminate waste becomes a survival tool for those excluded from formal planning structures (Gandy 2006, McFarlane and Silver 2017).

4.1. Sewer water use and Lusaka's urban political economy

Lusaka's rapid urbanisation has increased spatial and socioeconomic disparities. As the city has become larger, informal settlements and peri-urban zones (such as Meanwood Kwamwena) have expanded, often lacking access to basic services such as piped water, sanitation, and drainage (UN-Habitat 2014, World Bank 2009). In this context, effluent is not only a technical issue but also represents the dynamics of the political economy, which prioritises infrastructural growth for more affluent or centrally located groups, leaving peri-urban residents to build improvised systems of survival (Silver 2014, Truelove 2019).

The informal use of effluent for farming highlights the irregular geography of infrastructure delivery. Growers near the Ngwerere Stream have transformed deserted or decaying infrastructure (such as storm drainage systems and treatment discharge mechanisms) into a source of irrigation support, which underscores both inventiveness and official negligence. Although this resourceful usage of effluent can be seen as a form of 'incremental infrastructure' (McFarlane and Silver 2017), it likewise shows systemic omission from urban development and service distribution.

Simultaneously, the absence of guidelines or oversight reflects a broader governance vacuum in which the government vacillates between lenience and enforcing discipline (Chumo *et al.* 2025). This vagueness leaves growers and their practices in institutionally risky positions, increasing their vulnerability and limiting their capacity to negotiate additional sustainable practices.

4.2. Implications for urban planning, public health, and governance

The extensive use of unprocessed wastewater in urban farming in Lusaka has raised vital questions regarding public health, ecological governance, and urban planning. First, the lack of systematic warnings about health-related hazards and extension services that target growers who use effluent highlights the gap between municipal health institutes and informal manufacturers (Drechsel *et al.* 2010). This not only imperils growers and customers but also weakens wider goals around urban food safety.

The inability to integrate informal agricultural practices into formal city development planning means that growers have remained unaware of infrastructural and land-use guidelines. This invisibility reinforces marginality and weakens arguments for investing in rudimentary amenities such as water points, boreholes, or decentralised treatment schemes that may support safer forms of agriculture.

Town developers and policymakers must therefore implement more all-encompassing and participatory governance frameworks that recognise informal growers as vital participants in urban food and water schemes. Such acknowledgement should be accompanied by provisions for decentralised, setting-appropriate infrastructure (such as built wetlands or abridged treatment units) and instruments for formalising and regulating sewer water usage in ways that protect both well-being and sources of revenue (Raschid-Sally and Jayakody 2008, Scott *et al.* 2004).

Moreover, the present approach to effluent management in Lusaka echoes the weak understanding of infrastructure as a formal, top-down procedure. A shift toward recognising 'infrastructure as social practice', negotiated, modified, and sustained through daily interactions, would permit more responsive and locally entrenched interventions (Truelove 2019).

4.3. Gaps in the literature and areas for future research

Notwithstanding the growing body of literature on effluent use in urban farming, this review reveals important gaps that limit a complete understanding of this phenomenon. First, gender differences were not considered. Although women constitute a huge percentage of urban agriculturalists in sub-Saharan Africa, few studies have examined how gender affects access to effluent, exposure to danger, or decision-making power within irrigation systems (SOFA Team and Cheryl Doss 2011, Zwarteveen 2008). Considering these relationships is vital for creating impartial interventions.

Moreover, child labour and youth participation in wastewater-irrigated farming remain mostly undocumented. Anecdotal evidence suggests that children are occasionally involved in irrigating crops or drawing water, which may expose them to health risks. Future research should examine age-linked magnitudes of danger and labour distribution.

Third, there is a dearth of longitudinal studies on the long-term well-being and ecological and economic effects of effluent use. Many studies have offered snapshot evaluations. However, continued contact with impurities, mainly heavy metals and microbial pathogens, may have long-term effects that are not well understood in short-term analyses (Amoah *et al.* 2007, Drechsel *et al.* 2010).

Finally, policy assessments and evaluations of the impacts of activities intended to facilitate effluent use are rare. For example, where low-cost treatment schemes or awareness-raising campaigns have been implemented, efforts to measure their efficiency or scalability have been insufficient. This restricts the evidence for policy choices.

Addressing these gaps will entail interdisciplinary teamwork across public health, city planning, ecological engineering, and the social sciences as well as closer engagement between growers and local governance institutes.

5. Conclusion

This systematic review scrutinises the political economy of wastewater usage in urban and peri-urban farming in Lusaka, with a focus on informal farming schemes situated near polluted waterways, such as the Ngwerere Stream. The results highlight the contradictory nature of the effluent in Lusaka's urban transformation: a dangerous byproduct of neglect but also a vibrant resource for food production and a source of revenue and sustenance for marginalised residents.

Numerous important insights were obtained from the evaluation. First, access to wastewater is

influenced by infrastructural disparity, informal land tenancy, and proximity to waste discharge, thereby strengthening the prevailing designs of social and spatial exclusion. Informal growers trust unplanned structures to obtain and use water and frequently work apart from formal governance frameworks. Second, while growers show inventiveness and flexibility in managing health and ecological dangers, their contact with pathogens and contaminants remains high, with inadequate care from public health schemes or farming-related extension amenities. Third, governance is disjointed, with overlying organisational mandates and inadequate harmonisation among civic authorities, traditional leaders, and communal groups. This governance void has permitted informal ways of working to flourish but has also left growers susceptible to unpredictable enforcement and policy negligence.

