

# Ondofolo's leadership in Christian perspective: A study based on Papuan-Indonesian local wisdom

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Ondofolo is the highest customary leader in the order of the indigenous people of the Sentani tribe, Papua province, which is still in effect today. Ondofolo leadership is highly respected by the local community. This research was conducted to determine its leadership from a Christian perspective, using a qualitative exploratory approach. Data collection was carried out through participatory observation, interviews with Ondofolo and the head of the village customary court, and literature review. The research location was determined purposively in the Sentani customary area, data were analysed using triangulation. Ondofolo has values that are relevant from a Christian perspective, namely living righteously, full of wisdom and reason, and being able to manage his society, and having special attention that is carried out every day for his people. He is the highest leader among indigenous people, in his leadership always holding on to the Creator (God). Ondofolo's leadership can be used as an alternative leadership model based on local wisdom that can be used both in society, government and even in the church, because it contains leadership values and relies heavily on God while leading.

**Intradisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary implications:** This study contributes interdisciplinary aspects of contextual theology to Ondofolo's leadership to give new meaning to that leadership from a Christian perspective. The results are useful in forming the basis of leadership for the people of Sentani, Papua and is used as an alternative model of leadership based on local wisdom in Indonesia.

**Keywords:** Ondofolo; Christian leadership; local wisdom; Sentani; Papua.

## Introduction

Ondofolo is the designation for the highest customary leader among the indigenous people of the Sentani tribe in Jayapura district, Papua province. His leadership is highly respected by the people who live in the Sentani customary area, both those who come from the Sentani tribe and those who are not from the Sentani tribe. For example, someone who is going to live and settle in the Sentani traditional village area must ask for Ondofolo's approval to receive protection if he is hit by a disaster or there are members of the community who do not agree with his presence. Furthermore, it is also required to have the permission of Ondofolo to use land and build a house to live. '*Hak ulayat*' such as land, water, air, forests and natural resources exist within the Sentani customary area (Keputusan Bupati Jayapura Nomor 319 Tahun 2014).

Ondofolo is one of the formal government partners in Jayapura Regency, Papua province in solving problems or making decisions within the scope of the Sentani indigenous people. His leadership is interesting to study, because it is not shifted by the development of the times. He is a leader with integrity and while leading he always adheres to several 'traditional mandates', for example living righteously, full of wisdom and reason, being able to manage society, and having special attention to the lives of indigenous people. Ondofolo acknowledges that the Creator or God is the highest leader over Ondofolo, so that in his leadership Ondofolo adheres to God Allah (An. F, Ondofolo Yobeh Village, Interviewed August 2023).

The values of Ondofolo's leadership are the values of Christian leadership. Leadership is very important in any business, especially in ministry because you have to be dedicated, committed, visionary and have the motivation to make things happen (Muzira & Muzira 2020). There is no leader who can lead without serving; a leader must be humble and ready to carry that attitude through service to others (Quacoe-Takrama 2021). The basic principle of servant leadership is to focus on others before leaders consider their own problems (Chan, Cora & So 2017). In its implementation, these values can be carried out if a leader bases his leadership on the Lord God as the highest leader (Eph 1:15-23).

Ondofolo's leadership can be used as an alternative leadership model based on local wisdom that can be used both in society, government and even in the church, because it contains leadership values and relies heavily on God while leading. However, studies on it are still very limited, especially regarding Ondofolo's leadership from a Christian perspective, which is difficult to find. Based on this, it is necessary to study the Ondofolo leadership in the Papuan community, especially the Sentani tribe from a Christian perspective.

## Method

This study used an exploratory qualitative approach that examines Ondofolo's leadership from the perspective of Christian faith. The determination of the research location was carried out purposively on the indigenous people of the Sentani tribe who live in the Central Sentani sub-district, also the term Ondofolo only applies to the indigenous people of the Sentani tribe. Data collection was carried out by means of observation, interviews and literature review.

