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# **Cultural Practices Affecting Women's Rights in Ghana**

**A Study Conducted by the Research Department of the  
National Commission for Civic Education (NCCE)**

**February, 2004**

# CONTENTS

List of Tables	6
List of Figures	7
Acknowledement	8
Executive Summary	9
<b>CHAPTER 1 - Background</b>	<b>14</b>
1.0 Introduction	14
1.1 Objective of Study	15
1.2 Sample Design and Selection	15
1.3 Mode of Data Collection	16
1.4 Survey Instrument	16
1.4.1 Questionnaire	16
1.4.2 Focus Group Discussion	16
1.5 Training for Fieldwork	17
1.6 Questionnaire Administration	17
1.7 Data Analysis	18
1.8 Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents...	18
1.8.1 Age by Sex of Respondents	18
1.8.2 Marital Status	18
1.8.3 Educational Level	19
1.8.4 Religious Background	19
1.8.5 Occupation	19
1.8.6 Ethnic Background	20
<b>CHAPTER 2 - Cultural Practices Affecting Women in Ghana. ...</b>	<b>21</b>
2.0 Introduction	21
2.1 Cultural Practices in Ghana	21
2.2 Birth	23
2.2.1 Outdooring/Naming Ceremonies	23
2.2.2 Pregnancy Rituals	25
2.2.3 Return to Parents	26
2.3 Adulthood	26
2.3.1 Puberty Rites	27
2.3.2 Kyiribra	29
2.3.3 Marriage	30
2.3.4 Family Marriages	32
2.3.5 Betrothal	32
2.3.6 Levirate Systems	33
2.3.7 Elopement	34
2.3.8 Fostering	35
2.4 Death	36
2.4.1 Funeral Rites	36
2.4.2 Widowhood Rite	38

<b>CHAPTER 3 - Marriage Among The Konkombas</b>	...	...	...	...	...	...	40
3.0 Introduction	...	...	...	...	...	...	40
3.1 Forms of Marriage	...	...	...	...	...	...	40
3.2 Betrothal	...	...	...	...	...	...	41
3.2.1 Nature and Form	...	...	...	...	...	...	41
3.2.2 Origin	...	...	...	...	...	...	41
3.2.3 The Bridewealth	...	...	...	...	...	...	42
3.3 Exchange (Lipikpein)	...	...	...	...	...	...	43
3.3.1 Nature and Form	...	...	...	...	...	...	43
3.3.2 The Bridewealth	...	...	...	...	...	...	44
3.4 Elopement	...	...	...	...	...	...	44
3.4.1 Nature and Form	...	...	...	...	...	...	44
3.4.2 The Bridewealth	...	...	...	...	...	...	44
3.5 Widow Inheritance	...	...	...	...	...	...	44
3.6 The Way Forward	...	...	...	...	...	...	45
<b>CHAPTER 4 - Lapomi Among The Krobo</b>	...	...	...	...	...	...	<b>47</b>
4.0 Introduction	...	...	...	...	...	...	47
4.1 Marriage Rites	...	...	...	...	...	...	48
4.2 Birth of Children	...	...	...	...	...	...	48
4.3 Origin of the Practice	...	...	...	...	...	...	48
4.4 Removing the La-lapomi	...	...	...	...	...	...	49
4.5 Effects of Being Yobi	...	...	...	...	...	...	49
4.6 The Way Forward	...	...	...	...	...	...	50
<b>CHAPTER 5 - Fostering of the Girl-Child Among The Dagomba ...</b>	...	...	...	...	...	...	<b>52</b>
5.0 Introduction	...	...	...	...	...	...	52
5.1 The Nature of Fostering a Girl-Child	...	...	...	...	...	...	52
5.2 The Process of Fostering	...	...	...	...	...	...	52
5.2.1 Marriage	...	...	...	...	...	...	52
5.2.2 Pregnancy	...	...	...	...	...	...	53
5.2.3 Birth and Naming	...	...	...	...	...	...	53
5.3 How Did Fostering Evolve	...	...	...	...	...	...	54
5.4 Importance of Fostering	...	...	...	...	...	...	54
5.5 People Involved in the Practice	...	...	...	...	...	...	55
5.6 Overall Perceptions About the Practice	...	...	...	...	...	...	55
5.7 The Way Forward	...	...	...	...	...	...	56
<b>CHAPTER 6 - Initiation Into Traditional Priesthood Among The Ga of Tema and Kpone</b>	...	...	...	...	...	...	<b>58</b>
6.0 Introduction	...	...	...	...	...	...	58
6.1 Gods of the Ga	...	...	...	...	...	...	59
6.2 The Gods of Tema Manhean and Kpone	...	...	...	...	...	...	59
6.3 The Akon God	...	...	...	...	...	...	60
6.4 Officials of the Gods	...	...	...	...	...	...	60
6.5 The Wulomo	...	...	...	...	...	...	60

6.5.1	The Selection Process	...	...	...	60
6.5.2	The Training Process	...	...	...	60
6.5.3	Role of the Wulomo	...	...	...	61
6.6	The Traditional Priestess	...	...	...	62
6.6.1	The Selection Process	...	...	...	62
6.6.2	People Restricted and Excluded from Becoming Priestess	...	...	...	62
6.6.3	Training of Priestess	...	...	...	63
6.6.4	What Goes Into the Training	...	...	...	64
6.6.5	Prohibitions During Training	...	...	...	64
6.6.6	How the Shrine Treats Those Who are Not Able to Complete the Training	...	...	...	65
6.6.7	When Training is Deemed to be Completed	...	...	...	65
6.6.8	Effects	...	...	...	67
6.7	Role of Traditional Priestess	...	...	...	67
6.8	Tradition and Change	...	...	...	68
<b>CHAPTER 7 - Okuoku Cult Among The Adele and Challa</b>					<b>70</b>
7.0	Introduction	...	...	...	70
7.1	History of the Cult	...	...	...	70
7.2	Selection Into the Cult	...	...	...	71
7.3	Training	...	...	...	71
7.3.1	Prohibitions During Training	...	...	...	71
7.3.2	Inability to Complete Training	...	...	...	72
7.4	Effects	...	...	...	72
7.5	Tradition and Change	...	...	...	72
<b>CHAPTER 8 - Widowhood Rites Among The Asante ...</b>					<b>74</b>
8.1	Introduction	...	...	...	74
8.2	History	...	...	...	74
8.3	Nature of the Rites	...	...	...	74
8.3.1	Observers of the Rites	...	...	...	75
8.3.2	Exemptions from the Rites	...	...	...	75
8.3.3	Rites Performed Before Burial of Corpse	...	...	...	75
8.3.4	Rites Performed on Burial Day	...	...	...	77
8.3.5	Rites Performed After Burial	...	...	...	77
8.4	Motives	...	...	...	78
8.5	Opting Out of the Rites	...	...	...	78
8.6	Effects	...	...	...	79
8.7	Intervening Factors and Suggestions For Modification	...	...	...	79
<b>CHAPTER 9 - Laws Protecting Women and Perceptions About Women ...</b>					<b>82</b>
9.0	Introduction	...	...	...	82
9.1	Constitutional Rights and Cultural Practices	...	...	...	82
9.2	Laws Promoting Women's Rights and Their Impact	...	...	...	85
9.3	Sharing of Deceased's Property	...	...	...	87
9.4	Women's Political Empowerment	...	...	...	89
9.5	Girl-Child Education	...	...	...	93

<b>CHAPTER 10 - Institutions Active in Women's Rights Issues ...</b>	...	...	...	<b>96</b>
10.0 Introduction	...	...	...	96
10.1 Constitutional and State Bodies	...	...	...	96
10.1.1 National Commission for Civic Education	...	...	...	96
10.1.2 Commission for Human Rights and Administrative Justice	...	...	...	96
10.1.3 Women and Juvenile Unit of the Ghana Police Service (WAJU)	...	...	...	97
10.1.4 Ghana National Commission on Children (GNCC)	...	...	...	97
10.1.5 Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs (MOWAC)	...	...	...	98
10.2 Level of knowledge of Institutions	...	...	...	98
10.3 Knowledge of Areas of Work of the Institution	...	...	...	99
10.4 Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs)	...	...	...	100
10.4.1 World Vision International	...	...	...	100
10.4.2 Plan International	...	...	...	100
10.4.3 Action Aid	...	...	...	101
10.5 NGOs Operating in Study Area	...	...	...	101
10.6 What NGOs are Doing	...	...	...	102
10.7 Religious Bodies Operating in Study Area	...	...	...	102
10.8 Activities of Religious Bodies	...	...	...	103
<b>Chapter 11 - Field Experiences</b>	...	...	...	<b>104</b>
11.0 Introduction	...	...	...	104
11.1 Response to Survey	...	...	...	104
11.2 Socio-Economic Issues	...	...	...	104
11.2.1 Infrastructural Development/Provision of Services	...	...	...	104
11.2.2 Review of PNDCL 111	...	...	...	105
11.2.3 Widows	...	...	...	105
11.2.4 Insecurity in Dagbon	...	...	...	105
11.2.5 Checking Teenage Pregnancy	...	...	...	105
11.2.6 High Fuel Prices	...	...	...	105
11.2.7 High Cost of Living	...	...	...	105
11.2.8 Education	...	...	...	106
11.2.9 Health and Sanitation	...	...	...	106
11.2.10 Bushfires	...	...	...	106
11.2.11 Award of Contracts/Corruption	...	...	...	106
11.3 Political Issues	...	...	...	106
11.3.1 Politicization of Issues	...	...	...	106
11.3.2 Performance of District Chief Executives	...	...	...	107
11.3.3 Common Fund	...	...	...	107
11.4 Suggestions/Recommendations	...	...	...	107
<b>Chapter 11 - Conclusion and Recommendations</b>	...	...	...	<b>108</b>

## List of Tables

Table 1.1	Response to Questionnaire by Respondents ... ..	17
Table 1.2	Distribution of Questionnaire Among Respondents ... ..	18
Table 1.3	Age by Sex of Respondents ... ..	18
Table 1.4	Marital Status of Respondents ... ..	19
Table 1.5	Religious Background of Respondents ... ..	19
Table 1.6	Occupational Background of Respondents ... ..	20
Table 1.7	Ethnic Group of Respondents ... ..	20
Table 2.1	Cultural Practices Mentioned by Respondents ... ..	22
Table 2.2	Reasons for Identifying Family Marriage as Harmful or Good ... ..	32
Table 3.1	Demographic Data of Respondents ... ..	32
Table 4.1	Demographic Data of Respondents ... ..	46
Table 5.1	Demographic Data of Respondents ... ..	51
Table 6.1	Demographic Data of Respondents ... ..	57
Table 7.1	Demographic Data of Respondents ... ..	69
Table 8.1	Demographic Data of Respondents ... ..	73
Table 9.1	Demographic Data of Respondents ... ..	81
Table 9.1	Cultural Practices Mentioned by Respondents as Promoting or Inhibiting Constitutional Rights of Women ... ..	83
Table 9.2	Properties Women are Allowed to Own in the Community as Stated by Respondents ... ..	84
Table 9.3	Properties Women are Allowed to Own by Region ... ..	84
Table 9.4	Knowledge on Laws Passed to Protect Women by Level of Educ. ... ..	86
Table 9.5	Laws Mentioned as Protecting Women Against Harmful Cultural Practices ...	87
Table 9.6	Impact of Laws Passed to Protect Women ... ..	87
Table 9.7	Respondents Views on How Property of a Dead Spouse is Shared ... ..	88
Table 9.8	Sex and Respondents Preference for Assembly Member and MP ... ..	91
Table 9.9	Reasons for Preferring a Male MP ... ..	91
Table 9.10	Reasons for Preferring a Female MP ... ..	91
Table 9.11	Respondents Reasons for Preferring a Male Assembly Member ... ..	92
Table 9.12	Respondents Reasons for Preferring a Female Assembly Member ... ..	93
Table 9.13	Respondents Reasons for Furthering Boy Child Education ... ..	94
Table 9.14	Respondents Reasons for Furthering Girl Child Education ... ..	95
Table 9.15	Respondents Views on Furtherance of Boy or Girl Child Education when Financially Constrained by Region ... ..	95
Table 10.1	Number of Institutions Selected by Respondents ... ..	98
Table 10.2	Area of Work by Governmental Institutions ... ..	99
Table 10.3	Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) ... ..	101
Table 10.4	What NGOs Have Done ... ..	102
Table 10.5	Religious Bodies Mentioned ... ..	103
Table 10.6	Activities Religious Bodies Are Engaged In... ..	103

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## List of Figures

Figure		Page
2.1	Cultural Practices Mentioned by Respondents	23
2.2	Reasons for Identifying Puberty Rites as Harmful or Good	28
2.3	Reasons for Identifying Fostering as Harmful or Good	36
2.4	Reasons for Identifying Widowhood Rites as either HarmfulOr Good	39
9.1	Preference for MP	90
9.2	Preference for Assembly Member	90
10.1	Knowledge of Areas of Work of Institutions	99
115		

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**Laary Bimi**  
**Chairman, NCCE**  
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## Executive Summary

The National Commission for Civic Education (NCCE) from August – October 2003, with sponsorship from the National Governance Programme (NGP) embarked on a research project to identify and document cultural practices in the country and how they affect the constitutional rights of women. The study which was envisaged as a pilot one, also looked at the nature and development of specified cultural practices and pointed out the way to eradicate their harmful effects on women.

The pilot survey used a two pronged approach, namely a questionnaire which was administered in seven sample districts, and focus group discussions on specific cultural practices in the selected districts. As a research policy it was decided to focus on cultural practices that had been little researched into and hence had little documentation on them; hence such well researched practices as Trokosi, Female Genital Mutilation, Isolation of Witches into witch camps were not among the research practices.

The SPSS package was used. The focus group discussions were transcribed and analysed thematically.

### **Key findings from the pilot survey are:**

#### **Cultural Practices Affecting Women**

Several cultural practices are listed as affecting women either positively or negatively. Among these are widowhood rites (mentioned by 74.8 per cent of 560 respondents; and took 25.3 per cent of 1,594 cultural rites mentioned). Next in significance is puberty rites (17 per cent), marriage (11.7 per cent), okuoku (5.4 per cent), fostering (4.8 per cent) exchange of sisters (4.8 per cent) and any other (3.6 per cent).

#### **Harmful Practices**

Several of the cultural practices relating to women were seen as negatively affecting women. Top on the list of the rites considered harmful are widowhood rites (64.5 per cent), exchange of sisters (89.9 per cent), Betrothal (57.1 per cent). Elopment (79.1 per cent), Kyiribra (61.5 per cent). Widowhood rites is generally singled out for criticism because of its restrictions to widows, the deprivation suffered by widows, the financial loss occasioned by observance of the rite, and the mental and psychological effect on widows.

#### **Good Practices**

Marriage on the whole was seen as a cultural practice that positively affects women. It was generally seen as honouring women (37.1 per cent), providing women with companionship (0.9 per cent), and providing them capital for trading and other activities (70.4 per cent). Outdoorings/naming ceremonies were also considered on the whole as good. Its good aspect accounted for 92.7 per cent as against 7.3 per cent for harmful.

In spite of criticism of funeral rites as being too costly it was also generally acknowledged as good. In the same vein, though there were complaints about aspects of puberty rites, especially the exposure of breasts and parading girls in partial nudity, it was generally seen as a good practice. Among the principal reasons for people cherishing the practice is that it promotes sexual abstinence (16.3 per cent), prevents

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unwanted pregnancy (14.7 per cent), honours women (16.1 per cent), provides opportunity for suitors to marry (13.0 per cent) and gives opportunity for young ladies to get donation which sometimes can be capital for trading and others (4.4 per cent).

### **Betrothal/ Infant Marriage – Violates Rights of Women**

The practice of betrothal was common among various ethnic groups. In contemporary times that form of marriage has ceased in many places. From the survey, the Konkomba still observe the practice. The system is said to build a good and cordial relationship between two families as a man who betrothes a girl in any family is bound to be loyal and respectful to that family. The practice also helps to perpetually cement relationships between families. It also provides farm labour for in-laws thus improving their economic well being.

In spite of benefits, the practice is seen as having several drawbacks as it violates the right of a girl to free choice of a life partner. Several stories of suicides by betrothed girls are told, as some girls choose to die rather than marry people most of who are often not the ages of the partners.

Many betrothed girls on coming of age are forced to stop schooling, thus negatively affecting their education. Section 14 (i) of The Children’s Act, Act 560 explicitly provides that “No person shall force a child (a) to be betrothed (b) to be the subject of a dowry transaction; or (c) to be married”; penalty for contravening this is a fine not exceeding ₵5 million or a term of imprisonment not exceeding one year or both. It is important for laws of the country to be observed in practice through enforcement rather than on paper only.

### **Modification of Lapomi System to Ensure Promotion of Best Interest of the Child**

The Krobo were seen to be one ethnic group that have stages towards full marriage – *Yabami, Nyasinam and Fia*. It is only after the performance of the third and final stage of rites that children born out of the relationship are deemed to be those of the man. A child born outside the *Fia* stage during outdoorings/ naming ceremony has the *La* tied around its wrist and also bears the family name of the mother. It is only after performance of Lapomi that the ‘Yobi’ becomes the ‘child’ of the father with all rights over him/her.

Yobi are subject to various forms of discrimination, including inability to inherit the father. The welfare of the child is thus undermined by the *Lapomi* practice and there was a call to deal with high brideswealth. There was a general call by respondents for the traditional council to facilitate the change of customs where high brideswealth makes it impossible for men to perform full marriage rites and hence some run away on impregnating girls. The NCCE was called upon to be a collaborator in helping to educate the public on modifications to customary practices as proposed by the chiefs.

### **Initiation into Traditional Priesthood Violating Rights of Women**

Initiation into traditional priesthood remains one of the areas shrouded in great mystery. Available information points to gross violation of human rights in the initiation process. Among others, deep incisions are made on the body of trainees. Priestesses, as highlights of the initiation and outdoorings ceremony, dance naked before the public, acts that can be said to be done without respect for human dignity.

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Trainee priestesses are also prohibited from wearing garment and walk barefooted during the period and keep their hair in dreadlocks. They also as highlights of the initiation and outdoor sessions dance naked before the public. All these are done in spite of Act 26 (2) of the Constitution which states “All customary practices which dehumanize or are injurious to the physical and mental well-being of a person are prohibited”. The Constitution in Article 13 (1) talks about the sacrosanct nature of the right to life, but again as part of the training session a trainee priestess is led into a thick forest in the night barefooted, and may be harmed by wild animals and the likelihood that she might not return at all.

### **Cults No More Appealing in Nkwanta**

The Okuoku Cult among the Adele, Challa and Ntrubo in the Nkwanta District in the Volta Region was years gone by a very popular cult among the people and it was prestigious to be a cult member. Indeed, at a point Okuoko was one sure way of getting married as members were always in high demand. The particular great attraction of the cult was its abhorrence of infidelity and adultery. Any cult member who violated this sacred code had to confess or die. Members of the cult are also said to be strengthened spiritually and hence could stand against other evil forces. But there are side effects of the practice: the scar which develops as a result of the V shaped incision made at the back of cult members become sources of embarrassment for cult members. Some victims also become emotionally troubled for life, especially those who do not become active within the cult.

### **Modernisation, Economic Hardships and Fostering**

In the past fostering, where a man/woman gives his child to his sibling to bring up into adulthood, was most cherished among Ghanaian ethnic groups, especially the Dagomba. The process of fostering among the Dagomba starts at the time a man wants to marry and continues through to the birth of a child produced by that man to the child going into marriage him/herself. Children who stay with relations are often brought up under strict conditions which invariably imbue them with the values and characteristic of respect, abundance and diligence. Fostering provides childless couples with happiness and keeps the marriage intact, for barrenness can cause serious problems in marriage and for the family as a whole. It therefore helps to keep strong relationships within the family or between families, and fostering helps to provide social security for the aged.