This review highlights the need for policy interpositions that go past disciplinary or technocratic methods regarding effluent use. Decentralised models of water authority that include informal operators in the decision-making process are required. Funding context-appropriate structures such as low-cost treatment schemes and safe water points for irrigation is vital to reduce health risks while maintaining urban farming output. In addition, city planning procedures must become more all-encompassing and inclusive, admitting the realities of informal agriculture and guaranteeing that the voices of low-income adults, many of whom are women, are included in policy discourse.

Future research should address critical gaps in this evaluation. Studies on gender sensitivity are needed to clarify how access to effluent and exposure to hazards are distinguished based on gender roles and relationships. Similarly, the participation of children and youth in effluent-based farming, including the repercussions for their health and education, requires closer investigation. Longitudinal studies are essential for measuring the ongoing effects of contact with unprocessed sewer water on human health and ecological outcomes. Moreover, vigorous assessments of pilot activities (such as decentralised handling units or farmer training programs) might provide the evidence needed to inform scalable results.

In sum, wastewater usage in Lusaka's urban farming practices exposes the intricate interactions between need, omission, and adaptation. Addressing these issues and harnessing the potential advantages they offer require policies and research that are not only theoretically sound but also socially fair and inclusive.

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【Technical Report】

Exploratory Analysis of Wood Charcoal Production in Cameroon: Socio-economic Issues and Impact on the Peri-urban Forests of Ntouessong-Soa (Yaoundé fringe)

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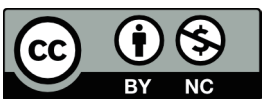
Abstract

The peri-urban forests in Africa are vital for the climate resilience of cities, but face significant threats from charcoal production, which degrades ecosystems and increases greenhouse gas emissions. This study focused on the Ntouessong locality in the northern part of Yaoundé, aiming to identify the main tree species used for charcoal, analyse production methods, and assess annual production quantities. We conducted focus group discussions and semi-structured surveys across four villages in the area. This study identified the key charcoal species including *Margaritaria discoidea*, *Cylicodiscus gabunense*, and *Sclerocarya birrea*. Due to the high level of forest degradation, charcoal producers no longer distinguish between species and tree categories. The predominant method of production was the smokestack. The results indicated that approximately 496.23 tonnes of charcoal were produced annually, generating 58,380 and 70,056 USD (29,190,000 and 35,028,000 CFA Francs, respectively). To address the impact of charcoal production in Ntouessong, sustainable management strategies are essential, including eco-friendly training for producers, legal organisations, and networking, to preserve biodiversity and support community resilience.

Keywords: wood charcoal production, environmental and socio-economic impacts, peri-urban forests



1. Introduction

1.1. Context and justification

Charcoal is a fuel derived from the incomplete transformation of wood, and it is an important product in many developing countries, where it constitutes a major source of energy for urban populations and even industries. Today, about half the world's annual harvest of round wood, or about 1.8 billion cubic meters per year, is used for energy (Sintayehu, 2024**)**. In Africa in general, the wood energy sector is experiencing significant growth. Nearly 90% of this volume is consumed in developing countries, where wood meets almost all of the energy needs, given that firewood consumption and charcoal production occur on a small scale and informally (FAO 1992 *cit. in* Girard 2002). Several studies, as well as various national and international programmes and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), are working to promote sustainable production practices to reduce the environmental impact of this activity. However, the cross-border trade in wood energy and rapid urbanisation in Africa are increasing, compromising efforts for sustainable resource management (Sola *et al*. 2021, De Vos *et al*. 2024). Therefore, stakeholders need to develop strategies aligned with sustainability goals, adopting harmonised institutional mechanisms at both the regional and continental levels (Sola *et al*. 2021). To prevent the marginalisation of women and vulnerable groups, solutions must be implemented to distinguish between small traders and large ones. CIFOR-ICRAF (Centre for International Forestry Research-International Centre for Research in Agroforestry), through the study by Schure *et al*. (2021), showed that good governance and institutional development, as well as the need for technical resources and skills, are factors that would promote the improvement of charcoal production. This study examined the value chain of charcoal production focusing on the efficiency of carbonisation and solutions beyond the performance of the kiln. The past studies by Mfomo et al. (2020) also showed that carbonisation techniques and the species used influence the quality attributes of the produced charcoal. It is noteworthy that most of the charcoal produced in Africa in general is sold in local, and sometimes regional markets, and used in households rather than in industry (Sola *et al*. 2021). Although laws exist to regulate the production and trade of charcoal, their enforcement is often inadequate. The value chain of wood energy in Africa is complex and interconnected, involving various stakeholders and challenges. According to the African Energy Commission (AFREC 2023), the percentage of charcoal consumption between 2000 and 2018 when compared to total biomass used has not yet exceed 20%. Thus, continuous efforts are needed to promote sustainable practices and reduce the negative environmental impacts of the sector.

In the peri-urban areas of Africa, charcoal production is one of the most practiced informal activities (FAO 2017). It represents a significant economic source for communities living around cities (Mbuangi *et al*. 2021), as it provides jobs and income for thousands of people (GTZ 2010; FAO 2017). However, the production and consumption of charcoal not only have beneficial socioeconomic impacts but also have significant environmental impacts on forests, particularly peri-urban forests, which serve as supply

basins for major metropolitan areas such as Yaoundé in Cameroon. These include biodiversity loss, greenhouse gas emissions, and public health issues (UNEP 2019, FAO 2020, Mbuangi *et al*. 2021, Schure *et al*. 2021)

Wood is a major energy source for many urban and rural populations in Cameroon. The energy consumption figures published by Kidmo *et al*. (2021) have shown that biomass is the primary energy source, accounting for 74.22% of total consumption. The production of wood energy provides income for many households, particularly in rural areas, where monthly revenues from the sale of wood energy by producers range from 50,000 to 150,000 CFA francs or approximately 80.49 to 241.47 USD (Noko *et al*. 2022).