Researchers conducted participatory observations to find out about Ondofolo's leadership, conducted interviews with traditional leaders (Table 1), and reviewed literature related to Ondofolo's leadership and leadership in a Christian perspective. The data were analysed by means of triangulation as a validation of the information obtained from various sources and the research results were displayed descriptively.

## Definition

A village is a community unit consisting of local indigenous people: Papuans outside the local indigenous community and other residents who are not Papuans, who are given the authority to regulate and manage the interests of the local community in the national government system (Peraturan Daerah Kabupaten Jayapura Nomor 8 Tahun 2014).

The village government is the organiser of government affairs by the village government and the Village Consultative Body in regulating and managing the interests of the local community based on local origins and customs that are recognised and respected in the Government System of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia (Peraturan Daerah Kabupaten Jayapura Nomor 8 Tahun 2014).

**TABLE 1:** Respondents by traditional village.

Respondents	Position	Traditional Village	Indigenous Territory	Subdistrict	Interviewed
An.F	Ondofolo	Yomokkrouw or Yobeh	Sentani or Bhuyakha	Sentani Tengah	August 2023
BF	Ondoafi	Yomokkrouw or Yobeh	Sentani or Bhuyakha	Sentani Tengah	July-August 2022
Al.F	Ondoafi	Yomokkrouw or Yobeh	Sentani or Bhuyakha	Sentani Tengah	July-August 2022
RI	Ketua Peradilan Adat	Hobong	Sentani or Bhuyakha	Sentani Tengah	July-August 2022
YPI	Ondofolo	Hobong	Sentani or Bhuyakha	Sentani Tengah	July-August 2022

Source: Pemerintah Daerah Kabupaten Jayapura, 2014a, *Keputusan Bupati Jayapura Nomor 319 Tahun 2014 tentang Pengakuan dan Perlindungan Masyarakat Hukum Adat di Kabupaten Jayapura*; Pemerintah Daerah Kabupaten Jayapura, 2014b, *Keputusan Bupati Jayapura Nomor 320 Tahun 2014 tentang Pembentukan 36 Kampung Adat di Kabupaten Jayapura*

Traditional village or YO in the Sentani language is a unit of customary law community that has a unity of traditions and social manners from generation to generation and has a certain territory and has the right to take care of its own household based on the customs that are adhered to (Peraturan Daerah Kabupaten Jayapura Nomor 8 Tahun 2014). Traditional village is a village that consists of local indigenous people and enforces customary regulations in people's lives (Peraturan Daerah Kabupaten Jayapura Nomor 8 Tahun 2014).

Traditional Village Government is a government led by a Traditional Village Head who is appointed based on deliberations based on the Keondiafian leadership system in indigenous peoples and is assisted by traditional functionaries (Peraturan Daerah Kabupaten Jayapura Nomor 8 Tahun 2014).

The rights of indigenous peoples that are protected include: protection of customary government institutions; protection of assets and/or customary objects; protection of 'hak ulayat', such as land, water, air, forests and natural resources contained therein (Keputusan Bupati Jayapura Nomor 319 Tahun 2014).

## Result

### Ondofolo as the traditional leader of Sentani village

Papua is one of the regions in Indonesia that has a lot of local wisdom, such as the customary leadership structure, which has been preserved to this day and has been passed down from generation to generation, while the people really appreciate every existing traditional leader. The Ondofolo customary leadership recognises that the highest leadership is the Creator or God. A leader is described as one who knows the way, who shows the way and who also follows the way. A leader is someone who knows his job, and who can teach others how to do the job, and must show himself before others by doing his own part in the group (Ishola & Wojuola 2019). There are several types of traditional leadership in Papua, namely royal leadership, authoritative male leadership (Big Man), Ondofolo leadership and mixed leadership. One type of traditional leadership in Papua, especially Sentani village, is Ondofolo and/or Ondoafi leadership. Ondofolo itself is a designation or nickname for an indigenous traditional leader in the village of Sentani. The current existence of Ondofolo remains relevant, because the customary leadership of Ondofolo does not conflict with religion or the formal government in Sentani village. In addition, Ondofolo's traditional leadership is known as the basis for inheritance of birthright and must be male:

'Ondofolo is the protector or head of customary law who leads and protects indigenous and tribal peoples and must be a man. He himself is an inheritance system from his ancestors or their ancestors who are Ondofolo. It is structural in nature, the structural one comes from the lineage of customary law, if the descendant was previously Ondofolo then the next descendant is the heir or successor who follows the birthright. If the family

doesn't have the eldest male child, the one who replaces Ondofolo is Ondofolo's younger brother. However, with shifts and changes, certain people are judged by customary law to be able to lead the community, they are proficient in customary affairs and finally appointed and appointed as Ondoafi. If that is not structural, it is functional or nomination and appointment, which is appointed with the approval of the chiefs of tribes and indigenous peoples to become Ondoafi. On the other hand, Ondofolo has the right to get the best results from hunting or fishing from laborers and crops from plantations. For example, in the distribution of hunted meat, the pork from the head down to the stomach is given to Ondoafi and the top part is given to Ondofolo.' (Ondofolo Kampung, Yobeh, An.F)

'Ondoafi are functional in nature or appointment based on the agreement of tribal chiefs and indigenous peoples. This appointment is closely related to several factors, including age, personality (fair, honest, and generous), mastery of customs, mental and physical maturity, and skill in leadership. Ondoafi is different from Ondofolo in terms of land ownership, Ondofolo owns land from their ancestors but for Ondoafi the land is only given to ensure the welfare of the indigenous people, such as growing food so that the indigenous people are not displaced.' (Ondoafi Kampung, Yobeh, BF)

'Ondoafi and Ondofolo are different, because Ondofolo is intact based on lineage while Ondoafi is nominated/appointed based on deliberations with Khoselo, Akhona and indigenous peoples. They have the same task of protecting, nurturing and maintaining the welfare of traditional villages.' (Ketua Peradilan Adat Kampung, Hobong, RI)

Like a leader in general, Ondofolo as the traditional leader of Sentani village has clear duties and functions as well as his traditional leadership structure. The combination of the five components makes up a strong working definition of leadership: firstly there must be one or more leaders, secondly leadership must have followers, thirdly it must be action oriented legitimately, fourthly action, and fifthly it must have goals and objectives. In addition, leadership requires a deep understanding of the role of people in the success of an organisation's mission and vision (Gandolfi & Stone 2016, 2018):

'In the adat village of Sentani, besides Ondofolo which is referred to as the leader of the customary law community, there are also several other terms such as Khoselo which is a nickname for every tribal chief in the adat village of Sentani, Akhona which is a nickname for every head of a keret, and Akha Peakhe which is a designation for the indigenous people of Sentani village. An Ondofolo oversees five tribal chiefs [*Khoselo*], each tribal chief [*Khoselo*] oversees five family heads [*Akhona*]. The change of tribal chief [*Khoselo*] is the same as that of Ondofolo, which is hereditary and must be the eldest son.' (Ondofolo Kampung, Hobong, YPI)

'The role of an Ondofolo and/or Ondoafi and Khoselo is to protect all customary law communities in that village. The prayer system has been passed down from generation to generation. Ondoafi do not own land, those who own land are only Ondofolo because the land is inherited from their ancestors. Seyiap Khoselo [*tribal head*] received land grants from Ondofolo for the welfare of the indigenous people of his tribe. However, a Khoselo also has his own land which was obtained from their ancestors. Unlike Ondoafi, Ondoafi will own the land when he

buys the land or the descendants of Ondoafi marry the descendants of Ondofolo who own the land, so that the land will be inherited by him.' (Ondofolo Kampung, Yobeh, An.F)