This much cherished practice is no longer appealing because many foster parents are not economically resourceful. The extended family system seems to be gradually giving way to the nuclear family. Where fostering is practiced, the children are often overworked and denied formal education thus losing the basic essence of the trust, the welfare and interest of the child. The denial of formal education to fostered children and their use as child labour violate Section 6 (3) of the Children’s Act, Act 560 which states “every parent has rights and responsibility whether imposed by law or otherwise toward his child, which include the duty to (a) protect the child from neglect, discrimination, violence, abuse, exposure to physical and moral hazards and oppression; (b) provide good guidance, care and maintenance for the child and assurance of the child’s survival and development”.

Section 8 of Act 560 also stipulates: “No person shall deprive a child of access to education, immunisation, adequate diet, clothing, shelter, medical attention or any other thing required for his development”.

Though economic hardships and others may have contributed to undermine the most cherished institution of fostering in the country, it is important that bodies like the NCCE educate foster parents on the Children’s Act to ensure that they do not undermine the welfare of children.

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## **Constitutional Rights of Women Being Inhibited by Some Cultural Practices**

The right to education is the top on the list of rights inhibited by cultural practices. A total of 28.9 per cent of respondents mentioned that cultural practices such as betrothal and fostering, parents relinquishing the upbringing of their children to others due to poverty, giving children out as househelps, all go a long way in contributing to the low enrolment rate among girls in schools and the equally high drop out rate and consequently the low literacy rate among women in the country. Other rights that are inhibited are: Right to practice any religion (22.9 per cent), Right to belong to a society of ones choice (16.4 per cent), Right to engage in Economic activity (10.8 per cent), Right to be voted for (8.6), Right to own Property (6.8 per cent), Right to vote (3.8 per cent) and Right to be protected from sexual abuse (2.1 per cent).

There are however some constitutional rights that are deemed to be promoted by cultural rites that are deemed to promote the welfare of women. Among these are protection from sexual abuse (26.8 per cent), right to own property (18.4 per cent), right to vote (13.0 per cent) and right to engage in economic activities. The cultural practices mentioned in relation to these rights include *Okuoko*, marriage, puberty rites and matrimonial inheritance.

### **Knowledge of Laws Protecting Women**

Out of the total respondents, 43.6 per cent said no, whilst 56.4 per cent said yes to knowing any laws or bye-laws passed to protect women against harmful cultural practices. More males (51 per cent) than females (39.6 per cent) know about the existence of laws.

### **Choice of Representatives to District Assemblies and Parliament**

The issue of women involvement in politics, especially with regard to elections to Parliament and district assemblies, featured in responses of respondents. The question asked was, “Who would you prefer to vote for as your MP, man or woman?”, and “Who would you prefer to vote for as an assembly member for your area? The responses indicate that 53.8 per cent prefer women, and 43.0 per cent prefer men for MP, whereas 52.7 per cent said women as 43.9 per cent said men for assemblyman. This is not completely surprising as the large segment of respondents were men. In terms of responses by the sexes, only 37.8 per cent of men said they would vote for women, while on the other hand, 34.6 per cent said they would vote for men. Sex thus seems to play a key role in preferences. Reasons given for preference of male as MP include: that men are courageous and bold (45.5 per cent), men are born to lead (28.5 per cent), men have time for their work (11.2 per cent). Among those who will prefer women as MP, their principal reasons were that: it is to help in women’s political empowerment (20.5 per cent), women are patient/sympathetic/careful (19.1 per cent) and women will show concern for women issues (15.8 per cent).

A careful observation of the reasons given point to the fact that whereas sex characteristics such as boldness and strength featured in the choice of men, for women, leadership qualities were major consideration.

### **Choice of Children to further Education**

The choice of who to educate, the boy-child or girl-child, in the midst of scarce resources is a major decision that sometimes confronts families. Though there is a general recognition of the importance of

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girl-child education, culture and tradition seems to play a role in decision-making. Responses indicate that 53.8 per cent would prefer to educate the boy-child, whereas 41.1 per cent would educate the girl-child, with 4.8 per cent being neutral. Reasons given for the choice of the boy-child include: that the girl will get pregnant during her education (35.5 per cent), boys will prosper and help family (22.4 per cent), girls will marry (12.1 per cent), boys will keep the family name moving (6.6 per cent), girls will help at home or trade (4.9 per cent), girl-child education is more costly (4.6 per cent). Those who opted for girl-child education gave among their reasons: that the girl child will care for the family (36.6 per cent), and to push forward the idea of girl-child education (29.1 per cent).

### **Knowledge Level on State Institutions Dealing With Issues Affecting Women**

Five major state institutions were identified by respondents as dealing with issues affecting women viz, National Commission for Civic Education (NCCE), Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ), Women and Juvenile Unit of the Ghana Police Service (WAJU), Ministry of Women and Children (MOWAC) and Ghana National Commission on Children (GNCC). The survey reveals that more than half of the respondents mentioned NCCE as dealing with women issues. Other institutions mentioned were: CHRAJ (34.3 per cent), WAJU (32.9 per cent), MOWAC (14.9 per cent), and GNCC (9.5 per cent). An overwhelming majority (91.0 per cent) of those who selected the NCCE talked of its civic education role. CHRAJ was generally seen as an institution playing several roles such as educating people on human rights, protecting people from being cheated, conflict resolution, protecting women and children from violence and for civic education. It is refreshing to note that though MOWAC is barely three years old about 14.9 per cent of respondents identified it as promoting the welfare of women and empowering them. Numerous NGOs were also identified by respondents as promoting welfare of women, among these are World Vision, CBOs and Plan International. Some of these organisations are into the provision of financial support for women's groups, public education and skill training for many women as a way of empowering them to address their concerns.

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# Chapter 1

## Background

### 1.0 Introduction

Since the United Nations declared the period 1975 to 1985 as the decade for women, several interventions have been initiated to create the enabling environment for the emancipation, empowerment and the promotion of the rights of women. In Ghana, legislative instruments and institutional mechanisms have been fashioned to promote the political, economic and social rights of women. Among these are the creation in 1976 of the Ghana National Council on Women and Development (NCWD) and the signing in 1980 by Ghana of the UN declaration on the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women. The NCWD, for example, was set up in response to a UN resolution of 1979 co-sponsored by Ghana, calling on member states to establish, if they had not already done so before the International Women's Year, an appropriate government machinery to accelerate the integration of women into development and elimination of discrimination against women on gender grounds. In response to the call of the UN, the National Redemption Council (NRC) by NRC 322 set up the NCWD and charged it, among others, to advise government generally on all matters relating to the full integration of women in national development at all levels, and to serve as the official national body for co-coordinating activities of women's organisation in the economic and social fields. The NCWD was also charged with raising the consciousness of Ghanaian women so that they could maintain their full potential intellectually, morally and physically thereby developing themselves.

In 1992, a further boost to promotion of women's rights was given by Chapter Five Article 27 (1), (2) and (3) of the 1992 Constitution which accords and guarantees equal rights to women without any impediment whatsoever. This provision is buttressed by Chapter Six of the 1992 Constitution that deals with the Directive Principles of State Policy. "Article 35 (4) and (5) of the Constitution specifies, that "the State shall cultivate among all Ghanaians respect for fundamental human rights and freedoms and the dignity of the human person" and 'the State shall actively promote the integration of the peoples of Ghana and prohibit discrimination and prejudice on the grounds of place of origin, circumstances of birth, ethnic origin, gender or religion, creed or other beliefs'. These constitutional provisions have been brought into force with various governmental policy directives and statutes that seek to protect the political, economic and social rights of women in Ghana. In 1994 Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) was abolished as being injurious to the mental and physical well-being of women. Harmful widowhood practices have also been criminalised. Section 17 of the Criminal Code Amendment Act 1998, Act 554, created the new offence of customary servitude which makes it a criminal offence to subject a person to customary servitude or forced labour. The object of this section was to criminalise the practice of *Trokosi* and confinement of alleged women witches in camps in Northern Ghana.

The creation of the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs and the appointment of a substantive Cabinet Minister to that effect underscore the government's commitment to the promotion of the interest of women, and the protection of their rights. Similarly, the appointment of a Minister of State to oversee the promotion of the education of the girl-child is a telling proof of efforts to improve on the lot of women.

Civil society organisations as well as local and foreign NGOs are all working assiduously to ensure that women take their proper place in the society, the economy and in politics.

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It is needless to overstress the point that the situation, status and position of women in Ghanaian society today is far better than what it was three decades ago. There is, indeed, a considerable improvement in the general condition of women. These efforts notwithstanding, there exist quite a number of customs and practices that still affect the rights of women. Most of these are social attitudes, individual and group mental frames, and some incorporated institutional arrangements. These customs and practices affect the realisation of the social, economic, and political rights of women in Ghana. It is against this background that the present research hopes to provide reliable data on these practices and how they can be tackled.

### **1.1 Objective of Study**

The general objective of this research is to identify and document customs and practices affecting the rights of women under the Constitution. Specifically, the research seeks to:

- Find out the nature and development of specified cultural practices and their effect on women's constitutional rights;
- Trace the root causes so as to understand them,
- Find out the extent of divergence or otherwise between women's cultural rights and constitutional rights; and
- Provide background information on the effects of these practices and point out the way to eradicate them.

### **1.2 Sample Design and Selection**

The research is designed as a pilot survey and was undertaken in seven purposively selected districts of the country. To be informed well on cultural practices in the country, the Commission first collected baseline data on cultural practices affecting women in all the districts of Ghana. This was done between June and July 2003. Reports from Akan dominated areas such as the Ashanti, Brong Ahafo, Eastern and Central regions, stated widowhood rites with little variations as the most prevalent practice. From the Northern and Volta regions, the issue of fostering, early and forced marriages were indicated. From the Greater Accra and Eastern regions, the issues of forced initiation into cults and fetishism were raised. Other practices such as *Trokosi*, Female Genital Mutilation, Isolation from friends and relatives, and forcing of women into witch camps on suspicion of being witches etc. were also captured. A review of existing literature shows that a lot of work has been done on the latter practices.

Considering the main objectives of this pilot survey, it was decided to research into practices which manifested in more than one region but had little or no documentation on them. Consequently, the following practices and districts have been selected for the purpose of the study:

1. Widowhood rites among the Akans of Ejisu and Manhyia, both in Ashanti Region, were chosen as sample districts first because the two areas are Asante dominated, and Asante culture is the most dominant among the Akan group. Ejisu in addition is noted for producing the famous Yaa Asantewa. Manhyia is also the seat of Asante tradition and culture.
2. Early or forced marriages among the Konkomba. The Saboba-Chereponi District was chosen for study because it is the home of the Konkomba, who are the largest group in that district in the Northern Region
3. Fostering of girl-child. It is a practice where a man gives his girl-child to a paternal aunt or sister to bring up to adulthood. This practice is common to many tribes in Ghana. However, the Dagomba attached a greater importance to fostering of a girl-child in their society. Hence Savelugu-Nanton, a Dagomba district in the Northern Region was selected for the study.

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4. ‘Lapomi’ is the practice where women are forced to single-handedly look after children because of non-performance of marriage rites. It is prevalent among the Ga-Dangme but more especially among the Krobo where there are several cases. Manya Krobo in the Eastern Region, which is the home district of the Krobo was selected for the study.
  5. Forced initiation of women into fetish priesthood. This is widespread among the Ga but predominantly at Tema and Kpone in Greater Accra. These two areas were thus selected for study.
  6. In the Nkwanta District of the Volta Region among the Ntobu, Challa and Adele is Okuaoku Cult. The practices of this cult greatly restrict women’s rights and freedoms. Nkwanta is the district of study.

### **1.3 Mode of Data Collection**

Both secondary and primary methods of data collection were used in sourcing information. Secondary data sources included publications, journals, newspapers, books, and articles etc. Primary data sources involved focus group discussions and structured questionnaires in each of the sample districts.

### **1.4 Survey Instrument**

The questionnaire and focus group discussion guides used evolved out of a series of meetings with officers of the Commission. A pre-testing of focus group discussion was conducted at Teshie on August 27, 2003, while that of structured questionnaire was undertaken by four officers in communities in and around Accra from August 22 to 26, 2003. Responses and reports from the pre-tests were used to finalize the survey instrument.

#### **1.4.1 Questionnaire**

The final questionnaire comprised four sections. The first section collected information on the background of the respondents with respect to age, sex, marital status, education, religion, occupation and ethnicity. The second section of the questionnaire attempted to capture cultural practices that have to do with women, and assessed respondents’ knowledge on the laws and their rights. The third sections took a look at people’s sex preferences on issues such as children education and political positions and the reasons for such choices. The final section was devoted to suggestions and recommendations.

#### **1.4.2 Focus Group Discussion**

Focus group discussion is an idea-generation tool used to understand social realities. It is a qualitative approach that can be used as a complement to a quantitative study, helping to answer such questions as *why?* or *how?* rather than *how many?* When used alongside quantitative studies, it can result in a much greater understanding of the issue than either method used alone. It explains, expands and illuminates quantitative data, in order to gain some understanding about the reasons for certain findings. It is particularly suited to subjects that are of a sensitive or personal nature, e.g. abortion, sexuality, certain cultural practices, etc.

In view of the problem under investigation, three separate focus group discussions were held on each cultural practice. The discussions sought to define the nature, trace the history and root causes of the practice. They also probed to assess the effects of the practice and solicited information on the way forward. Group composition ranged from 8 to 12 participants.

- The first was organized for a group of victims of the same age category in the district. The victims were able to share what they really felt about the practice.
- The second group made up of elders and perpetrators of the practice in the area helped us to have in-depth understanding of the practice.
- The third group consisted of opinion leaders, teachers, youth association cultural and social groups, the youth and youth group leaders.

### 1.5 Training for Fieldwork

Three head office teams made up of two officers each were deployed to the districts for 10 days from September 1 to 10, 2003. They organized a one-day training for officers in the respective district office. The training at Tema took place at the Tema District of the NCCE on August 28, 2003. Five officers attended the training. In Ashanti Region, the training was organized for eight officers on September 1, 2003 at the Conference Room of the Ashanti Regional Office of the National Commission for Civic Education. The training for research officers involved in the work in the Manya Krobo District took place at Somanya, capital of the Yilo Krobo District, on September 8, 2003. The five research officers were drawn from both the Manya and Yilo Krobo District Offices of the Commission. The training at Savelugu took place at the regional office of the NCCE, Tamale, on September 5, 2003 while that of Saboba was organized on September 9, 2003 at the district office of the NCCE, Saboba. At Nkwanta the training for the five research officers took place at the Nkwanta District Office of the NCCE on September 10, 2003.

All the training sessions took the form of lectures, discussions and demonstrations on how the data collection exercise would be conducted. Essentially, they also agreed on translation of certain words and phrases that would be used in the field. Administration of questionnaire and focus group discussions were done in the local languages of the respondents. Reports from the field indicated that an average of five questionnaires at an average period of 40 minutes was administered a day.

### 1.6 Questionnaire Administration

A total of 560 questionnaires were administered in the seven districts as shown in Table 1.1.

**Table 1.1: Response to Questionnaire by Respondents**

Districts	Frequency	Percentage
Ejisu	75	13.6
Manhyia	85	15.2
Manya Krobo	80	14.3
Tema	82	14.6
Saboba-Chereponi	80	14.3
Savelugu-Nanton	80	14.3
Nkwanta	77	13.8
Total	560	100.0

To ensure that females constitute more than half of the respondents, an operational policy specified that at least 65 per cent of the questionnaire should be administered to women. The target population and distribution questionnaire in each district is indicated in Table 1.2.

**Table 1.2: Distribution of Questionnaire Among Respondents**

Respondents	Traditional Rulers	Opinion Leaders	Religious Leaders	Victims	Women Groups	Others	Total	%age
Female	4	4	4	8	6	0	26	65
Male	4	4	4	0	0	2	14	35

The category of **traditional rulers** represents a broad group consisting of chiefs, sub chiefs, elders, queenmothers, kingmakers and stool fathers. This is because in most communities the chieftaincy institution is the bastion of culture and tradition. The **religious leaders** come from the African Traditional Religion, Christian and Islamic religions. The focus was on persons in leadership in those faiths or in their absence their assistants. The **opinion leaders** consist of such individuals as teachers, youth group leaders, assembly members/chairpersons of the social sub-committee of district assemblies and unit committee members. The **victims** were mainly women who have experienced the cultural practice. Also targeted for interviewing were **women groups** represented by women in churches and NGOs such as the 31<sup>st</sup> December Women’s Movement, World Vision and FIDA. The last category of ‘**others**’ were mostly influential men/women in the community.

### 1.7 Data Analysis

After focus group discussions, the interviews were transcribed and analysis done under various themes. The data collected through questionnaires was edited, coded and captured into the computer. The report was written after the data processing and analysis had been done.

### 1.8 Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

#### 1.8.1 Age by Sex of Respondents

As shown in Table 1.3, the survey results indicate that more female (364) than male (196) respondents were interviewed. The highest number of respondents were in the age group 41 to 50 years. They numbered 160 representing 28.6 per cent of the sampled population. This was followed closely by respondents whose ages were from 51 to 60 years. They accounted for 24.3 per cent of the sample. Nearly 75 per cent of the sample were adults above 40 years of age.

**Table 1.3: Age By Sex of Respondents**

Age	Male		Female		Total	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
Below 21	1	0.5	7	1.9	7	1.4
21-30	14	7.1	42	11.5	56	10.0
31-40	24	12.2	67	18.4	91	16.3
41-50	52	26.3	108	29.7	160	28.6
51-60	51	26.0	85	23.4	136	24.3
61 +	54	27.6	55	15.1	109	19.5
Total	196	100.0	364	100.0	560	100.0

#### 1.8.2 Marital Status

Table 1.4 provides information on marital status of respondents. The Majority (65.2 per cent) of the respondents interviewed were married. The widowed constituted 15.7 per cent, with single people

making up 8.8 per cent. The divorcees and married people who were not divorced but staying apart due to some reasons were 7.0 per cent and 3.4 per cent respectively.

**Table 1.4: Marital Status of Respondents**

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Single	49	8.8
Married	365	65.2
Divorced	39	7.0
Widowed	88	15.7
Separated	19	3.4
Total	560	100.0

### 1.8.3 Educational Level

About four out of ten respondents (42.0 per cent) did not have any form of formal education, thus, they were illiterate. A little over one-quarter of persons interviewed (26.3 per cent,) said they had elementary or junior secondary school education. Secondary school graduates accounted for 9.8 per cent. Whereas those with tertiary education were 4.5 per cent, those with unstructured form of education, that is, non-formal education, night schools and Muslim schools constituted 1.1 per cent of the sample.

### 1.8.4 Religious Background

It is often said that the issue of religion is explosive in nature. However, the survey sought to elicit information on religious background of the respondents because of the perceived inter-relationship between religion and cultural practices. The survey results show that the majority, 63.4 per cent of the sample professed to be Christians. Muslims and adherents of African Traditional Religion made up 18.6 per cent and 16.8 per cent respectively. Other religious persuasions such as Buddhism, Hinduism, Eckankar etc constituted 1.3 per cent.

**Table 1.5: Religious Background of Respondents**

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Christianity	355	63.4
Traditional	94	16.8
Muslim	104	18.6
Any Other	7	1.3
Total	560	100.0

### 1.8.5 Occupation

In terms of occupational status of respondents, the survey results show that 35.2 per cent were businessmen/traders/artisans. Another 31.6 per cent were farmers or fishermen. Civil/Public servants represented 8.0 per cent while teachers/lecturers constituted 9.6 per cent.