1.2. Problems

In Cameroon, several authors (Nguenang and Badjeck 2013, Mfomo *et al*. 2020) have revealed that charcoal can be produced not only by direct cutting in forests but also by recycling/valorising sawmill waste and can be obtained using traditional methods, such as earth kilns and open pits, which are inefficient and lead to significant material losses (Mfomo *et al*. 2020, Schure *et al*. 2021). Although carbonisation methods, such as pyrolysis and the use of modern kilns, are beginning to be adopted, their use remains limited owing to their high costs (Girard 2002). Nguenang and Badjeck (2013) identified six different methods of charcoal carbonisation: low-yield carbonisation, traditional mounds, metal kilns, brick kilns, artisanal retorts, and industrial retorts. Each method affects the quality and quantity of charcoal produced as well as the environment because these techniques contribute to the degradation of vegetation cover. Previous studies by Mfomo et al. (2020) showed that the quality and yield of charcoal depend not only on the wood species but also on the kiln type and the production/carbonisation method used. Carbonisation yields were estimated to be 16% using traditional techniques (ProPFE/GIZ 2017 cited in Schure *et al*. 2021). These yields increased to 22% in the improved traditional kiln and 30% in the Casamance kiln, with maximum rates of 25% and 32 %, respectively (Schure *et al*. 2021).

The demand for wood energy is constant, and Cameroon experiences considerable growth in charcoal demand each year. This demand was estimated at 356,000 tons per year in 2015, according to the GIZ-Pro/PFE cited by the UNDP (2022). However, the supply is often insufficient, and is currently estimated to be 240,000 tons per year, thus resulting in a deficit of 116,000 tons. The demand for charcoal is increasing, particularly in major metropolitan areas (Eba'a Atyi *et al*. 2016), such as Yaoundé. However, the activities contributing to its production have led to the degradation of peri-urban forests and destruction of the forest environment in general (Mesmin *et al*. 2024).

The peri-urban forests of the Ntouessong locality have been identified as one of the main supply basins for charcoal in the cities of Yaounde and Soa (Noko *et al*. 2022). Despite its importance, charcoal production in this area has always been informal, illegal, and unregulated, raising concerns about the

sustainability of forests and the livelihoods of the people who depend on them. Charcoal production on the outskirts of cities is illegal and informal, as communities do not distinguish the species used for production because Cameroon's forestry law requires each charcoal producer to have an exploitation permit (MINFOF 2024). They used cultivated fruit trees (non-forest species) and wood from species listed on the IUCN Red List, such as *Irvingia gabonensis*, *Diospyros spp*, *Pterocarpus soyauxii*, and *Guibourtia tessmannii*.

This raises the question of what impact charcoal production has on the vegetation cover of peri-urban forests in Ntouessong. Thus, this study aimed to contribute to improving the charcoal sector and reducing its negative impacts on the environment by identifying the main tree species used for charcoal production, analysing production methods, and assessing the quantities of charcoal produced annually. To propose strategies for sustainable natural resource management that contribute to improving the well-being of stakeholders such as local communities which produce and commercialise charcoal directly, traders, retailers, and future generations.

2. Methods

2.1. Study area

This study was conducted in four villages in the Ntouessong group (Figure 1): Ntouessong IV, V, VI, and VII. The Ntouessong group is one of the four groups that make up the municipality of Soa, located in the Mefou-et-Afamba Department on the northeastern outskirts of Yaoundé. The municipality of Soa is an administrative unit located on the southern plateau of Cameroon. This municipality is an integral part of the peripheral margins of the Yaoundé metropolitan area. The advantages of the natural environment and socioeconomic survey data justify wood production in this geographical area. The Ntouessong group comprises several villages home to a population primarily engaged in shifting cultivation and forest exploitation, including both food and cash crops, as well as the exploitation of forest resources, including charcoal production. This population is primarily made up of the Beti, mainly the indigenous Ewondo, along with a few foreigners from other regions of the country (PCD 2015). In this locality, charcoal production is particularly carried out by local native young and adult men who own land or have inherited it from their parents (MEM 2021). Ntouessong faces challenges related to deforestation and the sustainable management of natural resources because of its position between the cities of Yaoundé and Soa. According to the Municipal Development Plan (PCD) of Soa Municipality (2015), the vegetation of the Ntouessong group consists of a semi-deciduous forest of Sterculiaceae and Ulmaceae, along with some pockets of evergreen forest. This forest has undergone numerous changes owing to several major factors such as the overexploitation of wood energy, agriculture, and urbanisation (MEM 2021). In 2015, the population of the group was estimated to be 10,141, with 2,736 people residing in the four villages where the study was conducted.