In other words, Ondofolo and/or Ondoafi has a very important role in Sentani village because it is the top of the customary leadership of Sentani village. The efficiency and effectiveness of any leadership is largely determined by how harmonious the leaders are in order to effectively utilise all shared resources and capabilities, to achieve the set goals and objectives (Ishola & Wojuola 2019; McDermott, Kidney & Flood 2011). Leadership effectiveness in the eyes of followers is closely related to leaders who are driven, able to inspire, and prioritise needs, which in turn generates a sense of security and calm for followers. This points directly to the relationship between leaders and followers (Gandolfi & Stone 2018; Winston & Patterson 2006).

### The role of Ondofolo in the life of indigenous and tribal peoples

Although leaders are not the only factor influencing the success and happiness of followers, they are generally a significant and sometimes the most important factor (Hagos 2021; Van Wart 2013). A leader is someone who significantly influences the thoughts, feelings, and behaviour of followers and other individuals (Ben-Hur & Jonsen 2012). The pattern of Ondofolo's leadership as a general leader adheres to several 'traditional mandates', for example, to live righteously, to be full of wisdom and reason, to be able to understand the economy and to be able to manage the people, and to pay special attention every day. Individual values are their underlying beliefs about the desired behaviour or end state. Values drive 'attitudes, emotions, and behaviours, and usually persist over time and situations'; they play an important role in environmental behaviour (Graves & Sarkis 2018; Ruppert, Keizer & Steg 2017; Van Den Broek, Bolderdijk & Steg 2017). Spiritual values of integrity, honesty, and humility, and spiritual practices of treating others with respect and fairness, expressing care and concern, listening responsively, respecting others, and taking time for personal reflection have all been associated with measurable positive effects on organisations and individuals (Freeman 2011; Lynch & Friedman 2013).

Believing in and fearing God Almighty is a customary mandate to live a righteous, honest, just life, full of wisdom and reason. Even though the Ondofolo leadership is the highest leadership in the Sentani customary law community compared with formal leadership, they acknowledge and believe that above their leadership is the creator or God Allah:

'Ondofolo and Ondoafi are the highest customary law community leaders in Sentani Village. We were formed and created by the creator. So that Ondofolo must have an attitude like the creator [*God*] who loves one another, protects, upholds truth and justice and has a good personality. So that we believe above us there is no one else who can manage us besides God.' (Ondoafi Kampung, Yobeh, Al.F)

'In that tradition we embrace the disabled, the blind, the poor, the widow or the widower, whatever it is we embrace, because our customary government system is like that. We Ondoafi are friendly to the community, our society is currently blending in, so in my area the residents don't reject anyone whether from a different ethnicity or religion. So whoever comes to our territory is our people. We are also always honest and firm in leading the community so that good relations are always established.' (Ondoafi Kampung, Yobeh, BF)

There are many problems that cannot be resolved by the formal government regarding issues of community empowerment and development, so the formal leaders involve Ondoafi and/or Ondofolo in dealing with these problems. Its existence can be seen from every decision-making and conflict resolution as well as participation, because he is responsible and has the capacity to decide and issue policies in the implementation of development in their territory:

'Ondofolo has great responsibility for the inheritance rights of all village assets in the form of land and customary objects whose inheritance rights must be held by ondofolo and also the customary law community. He is also responsible for the natural resources in his village and his jurisdiction. We Ondofolo are obliged to apply customary life to our members, through politeness in association and traditional ceremonies in the village. In addition, Ondofolo acts as a judge in resolving disputes that arise between people. The capacity to take or determine decisions in every deliberation.' (Ondoafi Kampung, Yobeh, Al.F)