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**Table 1.6: Occupational Background of Respondents**

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Student	17	3.0
Farmer/Fisherman	177	31.6
Teacher/Lecturer	54	9.6
Civil/Public Servant	45	8.0
Business/Trader/Artisan	197	35.2
Unemployed	34	6.1
Any Other	36	6.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>560</b>	<b>100.0</b>

### **1.8.6 Ethnic Background**

There is a strong interrelationship between ethnic groupings and cultural practices because culture is learnt from the milieu one lives within. The survey as a result sought to identify the ethnic background of the respondents for this study.

The results as indicated in Table 1.7 shows that nearly a third (28.8 per cent) of the sample were Akan. The Ga-Dangme were a quarter of the sample. This was followed by the Gurma, who were made up of 17.1 per cent of the total respondents. The Mole-Dagbani constituted 14.8 per cent. The rest, the Guan, Ewe, Mande-Busanga and Grusi had 8.2 per cent, 3.9 per cent, 0.9 per cent and 0.5 per cent respectively.

**Table 1.7: Ethnic Group of Respondents**

<b>Ethnic Group</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Akan	161	28.8
Ewe	22	3.9
Ga-Dangme	144	25.7
Gurma	96	17.1
Mole-Dagbani	83	14.8
Grusi	3	0.5
Mande-Busanga	6	0.9
Guan	46	8.2
<b>Totals</b>	<b>560</b>	<b>100.0</b>

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## Chapter 2

### Cultural Practices Affecting Women in Ghana

#### 2.0 Introduction

The term culture denotes the way of life of a people. It consists of patterns, explicit and implicit, and behaviour acquired and transmitted by symbols, consisting of the distinctive achievement of human groups, including their embodiment in artifacts. A number of factors determine the culture of the people, These include the environment, the society, heritage and the time. The physical environment also provides the material base and influences the people's way of life and ethos, especially where the level of technological development is low.

Culture is seen to pertain to the group or the society collectively. Thus what is peculiar to the individual is regarded as idiosyncratic. Nevertheless it is individuals who bond together to form a group and the society. In any society or group it is never always all members who adhere to the norms or the tenets of the collective ideology. Contrary to what is sometime around, individuals are not slaves of culture, nor does the culture deny individuals the exercise of their creative impulses. Some of the changes that occur in culture may in fact stem from individuals, particularly those imbued with charismatic qualities and attributes like statesmen. Culture survives the life span of the individuals bonded together in a society at any point in time. Culture as a legacy is transmitted from older members to new members, from adults to children. An Ewe child (both parents Ewe) born and bred in an entirely Dagaaba cultural milieu or cultural context can be expected to learn and exhibit Dagaaba cultural traits rather than Ewe culture. He or she will grow up thinking and feeling as a Dagaaba and reacting to things the way a Dagaaba would. Societies often have ways of transmitting or inculcating their culture. Formal and informal interactions may be used but they are combined with participant observation method. In almost every culture there is a notion of change and all cultures are in the process of changing. There are however differences in the momentum of change between societies. In contemporary Ghana, the rural areas are perhaps less subject to rapid change than the urban milieu. Given the multi-ethnic groups in the country, and other cultural determinants such as location, environment, and heritage each has its peculiar culture. Nevertheless, a sense of belonging to a wider society exists as Ghanaian Culture could be identified. The identification with common national symbols and objects creates a we-feeling among Ghanaians irrespective of peculiar ethnic group.

#### 2.1 Cultural Practices in Ghana

Each of the different ethnic groups in Ghana have socio-cultural practices that mark the individual's major transition points, namely the time a person enters the world through birth, when he comes of age and enters the world of adults, and when through death he departs from this world and enters the world of his forebears. Three major stages are distinguished with varying degrees of intensity and seriousness of ceremonies and rituals.

Almost all the ethnic groups welcome a new baby with much fanfare, as childlessness is frowned upon and childless couples are despised and would therefore go to any length to have their own child. The outdooing and naming ceremonies are common among all ethnic groups. The specific days for ceremonies vary from eight days among the Ewes to a month among the Gas. The lavishness of celebration is greater among the Gas.

The transition from infancy to adulthood is marked by puberty rites and initiation ceremonies, but with greater emphasis on girls than boys. Across the ethnic groups the puberty rites for girls look more elaborate and encompassing.

After leading a hopefully peaceful and long life, a man or woman dies. This is an occasion for another series of rites involving the deceased as well as those he/she left behind, namely the widow or widower and the children. The widowhood rites mark this stage but have different effects on the sexes – male and female.

The survey sought to collate information on the cultural practices that have to do with women in the study area. The results are presented in Table 2:1.

**Table 2.1: Cultural Practices Mentioned by Respondents**

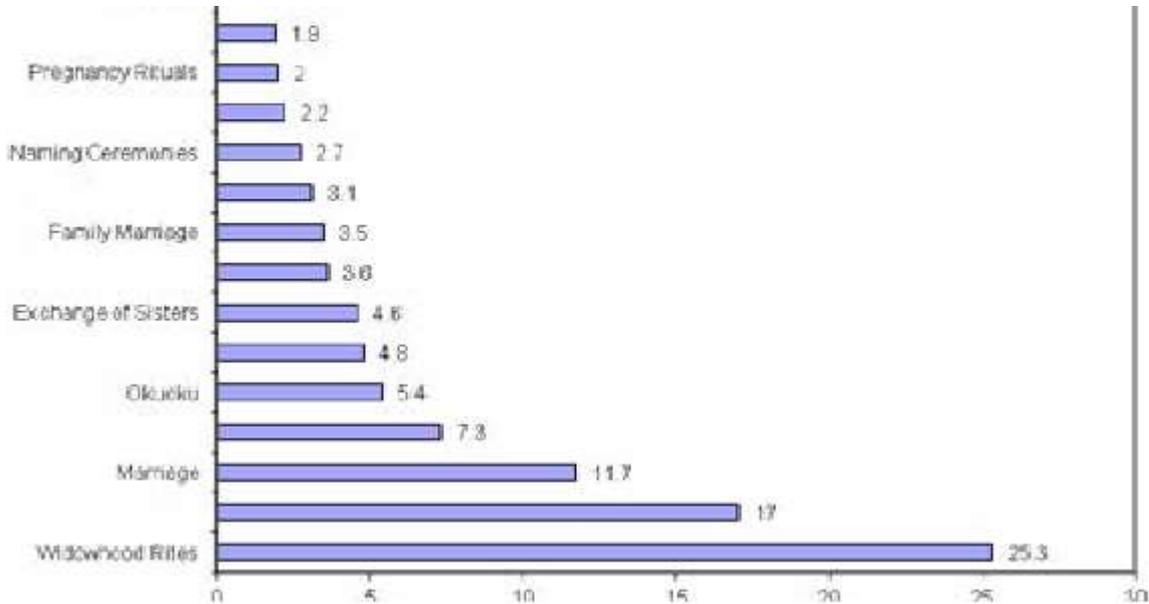
	Frequency Percent as Against Total Respondents who Mentioned this Rite		Percent Against Total Rites Mentioned
Widowhood Rites	402	71.8	25.3
Puberty Rites	271	48.4	17.0
Marriage	186	33.2	11.7
Betrothal	117	20.9	7.3
Okuoku	86	14.5	5.4
Fostering	77	13.8	4.8
Exchange of Sisters	74	13.2	4.6
Any Other	58	-	3.6
Family Marriage	55	9.8	3.5
Lapomi	50	8.9	3.1
Naming Ceremonies	43	7.7	2.7
Return to Parents	35	6.3	2.2
Pregnancy Rituals	32	5.7	2.0
Elopement	31	5.5	1.9
Nnobia	28	5.0	1.8
Funerals	21	3.8	1.3
Kyiribra	17	3.0	1.1
Kplekemo	11	2.0	0.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>1594</b>		<b>100</b>

Out of the 560 respondents, 402 representing 71:8 per cent mentioned widowhood rites. In terms of the 1,594 cultural rites mentioned, 25.3 went for widowhood rites. The next significant rites mentioned is puberty rites, which was mentioned by 48.4 per cent of respondents, and it took 17.0 per cent of share of total rites mentioned. As many as 33.2 per cent of the total respondents mentioned marriage, whilst out of the total mentioned rites it took 11.7 per cent. The next significant rites mentioned was Betrothal, which 20.9 per cent of total respondents mentioned and it took 7.3 per cent of total rites mentioned. Other rites mentioned were ‘Okuoku’ (5.4 per cent), Fostering (4.8 per cent), Exchange of Sisters (4.6 per cent), Family Marriage (3.5 per cent), ‘Lapomi’ (3.1 per cent), Naming Ceremonies (2.7 per cent), Return to parents (2.2 per cent), Pregnancy Rituals (2.0 per cent), Elopement (1.9 per cent), ‘Nnobia’ (1.8 per cent), Funerals (1.3 per cent) ‘Kyiribra’ (1.1 per cent). Among rites mentioned under the ‘any other category’ were: ‘Jweremo’, Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), ‘Trokosi’, Facial Mark, Levirate rites (Yalorgba ) among the Krobo, Konkomba and Akan.

Figure 2.1 presents the per centage share of each rite, in the total of rites mentioned by respondents.

Widowhood rites with its 25.3 per cent is highest mentioned with Kyiribra accounting for 1:1 per cent. In the “any other” category are Jweremo, Female Genital Mutilation, Trokosi, Facial Marks, Perforation of ears of women, Levirate rites, witchcraft accusations/condemnation to witch camps, Menstrual period restrictions, Restrictions of women in relation to certain diets, especially meat and eggs.

**Figure 2.1: Cultural Practices Mentioned by Respondents**



**Percentage**

An attempt is made to outline in detail the features of the identified cultural practices and to what extent in the view of respondents, they promote or inhibit the welfare and constitutional rights of women. This analysis is presented under the three main rites of passage namely: birth, adulthood and death.

**2.2 Birth**

**2.2.1 Outdooring /Naming Ceremonies**

Children are considered as a great blessing among all ethnic groups of Ghana. When the child is born within the first eight days it is referred to as ‘it’, because it is the belief that such a child is a ghost, and its ghost-mother, in the other world may be in search of it. If the baby dies before the eighth day, it is concluded that the search had succeeded. The baby would be buried unceremoniously as a worthless thing, and never remembered or talked about. After the eighth day the child is deemed to be part of the world and therefore must be named into the family.

An outdooring ceremony is performed early in the morning of the eighth day to introduce the child to the

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lineage to which it belongs, establish the social fatherhood of the child, and give it a name. Among the Gas the baby is conveyed from its mother's house to the father's major lineage 'We' for the ceremony. An elderly person from the lineage or an admired person from another lineage may be called to perform the rite. The rites are preceded with pouring of libation. The baby is put on the ground just under the eaves of a thatched roof. The 'outdoorer' takes a new calabash, fills it with water and throws it onto the thatched roofs. Where there are no thatched roof, water from a calabash is sprinkled on the baby. The ceremony is said to introduce the child to the rain and earth, that is to the elements of nature. The 'outdoorer' then calls the child's name, gently tapping it first with the right, then left leg, says *ko minane, ko misuban* "take after me, follow my footsteps". The child is picked up and libation poured welcoming him to the lineage.

In other places and among other ethnic groups, instead of the child being put on the ground, on the day in question, after the pouring of libation, the child is put on the lap of the 'outdoorer'. The 'outdoorer' announces the name of the baby. He then dips his middle finger into water, in a glass standing by him and touches the baby's lips saying "Kojo, this is water, if you say something is water it must be water". He does this thrice and then dips his middle finger into a glass containing schnapps or akpeteshie and touches the baby's lip saying, "Kojo, this is schnapps or drink, if you say something is schnapps or drink, it must be schnapps". He does it thrice.

What the baby is being told in effect, is that his/her 'yes' must be 'yes' and his/her 'no' must be 'no'. Among some groups in addition to the above or as a substitute, salt is used to touch the child's lip followed by the same admonishing.

Among the Dagomba, the naming ceremony occurs at the end of the first week, and it ends the ritual seclusion of the child and mother. The ceremony follows either the traditional or Islamic pattern, though the latter appears to have the greater prestige and is more widely publicized.

Sometimes a private traditional naming ceremony is performed on the sixth night and then a public Islamic rite performed on the seventh day. The baby's hair is shaven and a fowl is sacrificed to the paternal ancestor, who is reincarnated in the child as his ancestral namesake. The Dagomba, like the Ewe, take pains to know, through a diviner which ancestor has come back in the form of the new baby. News of the Suna, Islamised naming ceremony is sent to relatives and friends six days after the birth by a messenger distributing kola to the guests for whom a sheep is slaughtered. Early in the morning, the Mallam comes to the house of the family head and after prayers, a name, more often suggested by the Mallam, is announced with loud ululation. The baby is then carried out by the father's sister, and the hair shaven.

The naming ceremony is often followed by merrymaking and presentation of gifts to the baby and mother. Among the Ewe, the father provides 'vidzinu', in appreciation of the wife's safe delivery. Among the Ga, the husband gives out 'otshiwuo' "one week fowl" and gift of cloth, 'dswelemo'

Ghanaians believe that there is a lot in a name, thus much attention is given to the name. There is an array of names given to the baby: cult names, names arising from the occasion of birth, names according to place of birth, name according to order of birth, soul names or names of valour. Children are also sometimes named after elders, and it is supposed that such children will grow to be like the persons after whom they have been named e.g. Mandela, Gadafi, Rawlings.

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Thus, it is possible for a child to be given four names on the naming day, viz his day of birth, say Monday, which makes him Kojo. If he is the first boy of the parents he may be called Opiesie among the Akan or Fui among the Ewe. A posthumous child is called Ahia among the Ga, Anto among the Akan and Megbew by the Ewe. A boy who survives either after his older siblings have died young or after the parents have had a number of stillbirths has absurd names such as Ati (stick), Ekpe (stone), Elo (crocodile) or Modhake among the Ewe; among the Ga names like Yaka, Ohui, Awuni; and among the Akan names like Donkor. The belief is that when the babies carry such absurd names, the evil spirits responsible for their death will no longer find them attractive and hence leave them alone.

The birth of twins is often heralded with flutes among groups. They are regarded as sacred and are treated as such lest they bring disaster on the parents and community. Among the Ewe the first born of twins is called the younger, Etse for a boy or Xetsa for a girl, and the second born is regarded as the messenger of the second Atsu or Xi. Among the Ga, twins of both sexes are called Oko or Akwele and Akuette or Ate for male twins and Akwele and Akuoko for female twins. Among the Akan the senior is Ata Panyin and the junior Ata Kakra. Subsequent children often twins also have special names but both males and females are given the same names. Among the Akan one can be Tawia and Nyankomago for the first and second. Among the Ewe they would be called Do and Dofui and among the Ga they will be Tawia and Ago.

From Figure 2:2 there is consensus among respondents about importance of the outdooring/naming ceremony, over 90 per cent of respondents identified it as a good cultural practice. Particularly lauded by respondents is the donation of gifts (61.0 per cent) with “any other” reason accounting for 31.7 per cent. Those who considered naming ceremony harmful were against giving liquor to the child (2.4 per cent), and some others claim that in some places the god-father spits into the mouth of the child (4.9 per cent).

### **2.2.2 Pregnancy Rituals**

Childlessness is considered a social disaster in traditional society. A woman so afflicted goes to all kinds of efforts, including medicinemen and gods to have a child. A pregnancy is thus considered a happy phenomenon. Traditional society periodically considers pregnancy and childbirth as warfare, because nefarious witches and others can wreak havoc on their helpless victims and destroy pregnancies. A pregnant woman is thus expected to physically, medicinally and spiritually protect herself.

Medicines used include herbs, bark of trees, roots of trees, and others; ante-natal visits to hospitals are also common. Spiritually that period is one of intense prayers. In some places a talisman may be provided for a woman to wear around her waist or amulets that she may wear around her wrist or hang on the door-post of her room. Physically, pregnant women are forbidden to undertake certain actions, example look at ghastly things.

Among the Dagomba special rituals are performed at various stages of the pregnancy. In the case of first pregnancy in the seventh month the husband’s sister or other female relations announce the change of status by tapping her on the shoulder, saying ‘you were a child now you are grown’. It is only then that she can be called by anybody as a pregnant woman.

From the questionnaire, out of the 34 respondents who identified pregnancy rituals as a rite adversely affecting women, 94.1 per cent saw nothing wrong with the practice and listed it as a good cultural

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practice. Reasons given included the fact that it marks the promotion of a woman into adulthood and that it brings about social cohesion. There were 5.4 per cent of respondents who saw the practice as harmful and reasons given include the fact that it serves as an avenue for transmitting evil spirits to the unborn child.

### **2.2.3 Return to Parents**

The birth of a child is an occasion for great jubilation in families. All efforts are thus taken by societies to ensure that women bring forth safely, especially as the labour process is considered as one of life or death. For maximum help during the period of labour and immediately after birth, in several societies women go back to their mother's house to be delivered.

Among the Ga, the woman goes about her normal duties while pregnant until a few days before childbirth. The mother's house is believed to be a familiar surrounding, and as it is among her own people, she can get all the necessary help she may need. Another reason for going back home is the belief that any adultery she has committed would result in difficult labour and sometimes the death of her child, if she does not confess.

For this and many other unpredictable things which could happen during childbirth, it is considered advisable that she delivers among the mother's kin. After child birth the woman is expected to stay with her kin for several months. This could be as long as one or two years. The belief is that, if she got pregnant before the child was weaned both child and mother would be affected.

Among the Ewe therefore, this period is to prevent her from having 'Kpedeviwo', unweaned children. The period with her mother it is believed offers the woman the opportunity to work and gain some amount of financial independence of the husband.

Opinion on the practice of wives returning to parents for childbirth and remaining for a period looks divided; while 51.8 per cent of those who mentioned it as a rite saw it as good, an equally high percentage (48.2 per cent) said it was harmful. Reasons given for identifying it as harmful range from the fact that it makes husbands go for another woman (17.9 per cent), it puts the responsibility of child-care in those crucial one to two years in the hands of the woman, so that women have no support from men in child care (30.4 per cent).

Those who saw its practice as good pointed out that the mother of the woman helps in the upbringing of the child (30.4 per cent), the child is well looked after (8.9 per cent), and that the burden of child rearing is taken care of by her mother, the woman can engage in economic activities and thus increase her independence of the husband (3.5 per cent).

### **2.3.1 Adulthood**

During the years of adulthood of the individual, certain rites may be performed. Among rites identified by respondents were puberty rites, kyiribra, becoming a fetish or a cult member like that of Okuoku. These rites are examined in detail one after the other.

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### 2.3.1 Puberty Rites

In matrilineal Ashanti society where the survival of the matrilineage depends upon its female members, a barren woman is a disgrace and a cause of despair. Her state is held to be an implicit betrayal of her people and she feels it as such, her concern being shared by her matrilineage.

Conversely, prolific childbearing is honoured and parents of large families and mothers of twins and triplets are held in high esteem. In view of a girl's upbringing and the indispensable role she plays as a source of manpower, her entry into womanhood is marked by complex ceremonies entailing much preparation and rituals. Puberty rites are performed after the onset of the girl's first menstruation. Girls of any age from 13 to 20 years go through the rites; some delays in the rites are occasioned by parents' desire to choose an opportune time and the physical development of the girl. Preparations for the ceremonies are usually two fold: spiritual and material.