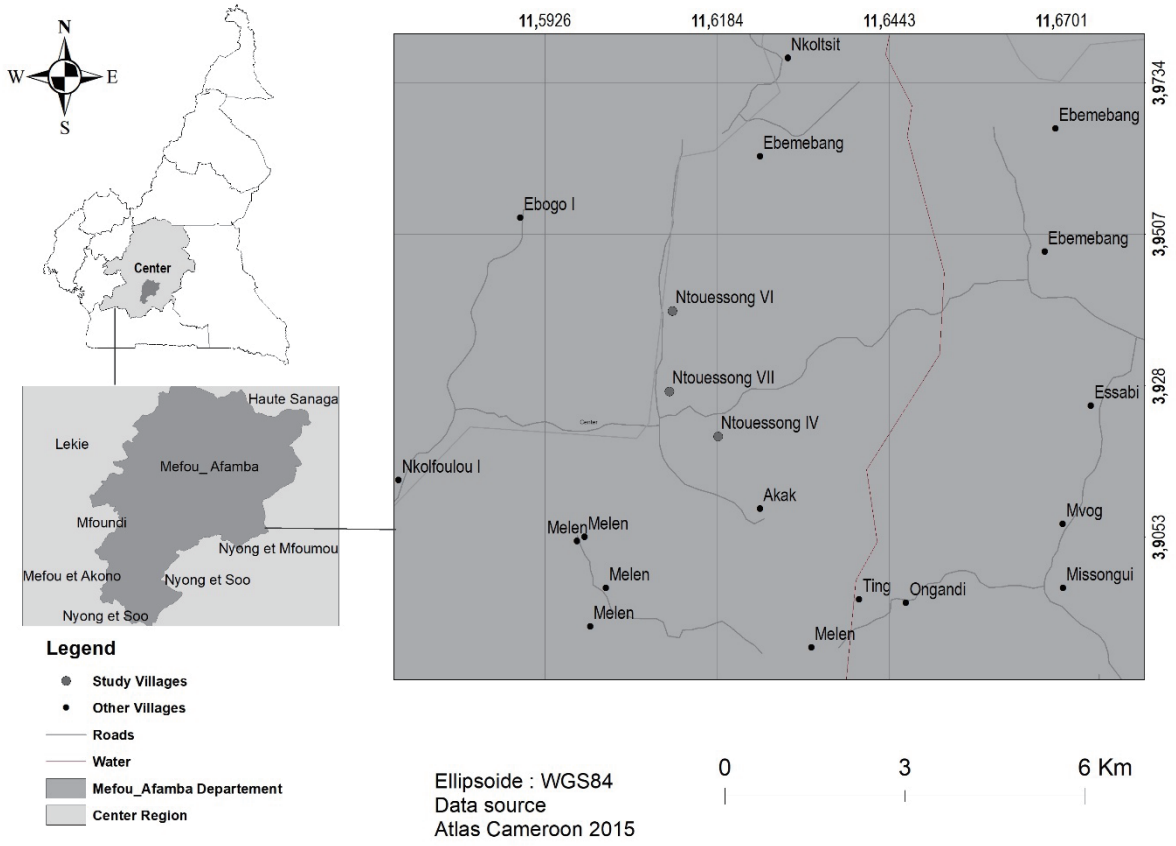


Figure 1. Study area

2.2. Data collection and analysis

2.2.1. Data collection

The survey was conducted between April and May 2021. The linear snowball technique recommended by Russell and Hanoomanjee (2012) was used for sampling. A total of 140 participants took part in four focus group discussions conducted in the four villages of the Ntouessong locality, with 30 out of the 40 participants from each village. A semi-structured questionnaire was administered to 11 charcoal producers from four (04) villages in the northern periphery of Yaoundé, where wood carbonisation activity occurs. This grouping was selected based on its proximity to the cities of Yaoundé and Soa. The 11 charcoal producers interviewed were all men aged between 15 and 35 years. The main parameters considered were the sociodemographic characteristics of the charcoal producers, type of wood species used, production processes, quantities produced, and marketing prices. Species were identified using the identification key described by Vivien and Faure (1985).

2.2.2. Data analysis

The collected data were encoded in an Excel spreadsheet and then analysed. The data included

qualitative and quantitative aspects.

For qualitative data, social characteristics were evaluated, such as gender, age group, and village of origin. Regarding access to resources and carbonisation practices, elements such as the tree species used and type of kilns/mounds were considered. In the sections related to the charcoal value chain, the analysed variables included the locations for the biomass collection, the placement of kilns, packaging, storage locations, and sales locations.

For quantitative data, the following aspects were evaluated. The frequency of citations (FC) corresponded to the ratio between the number of respondents who mentioned a particular answer (n) and the total number of times the responses were mentioned in the survey (N). FC was calculated using the following formula: $FC = n/N \times 100$.

The proportion of respondents who gave a particular answer was also calculated. The number of kilns per year per charcoal producer, number of bags per kiln, selling price per bag, and number of charcoal producers per village were determined through direct survey identification.

3. Results

3.1. Socio-demographic profile of charcoal producers

At the end of this study, 140 respondents were sampled, and 11 charcoal producers were identified and interviewed in only three (03) villages out of the four (04) visited: eight (73%) in Ntouessong V, two (18%) in Ntouessong IV, and one (9%) in Ntouessong VI. The Ntouessong V area is the farthest from Yaoundé and still has fewer degraded forest areas, which explains the high number of charcoal producers identified in this group. All of the identified charcoal producers were male, originally from and residing in the area; 73% were over 35 years old, 18% belonged to the age group of [25-35] years, and 9% were in the age group of [15-25] years, indicating that this activity was exclusively practiced by young and adult men in this zone.