The role of Ondofolo in real life was experienced by researchers, namely in terms of buying and selling land for the construction of campus buildings at Sekolah Tinggi Agama Kristen Protestan Negeri (STAKPN) Sentani. The campus has paid in full for the land from the seller who owns the land, namely the tribal chief (*Khoselo*). However, the land is customary family land so that each member of the family wants to get the same payment from the campus, which causes the campus to be confused in handling this problem. Even though the campus has made a land certificate in the name of STAKPN Sentani through the formal government, this really has no effect on the customary law community because all they know is that their leader is only Ondofolo and/or Ondoafi. From the problems that existed, the campus decided to contact Ondofolo in the area and ask for help regarding this land issue because the land is included in customary 'Ulayat Rights' so that the resolution must involve the customary government. Therefore, Ondofolo invited campus parties (buyers), namely researchers and several campus representatives, land sellers and their families (brothers and sisters), as well as tribal heads (*Khoselo*) and formal government (district heads and land office representatives), to come to the traditional house namely Obee to, conduct meetings to resolve the issue of legal land release in customary and formal governance. Because according to the customary law of the Sentani people, the land that is legally sold and which cannot be contested by the seller is the land

that was sold to the knowledge of Ondofolo, in which Ondofolo's signature was listed in the release letter and it was done at Obee's house. Solving problems at Obee's house is absolute and cannot be interfered with by anyone. Even though the land belongs to the tribal chief (*Khoselo*) himself and has been sold without Ondofolo's knowledge, it is considered illegal, although it has been brought to trial.

Ondofolo also played a role in the demonstration case carried out by STAKPN Sentani students. At that time the demonstration activities could no longer be secured by the formal government and lecturers. So the campus contacted Ondofolo to help stop the demonstration. When Ondofolo arrived at the demonstration site, all the students who were carrying out the demonstration stopped and listened to what he had to say. Because they believe that the customary government led by Ondofolo is the highest customary law community leader in Sentani who has greater influence over them. In addition, Ondofolo also plays an important role in arranging dowry for the bride and groom, giving directions for approval of applications and determining the wedding date. In holding the thanksgiving and death parties, Ondofolo is assisted by the tribal chief (*Khoselo*) as his messenger to arrange the series of events, which will be held at Obee's house.

### Ondofolo from a Christian perspective

Leadership is very important in any endeavour, especially in the church because today's church needs dedicated, committed, visionary and motivated leaders who will make things happen. There are three ways in which leaders are appointed in the Bible, such as self-appointed leaders, human appointed leaders and God appointed leaders (Ishola & Wojuola 2019). Ondofolo's leadership is relevant to Christian leadership. Ondofolo believe that they were created and chosen by the creator (God Allah), who is the highest leader in society. This does not make Ondofolo forget the creator (God) who is the highest leader in a Christian perspective:

'Ondofolo is not under anyone's orders anymore, which means the ruler above us Ondofolo is only the creator. We were formed by the creator, so we are directly related to the creator [*God Allah*].' (Ondofolo Kampung, Yobeh, An.F)

Christian leadership implies service as implied in the statement of Jesus who said whoever becomes great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever wants to be first among you must be your slave (Mt 20:26-27). No leader can lead without serving; a leader must be humble and ready to carry that attitude through service to others. It is also necessary for a leader to make his ministry to people a personal matter (Quacoe-Takrama 2021). The term servant leadership comes from two words – servant and leader. These words seem to have opposite meanings, but servant leadership implies true leadership (Lee 2021). Ondofolo can be said to be a servant leader, because Ondofolo's leadership values are relevant to religion, besides that Ondofolo serves

the people in his territory. An Ondofolo must be able to maintain good relations between residents and with himself.