The former consist of consulting a deity on auspiciousness of the rites for the girl, while the material side consists of gathering a number of things, some of which may be bought or borrowed. Some of the items are for immediate use during the ceremony, while others are for later use as a future wife. The initiation rites normally run over a six-day period presided over by the queenmother. On the first day of the rites, the girl is enstooled in the open air, a brass holder containing an egg, okro seeds, water and the leaf of the adwira plant is placed beside her, in the neighbourhood of Kumasi, there is an egg behind her and another in front of her. The girl is shaved and given a ritual bath in a river, after which she is dressed in finery which is followed by dedication and scramble. After the rites, the girl is addressed by children as Eno.

The right to marry is only a corollary to the girl's introduction to sexual life and the words used in the songs and prayers go a very long way to emphasise this. The nubility rites therefore may be said to be a socially recognised way of proclaiming the availability of a girl for marriage. The six-day ceremony ends with the lady beautifully dressed to thank people in her village and also in the nearby villages for their participation in the six-day ceremony.

An equally elaborate initiation ceremony called 'Dipo' is observed among the Krobo. The rite which also runs over a number of days is also presided over by the queenmother or elderly women and a traditional priestess. Highlights of the ceremony include the marking of the wrists and back of the initiates. The marks on the back signify that the woman is ready for marriage. The one on the stomach shows she is matured for child-bearing. As part of the dipo rites, initiates are adorned with beads with their breast exposed and paraded through the village for people to see that they have come of age.

Among the Ga in the Tema Municipality, the initiation rite into womanhood is known variously as Otofo or Ashii. The people of Kpone and its environs call it Otufu and those of Tema Manhean and its environs call it Ashii. The rites are in three stages.

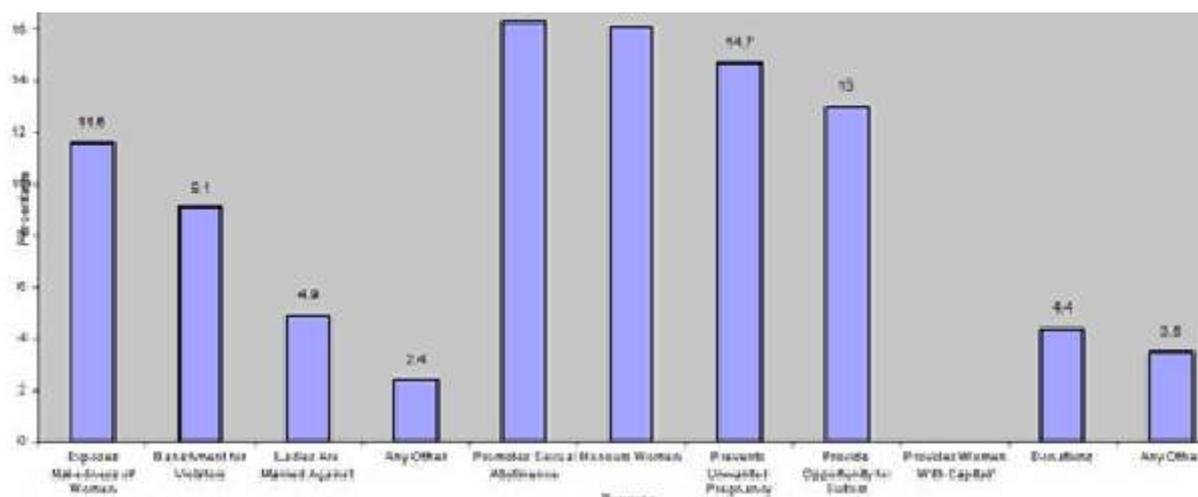
The initial stage is confinement, the second stage outdooring and the last stage is presentation of gifts. At the confinement stage the initiates are trained by a woman of good standing, that is, a married woman or a widow of good repute. In confinement, lasting three days, the initiates are taught everything about good womanhood, ie. home management, management of a husband and child care. From confinement, they start the second stage. Their bodies are smeared with shea butter. They are dressed with their lower parts covered with a white piece of calico. They are then seated on a stool for suitors to admire them.

As a result of the shea butter smeared on their bodies, on drawing near an initiate one can see the under part of the young ladies because the white calico becomes transparent.

At the final stage the young ladies are given a hot bath to wash off the oil from their bodies. Thereafter, they are dressed up to the chest, leaving their breast. They are then paraded through town to greet friends and relatives amidst drumming and dancing to signify an end of the stage. The last day of the final stage is set aside for presentation of gifts to the young women or ladies.

In years goneby, Bragoro, Dipo and Ashii were sacrosanctly observed by the youth. Among the Krobo it was a source of pride for our women to have the marks identify them as people who have performed 'dipo'. And the women can ask each other whether they have the marks on their backs. Sometimes a Krobo woman that has not undergone that rite cannot get a husband. At other times a woman can even get married but when the husband finds out that she had not been initiated he could divorce her even though there may be children between them. A man who wants to marry may ask the lady of her marks as proof that she has undergone 'dipo'. There are instances where women are brought home to verify if they had the rite performed. In Tema the practice is maintained because it gives the right to ascension to the stool of Tema.

Though aspects of the rites, ie exposure of the breast and other parts of the body of the young ladies, may seem dehumanising, and despite the influence of Christianity and modernisation, there seems to be consensus in the areas observed that the puberty rites are important. Indeed , answers to questionnaires distributed reveal that the practice, in spite of modernisation is considered by 317 out of 440 respondents (representing 72.0 per cent) of those who mentioned puberty rites as a practice affecting women. Figure 2.4 illustrates the attitudes to puberty rites.



About 14.3 per cent of those who mentioned rites said puberty rites promote sexual abstinence. Other responses were that it honours women (14.1 per cent), prevents unwanted pregnancy (10.7 per cent), provides opportunity for suitors to make choice of future wife (10.0 per cent), provides women with

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capital (3.4 per cent). Among the items under ‘any other’ which account for 19.5 of respondents were: it grooms the girl-child, enhances good marriage, prevents the contracting of STD and other diseases, it provides opportunity to get a good man to marry, prepares the girl child for marriage, girls get to know more about their own culture. Notwithstanding these good sides, respondents pointed out several concerns about puberty rites. Top on the list of concerns (accounting for 11.6 per cent) of negative effect of practices was the fact that it exposes the nakedness of women. Others criticised the sanction of banishment put on girls who violate conditions for puberty rites. Among the ‘any other’ category are such reasons as portraying women as sex objects and making them the prey of lustful men. A religious dimension to criticism was provided by a respondent during FGD at Odumase who cited one case of a girl who underwent the ‘dipo’ and thereafter started behaving strangely, like one who had high fever. It turned out through prayers that those who took her for the rites (since the mother did not want to come out openly as the one doing it for her) used some beads through which they put evil spirits in her.

### **2.3.2 Kyiribra**

Kyiribra is the offence which a girl, with her accomplice, commits by ‘taking seed’ before the performance of her nubility rites. The consequences of the offence are believed to be catastrophic, both for society and for the individual culprits. It is an insult to the spirits of the dead, and infuriates them. It brings great shame to the matrilineage ancestors and defiles the gods and God. In retaliation for Kyiribra the spirits are said to visit the living with drought, famine, diseases, childlessness and other hardships unless the offence is ritually cleansed.

The Kyiribra ceremony is meant primarily to restore the social order, disrupted by the crime, of an uninitiated girl becoming pregnant to its old peaceful, unblemished condition. Any moral laxity prior to a girl’s attainment of puberty was considered not only as blood-letting but an attempt to drive the supernatural powers in their fury to inflict calamities on the living. If found out that the girl had in fact had her menses but had concealed the fact, then the offence was no longer ‘blood-shedding’ but *mmuso*, which sometimes brings along with it ill-luck. This infringement might be atoned for by a sacrifice upon the ancestral stool or upon the shrines of the gods, to placate both categories of spiritual powers. Because of the dreaded consequences of the Kyiribra ceremony many a parent takes steps to hide pregnancy of an uninitiated child either by rushing her through the process, taking her to another town and pretending the rites had been performed or procuring abortion for the girl.

When in spite of all these steps there is an exposure and the queenmother is satisfied that the girl is guilty of the offence, the girl is summoned and goes through a ceremony which serves as a substitute for nubility rites except that grave humiliation accompanies this rite, which ends up with ostracising of girls and boys to live in a hut prepared for them in the forest, and to remain there until about 40 days after the birth of the Kyiribra child. Invariably victims of the practice die on return mainly out of shame and humiliation.

Due to urbanization, education and religion, all factors in social change, the practice of Kyiribra seems to be fading. Indeed, only 29 out of 560 respondents to the questionnaire identified it as one of the cultural practices that affect women; of those who listed Kyiribra almost more than half (61.5 per cent) were of the opinion that it was a harmful practice, as it cast out women, and brought a curse on them. According to the five respondents, representing (38.5 per cent) who said the practice is good, the fear of Kyiribra enforces/promotes sexual abstinence.

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### 2.3.3 Marriage

Marriage is one of the oldest institutions and can be traced to the Garden of Eden where God brought the first man and woman together as husband and wife. It is a universal institution but the way it is contracted and perceived may differ from society to society, reflecting the specific culture of the people. According to the Encyclopedia of Social Sciences (ed) J. Kupe, it is “a culturally approved relationship of a man and one woman (monogamy) or one man and two or more women (polygamy or polygamous) in which sexual intercourse is legally endorsed between the opposite sex partners and there is generally an expectation that children will be born of the union and enjoy the full birth status right of their society.” To G. K. Nukunya in *Kinship and Marriage Among the Anlo Ewe*, marriage is “a union in which the man and woman having passed through the approved customary procedures, are legally recognized as husband and wife, and are therefore subject to all the rights, duties and obligations such relationship entails”. Almost everywhere in Ghana marriage is seen as one of the critical rites of passage and is analogous to birth, puberty and death rites.

Among the ethnic groups, except for persons in a consecrated life mainly for religious purposes, to attain and grow to old age without entering a marriage union was considered abnormal. Quite often then, marriage for most individuals symbolised a transition from irresponsible adolescence to maturity and respectable citizenship. The achievement of a measure of jural and economic independence was associated with marriage.

Among many ethnic groups in Ghana, polygyny is allowed. Rationalisation of Polygyny is associated with chiefs, the wealthy, the old and the influential. In the case of chiefs many are polygynists not necessarily by choice. Some of their wives are inherited from previous incumbents and are only wives by name. The number of wives a person has often reflected his standing in society. Wives and children are considered as political and economic assets where land is available and technology simple; this labour availability sometimes makes a difference in wealth between individuals. Attitudes of wives and women towards polygyny differ. Among some ethnic groups, wives may not necessarily oppose any polygamous plans of the husband on account of the assistance that a second or third wife provides. In FGD in Saboba, some of the respondents saw polygamy in a positive light, and some stated they would initiate moves to get additional wives for their husbands. Doing so, they would get co-wives who assist in household chores and on the farm. Among the Akan, Dagomba and Ewe though wives have no veto on the issue, they have the right to claim compensation in lieu of prior consultation.

The institution of marriage, like many others, is regulated by certain rules. One of such rules is prohibition of acts of sexual intercourse which are directly related to the marriage. In all Ghanaian societies, the incest prohibition rules forbids sexual intercourse with members of the immediate family that in some cases may be extended to the wider kin group. Those who cannot procreate together cannot usually marry. Among the Asante, sexual intercourse with a clan sister or brother was out of the question. Among the Ewe, marriage between the uterine kin is prohibited. The feeling of personal and closer intimacy in the relationship of *dagadadiviwo* or uterine kin is best illustrated by the Anlo attitude to sexual relationship between them. It is considered incestuous for two persons to have sexual relations if their uterine connection is known, however distant the relationships; and marriage between them of course is forbidden. The prohibitions on sexual relations within a group of people help maintain intimate face-to-face ties. Indiscriminate competition between members of such groups for the favours of the opposite sex can have potentially disastrous consequences for group solidarity. The prohibition also works to check the possibility of in-breeding within the group of closely related kin.

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All such marriages are finalised with the payment of bridewealth. Its approval by the family shows approval of the union of the two individuals. The bridewealth is never presented or accepted where there is disapproval. Through the bridewealth, the bridegroom expresses his appreciation and gratitude in a way for the care and upbringing of his wife. It shows the high value placed on the bride by the bridegroom's family. For the bride, it confers honour and prestige on her, her family and the community.

In Africa the marriage payment, whether it be small or large, is the objective instrument by which a 'legal' marriage is established. In some instances, it is a compensation or indemnity to the woman's family for a loss of a member. This is particularly seen where the marriage payment is considerable and is used to obtain a wife for the woman's brother. The payment may, in some instances, be regarded as part of an exchange of a kind that is used in many parts of the world to establish a friendly alliance between groups. But it is definitely not buying a slave.

The payment of bridewealth is considered as general reciprocities. Among the Builsa, bridewealth is comparatively low, hence concomitant lineage commitment to the marriages of daughters is comparatively low. Marriages are known to be weak and the distinctions between separation and divorce tenuous. It is said that whenever a wife returns to her natal family a fresh batch of suitors make their appearance. Where bridewealth is considered inadequate, commitment to a daughter tends not to be low. Where bridewealth constitutes a substantial value it becomes a strong factor in marriage stability. Firstly, its size could put it beyond the means of most individuals and necessitates the active involvement of kin groups in its collection or the use of corporate group resources in its settlement. When the collection of bridewealth falls to the lineage or kin group the recipe of the bridewealth due to the bride squarely becomes a group affair and the resources so claimed become group resources. Lineages and kin groups become thus keenly involved in the management of member's marriages to ensure that group resources are not wasted when marriages end in divorce. Each group can safeguard its economic interest by ensuring that its members are not responsible for a marriage's failure. In many societies a husband's negligence of his conjugal responsibilities leads to separation that does not oblige the wife -giver to return the bridewealth. Consequently, when the break is pinned on the wife her lineage should return the bridewealth. This is not easy as such goods may have been put to use in other bridewealth presentations.

The formalisation or completion of marriage rites confers certain rights, duties and obligations on the partners. The man is expected to provide the basic needs of the wife and family and give them the necessary protection. He has responsibility for providing the health needs as well as upkeep of the family. The woman for her part provides the necessary assistance to the husband and shares duly in the economic upkeep of the home. As a couple they provide sexual satisfaction to each other, respect, trust and support each other at all times.

A large number of respondents who mentioned cultural rites affecting women (80.1 per cent) are of the opinion that marriage rites promote welfare of women. The major factor identified for its being good for women is that it honours them. This is because a married woman is viewed as somebody with good character, as no man would like to marry a base woman. To 7.4 per cent of respondents, marriage rites provide capital for women, and women gain companionship through marriage. The husband and wife comfort each other in times of troubles and share their joy together. This creates friendship and fellowship. Others see marriage rites as promoting peace in marriage; marriage protects women from sexual abuse, promotes responsible sexual satisfaction and provides a legitimate avenue for sexual satisfaction. Marriage provides the legitimate means by which new ones are born into the society. Children born outside marriage are said to be illegitimate. They do not receive the respect of society

and do not go through proper socialisation. The costly nature of the bridewealth is seen by respondents who view it as a marriage rite as a harmful aspect of marriage rites. The payment of such dowries gives men a feeling of ownership as it gives the impression that women have been sold to husbands and thus in some cases lead to enslavement or suppression of women, and consequently to domestic violence.

### 2.3.4 Family Marriages

While some societies maintain strict rules of exogamy, which compel members of the exogamous unit to seek spouses in other groups, there are several other groups which encourage endogamy provided rules of prohibitions are adhered to. In the latter societies men and women alike are encouraged to marry from home or in some cases enter what is called family marriage. Many societies appear to favour family marriage. Reasons given by some respondents for considering family marriage as good include providing easy choices of partner for spouse, especially women.

Table 2.4 reveals that of those who identified cultural rites affecting women, 23.5 per cent pointed to family marriage as one such practice. To 12.9 per cent of respondents family marriage promotes solidarity as it binds and unites families. Of course there are several others who are opposed to family marriage because they consider it as harmful to women in general. A little over a quarter (26.0 per cent) of those who identified rites in the society said invariably family marriages are based on cohesion to the detriment of either of the partner.

**Table 2.4: Reasons for Identifying Family Marriage as Harmful or Good**

	Frequency	Percent as Against Total Respondents who Mentioned this Rite	Percent Against Total Rites Mentioned
<b>Harmful</b>			
Women Forced into Marriage	22	3.9	26.0
Suppress Women	16	2.9	18.8
Leads to Breakdown of Marriages	3	0.5	4.7
Any Other	4	0.7	3.5
Sub-Total	45	8.0	50
			(52.9)
<b>Good</b>			
Women Are Well Cared For	6	1.1	23.5
Binds and Unites Families	20	3.6	12.9
Easy Choice of Partner	11	2.0	7.1
Any Other	3	0.5	3.5
Sub-Total	40		(47.1)
<b>Total</b>	<b>85</b>		<b>100</b>

### 2.3.5 Betrothal

Marriage as defined above as a union between an adult couple is not always so. Among some ethnic groups marriage may be formalized for children. Among the Asante, at one time or the other in the past, child marriage was encouraged. The betrothal marriage, called *asiwa* is often initiated by a man who targets a family and requests that if a pregnant woman gave birth to a baby girl he be allowed to marry her. If the parents consent the would-be husband would start maintaining the unborn child

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through services to the parents, like helping them on the farm. If his dream materialises and a baby girl is born, he continues to maintain her until she reaches puberty at which time he would perform the rites. Similarly a baby girl, at any stage, may be betrothed. This practice usually happened among cross-cousins.

The practice of betrothal persists among the Konkomba and Bimoba. This is dealt with in greater detail in chapter three of this report. Several reasons (economic, religious and medico-religious) are provided for the continuation of the betrothal system. On the whole, parents benefit by way of bridewealth. Betrothing the female child to a medicine man through whose intervention or intercession, conception and safe childbirth was achieved is considered as a just reward. The arrangement also serves as a guarantee against the child's ill-health or death.

Responses to questions administered on this issue isolate other advantages accruing to the girl-child, including providing the girl with easy choice of partners, guaranteeing the performance of customary marriage rites on the lady. The bridewealth also serves as a binding force between the couple as both reflect on the consequences of a possible divorce – the man wasting years of toil and labour and the girl putting parents in the awkward situation of paying back bridewealth. The 'other' reasons given for subscribing to this style of marriage include the fact that it guarantees that the women would be properly looked after, for invariably persons they are betrothed to are older and settled in life. Whatever its rationale and benefits, infant betrothal has several drawbacks and harmful effects.

Several of the respondents in FGD, and over 57.1 per cent listed betrothal as a harmful cultural practice, and said it violated the free choice of the lady to a life partner. The girls have no say in the planning of their marriages. Several respondents (4.1 per cent) pointed out that such marriages are unstable and break down soon after their consummation, when the brides achieve a measure of control over their lives, and the right to make choices. Such betrothals lead to early marriage and lead to denial to the bride of education, especially as the groom fears that access to formal education would estrange the child-bride from him.

### 2.3.6 Levirate Systems

Another type of marriage which is practised among several ethnic groups of Ghana can be described as secondary marriage. These include levirate, **sororate** and widow inheritance. In widow inheritance the customary successor, aside of the property, also takes over the wife and children as the father of the child he begot with the widow. It is an arrangement to cater for the interest of the widow and children emotionally and socially. The practice among the Konkomba is discussed in detail in chapter three.

The Krobo, Konkomba and Adele and some Ga observe the levirate arrangement. A proxy or surrogate husband is found for the widow from among the immediate kin of the deceased husband.