3.2. Ethnic and socio-professional characteristics of charcoal producers in Ntouessong locality

Charcoal producers in the Ntouessong locality had relatively homogeneous ethnic and socio-professional characteristics. Most producers belonged to the Beti ethnic group (82%), particularly in Ewondo. The remaining 18% did not reveal their origins or families' names. Beyond charcoal production, their primary occupation, many also practiced agriculture, livestock, and handicraft. Most were over 35 years old (Figure 2), had a secondary education level, and had learned charcoal production techniques through experience and intergenerational knowledge transfer. Charcoal producers played an important role in the local economy and contribute to meeting the energy needs of households and even businesses in and around the localities.

3.3. Main trees used for charcoal-making

This study identified 13 species belonging to 13 genera and 9 families. Among the species mentioned, the most used were *Margaritaria discoidea*, *Cylicodiscus gabunense*, *Sclerocarya birrea*, and *Erythrophleum suaveolens*, with frequencies of 22 %, 18 %, 14 %, and 10 %, respectively. The least commonly used species were *Piptadeniastrum africanum*, *Zanthoxylum* sp., *Diospyros* sp., *Disthemonanthus benthamianus*, *Irvingia gabonensis* with citation frequencies of 5% each, and *Terminalia superba*, *Persea americana* and *Alstonia boonei* with (5%) (Figure 2). The people of Ntouessong used a variety of tree species for charcoal production regardless of their conservation status or importance to community members. In Ntouessong, *Diospyros* species (classified as vulnerable) were used for charcoal production. They also used fruit trees and non-timber forest products (NTFP), such as *Persea* americana and *Irvingia gabonensis*. However, we observed that among the species used for charcoal production, there was an inclusion of non-forest fruit trees, such as the avocado (*Persea americana*), indicating that the environment was not only heavily degraded, but that charcoal makers were using available biomass indiscriminately.

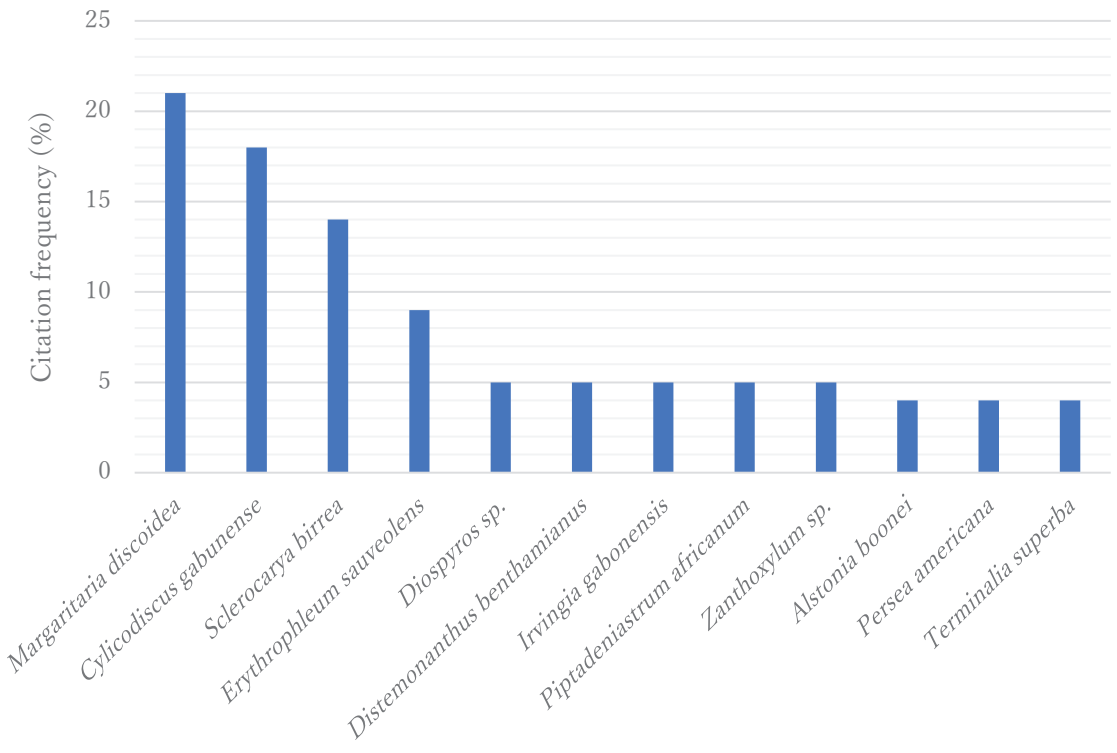


Figure 2. Trees Used for Charcoal Production in Ntouessong locality

3.4. Main drivers of forest degradation and plant resources availability for charcoal production in Ntouessong locality

Given the number of charcoal kilns established annually in the locality (208 kilns in Ntouessong V, 28

kilns in Ntouessong IV, and 24 kilns in Ntouessong VI), we could conclude that the forests in these areas (particularly in Ntouessong V) are under significant pressure. This charcoal-related pressure has led to rapid deforestation, which limits the natural regeneration of biomass. Based on questionnaires with 140 respondents, wood energy (30%, including charcoal) exploitation emerged as the leading cause of forest degradation in Ntouessong, which means 42 respondents (Figure 3).