Servant leadership, introduced into the organisational context by Greenleaf, is founded on the idea that a leader is a servant and leadership is a relationship not a position. The idea of servant leadership is based on the teachings of Christ (Lk 22:24–30) (Hagos 2021). Servant leadership is in line with the concept of leadership, which is based on the ideas of integration and authority. Authority must come from one's influence on subordinates, not from his position. He called these scenarios 'power with' and 'power over', respectively. It is a leadership approach that focuses on people, principles and the big picture. Therefore, leaders who serve rather than impose, they empower rather than control. They see their job as a calling not a career (Muzira & Muzira 2020). A servant leader is not just a servant waiting for instructions, but a leader who shows initiative, takes risks, assumes ownership, provides structure and takes responsibility for failures (Sousa & Van Dierendonck 2017). But servant leadership is contrary to the norms of other types of leadership, where a leader has a sense of divinity and influences his followers in a positive direction and servants follow him (Du Plessis & Nkambule 2020).

Servant leadership does have a positive effect on followers. The strongest effect found was on health; organisations led by servant leaders create an environment in which followers feel and indeed are healthier (Lynch & Friedman 2013). Leadership includes seven dimensions, including love, humility, altruism, vision, trust, empowerment and service (Muzira & Muzira 2020). There are 10 characteristics of servant leaders, namely listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualisation, foresight, stewardship, commitment to growing people and building community (Du Plessis & Nkambule 2020; Lynch & Friedman 2013). Servant leadership consists of 20 attributes, which are divided into 9 functional attributes and 11 companion attributes (Lynch & Friedman 2013; Russell & Gregory Stone 2002). Functional attributes are 'operative qualities, characteristics, and traits possessed by leaders and observed through the behaviour of certain leaders at work'. The nine functional attributes are vision, honesty, integrity, trust, service, exemplary, pioneering, respect for others, and empowerment (Muzira & Muzira 2020).

## Discussion

Christian leadership implies service as implied in the statement of Jesus who said whoever becomes great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever wants to be first among you must be your slave (Mt 20:26–27). Leadership provides vision and direction to the group and enables its members to work together to achieve its goals. The characteristics of servant leadership include obedience to God, trust in God, wisdom, courage, authority, integrity, compassion, empathy, patience, facing criticism, selflessness, perseverance, managerial qualities and an eye for preaching because of the gospel (Du Plessis & Nkambule 2020). Musa has the attitude and traits of servant leadership. In the Old Testament, Moses is recognised as the greatest model of

leader, He was the first leader to appear by the spirit of God. Moses' unique identity and mission as a servant of God brought the Israelites to the land of Canaan, fulfilling God's promise to the ancestors of the Israelites, as stated in the book of Deuteronomy 30:5 and 20. Likewise, the traditional leader of Sentani village, Ondofolo, was chosen by God to serve, protect and care for his people. Ondofolo is a servant leader, because of his leadership values, traits and characteristics such as, faith, honesty, humility, fairness and wisdom and can be relied upon are characteristics of servant leadership.

## Conclusion

Ondofolo is a designation for someone who leads the Sentani indigenous people and is positioned as the head of the traditional village government, while the customary government system is called the keondoafian system. He is structural because it is passed down from generation to generation in one generation, but Ondoafi is functional because it is appointed by several tribal chiefs (*Khoselo*) with the consideration that the person has integrity. They are leaders who are honest, live righteously, are full of wisdom and reason and are wise, and are able to manage society. Ondofolo believes that if they make a mistake, they will be cursed or even die, so they always act with caution. While solving problems, Ondofolo prioritises togetherness, which must be attended by everyone involved, and its implementation at the Obee traditional house. This is done so that the resulting decision is absolute or cannot be changed. In carrying out his leadership always hold on to God. Ondofolo's leadership can be used as an alternative leadership model based on local wisdom that can be used both in society, government and even in the church, because it contains leadership values and relies heavily on God while leading.

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## Authors' contributions

F.W. contributed to the preparation of research frameworks, methods, interviews with respondents, biblical literature and article writing. D.R.P. was involved in the search for literature review and article writing.

## Ethical considerations

This article followed all ethical standards for research without direct contact with human or animal subjects.

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## Data availability

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

## Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated agency of the authors and the publisher.

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