At the FGD in Odumase, the *Yalorgba* practice was discussed at length. It was the consensus among discussants that the practice where a woman is given out in marriage to a younger brother of her husband is not meant to be proper marriage, but to ensure that the deceased man's property stays within the family since when a widow re-marries outside the family, she will take the dead husband's property away from his people. The practice, it is said, is out of pity. The woman might have been a good wife and may have children with the husband so there should be someone from the family to take good care of her and the children by seeing to their wellbeing. Sometimes however the woman is forced to enter this second marriage against her will. There are also situations where the man may be interested in sleeping

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with the woman and this poses problems for the woman. There are instances where a woman may not like the second man while the man may be interested in her and this leads to quarrels within the family. Examples were cited in the FGD of instances where women were forced into such marriages with untold problems. Two classic examples were given. In the first case involving a family at Odumase, a family member of a man proposed to his wife while the husband was still alive. The woman protested and the man asked if she was not aware that she would be given to him after her husband's death. Well, sooner or later the husband died. The woman was given to this very man and that day she cried openly. In the second case also at Odumase, the second husband used to provide for the widow but when he realised the woman was not going to jump into bed with him, he stopped providing for her. There is the case of a man with three wives who died; then one of his brothers saw the elders to ask for one particular woman. Now if you ask such a man to just see to the welfare of the said woman, it would surely lead to something else.

Some women have kicked against the practice because they loved their husbands and cannot imagine going into bed with their husband's brothers. In other cases they found someone else to marry. In that case the drinks are paid to the younger brother because there still exists spiritual bonds with the wife so when she finds someone she wants to marry, she must be separated from her dead husband with a drink. It is not separation that takes place. The ghost is informed that the wife is now with the said man (from outside the family). The family does not renounce this widow so when something befalls this woman in her own family they go to give presents to the woman's family

The **sororate** is the obverse of the levirate. In some respect it amounts to re-marriage. Not only should a new bridewealth be presented on behalf of the new girl, but she does not necessarily bear children for the deceased woman. She is expected to occupy the deceased woman's compound and care for her own children and those of the deceased widow.

### 2.3.7 Elopement

In several Ghanaian societies marriage is deemed to have been sealed after going through certain stages and the acceptance of brideswealth by the girl's parents or guardians. There is therefore no possibility of confusing mere love affairs with marriage. A man and woman cannot be said to be married and live together as such without payment of the brideswealth. The marriage process could however be circumvented by some lovers who, either for reasons of the girl being betrothed to someone or the boy's inability to immediately pay brideswealth, run away together to live somewhere where they can live together. This practice which is common among the Konkomba is considered a way of going round the rather long marriage process which has an institutionalised betrothal system.

After settling for years, and sometimes even having children, the runaway husband will approach the girl's father through an intermediary, usually his own brother, to pay the brideswealth. If the father agrees, as he always does, then the marriage is valid. But such a union leads to reprisals on the part of the lineage group that lost a wife. They in-turn will refuse a promised wife to a suitor from the same clan. Where parents of a girl refuse to accept brideswealth, it is considered that children born by these lovers belong to the woman's husband and can be accepted by him as his children.

Respondents who identified elopement as a cultural practice affecting women were unanimous in their view that it was a harmful practice. As many as 79.1 per cent saw it in that light, with only 20.9 per cent identifying it as good. Reasons canvassed for the latter view relate to the fact that it circumvents the practice where women are forced into marriages (16.7 per cent) and that it provides women with

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marriage partners (4.2 per cent). One reason for identifying the practice as harmful was that it disturbs the social order and sometimes brings tension among families.

### **2.3.8 Fostering**

The practice of rearing relatives' children is common among all ethnic groups in Ghana. While some practice it at will, others have an institutionalised kinship fosterage. Among the Ewe it is not uncommon to have parents send their sons to their artisan brothers to learn such trades as carpentry, masonry, fitting and fishing. According to Diana Gladys Azu in *"The Ga Family and Social Change"*, among the Ga, children are sent to relatives or non-relatives for training; It is preferred to send a child to someone of the same sex for training, although this is not always followed, it is less often the case that a boy is fostered by a female than that the girl is fostered by a male. Among the Kassena it was part of custom to turn over the first child to the brother.

The Dagomba are perhaps the one group with a very formalised fostering system. The practice of rearing a relative's child may be viewed as a specific mechanism which detaches the child from its parents and attaches it to the members of the wider kinship group. It refers to the institutionalised way through which parents temporarily handover the responsibility for rearing their children to a relative. The child goes to live with the foster parent to serve and be trained by him or her. A fostered child maintains its attachment to the fostering kin and also to its real parents. A son may be given to their father's brothers to be educated, while girls could be given to the father's sisters. This child may be given out at the age of between four and eight and stay with the paternal uncle or aunt until marriage.

Some writers like A. K. Awedoba in *Culture and Development in Africa* point out that fostering addresses problems of childlessness. It is also believed that fostering is for the good of the child as foster parents were known to be stricter in disciplining the child than the child's own parents. There is a special case of fostering for princes among the Dagomba. It is thought that when a child is brought up in his own father's house he gains a false sense of importance and superiority instead of being imbued with the valued characteristics of respect, obedience and diligence. Thus a senior court official could be given a chief's son and told to teach him how to behave in the manner befitting a prince.

Through learning to work like a commoner and being humble before people, the prince may avoid earning the harmful envy of evil doers. The manifest functions and dysfunctions of fostering of children were identified by a number of respondents in FGD discussions on fostering among the Dagomba (refer to chapter five) and also in responses to questionnaire administered.

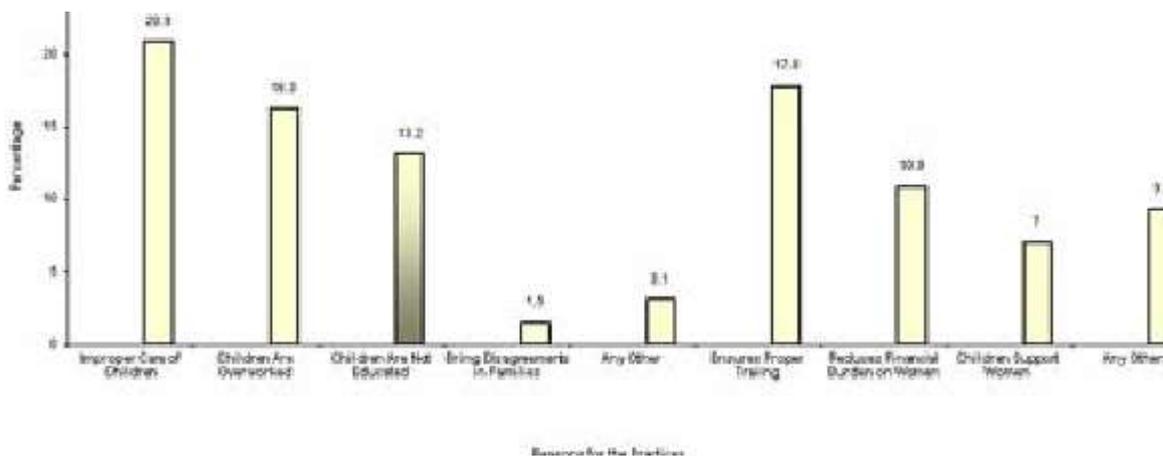


Figure 2.3 presents data from the field on responses to good and harmful effects of fostering. Twenty-three of the 129 respondents on this issue pointed out that fostering ensures proper training of children. Therefore foster parents are better able to bring up the child without undue harassment or pampering characteristic of parents, while in the case of a chief's son, he is brought up to be humble and hardworking so as to avoid the jealousy of a mother's co-wives. Out of the 129 rites mentioned, 10.9 per cent were for the fact that it reduces the financial burden on parents. In a way more endowed brothers and sisters are made to share resources with less fortunate ones, thus re-distributing wealth among kith and kin. On the other side, the child supports the foster-parents through rendering services. The functioning of the fostering system seems to have been undermined by social change and increasing economic hardship. As figure 2.8 illustrates out of the 139 times the fostering rites were mentioned by respondents, for 55.0 per cent it was in a negative light. A major criticism of the system was the fact that foster-children are not properly looked after (20.9 per cent), they are overworked (16.3 per cent), that such children are not educated (13.2 per cent), thus undermining the constitutional right of the child to good education as spelt out in Article 38 of the Constitution.

## 2.4 Death

The last *rite de passage* performed in all Ghanaian societies has to do with death. Generally, mortuary rites are extensive and more often than not where it is a case of a husband the wife goes through widowhood rites

### 2.4.1 Funeral Rites

Ghanaians see death as a necessary end of man. However, there is the tendency to always seek an explanation for any person's death at the time he dies. It is the expectation of all that a person will live to a ripe old age and die a natural death and such a person before he/she dies must sip water which is believed will sustain him on his journey into the spirit world.

Death in any other way is regarded as unnatural, for example such deaths as at child birth, through accident, through abortion or suicide etc. On Death through war, though it is seen as unnatural, the person is regarded as having served his country honourably and hence deserves a respectful funeral as society prescribes. All unnatural deaths are accorded some form of funeral. In the case of death by suicide in times past the corpse was dishonoured and thrown into the forest. In death through road

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accident, among the Ewe, the person is not laid in state in a room but in a hut (make-shift structure) outside the family house erected for that purpose.

Persons who live a full life with good character are buried with all pomp and dignity which will satisfy them and hence encourage them to become ancestors. Only persons who live honourable lives are deemed to become ancestors. They in the spirit world intercede for the living and can also punish and reward the living for their actions.

The natural death is not announced immediately, to allow the family time to organise itself. Messages are also sent to relatives far and near. Among the Ewe the management of the funeral is the responsibility of the kin of the deceased. On the eve prior to burial there is a wake. It starts with wailing and firing of muskets. The body is washed. This is the responsibility of the sons of the family, if the deceased is a male. Otherwise it is that of the daughters. Among the Ga, if the man is married, his widow will be holding a toe each whilst he is being bathed. Warm water is used with chewing sponge, lime, towels, soap perfumes. Lime is used as perfume. Among the Akan the body is washed three times before it is dried with soap.

When the corpse is laid in state, some elders, mainly old women, from both maternal and paternal sides stay in the room. Others who must stay in the room are wives and relatives who may want to. These are the people one greets as one files past the corpse. The wake ceremony is marked by drumming, singing of dirges, weeping, drinking and dancing. Mourners appear in black cloth. On the day of the burial, the widow or widower does not go to the cemetery. After the lowering of the coffin into the grave, there is pouring of libation. The mourners return home and that ends the funeral.

Due to social change, the traditional mortuary rites have seen many changes over the years. In the days gone-by it was the responsibility of the lineage to produce the coffin but this has been shifted to the children of the deceased if they are old or the surviving spouse. Wake is gradually being replaced by a short church service the night prior to burial. In many places, the burial ceremonies are preceded by church service. After burial there is a family gathering where sympathisers give donations and they in turn are refreshed. The nature, form and size of funerals are determined by the age, status, occupation of the deceased.

A major criticism of modern funerals is the great expense involved. There are families which insist on having a special funeral cloth worn by relatives. This often brings extra expenses on family members. Another area of great expenses is the refreshment after burials. It has almost become fashionable to give “take away” food at funerals and it is not uncommon to see people gulp down several bottles of beer or minerals and take extra away all at the expense of the deceased family, who should rather be helped in their moment of grief.

More 75 per cent) of respondents who identified funeral rites with women pointed out it was one in which women were affected positively. Among reasons given for that stance is that it provides opportunity to honour the deceased, and gives the deceased a fitting farewell from the labours of this earth. Funerals also could be the opportunity for social interaction as well as for the deceased family to receive donations. A major criticism of funerals for which they are seen as harmful is the big cost in terms of buying coffins, provision of food and drinks for morners and sympathisers. Invariably, many a family are left with huge debts after funerals.

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## 2.4.2 Widowhood Rites

Almost all ethnic groups in Ghana have one form or other of institutionalised ways of mourning by the spouse. Invariably, it is more rigorous for widows than widowers. The widowhood rites serve to break both the domestic and sexual hold of the deceased partner and announce the change in status of the woman.

Almost immediately when the death of a husband is known women start their widowhood rites. Among the Ewe, *ahowowo*, as it is called, starts with the woman wearing her red under-cloth, *godui-dzi*, more securely around her private parts. Among the Akan she smears her private parts with red clay. All these are precautions against attempts by the husband's spirit to copulate with her. Should the spirit succeed the wife will become permanently pregnant.

Among the Ewe on the day of the wake, the widow or widower gets through the ritual of *yodzogbonon* "drinking the special funeral pap," to prove her innocent of her husband's death. She must also observe the practice of putting a piece of charcoal into her food, otherwise the spirit will partake of the food and harm her. This practice is also observed by men.

The *ahowowo* falls into two parts. First is the 16 days of confinement for either the husband or wife. After this the widow observes the first 16 months of mourning. During this period she is expected to be in black. The period ends with *ahotsilele*, the ceremonial washing of the widow. A widow must go through *ahowowo* before re-marrying. She is regarded as the wife of the dead husband even during this mourning period; any sexual activity at this time is regarded as infidelity.

Among the Akan, the woman starts observing her widowhood rite from the date of death of her husband through to the funeral. Several prohibitions and limitations are visited on her. Her eyes may be sprayed with grind pepper, she may be expected to undertake dry-fasting during the funeral rites. She could also be made to sleep in the same room with the corpse. The severity and extent of the treatment she will pass through depends on the regard the sisters-in-law have for the widow. The details of widowhood rite among the Akan (Asante) are dealt with in chapter seven.

Among the Ga, when the woman loses her husband she changes into black cloth and is secluded in a room in the mother's house. She takes part in the final bathing of the husband, and stays in the room where he is laid in state until the relatives return from the cemetery. The following day she visits the tombstone and goes back to seclusion. The next time she comes out, she performs the *abusua too* rite which entails spending the night with an old woman in the room where the husband was laid, then at dawn she is taken to the beach where she is clean shaven and she comes back into the courtyard to "cook" for the husband's ghost. On the eve of the third month which ends the funeral, she spends the night in the *saino* and bathes at the beach the following morning. She is dressed in black cloth and a white band is put in the middle to signify that she has successfully gone through the rituals. The killing of *okulafo too*, 'widow's goat', is believed to pacify the dead man so that his ghost will not harass the widow or the successor. It also ends the sexual bond and monopoly which the dead husband had over his wife.

Among the Konkomba, widows are forced to stay in the same room with the corpse until burial. Before burial, the widow is forbidden to eat or drink water. She can only eat or drink after the burial of the dead husband. In a situation where the man has many wives, they all sleep in the room of the first wife and do all things together, that is going to market, toilet etc. For the first three days after burial they take

supper before sunset and have to remain indoors till the next day. It is believed that when they come out in the night, they will see the spirit of their husband which may cause their death. On the third day the widow must shave the head to signify that she is in her mourning mood. A white thread is tied around her neck and a woven fibre tied around her waist; the woman also uses loin cloth (“Amoshi”) to protect her private part so that the dead husband cannot have sex with her. It is believed that she will die should it happen.

If it happens that the corpse is sent to the mortuary, it is assumed the man is not yet dead but some rituals have to be performed for the widows until the corpse is brought for burial.

The widow (s) move to their various rooms after the third day. Widow(s) carry calabashes to wherever they go and eat and drink from them. Widow(s) are not allowed to attend any funeral or market if they have not been sent first to the funeral of another person to mourn.

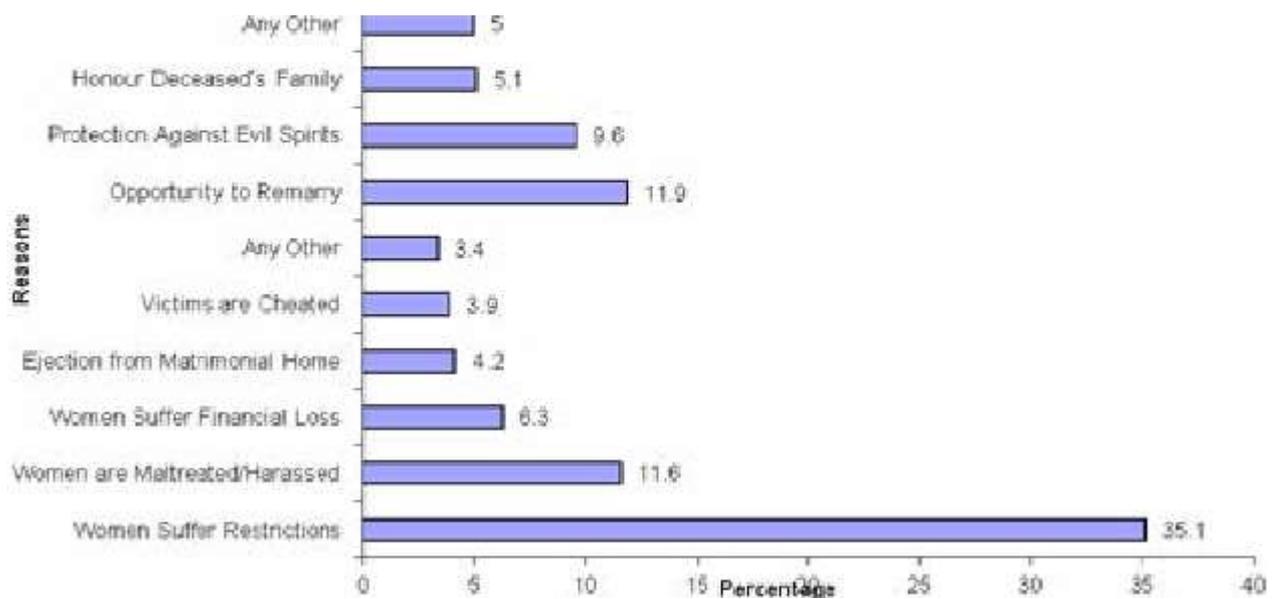


Figure 2.4 shows reasons for identifying widowhood rites as harmful or good. As high as 64.5 per cent of respondents identified widowhood rites as harmful. Reasons given include the fact that women suffer restrictions, are maltreated and harassed, they suffer financial loss and are sometimes ejected from the matrimonial home. Those who saw the practice as good accounted for only 35.8 per cent, and their reasons included: It provides women an opportunity to re-marry. It gives them protection against evil spirits, it honours the deceased's family and provides support to widows.

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## Chapter 3

### Marriage Among the Konkomba

#### 3.0 Introduction

This chapter will discuss issues of marriage and the constitutional rights of women among the Konkomba. The Konkomba (Likpakpaln) are part of the Gurma ethnic group of Ghana. Others in that group are the Bimoba, Kyamba, Pilapila, Basare, and Salfalba. The Konkomba inhabit the north-eastern part of the Northern Region of Ghana and are spread in three administrative districts, namely Nanumba, Zabzugu-Tatale and Saboba-Chereponi. The traditional home of the Konkomba is Saboba. The Konkombas are mainly farmers and are renowned for cultivation of yam. In the districts where they are in large numbers and also in other areas such as the Krachi and Nkwanta districts of the Volta Region and several districts in Ashanti and Brong Ahafo regions, and even in the Greater Accra Region they have carved a reputation for farming.

The study was conducted in September 2003 at Saboba, the district capital of Saboba-Chereponi District in the Northern Region of Ghana. The Konkomba are the majority tribe in the Saboba-Chereponi District. There are however minority groups like the Chokosi (or Anufo), Basare and Chereponi. The study which was on marriage among the Konkomba took the form of focus group discussions involving the following:

- Women who have experienced early child betrothal, exchange, widowhood and elopement types of marriages.
- Women and men who gave their daughters for these types of marriages, and men who have married through these systems.
- Opinion leaders, teachers, pastors, youth associations who observe the practice.

The three groups met separately at the premises of the Rural Integrated Literacy and Development Programme (RILADEP) at Saboba. A total of 28 respondents were involved with a little over 50 per cent female respondents. Out of the total 28 respondents, ten were married through the betrothal system, five through exchange, two had experienced widowhood and two elopement. Only one had not married at all but the rest (eight) had married through the normal system. All the participants in the FGD were Konkomba. All the women who were betrothed at birth did not have any form of formal education, that is to say, they were all illiterates. Only one of those who were exchanged in marriage had primary education. The ages of the respondents were between 36 to 60 years. Refer to Table 3.1 for details of socio-demography data on respondents.