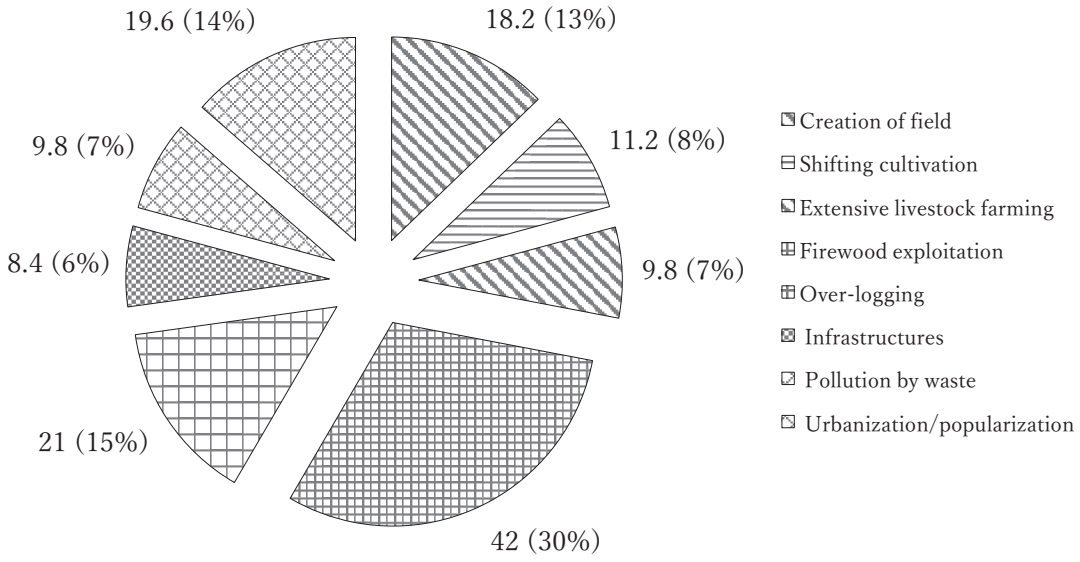


Figure 3. The main causes of Ntouessong forest degradation
Note: Total sampled number is 140

This pressure on ecosystems can degrade soil quality and water resources, reduce biodiversity, and hinder plant growth. Therefore, although the demand for charcoal may stimulate the local economy and household income in the short-term, it compromises the long-term sustainability of plant biomass in the sector.

We have also noted that during the exploitation of forest resources, the majority did not adhere to any tree-felling criteria, particularly regarding species selection. Charcoal producers cited the same species used for charcoal production as rare in the area. Thus, the results indicate that forest exploitation by charcoal sector actors is a significant cause of environmental degradation.

3.5. Charcoal production methods

In the Ntouessong area, the only method of charcoal production was the use of buried kilns, specifically the traditional mound (100% of the respondents). The process of carbonising wood using a traditional mound begins with the preparation of wood, which includes selecting a suitable or available species, cutting it into uniform pieces, and drying it to reduce moisture. The wood is then stacked in a dome

shape (Figure 4) and covered with leaves and soil to create a carbonisation chamber with openings to control air and allow smoke to escape. The fire is lit at the base and must be carefully monitored to avoid complete combustion, which can last from several hours to days. Once carbonisation is complete, the fire is extinguished, and the charcoal is cooled before being extracted and stored.

Stacked Wood for Carbonisation

Wood Carbonisation in a Traditional Mound Kiln

Former carbonisation site in the forest

Figure 4. Charcoal Production Method in the Ntouessong Area
Source: Pictures taken by Millennium Ecological Museum (MEM) (2021)

3.6. Quantities of charcoal produced in study area, storage, marketing, and transport

According to the following table (Table 1), the eleven charcoal producers surveyed in the Ntouessong group produced an average of 11,676 bags of charcoal annually. Referring to the past studies by GIZ-ProPFE (2020), which stated that an average bag of charcoal weighs 42.5 kg, it was estimated that approximately 496.23 tonnes of charcoal are produced in the study area. The number of kilns per year per charcoal producer varied between four (4) and ninety-six (96) depending on the individual charcoal producer. Overall, the eleven charcoal producers typically exceed 260 kilns per year, representing a significant area of degraded forest, not only for the creation of kilns, but also for the collection of wood.

Table 1. Quantities of charcoal produced by each producer

Locality	Charcoal producers	Number of kiln/years	Number of bag/kilns	Number of bag/years	Average selling price of bag in USD*
Ntouessong IV	P1	24	100	2,400	5.5
	P2	4	23	92	6
Ntouessong V	P3	12	20	240	5.5
	P4	24	25	600	5.7
	P5	24	50	1,200	5.8
	P6	96	40	3,840	5.4
	P7	4	55	220	5.4
	P8	24	60	1,440	6
	P9	12	38	456	5.4
	P10	12	63	756	5.7
Ntouessong VI	P11	24	18	432	6
Total		260		11,676	

Note: Prices collected in 2021, with ± 0.238 is SD corresponding

The figure below (Ffigure 5) shows the amount of charcoal produced by village: 372.17 tons (75%) in Ntouessong V, 104.21 tons (21%) in Ntouessong IV, and 19.85 tons (4%) in Ntouessong VI, for a total of 496.23 tons. This result is justified by the distance of the different localities from the city of Yaoundé, and therefore from the degree of urbanisation.