#### 3.1 Forms of Marriage

Among the Konkomba marriage is seen as one of the critical rites of passage. To attain adulthood and grow to old age without entering a marriage union is considered abnormal. But though recognised as a union between a man and wife, it is also seen as a union of two families. A man's brothers and sisters refer to his wife as *my wife* or *our wife*. This is due to the extended family system. The Konkomba tend to favour polygyny. A man is permitted to marry more than one wife. Some Konkomba women desired that their husbands marry more than one woman so that they could work together on the farm and assist in household activities.

The study reveals many manifestations of the concept of marriage. Of course, the typical marriage

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where young adults who love each other willingly accept to live as husband and wife is demonstrated among the Konkomba, as in other societies in Ghana and many parts of Africa. For the purpose of this study, we termed this type of marriage as a normal marriage. This is because, first it is common to all societies in Ghana, and secondly, it is consistent with the provisions of our Constitution.

Other types of marriage identified among the Konkomba are:

1. Betrothal.
2. Exchange.
2. Widowhood.
4. Elopement.

### **3.2 Betrothal**

#### **3.2.1 Nature and Form**

Betrothal is a situation where parents of a girl-child, without consent of their daughter agreed to give her out to a man to marry. This is done at her birth or during her infancy. A man can betroth his daughter to his friend at birth. In another case, if a man happens to propose to a lady and then realises that the lady is already betrothed or engaged, he calls the lady a friend and gives her gifts. When such a lady gives birth to a baby girl, the woman can plead with the husband to give their newborn girl to that man. If the husband agrees to the request, the girl is given to the man to marry.

#### **3.2.2 Origin**

It is difficult to trace when the betrothal system of marriage actually evolved. Students of the Bible might conclude that it was adopted from the Jews. However, some respondents said, it all happened that two young men from two different clans of Konkomba were good friends. One got married first and gave birth to a baby girl. He invited the friend and asked him to marry the daughter in future. This he did in appreciation for the good things the friend did for him. The friend eventually married the girl that cemented their friendship.

Betrothal system of marriage builds good and cordial relationship between two families. A man who betrothes a girl in any family is bound to be loyal and respectful to the family, at least, until the marriage is consummated. Any act of vandalism or disrespect can cause the marriage to be terminated. Some also give out their daughter as a sign of appreciation for what the man or a member of that family does for them. This perpetually cements their relationship and they continue to live in harmony. One important factor why child-bride taking is encouraged can be termed as economic as much is gained from the bride-price paid to the in-laws. In addition to the money, drinks and other gifts that the man is made to offer, he provides labour to work on the farm of the in-laws once every year for nine years.

In spite of these benefits, betrothal and infant marriage have several drawbacks in our contemporary constitutional rule. Most of these girls are married before the age of 18 years. This is a clear violation of the provision of the Children's Act of 1998. The girls are required, under the pretext of culture, to marry men they do not love. Considering the age of the men, at times they marvel whether the men are their husband or their fathers. One participant narrated an incident that happened quite recently. According to her, a young lady was forcefully brought to the man who betrothed her at birth. The lady refused to share a bed with the man, although they sleep in the same room. As this continued, one night

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the man's children held the lady for their father to rape. To retaliate, the lady one night cut the man's sex organ and reported herself at the police station. The case was duly sent to court. The point we are driving at is that, such marriages do not only infringe on the constitutional rights of the lady, but they are also one of the reasons for unstable marriages, causing social problems for the communities and the nation at large.

The women who are not brave enough like the one above may commit suicide. A case was reported that a lady was being sent by a ferry to join her betrothed husband at Dambai. When they got to the middle of the Volta River, the woman jumped into the river and that was the end of her life. Others commit various forms of suicide.

Notably, these women are often denied formal education. All the female participants in the FGD who were betrothed did not have any form of formal education. The Constitution provides for free and compulsory basic education. Education takes one-third of our national budget. Despite these, low enrollment and high drop-out rates are recorded in the Saboba area. A major cause of the high drop-out rate is the need of early marriage of the girl-child. At one focus group discussion, it was revealed that during the 2002 academic year in Saboba, ten betrothed girls were withdrawn from school presumably by their husbands. Though some non-governmental organisations made efforts to re-instate the girls, only three went back to school, one of those who could not go back was pregnant.

### **3.2.3 The Bridewealth**

At birth the man sends a bundle of firewood to give to the prospective in law but does not declare his intentions. This can be done two or three times. The next step is done by sending a head pan of grains and a guinea fowl.

When the baby girl is about a month old, he sends a pot of pito (local brewed beer). After that a second pot of pito is sent in a month or two. After the second pot of pito the little girl's father gets to know that the man is interested in his daughter. He summons the immediate family members (men) to a meeting and tells them what is happening and finds out whether there is any hindrance that will prevent the marriage.

The third pot comes after the meeting, to finally hear from his prospective in-laws about his intentions. After the drinking, the elders of the family then disclose to the prospective husband whether the girl will be his in marriage or not.

If there is a positive response from the prospective in-laws then he continues to pay the rest of the dowry. He comes yearly to farm for both man and woman for nine years. On the part of the man in the first year he comes alone and the second year he comes with another person to make two. In the third instance the number increases to three until it reaches eight people in the eighth year. He equally farms for the woman. Within the eight years of farming, it is compulsory for the man to drink and pay for a pot of pito and also buys Pito for the in-laws any time he meets them. The ninth year is reserved as a resting year until the tenth year where the farming and drinking ends.

Meanwhile, aside farming, when the girl is about three years old 30 bundles of unthashed guinea-corn and a pot of pito are also sent to the in-laws. This is known as 'Gidiboa'. Between eight to nine years age of the girl, three big baskets of thrashed guinea corn and a pot of pito are also sent to the in-laws. This is known as Gididon.

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A third and last set of ten bundles of guinea corn together with a big pot of pito are again expected to be sent to the in-laws. This is known as Gidichean. By this last stage, the girl is mature and ready for marriage. The prospective husband thus sends his friend who goes with a hand woven white cloth (known as Lichakpekekeln) to the mother in-law asking for the release of the wife. This particular practice is repeated three times. On the fourth occasion the mother in-law accepts the cloth. Thereafter, a day is fixed for the release of the wife. A special pito is brewed at the father's house to mark the day. On the fixed day a man or woman is sent by the husband to bring the girl. After they have drunk the pito, the girl is prepared and sent outside the house and rituals are performed at the entrance/in front of the hall, where finally she is released to the man/women who have come for her. She is then sent to the house of the oldest man in the family of the husband. She spends two nights there and during that period the most senior wife of the man counsels her. On the third day's night she is sent to the husband's house.

The last and final stage of the process of payment of bridewealth is where the father-in-law provides some guinea corn to the girl to brew pito. The whole family comes together to drink with people paying for what they drink. The amount realised is given to the bride as capital. They also make a farm of food ingredient for her to start life with.

### **3.3 Exchange (Lipikpein)**

#### **3.3.1 Nature and Form**

The next form of marriage among the Konkomba is exchange (Lipikpein). It is a practice that is analogous to a barter system of trade where a white fowl is exchanged for a black fowl. This follows that a man exchanges an unmarried woman from his family with an unmarried woman from another family for the purpose of marriage. A man looks for a woman whose family member is prepared to accept a woman he has to exchange in marriage. For instance, if Mr. Ato has a sister called Elisabeth and he wants to marry, he invites men from a different family to examine Elisabeth. If Mr. Baako expresses interest in Elisabeth, he brings his sister Gladys to exchange with Elisabeth. The consent for the marriage is not necessarily between the couple. Once the two men agree to the give-and- take, the women are compelled to marry the men, even if it is against their wish.

A man can exchange his own daughter with another woman to marry. In the same vein, a brother can use his sister for exchange for another lady to marry. With amicable agreement, a man can use any family member such as his niece or cousin for exchange for a woman to marry.

Exchange as it is practiced today was not known until the early fifty's (1950s). It is a development that emerged from a practice among the Konkomba called replacement. Replacement is a situation where when one is married from a particular clan, even if the woman may be dead, any family member of the woman could also go to marry from that clan. According to Kenneth Wujangi, the KOYA president, although he married through the normal practice over 30 years ago, just about a year ago, his in-laws demanded a woman from his family to be given to a man in their family. It is a form of reciprocity.

It takes over nine years to marry through the betrothal system. Normal marriage also involves a lot of things. As a result, instead of going through the normal process of marriage, which has a long gestation period and is also very expensive to afford, people instituted exchange of sisters, daughters, cousins and nieces. This the participants referred to as lazy people's kind of marriage.

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The participants hardly identified anything positive about the exchange system. They consented that if a man has a sister or sisters he is assured of having wife or wives. A man might marry a very beautiful lady he could not have afforded through other systems. The bridewealth is always negotiable. Since the process involves a compromise, the bridewealth is cheaper, affordable and fast track.

The practice connotes barter trade. Meanwhile, human beings are not commodities to trade with. One serious implication is that, a divorce in Mr. Ato's marriage automatically results in divorce in Mr. Baako's marriage.

### **3.3.2 The Bridewealth**

There is no standard form of dowry in this kind of marriage. The families prescribe an amount of money for the husbands to pay and the marriage is sealed. Each family determines how much to collect before the marriage is to be contracted. In any case, some pito would be demanded from the man on the day the marriage is supposed to be consummated. The number of people available for the ceremony determines the number of pots of pito that would be provided.

## **3.4 Elopement**

### **3.4.1 Nature and Form**

Elopement is a situation where a man loves a woman and expresses the interest to marry her. The woman in turns accepts willingly to marry the man. If for one reason or the other, the parents of the woman pose problems for a smooth and successful marriage of the two of them, the man elopes with the woman, leaves the town to settle with her somewhere else, sometimes in a different region. Depending on the gravity of the situation, it can take just a year, two, three or ten; the man then comes forward or asks his parents at home to regularise the payment of the bridewealth for the marriage to be recognized as such.

### **3.4.1 The Bridewealth**

No matter how long it takes, even though some attract some form of fines or penalties, the man surely settles the bridewealth. Most of these women who eloped usually were women who were betrothed at birth and might not be interested in the man. The parents who had committed themselves to the first man could also not have easily allowed another man to marry their daughter.

## **3.5 Widow Inheritance**

The last type of marriage is the widow inheritance. The death of a spouse in Konkomba society does not necessarily terminate a marriage. In the event where a husband living with the wife dies, a husband is found for the widow from the immediate kin of the deceased husband. He takes over the woman and performs the responsibilities of a husband, takes care of the children and the property of the deceased. This shows that the woman to some extent is married to the whole family. This underscores the fact that brothers from the same family come to work on the farm of the father-in-law for nine years as part payment of the bridewealth. These arrangements were made to provide security, especially for the woman.

One of the participants in the FGD revealed that her senior sister who was betrothed died before the consummation of the marriage. Invariably, she was substituted at the age of 12 years to marry the man

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who betrothed her sister. She could not object to the request because it was not possible for the father to refund the payment made for her sister.

### **3.6 The Way Forward**

The accounts from the FGD show that betrothal, exchange of sisters, widowhood and elopement forms of marriage are still being practiced among the Konkomba in this contemporary Ghana. These form of marriages, as stated by the respondents denied a woman in this society to a large extent, the right to choose her marriage partner. Regrettably, the victims are denied access to formal education. Most of these girls are married before the age of 18 years. They become potential parents who are not adequately prepared physically, psychologically and financially to offer responsible parenthood. As a result, their children end up being street children, drug addicts, school dropouts and all kinds of burdens on the community. Though no figures exist to point out the number of women who commit suicide rather than marry men forced on them, there are cases to point out that the choice of suicide could well be high among girls. Others are enslaved in marriage for life. In short, most women or girls in this society are not fairly treated. To this effect, we can conclusively say, the system of marriage among the Konkombas has to a large extent undermined the constitutional rights of their women.

Culture, all told, centers on people, hence the slogan “culture is man-made” Awedoba (2002:25). In every cultural practice, there must be the notion of change.

The message of this survey is that, the respondents have identified some measures that can trigger cultural change, particularly, the marriage system among the Konkomba. The first concerns creation of awareness. The majority (75 per cent) of the respondents saw the need for seminars and workshops to be held for the chiefs, elders, parents, Assembly members, Unit Committee members and opinion leaders, among other things:

- To encourage girl-child education in the district. They admitted that men fear to approach women when they are highly educated. It is no secret that the men play on the ignorance of the women.
- Sensitize them on human rights and freedoms as enjoined by the Constitution;
- Allow women to choose their own marriage partner.

This is not to suggest that there has not been education on these issues in the area. The Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ), the National Commission for Civic Education (NCCE), the Konkomba Youth Association (KOYA), Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and Religious Bodies are all doing their best. The Christian type of marriage is gradually increasing in this society. Again, the president of KOYA, for example, reiterated that, when the youth of Konkomba from various parts of the country met at their last Easter convention meeting in 2002, the issues of forced marriage and girl-child education were tabled and extensively discussed. According to Kenneth Wujangi, the KOYA president, some level of awareness has been created. What is needed now is a collective effort to confront the problem.

The second measure that came up was on enactment and enforcement of laws. The respondents stressed that if the existing laws are really implementable, then the law enforcement agencies should be empowered to do their work effectively and efficiently. Besides, the District Assembly could equally enact bye-laws that would arrest the situation.

The idea of forming women’s associations to complement the efforts of the Konkomba Youth Association

was brought up by the respondents. If this is done at the village level they would be able to make an impact. At this level, parents who encourage the practice could easily be confronted.

**Table 3.1 Demographic Data of Respondents**

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Group 1</b>	<b>Group 2</b>	<b>Group 3</b>	<b>Totals</b>	
<b>Sex</b>					
Male	-	6	7	13	
Female	9	6	-	15	28
<b>Age</b>					
Below 21		-	-	-	
21 – 30		-	-	-	
31 – 40		1	2	3	
41 – 50	5	-	4	9	
51 – 60	3	7	1	11	
60 +	1	4	-	5	28
<b>Marital Status</b>					
Single		-	1	1	
Married	9	12	6	27	28
<b>Level of Education</b>					
No formal education	7	8	-	15	
Primary	1	-	-	1	
Middle	-	3	1	4	
Secondary/ Vocational	1	1	1	3	
Post Sec./Training Coll.	-	-	4	4	
Tertiary	-	-	1	1	28
<b>Occupation</b>					
Student		-	-	-	
Farmer	4	5	-	9	
Teacher	-	-	2	2	
Civil/Public Servant	1	2	4	7	
Self Employed/ Artisan	2	2	-	4	
Unemployed	2	3	-	5	
Any Other (Pastor)	-	-	1	1	28
<b>Religious Background</b>					
Christianity	1	4	5	10	
Moslem	8	8	2	18	28
Traditional					
<b>Ethnic Background</b>					
Konkomba	9	12	7	28	

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## Chapter 4

### Lapomi Among the Krobo

#### 4.0 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the Lapomi practice among the Krobo of the Eastern Region of Ghana. The Krobo are part of the Ga-Dangme ethnic group of Ghana. The Ga and Shai are the two others in that group. The Krobo trace their origin to Nigeria. From there, they settled on the Kloyo Mountain about 1,094 metres above sea level from which they were forced down in the last century. Today the Krobo occupy two main districts in the Eastern Region, Manya Krobo and Yilo Krobo districts. The former covers an area of 1,479 sq. kilometers while the latter occupies a land area of 805 sq. kilometers. The 2000 Population and Housing Census put the population of the Manya Krobo District at 154,301 with a male- female ratio of 92.2:100. The Yilo Krobo District had a population of 86,043 with a male female ratio of 95.2:100. The Krobo constitute the dominant group in both districts accounting for close to 80 per cent of the population. They are basically farmers with a small proportion as fishermen. The scarcity of fertile farm lands has made many a youth to migrate. There are thus large numbers of Krobo in Akyem land, namely Fanteakwa East Akyem, West Akyem, Suhum-Kraboia-Coaltar districts. Others are in Accra and elsewhere.

The study was conducted in the Manya Krobo District, it being the place with a large proportion of Krobo and considered the cultural home of the Krobo. The study took the form of focus group discussions in which three categories of people were represented: the victims of Lapomi, that is people who had experienced it either as children or as women; traditional rulers and elders who see to the enforcement of the practice; and people who observed the practice from afar as enforcers or critics ie opinion leaders, pastors and teachers.

In all, 24 people were involved in the three focus groups structured along lines of victims, traditional rulers and elders and opinion leaders. Out of the 24 respondents 18 were male with six as female. The Majority of the respondents 12 or 50 per cent were in the age group of 61 and above, 33.3 per cent were in the age group 50 – 60, 12.5 per cent were in the age group 41 – 50 and 4.2 per cent were aged 31 – 40.

Respondents were literates; all having completed basic education. A total of nine (37.5 per cent) were of post-secondary and above status. Salaried workers, that is civil servants and teachers, constituted the majority of the group, 37.5 per cent, with the next significant group as farmers/fishermen. More than two-thirds of respondent were married Christians .

#### 4.1 Marriage Rites

The institution of marriage is considered very important among the Krobo. Not only does it confer on one conjugal rights, but also the right to have custody of the child, and in death the right to bury the child. The marriage rites among the Krobo go through three major stages: Yabami, Nyasinam and Fia.

The first stage Yabami: there a man gets to know his future in-laws, that is, the parents of his wife-to-be, behind closed doors. In some instances the woman goes out to help the man on the farm. Given the high rate of emigration among the Krobo, women sometimes travel with the men to help them in their farmstead or other farms.

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Nyasinami is the second stage of marriage. Here the husband is accepted by the woman's family as having a seat in their home. The man is often invited to all activities organised in the woman's house. He can now go openly to the woman's house, unlike at the earlier stage.

The final stage, 'Fia', is the blessing of the marriage and this unites the two families. It is only after the performance of the third and final stage of rites that children born out of the wedlock can be named by the father and he takes full custody of the children.

## **4.2 Birth of Children**

Among the Krobo any union was expected to produce children. The birth of a child was heralded with much joy and on the seventh day such a child was outdoored, and given a name. Where the child was not a product of a 'valid marriage relationship', that is, the final stage in marriage had not been reached during the naming ceremony, another smaller ceremony, Lamvomi (tying of La) was undertaken. In that ceremony a La is put on the wrist of the baby. These are three beads strung together in black, white and blue, with raffia. The black bead is called *tovi*, white is *nyoli* and blue *korli*. The raffia string is *hlorwe*. *Tovi* means darkness in which the child was before birth. The white bead stands for victory and it also means successful transition, darkness to light. 'Korli' stands for money or wealth. The La is tied on the child's wrist by the eldest daughter of the father. (In the olden days La served as a means of identification of a Krobo; this prevented them from attacking each other). The child is named by the head of family of the woman. Children so named stay in the mother's homes, that is with the maternal grandfather. The family head also presents clothing, drinks and money for the naming ceremony. The family head also pours libation.

The end of the raffia thread is used to touch the forehead, chest and tongue of the child and he is told – 'when you see, you do not say, the mouth of a person is dumb'. The forehead, chest and tongue are touched because the brain is behind the forehead, the heart is in the chest, the tongue is used for the talking.

It is only after a man performs another rite to cancel or undo what has been performed earlier that he can take full authority/take custody of his own children.

## **4.3 Origin of the Practice**

There were divergent views among respondents as to the origin of the practice. According to some when the Krobos came down from the Mountain from Samer due to the wars they had a small population. The elders were not giving out their daughters in marriage because they needed the children. They therefore took the first child of their daughter. This practice went on till the time of Sir Emmanuel Mate Kole, Konor of Manya Krobo, when it was realised the practice was causing a lot of harm. Children were now being given back to their biological fathers but because the child already bore the name of his mother's family, the father had to perform "Lapomi" to cancel that name so that he can re-name the child. The child seized by the grandfather is 'Yobi' (woman's child) and then we have 'lover's children' who come out of unions between girl and boy friends. Both of these are the children for whom 'Lapomi' is required. An example was given by a participant who said "My grandfather seized my mother's senior and junior brothers. He did not release them to their father who comes from Piengua so these uncles of mine belonged to the Suisi clan when my grandfather was alive but when he died my uncles bought the items for their 'Piengua' father to perform the 'lapomi' rite and take them to the paternal family."

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Some respondents also pointed out that Lapomi was instituted as a way of punishment for men who impregnate women before fully marrying them. Through Lapomi one cancelled the name given by the woman's family to one's name. So 'Lamvomi' (tying of 'la) is done again for the child.

#### **4.4 Removing the La-'Lapomi'**

The La so tied need not be forever on the child. The father can choose to untie that La and hence comes the ceremony of Lapomi. Certain items such as drinks and sheep are necessary to perform that rite. By custom a man gets one child with a woman and has to present one sheep and a bottle of drink. When the number of children is six, he still presents one sheep and a bottle of drink.

In years gone by no money was involved. Today, however, money is also accepted. This is especially in cases where the father comes forward during pregnancy but they desert after the birth of the child and nothing is heard of them till the children grow up. When such fathers come forward at this stage, an amount of money is claimed from them.

The point was also emphasised that some women see the collection of money as a way of exploiting men. A classic example was given where a man took a child and looked after him well. This child became a doctor, then the father decided to come to the mother's family to perform 'Lapomi'. He came with the needed items (sheep and drink). The mother of the child was asked if she had anything to say and she said when she was moving with the man in those days, he borrowed some money from her (about thirty cedis) so today she is demanding the equivalent which she put at one million cedis. Her own family objected and brought it down to five hundred thousand cedis but the woman refused to accept that. The family tried to convince her citing the fact that the father took responsibility for the child right from the beginning. She still stood her ground and told the meeting that if they went ahead to perform 'Lapomi' everyone will hear of them on *Radio Ada*. The rites could not be performed but the child is still with the father's side. The woman, it was unanimously agreed upon, was being greedy. She is not looking at the effort that went into making her son what he is today.

#### **4.5 Effects of Being Yobi**

A woman's child in the grandfather's house is often seen as not having any rights, except the grandfather, before his death, specifically provided for such a child. In most cases any person who subsequently rises against such a child faces punishment from spirits of the deceased grandfather. Several examples were given where mother's brothers rose against such children and died, as the grandfather was said to have given such children a firm seat in his home.

Children for whom Lapomi is not performed cannot inherit on the mother's side nor the father's side. When a father dies, other children for whom Lapomi had not been performed are not considered by their step-brother in the sharing of property.

Sometimes on the death of a father other step-children team up to sack siblings for whom Lapomi had not been performed.

Sometimes when children for whom Lapomi had not been performed die, there is confusion over who buries them. Confusion does not come only between children from different mothers, there is also confusion especially where a couple had a child before getting married properly. This first child, knowing

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his standing, may not even go to stay with the parents and siblings but remains with his mother's family. A classic example was given where the corpse of one such child was brought for burial; the uncles refused to have the funeral at their end. The funeral was finally thus performed at the in-law's place, that is, the home of the man to whom the mother of the deceased was married.

A major issue is whether a Yobi (a woman's child) can become a chief? The consensus was that if a grandfather gives his grandchild a seat in his home, whoever jokes with such a child will die. Where the children of the old man are not many and the grandchild is the only male in the family he can rule. Indeed, there are many such chiefs in Krobo land. If the position becomes vacant the elders consider things such as financial standing, personality and grace. One of the two could be a drunkard. The woman's child can be chosen. The issue is once the grandfather has brought his grandson into his home, he has a place there. That is why in the event of the grandfather's death, whoever rises up against the grandchild dies. The grandfather's ghost invites that person to come and answer. A classic example was given where a family had a stool in the house. Their family head gave each his share of property before he died. The family head is father to one of them – the man's child and grandfather to the other – the woman's child. The two are therefore nephew and uncle. The man's child approached the woman's child and asked him to occupy the stool. They are there living happily today.

#### **4.6 The Way Forward**

Accounts at the focus group discussions point to the high bridewealth as a factor accounting for men not fully performing marriage rites of concubines before conception and birth of a child. This bridewealth needs to be looked at. Some years ago the Konor came out with guidelines for performing of marriage in Konor land but few people complied with them, with many pointing out that the daughters were not the Konor's. Though some complied with the guidelines, many others did not. What is important is for persistent education for parents to reorganize the honour of having children well married even if the monetary consideration is small.

Many young men run away from women they impregnate because of inability to bear the full cost of bride wealth. Parents need to be educated to relax things so that men can take care of impregnated daughters and also the child when it is born. The Children's Act 560 stipulates clearly in sections 2 on the child welfare principle that "The best interest of the child shall be paramount in any matter concerning a child, and 2 (2) states" the best interest of the child shall be the primary consideration by any court, person, institution or other body in a matter concerned with a child."

The insistence on payment of considerable bride wealth, leading to children being born without performance of marriage rites of daughters and consequent declaration of such children, as 'Yobi' is an issue that needs discussion. The Yobi becomes a victim of circumstances and his/her interest is hampered. Refusal of some grandparents to release children to biological fathers with several excuses even when the father has ability to look after the child is a clear violation of Section 5 of the Children's Act, Act 560 which stipulates "No person shall deny a child the right to live with his parents and family and grow up in a caring and peaceful environment unless it is proved in court that living with his parents would (a) lead to significant harm on the child; or (b) subject the child to serious abuse; (c) not be in the best interest of the child." Section 7 of the Children's Act, 1998, Act 560 also states 'no person shall deprive a child of reasonable provision out of the estate of a parent whether or not born in wedlock'.

The issues highlighted in the focus group discussion need the attention of the traditional council for it to look at customary/cultural practices in the light of modernity and constitutional/legal provisions. The NCCE, as a body charged with education of citizenry on the Constitution and laws, can be a good

collaborator with traditional councils. It could help disseminate conclusions and decisions of the chiefs to ensure that cultural practices conform to provisions in our laws and the Constitution. On that ground rites can be selected for enforcement of provisions by law enforcement agencies and the courts. Sometimes it is out of fear that the men run away from the women they impregnated. Things must be relaxed a bit so that when someone impregnates a woman he should care for the woman during pregnancy. When the child is born the father must provide for his child.

**Table 4.1 Demographic Data of Respondents**

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Group 1</b>	<b>Group 2</b>	<b>Group 3</b>	<b>Totals</b>
<b>Sex</b>				
Male	4	6	8	18
Female	2	2	2	6 24
<b>Age</b>				
Below 21	-	-	-	-
21 – 30	-	-	-	-
31 – 40	1	-	-	1
41 – 50	2	-	1	3
51 – 60	3	2	3	8
61 +	-	6	6	12 24
<b>Educational Background</b>				
No Formal Education	-	-	-	-
Primary	-	-	-	-
JSS/Middle	2	3	4	9
Secondary/ Vocational	2	1	3	6
Post Sec./Training Coll.	2	3	1	6
Tertiary	-	1	2	3
Any Other, Arabic	-	-	-	- 24
<b>Occupation</b>				
Student	-	-	-	-
Farmer/Fisherman	1	2	2	5
Teacher	2	2	-	4
Civil/Public Servant	1	2	2	5
Trader/Businessman/Artisan	1	-	1	2
Unemployed	-	-	-	-
Any Other	1	2	5	8 24
<b>Marital Status</b>				
Single	1	-	-	1
Married	3	8	8	19
Divorced	2	-	-	2
Widowed	-	-	1	1
Separated	-	-	1	1 24
Any Other	-	-	-	-
<b>Religious Background</b>				
Christian	4	5	8	17
ATR	2	3	2	7
Muslim	-	-	-	- 24
Any Other	-	-	-	-

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## **Chapter 5**

### **Fostering of the Girl-Child Among the Dagomba**

#### **5.0 Introduction**

This section deals with fostering of the girl-child among the Dagomba with the aim of understanding and assessing the effects the practices have on the girl-child or women. The Dagomba are part of the Mole-Dagbani ethnic group of Ghana. Others within that category are the Builsa (Kangyaga or Kanja), Dagarti (Dagaaba), Kusasi, Mamprusi, Namnam (Nabdum), Nankansi and Gurense, Nanumba, and Walba (Wala). The Dagbon State covers Tamale, Tolon-Kumbungu, Yendi, Gushiegu-Karaga, Savelugu-Nanton and Nanumba districts in the Northern region of Ghana. Yendi is the traditional capital. At the 2000 Population and Housing Census the population of Savelugu-Nanton District was 89,968 made up of 44,700 males and 45,268 females. The district is basically agrarian.

This study was conducted in September 2003 at Savelugu, the capital of Savelugu-Nanton District. It took the form of focus group discussions involving the following:

- Women who have experienced fostering as girl-child or during their childhood.
- Women and men who have fostered girls and brought them up to become adults.
- Opinion leaders who observe the practice.

The three groups were met separately at the district office of the National Commission for Civic Education (NCCE), Savelugu. A total of 29 respondents were involved with a little over 60 per cent female respondents. About 80 per cent of those who experienced fostering had no formal education. Of the group, for those who had some form of formal education, the highest level of educational attainment was primary level. The ages of the respondents were between twenty-two (22) and fifty-two (52) years (see Table 5.1 at end of the chapter).

#### **5.1 The Nature of Fostering a Girl-Child**

Fostering of a girl-child according to the respondents is a practice where a man gives his girl-child to a paternal aunt or sister to bring up to adulthood. The child is considered as a daughter of the sister who brings her up. In other words, the sister plays the role of a mother in the life of the child. Even if the child happens to marry and give birth to a baby, she returns to the aunt to take care of them. Similarly, if there should be a divorce in her marriage, the aunt accepts her back in her home. She does not go back to her biological mother, except the unexpected happens. The sister of the man consists of the man's

- Maternal sisters.
- Paternal cousins.
- Half-sisters (same father with different mothers or same mother with different fathers).

#### **5.2 The Process of Fostering**

##### **5.2.1 Marriage**

The process of fostering starts at the time the man wants to marry. When a man sees a girl he admires, he informs his sister about his desire to marry her. The sister investigates the background of the lady and advises her brother to either proceed to court the lady or otherwise.

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If the lady is recommended the man goes ahead to court. Successful courting then leads to the consummation of the marriage.

The man's sister plays some roles before the wedding ceremony. She provides headgears, veils, and sometimes clothes. Those who can afford it assist their brothers with money. When the wedding is over and the bride is taken to her marital home, the sister visits them once in a while to see how they fare.

### **5.2.2 Pregnancy**

When the lady is pregnant for two months the man goes to inform his sister that his wife has changed. The sister then comes to observe the brother's wife and agrees that she is pregnant. The brother then chooses a day and informs the sister to come and pronounce his wife's pregnancy. The sister comes on the said day and gives the brother's wife some concoction to drink and during the process of drinking she knocks at the head (light one) and then tells the sister-in-law that she was a child but now is an adult. This is done between three to four months of the pregnancy. It is after this act that anybody, including the husband can call her a pregnant woman. This is called *Pregibu* in Dagomba.

Between the fifth and sixth months of the pregnancy, the man's sister (auntie-to-be of the unborn child) sends some ingredients for making soup to her brother's house and prepares a meal which is distributed to the two families. The auntie takes the food to the pregnant lady's room. The woman would be asked to hurry up into the room to meet the person who cooked the food. At the time of eating the food, which is T.Z. and groundnut soup, the aunt knocks at the head again and puts a talisman around her neck. She tells her again she was a child but now an adult. This is the confirmation of the pregnancy.

Confirmation is done because during the early months there could occur a miscarriage and it is also a second protection for the pregnant woman and her unborn child.

The man's sister plays these roles to signify that the woman is married to a responsible family and to indicate that the man has relations or relatives. Previously, all families practiced it but now because of modernization and social transformations the practice is limited to some families that still value the tradition. Those who still practice it feel that when a pregnant woman does not go through the pregnancy rites, the child when born behaves abnormally or may not be mentally active.

### **5.2.3 Birth and Naming**

After delivery the man's sister sends ingredients for the preparation of meals to the new mother. She does the cooking for six days.

On the seventh day when the newborn baby will be named, the woman's parent (mother of the child) brings soup ingredient to her marital home and prepares the meals for all the two families and the invited guests. The aunt of the newly born child (man's sister) presents beads, earring, baby dresses to the child. If the child is a baby girl, then the auntie expresses her interest in fostering the child at the appropriate time in the future

Normally after delivering the first child, the woman will go back to her parents for two to three years so that her mother or the auntie will help in caring for the baby since as first-time mother she lacks the experience of baby care. This practice of going back to her parents to help in baby care is repeated at second birth as well.

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While the baby and her mother are at their maternal home the auntie (the man's sister) visits them with gifts to the child, to again show her interest in fostering the child. When the woman comes back to her husband's house after two to three years during the second pregnancy, the auntie (man's sister) sends some cola nuts and some money to the family head to ask for the girl she is going to foster. The family head accepts the cola nuts and informs the man of the impending fostering. The cola nuts are shared to members of the household and to key family members.

A message is then sent back to the man's sister that the girl's mother is sick; when she recovers she will get her daughter. Here the pregnancy is referred to as sickness.

After delivering the second child, the first girl-child to be fostered is taken away by the auntie immediately the outdoorings is over. If the auntie is well known by the fostered child, she is normally happy and willing to go. But where the auntie is not well known by the child or had not received any gifts, she is not happy or ready to go.

Even though the child is for the auntie, the child is normally handed over to the auntie's husband to be given to the wife to help in fetching water and fuel wood. However, as soon as the child is given to the auntie it means the father has no right to take the child back even on the ground that the child is not being cared for properly.

### **5.3 How did Fostering Evolve**

Legend has it that the practice came about as a result of a woman who was unable to bear a child and had to foster her brother's girl-child so that that child and all the grandchildren would become hers. The first woman who started it took good care of the girl and it helped her to have a good marriage. People saw it, admired it and put it into practice. The humane and beautiful fostering was admired and it became a practice and it eventually evolved to be the rule rather than the exceptional circumstance that brought it about. Today, there are distortions in the fostering and fostered children most often are maltreated, enslaved and poorly brought up.

### **5.4 Importance of Fostering**

The concept of family in Dagbon society is not like the typical Western understanding of nuclear family. The family in Dagbon is broader than the nuclear family that includes

- a. Mother and grand mothers.
- b. Father and grand fathers.
- c. Uncles Maternal and paternal.
- d. Cousins maternal and paternal.

In Dagbon society, parents do not have full control over their children, especially when their senior siblings and parents are still alive. It is established that the parents themselves are under the control of their own parents and the head of the kindred. A child whether a boy or a girl, is considered as a property of the extended family, and in some sense, the property of the community as a whole. The girls are given to their fathers' sisters because it is believed they will be stricter in bringing them up as adults. A child who is brought up under a strict condition would invariably be imbued with the valued characteristics of respect, obedience and diligence. The institution of fostering provides childless couples happiness and keeps the marriages intact. Barrenness can cause serious problems in marriage and for the family

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as whole. It therefore helps to keep strong relationships within the family or between families.

The fostering system helps to provide social security for the aged. Even if not fostered one is made to believe that all those who could have fostered you are indeed your biological parents and hence you are obliged to take care of them at old age. In the same vein, orphanage is not known in its real sense in Dagbon society. The girls are adequately prepared for marriage with all the wares they need to become good wives. Some acquired skills from their fostered parents on which they depend for livelihood.

### **5.5 People Involved in the Practice**

Those involved are family people, including the second-generation. Relations can foster under any permutation in the relationships. The practice of fostering involves the brother's, sisters and family heads. Fostering is not limited to a brother's child alone but where there is a good relationship between a man in the family and a woman in the family or outside the family. Sometimes it is the father of the child who does it voluntarily just to please his maternal and paternal sides.

Fostering of girl-child is not compulsory for the auntie. However, if the auntie shows the interest, the brother is obligated by tradition to release his daughter for her to foster. Failure can easily cause a break in family ties. It is demonstrated that a child would remain in the fostered home even under the following challenges:

- a. Maltreatment or perceived maltreatment.
- b. If her mother encourages her to do so.
- c. If she is influenced negatively by her peer or outsiders.

If a girl-child absconds from her foster parents in such a way that it might bring about some ills in the family relations, her father may buy a sheep and call her to witness the slaughter of the sheep to signify the performance of her funeral. The society sees it as a sign of disrespect on the part of the child if she absconds from fostering.

### **5.6 Overall Perceptions About the Practice**

All the participants accepted the fact that the institution of fostering is good if only foster parents would remain committed to accomplish its importance as discussed above. The general complaint emerging from the discussion is that the way some aunties practice it these days makes it no longer appealing. They failed to take very good care of the girls, hence, the new slogan, *dim a tuoo ni* meaning take care of your own.

The traditional family system is breaking down due to several factors, among which are:

- a. The society is no longer traditional and exclusively agrarian. The upbringing of children is no longer under the same socio- economic condition and environment in every home as it used to be. There are social classes of varying degrees of status.
- b. Many of the parents are not economically resourceful, they cannot take care of the children as they are supposed to.
- c. There is the influence of urbanisation all over Dagbon with urban individualism replacing the *we* in society.
- d. Westernisation is killing the African family and beneficial mutuality in the family relationships.
- e. Some foster parents have little or no concern for the child.

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It is regrettable that the importance attached to fostering is declining and even where it takes place some of the children become more or less an ‘abawa’ or treated like a beast of burden. Specifically, the following problems have been identified.

- The child does too much work, which retards her growth and tends to make her depressed.
- They are discriminated against as compared to the auntie’s own children.
- They are also denied formal basic education.
- Others take to prostitution and begging on the streets because of maltreatment.
- The children always lose their childhood as they tend to work throughout their lives.
- As a result of improper upbringing they lose their beauty and self-esteem hence they tend to go after irresponsible men.
- They tend to acquire no income generating skills.

During our discussion with the women who had been fostered, one of them in narrating her bitter experience could not control her tears. She said it was her childhood dream to be educated and undertake social work of the type the facilitator (Madam Kate Memunatu), the district director of the NCCE was doing. Her dream, however, never materialised. According to her, she was in primary four (P4) when her father gave her out to her auntie. The auntie who was a nurse by profession asked her to take care of her baby until the baby becomes mature. The auntie failed to support her to continue her education. Instead, she promised to support her to learn hairdressing. Even for this, she refused to pay the necessary fees involved. Finally, she ran back to her father’s house. The father refused her back to the house. Knowing well the consequences of going back to the auntie or forcing to stay with the father, she decided to proceed to Accra to serve as *kayayo* (female porter). There are countless numbers of them who besiege Accra and engage in menial jobs such as prostitution, begging and *kayayo*.

Fostering has also led to broken marriages as some mothers protest against bad treatment of their daughters by their husband’s sisters.

### **5.7 The Way Forward**

Out of the twenty-nine (29) participants, nineteen (19) were against while ten were in favour of the practice. Those who favoured the continuation of the practice were illiterates. Of this group, the majority were men. To them, the institution of fostering has removed financial obligations on the child from their shoulders. Others were of the view that if the girls would not be denied formal education they had nothing against fostering. Similarly, those who wanted the practice to be stopped pointed out that most of these girls are denied formal education and proper care, yet their parents have nothing to say about it.