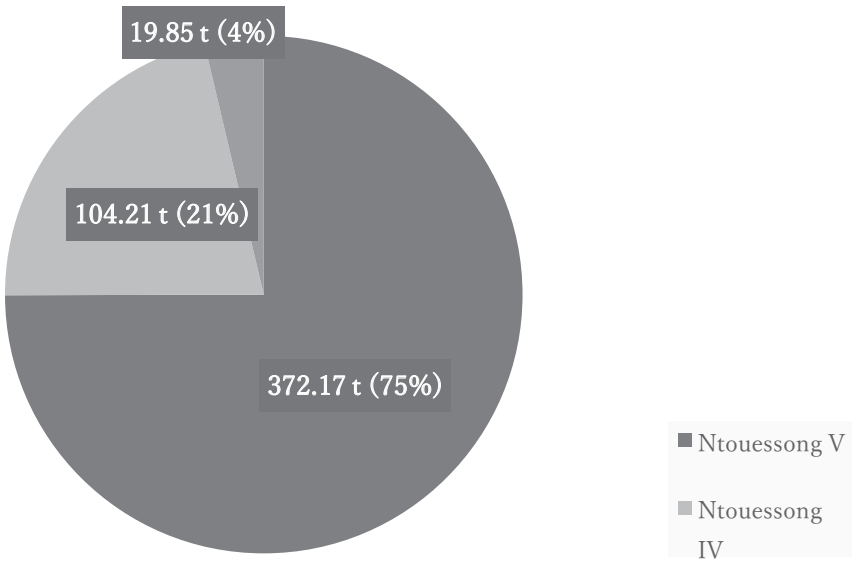


Figure 5. Quantity of charcoal produced annually/village

Note: Total sampled number is 496.23 tonnes

In the Ntouessong locality, charcoal was packaged in 100 kg bags and stored in old huts or directly exposed in front of residential huts for sale. Finally, the charcoal produced in this area was sold indiscriminately to wholesalers from urban areas, such as Yaoundé and Soa, and households (for direct consumption), and was transported by motorcycles, pickups, and canters (Figure 6).

Figure 6. Different Means of Transporting Charcoal in the Ntouessong area (a motorcycle, b and c pickup, d canter)

Source: Pictures taken by MEM (2021)

3.7. Annual income evaluation of Ntouessong charcoal producer

In Ntouessong, the producers' incomes ranged from 276,000 to 10,368,000 CFA francs per year (Table 2). The average annual income per producer is estimated at 2,971,800 CFA francs, depending on production volumes and local market prices. An evaluation of the annual income of charcoal producers in Ntouessong showed that charcoal production is a vital source of income for local households in this peri-forest area. The high income may be attributed to the geographical location of Ntouessong. It is a peri-urban area that supplies the cities of Yaoundé and Soa, and two large urban areas in Cameroon. This explains the high productivity driven by strong demand. Charcoal production is one of the main sources of income for producers involved in improving their income and well-being. This high income can also be explained by the availability of raw materials. The raw materials needed to produce charcoal in this area do not require any financial investment because producers use the available wood resources in the surrounding forest pockets. Charcoal production in the Ntouessong localities could contribute significantly to the economy and meet the fundamental needs of households. In the peri-forest area of Ntouessong, charcoal production generates substantial income that supports household economies and is essential for meeting the fundamental needs of producers and their families. The highest income was observed in the village of Ntouessong V, with annual incomes ranging from 594,000 to 10,368,000 CFA francs per producer (Table 2). This village still has the largest proportion of forest cover, and its distance

from urban centres means that it has not yet undergone significant urbanisation, which contributes to the degradation of its forest cover.

Table 2. Annual revenue per producer

Locality	Charcoal producers	Number of bag/years	Average selling price of bag in USD *	Annual revenue/producer (in USD)
Ntouessong IV	P1	2,400	5.5	13,200
	P2	92	6	552
Ntouessong V	P3	240	5.5	1,320
	P4	600	5.7	3,420
	P5	1,200	5.8	6,960
	P6	3,840	5.4	20,736
	P7	220	5.4	1,188
	P8	1,440	6	8,640
	P9	456	5.4	2,462.4
	P10	756	5.7	4,309.2
Ntouessong VI	P11	432	6	2,592

Note: *year 2021, with ± 0.238 is SD corresponding

4. Discussion

4.1. Socio-economic issues and their impact in charcoal production

In the Ntouessong locality, charcoal production is exclusively practiced by young and adult men, with similar results reported by Noko *et al*. (2022) in the Soa area where only men are involved in charcoal production. This emphasises the gendered nature of the activity and its implications in the local socioeconomic context.

Our findings suggest that the education level is not a key determinant of charcoal production. Ethnic homogeneity among producers in the study area may be attributable to their access to forest resources. Charcoal production appears to be a significant activity for the community, providing a vital source of income for producers and their families. In the northern region of Cameroon, Todou *et al*. (2017) revealed that, due to poverty and unemployment, people with primary education are mostly charcoal sellers. These phenomena were similar in both northern and central Cameroon.

4.2. Environmental impacts of charcoal production

The choice of species for charcoal production appears to depend on the availability of plant materials in the region and the quality of wood, as suggested by Todou *et al*. (2017). This may explain the inclusion

of fruit species in the charcoal production in Ntouessong. Traditionally, *Piptadeniastrum africanum*, *Alstonia boonei*, *Triplochiton scleroxylon*, and *Diospyros* sp. are recognised as commonly used species for charcoal production, supported by Awono *et al*. (2013) and Mfomo et al. (2020). However, the inclusion of non-forest fruit trees, such as avocado (*Persea americana*), suggests that the environment is heavily degraded, and charcoal producers use available biomass indiscriminately.

The presence of such a large number of charcoal kilns contributes to biodiversity loss in peri-urban areas. According to Chidumayo and Gumbo (2013), most of the charcoal in tropical countries is produced using traditional earth and pit kilns, which exacerbate forest degradation. Mohammed (2023) further emphasised that charcoal production entails cutting down trees and removing vegetation cover, which leads to biodiversity loss.

This pressure on ecosystems not only degrades the soil quality and water resources but also reduces biodiversity and complicates future plant growth. Although the demand for charcoal may temporarily boost the local economy and household income, it ultimately jeopardises the long-term sustainability of plant biomass. Furthermore, most producers do not adhere to any tree-felling criteria, particularly those regarding species selection, leading to the same species being frequently reported as rare in the area. This aligns with a parallel study of local communities' perceptions of environmental degradation in Ntouessong.

4.3. Challenges in traditional charcoal production method in Ntouessong

The results revealed that, in the Ntouessong area, the only method of charcoal production is the use of buried kilns, specifically traditional mounds. Although this method is accessible and inexpensive, it has significant drawbacks such as low yield and harmful emissions, necessitating careful management to minimise environmental impacts. The exclusive reliance on this traditional method may indicate that charcoal producers in the Ntouessong area are resistant to change or are unaware of alternative charcoal production methods. This could also be due to a lack of training in modern charcoal production techniques, which have primarily relied on ancestral methods. Furthermore, the low investment required for this method encourages continued use, particularly in contexts where wood is abundant and labour costs are low, according to Mfomo *et al*. (2020).

4.4. Market dynamics and economic contributions of charcoal production

In the Ntouessong area, the pricing of charcoal bags varies by time and producer, ranging from 5 to 6 USD (2,500 FCFA to 3,000 FCFA) on-site, highlighting price irregularities and reflecting the informality and illegality of the charcoal sector. This informality is further compounded by the absence of organised associations among producers, where each trader sets prices based on supply and demand. Sola *et al*. (2021) noted that while wood fuel value chains support millions of people and serve as a

major source of energy, they remain informal, illegal, and unaccounted for in national statistics, with their contributions to the economy not officially recognised.

The high income derived from charcoal production can be attributed to Ntouessong's geographical location, which supplies large urban areas and thus benefits from strong market demand. Charcoal production not only improves income and well-being for local producers but also significantly contributes to the economy, meeting fundamental household needs. Although this activity contributes to biodiversity loss and forest degradation, it provides an essential income for economically depressed peri-urban areas, as highlighted by Zulu and Richardson (2013). Furthermore, charcoal production offers regular income that serves as a safety net against economic shocks and aids in poverty alleviation, particularly during lean agricultural seasons. Additionally, the availability of raw materials, which require no financial investment, enhances profitability for producers in the region, allowing them to utilise abundant wood resources from surrounding forests.

5. Strategy for sustainable charcoal production in Ntouessong

Wood charcoal production has been an essential anthropogenic activity since prehistoric times (Deforce *et al*. 2013, Alcaide *et al*. 2020). In the Ntouessong area, the annual production of charcoal is equivalent to 496.23 tonnes, thus indicating that this activity is intense in the area. The local population uses endangered species, as well as wild and exotic fruit trees, to produce charcoal, which shows that no proper selection of trees is made. Therefore, it is essential to develop strategies for the sustainable management of wood resources in peri-urban forests. This sustainable management involves the training of charcoal makers in the Ntouessong group in eco-friendly charcoal production, which would be a significant asset in reducing greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) and a local mitigation strategy (Girard 2002). Charcoal production in Ntouessong generates considerable income for those involved in the production and marketing of this product. However, these profits are controversial, because charcoal production has an environmental impact and contributes to forest degradation. Nyarko *et al*. (2021) mentioned that despite the benefits of charcoal production, its production and consumption in Africa are associated with numerous ecological and health challenges. Therefore, it is essential to develop production systems that are less harmful to the environment and the health of producers.

It is also important to organise charcoal producers into associations that would enable them to develop and promote production practices that ensure good forest governance, leading to the enforcement and respect of the law. In Cameroon, the management of the wood fuel sector is prescribed in the 1994 Forest Law, and commercial production of wood fuel is regulated by the 1995 Decree on Forest Regime Implementation Modalities under two types of permits for the exploitation of special forestry products, including charcoal (Schure *et al*. 2013). Networking among producers would also contribute to the development of the sector in the locality, improvement and restoration of vegetation

cover in former charcoal sites, reduction of environmental degradation, compliance with environmental laws, valorisation of wood waste, and collaboration with neighbouring communities. All of this would be in close alignment with Cameroon's Strategic Documents for Development (SND-30) and Climate National Determined Contributions (NDC-), which demonstrate a commitment to balancing energy needs with the preservation of natural resources, while enhancing the resilience of populations to climate change.

6. Conclusion

This study has highlighted the significant role of charcoal production, which serves as the primary energy source for local communities, in the Ntouessong area. Despite their economic benefits, current practices contribute to severe environmental degradation through deforestation, biodiversity loss, and greenhouse gas emissions. The predominant use of traditional production methods coupled with the informal nature of trade exacerbates these issues.

It is important to note that charcoal producers also use fruit trees and NTFPs such as *Persea americana* (avocado) and *Irvingia gabonensis* (bush mango) for charcoal production.

Training charcoal producers in eco-friendly production methods and organising them into legal entities could enhance production efficiency and promote sustainable practices. Additionally, establishing better governance and collaboration among stakeholders will help mitigate environmental impacts and support community livelihoods. Aligning these efforts with national development and climate strategies is essential to ensure a balanced approach to energy needs and natural resource preservation, ultimately contributing to the resilience of local populations to climate change.

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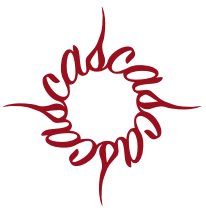

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