Most of the participants were aware that there are laws protecting children. They mentioned Social Welfare, Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice, the NCCE as some of the bodies educating the people on these rights and laws.

They contended that the laws should be enforced to achieve their objectives.

**Table 5.1 Demographic Data of Respondents**

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Group 1</b>	<b>Group 2</b>	<b>Group 3</b>	<b>Total</b>	
<b>Sex</b>					
Male	-	4	7	11	
Female	11	6	1	18	29
<b>Age</b>					
Below 21	-	-	-	-	
21 – 30	11	3	1	15	
31 – 40	-	2	-	2	
41 – 50	-	4	5	9	
51 – 60	-	1	2	3	29
60 +					
<b>Marital Status</b>					
Single	-	-	1	1	
Married	11	10	7	28	29
<b>Level of Education</b>					
No formal education	9	5	-	14	
Primary	2	-	-	2	
Middle	-	1	3	4	
Secondary/ Vocational-	-	-	2	2	
Post Sec./Training Coll.	-	1	-	1	
Tertiary	-	2	1	3	
Other, <i>Arabic School</i>	-	1	2	3	29
<b>Occupation</b>					
Student	-	-	1	1	
Farmer	-	3	2	5	
Teacher	-	2	1	3	
Civil/Public Servant	-	-	1	1	
Self Employed/ Artisan	11	5	3	19	
Unemployed	-	-	-	-	29
<b>Religious Background</b>					
Christianity	-	-	1	1	
Moslem	11	10	7	28	
Traditional	-	-	-	-	29

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## CHAPTER 6

### Initiation into Traditional Priesthood Among the Ga of Tema /Kpone

#### 6.0 Introduction

The chapter focuses on initiation into traditional priesthood of the Akon god of the Ga in the Tema Municipality. The Tema Municipality, with Tema as its administrative capital, is a coastal city situated about 30 kilometres east of Accra, the national capital. The municipality shares boundaries on the north and east with the Dangme West District, the west with Accra metropolis, the north-west with Ga District, and the south with the Gulf of Guinea. Until 1952 when government decided to develop a deep sea port, Tema was a small fishing village with equally small villages around. Today the municipality is made up of about 44 settlements, the notable ones being the Tema Communities 1– 22, Ashaiman, Tema Manhean, Ogbojo, Bethlehem, Ashaley Botwe, Kpone, Kakasunaka, Lashibi, Sakumono, Appolonia Katamanso and Adjiringnanor. The 2000 Population and Housing Census puts the total population at 506,400 made up of 251,482 males and 254,918 females.

The population is distinctively urban and rural. The study area, Tema Manhean and Kpone, typifies the divide. The latter is rural and the former urban. Tema Manhean (or Tema New Town), was first sited about 17 miles along the coast to the east of Accra. On each side of the village was a lagoon, Sakumono on the west, and Tsemu on the east. These two lagoons were inhabited by two gods: Sakumono and Ifemu. When the government acquired a 165.8 square kilometres land for construction of a harbour and a town, the village (Old Tema) was moved to a site 4.8 metres east of Old Tema in a place called Tema Manhean. The body charged “with the duty of developing a new town and port of Tema” is the Tema Development Corporation (TDC). The original population of Tema Manhean was 7,002. Today the population stands at 58,786. They moved into the new settlement with their customs and cultural set up (including their gods) irrespective of the influences they came under. The main occupation of the people is fishing with more than 80 per cent in that sector.

On the other hand, the early settlement of the people of Kpone was Saga Gonno or Saga Hill where the Valco Hospital is. On the top of the hill stands a baobab tree which indicates the courtyard of the palace of the late King Angmor Keteku, the last ruler of Saga. It moved to the present site in about 1718. The main occupation is fishing with over 80 per cent of the people engaged in that. A free-zone has been embarked on to be developed at Kpone. The population of the community, according to the 2000 Population and Housing Census is 11,230.

The study was conducted at the two sites, Tema Manhean and Kpone. It took the form of focus group discussions involving three groups of people: first, wulomei of the Sakumono, Nyado and Akon shrines and their linguists; second, traditional priestess and third, opinion leaders, youth group leaders and other religious personalities who observe the practice. The three groups met separately, the first at Sakumo Wulomo’s residence, the second at the shrine of Akon god at Kpone and the third at the premises of the Traditional Council at Kpone. A total of 20 persons were involved in the FGD; five were women and the rest males. All were aged 41 years of age and above. Indeed, 60 per cent were of age 60 and above, with 25 per cent in the age group 51 – 60, and 15 per cent in age group 41 – 50. One out of every two respondents had no formal education with 25 per cent having JSS/Middle education. All but two (10 per cent) of respondents were married. Those two were divorcees. Three out of four of the

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respondents were adherents of African traditional religion, with the other 15 per cent being Christians. (See Table 6.1 at end of the chapter for demographic data on respondents)

## 6.1 Gods of the Ga

Among the Gas each town has a dozen gods. Though this may present total chaos, on comparing their rites with one another, the gods could be divided into four main states. First are the gods worshipped with singing and dancing, called *kple*. These gods include the aboriginal gods worshipped before the coming of the Ga group. Chief of these are the gods of lagoons. The gods, which are worshipped with such songs, are believed to have originated from Kroboland. Their worshippers perform the Otofu rites for marriage to girls.

The Kpa gods, which are centred in La were brought by the Bonni. The last group are gods whose worshippers use the Otu and Akon type of dancing and music. They are of Fante and Akuapem origin. They are war gods which assist in war.

Another classification of gods provided by some respondents in the FGD were: “Woku”, gods brought from other places such as Dahomey, Benin and the like; Obuade, those the ancestors met at their present settlement; and Tinasi, those acquired for protection by the various clans.

## 6.2 The Gods of Tema Manhean and Kpone

The people of Kpone and Tema are part of the Ga group of the Ga-Dangme ethnic group. Four major gods are known to exist among the Ga of Tema and Kpone: Sakumo, Nayo, Tsaadey, Awudu. Other gods are Akon, Otu, Me, Kple. Sakumo is the god of the Sakumo lagoon which lies a mile or more west of Tema. The lagoon together with Ifemu lagoon formed the protection arms around old Tema. The Sakumo god being indigenous is the senior god in Tema and its Wolomo is the high priest. He has servants, Woyei and Dzranoyei, who perform special duties during the Kpledzo festival celebrated in April – May when the rains begins to transfigure the earth and the lagoon starts to swell.

The next god in seniority to Sukumo is Nayo ‘grandmother woman’ who is the goddess of birth. Her Wulomo, known as Nyado Wulomo, shares with him the place of honour at most important functions. It is said to have been brought to Tema by the Kpeshi people who settled at old Tema. As a rule, a god who is the god of a place such as a lagoon or river can never be ousted by new-comers. And though some of the worshippers of such a place–god may depart and carry on a colonial worship from afar the central worship of the place-god will always be in his own place and the god will always be the senior at that place.

Tsaadey is another female deity brought from Kpeshi and is seen as ‘wife’ of Sakumo. Awudu, the god associated with the horned- black spitting snake called blika, is a snake-god and is the fourth in ranking. Other gods are Ogbenai, Afiye Komitse, Ayama, Okulele, Latekale and Ifewi, Obame, Ade, Afadu, Dzebu and Amisa. Some of these gods had dwindled in influence over the years, with some actually dying off in the sense of not having any followers.

In the pre-colonial days, the four Wolomei, who were in charge of the four gods administered the settlement. The Wulomei originally belonged to houses, which have now grown into quarters of the town. The Sakumo Wulomo and Nayo Wolomo, as seniors and because of their important roles were

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never allowed to go to war. It was thus Ifade Wulomo who took charge of the war magic (in a stool form) and accompanied the troops to battle. Awudu Wulomo also had a similar war magic in a stool. The British seeing the stool of the Awudu Wulomo and the Ifade Wulomo erroneously thought they held political office, as it was among the Akan. The Awudu Wulomo was thus made Mantse (the paramount chief), while the Tsaadey Wulomo was made Mankralo, almost an assistant Mantse.

### **6.3 The Akon God**

The origin of the Akon god is shrouded in mystery. It is however believed to have originated from the Fante, for its priestess when possessed speaks Fante.

According to a respondent at the FGD, the god is their clan god and it protects their clan. Their great grandfather was a fisherman. One day on his fishing expedition he cast his net only to catch a strange object. On three occasions he caught the same object only to throw it back into the sea. On the fourth occasion he put the object in the boat and brought it ashore. Consultation revealed it was Akon god who was to protect the clan and gave it prosperity in the fishing industry. The chief fisherman of Kpone remains within the Annag family.

### **6.4 Officials of the gods**

Every god has a high priest called Wulomo. A high priest is distinguished by the name of the god, example Sakumo Wulomo, Nayo Wulomo, Akon Wulomo. Attached to the service of the gods are women known as gbayei, dzranoyei and woyei. These woyei (singular woyo) are the mouthpieces of the gods. The priest, the dzranoyei, the gbayei and the woyei all wear a long necklace of alternating black and white beads. The white ones are made of *adodi* shells from the Volta river, and the black are hard round seeds called *ayiblibi*. The priest and woyei of some of the Kple and Me gods have on this string a pair of tiny horns of the little antelope called yo. Priests also wear anklets of white *adodi* as well as bracelets. The woyei wear bracelets on both wrists. Initiates with the right to enter the sacred groves wear a bracelet on the right wrist.

### **6.5 The Wulomo**

#### **6.5.1 The Selection Process**

Not everybody can become a Wulomo. There are clans with specific houses (gates) whose members are qualified to be Wulomo. One could therefore not become a Wulomo if outside this clan. The gates of the Sakumo We (clan) are: (i). Kporwulu Nor, (ii) Amorkortse We, (iii) Nii Amolitse We, (iv) Agbo We. The Aboitse We (clan) gates were (i) Mate Din We, (ii) Abo Kofi We, (iii) Agorjor We. Candidates for Wulomo rotated among the clans. Upon the death of a Wulomo, the elders of the particular gates whose turn it is to become Wulomo provide the candidate. Most often the person (candidate) is not informed. When the person is ‘captured’ a komi (back of a tree woven) is put around his neck by the priestess and powder or white clay “ayilo” powder is poured on him. Later rituals are performed to install him as Wulomo.

#### **6.5.2 The Training Process**

On capturing the candidate he is confined for a week. The items for the training and the outdoor

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ceremony, the money and other items needed are provided by the family members. During confinement he is taught how to relate to his family members and the community in humility, pour various kinds of libations, purification rites and how to pray for the community. The gods also had their days of worship on which prayers were offered and on such days, if for example it was Fridays, the trainee was not expected to eat leftover foods, fermented foods and food prepared from corn until 12 noon, so that one's prayers will be heard by the gods. During confinement the Wulomo-to-be is prohibited from any sexual relations, as sexual relations during the period would defile and make him unclean. He must also not drink any kind of alcoholic beverage so that he could concentrate on what he was being taught.

At the end of the training a Wulomo is outdoored by being presented to the whole community. He is then given "kotua" or "lokuku" – dried coconut case from which libation was poured to prove that he had really undergone training. Marks and incision are made on his body to identify him as Wulomo. He is also given "Afli" "beads" for both wrist and a staff of office. The staff, it was explained, is a symbol of office like that of Moses.

Some of these prohibitions, which the new Wulomo observed during confinement and training, continue into his working life as Wulomo. He is not to eat or drink in public and while eating no one must speak to him. He was also not to wear slippers or any kind of footwear. Several reasons were offered for not wearing a footwear. According to one of the Wulomei, by not wearing slippers before a god was a perpetual sign of respect. They make themselves ever prepared to be in touch with the gods and one can't be in slippers and talk to the gods. The experience of Moses and the burning bush on Mount Sinai was used to buttress the point. There God called Moses, and he told him to remove his slippers because he was standing on holy grounds. Another Wulomo pointed out that all sacred things abhor contamination. A Wulomo in slippers could step on faeces which could easily soil his clothes. If he is however barefooted he can easily feel something under his feet and clean it before it contaminates him.

The priest observes other taboos. He must not see a dead body, and if he himself is about to die, he must be taken from the place of his god. He must not eat solid salt except in the form of sea water. He must not eat fermented food and must refrain from sexual intercourse on certain days of the week and before performing important rites. He must not eat on any day until the sun has shone.

### **6.5.3 Role of the Wulomo**

The Wulomo performs various roles. His duties are not only to officiate at public worship and give the god its daily or weekly libation, but to interpret to the people the wishes of the gods, and his is the final voice in any controversy about whether something was right or wrong. Any one may take a 'case' to him if dissatisfied by the decision of other courts, but no one would appeal to him lightly for "his voice is the voice of the god". The peace of the town is one of his first concerns. He is the father of all. His duty is to pray and advise people.

He offers prayers, pours libation and performs purification rites. Before anything bad happens in the community it was revealed to them by the gods and it was averted. They further helped people to resolve their personal problems.

The Wulomo is not allowed to have personal property but his flock would be guilty of reckless insult to the god if they allowed his priest to lack any necessary, reasonable comfort or any thing necessary for his priestly dignity. In general the high priest is surrounded with little pomp but much simple dignity. He commands enormous respect which is well deserved.

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The Wulomo has to care for himself, the shrine and the needs of the gods. The Wulomo also depended on fees paid by people on consultations. In times past a lot of people frequented the shrines but with the advent of Christianity the number has reduced drastically. Though today one or two people visiting the shrine send drinks and money, the money is used to buy items such as “jinstsu” – chaff of palm fruit” and water for purification rites.

Whether a Wulomo would engage in other work or not depends on the particular god being served. Some Wulomei were allowed to work and when needed they attended to the gods. Another Wulomo however indicated that he was not permitted to work. The linguist on the other hand works but most of the time he was at home to attend to people who consulted him/god. He also indicated that since he was the linguist for the Wulomo it is not good for him to be absent from the house.

On the social life of the Wulomo, their movement is restricted because they are the elders of the community and cannot therefore roam about aimlessly as all eyes are on them as representatives of the gods. The Wulomo pointed out that they travel by car when the need arises. However, in the olden days when there were no cars they walked. One of the Wulomei emphasised that in former times it was known that they walked but in reality when they got to the outskirts of the town or village they vanished by means of some spiritual powers and reappeared wherever they were going. However these powers are not available to them in present days because their forefathers have taken the powers away.

Other roles of the Wulomo relate to installation and burial of chiefs and the performance of purification rites for those called by the gods to become fetish priestess. Nyado wulomo performs rituals on the death of chiefs and other elders of the community. He also served as the linguist of all the wulomei.

When a priestess is possessed, it is the Nyado wulomo who performs the purification rites. When a victim is first possessed, before she could speak it is the Nyado wulomo who puts a leaf in her mouth. The Wulomo is more or less the father of the priestess but he is installed by the priestess. When the priestess gets possessed it is the Wulomo who performs purification rites to pave the way for the god and he is always present when the priestess is operating. So when the priestess is possessed it is the Wulomo who interprets her actions. Whatever is brought to the priestess by people who consulted the priestess is presented through the Wulomo.

## **6.6 The Traditional Priestess**

### **6.6.1 The Selection Process**

The various gods have ways they call people into their service. A participant in a narration said she was taken ill for about a month, not eating and drinking water, neither did she talk to anybody.

Another pointed out that she was a Christian who came for the Ashii – dipo ceremony in New Town and got possessed after that. Another participant stated that she got possessed at church. Another said she got pregnant and gave birth to a nasty baby after two years. She went through horrible experiences till the 1979 uprising when she heard a gunshot at Makola and it became evident that she was possessed by the Otu Ansah god, a warrior god. It was the gunshot that evoked the god.

### **6.6.2 People Restricted and Excluded From Becoming Priestess**

There was a general consensus that it is the decision of the gods as to whom to call. Though the victim might not be interested, nothing could be done about the decision of the god. Anybody, including

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persons with disabilities can be chosen by the gods. Respondents however acknowledged that they had never seen a disabled priestess, but they believed Persons With Disability (PWDs) could be priestesses provided they could dance, which is a major task of priestesses. They pointed out that some fetish priestess have such crooked legs that one will wonder how they will dance, but they dance surprisingly well when possessed. When such priestesses are ridiculed by an observer because of the funny ways they are performing, the observer who ridicules the priestess is punished by giving birth to a baby with the same deformity as those of the priestess.

There was considerable disagreement on whether the call of the god could be averted. Some participants, including a chief fisherman, indicated it could not be averted even if attempted. Living testimonies of victims who claim they have been able to avert it were given.

On categories of persons, respondents think the gods exclude from becoming priestess, were identified as left handed persons, twins, stammerers and six fingered persons. A reason given for exclusion of twins for example was that they are already possessed with some other spirits so the gods oppose them. The left hand is also not used for any good so left handed persons are also excluded.

### **6.6.3 Training of Priestess**

When a person gets possessed she is taken to the shrine in the family house. There are many gods in the shrine so she picks the particular god that has possessed her. All the family members will be present. The god is then asked whether he has possessed the victim. After he has confirmed it, he gives specific instructions as to what should be done. Fowls are then slaughtered and all kinds of rituals performed.

Purification rites are thus performed to cleanse the victim after which she is confirmed. In confinement, the initiators enquired of the victim's debtors and creditors and informed the family accordingly so that they could take care of all such debts. Sheep, drinks and other food items are provided for the fetish priestess and *dadefoi* invited to cook.

The following day her hair is cut and she is given a strip of cloth to use. The other fetish priestesses then go into the bush to and fro seven times to get the leaves/herbs that will be used for the new initiate. On their return the seventh time all the priestesses come with leaves/herbs in their mouths. The leaves in their mouths are removed by one of the elderly priestesses and their faces washed to ward off the gods. All the leaves are then put together and the juice squeezed into the eye of the "blafo" for him to experience what the victim will go through. At this point all the priestesses swear an oath to the new initiate that she will have nothing to do with her relatives till the completion of her training.

As part of the rituals one respondent noted "I was made to sit on a mortar and given a pestle to hold firmly, while sitting, my back from the neck down the spine was cut and along the ribs, joints and chest. The juice from hot lemon removed from the fire was squeezed into the cuts and some other medicine. It was when the juice from the leaves was squeezed into my eyes that I got possessed, fell down three times and rolled on the ground, later I went to the drummers and called the name of the god possessing me and then danced for a while. A sheep was again slaughtered on me and my hair made into dreadlock. A bead was put on my right wrist and neck and a ring on my left big toe, a cowry was put at the back of the dreadlock. I was then seen off to Mayera where I was to be trained. I got possessed again while being seen off to the place of training."

According to some respondents when the victim gets possessed and it becomes evident that she is needed

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by a particular god, a kind of beads known as “abake” or “banka” is put on her right wrist to indicate that she has accepted to undergo training to become a priestess. Whatever she is going through by then, i.e sickness, ceases. She is then entrusted to a fetish priestess of that particular god or shrine to train. For the Akon god the training normally takes place at Mayera, a village at the outskirts of Accra. The story has it that, in years gone-by, initiates of Ga gods were mostly sent to Mayera for training. But some initiates of some gods were always not coming back. As a result some stopped sending women there for training. Hence the name Mayera.

When initiates are sent to Mayera they are put on three months probation. If it becomes clear that she could undergo training the necessary rituals are then performed to begin the training process.

Henceforth the victim is not going to wear any dress so she is given “abenbu,” a strip of brown cloth which would be used during training. A part of raffia woven is placed around her neck, legs, ankle and loin to signify that she is a priestess-trainee. The dress code during training also varies from god or cult to cult. Exposing the breast, dressing half naked was not associated with all the cults. “Me” cult priestess were given two strips of calico, one for the body, the second for hair gear and an additional one to serve as cover cloth. They do not expose their breast. All priestesses-trainees are not allowed to wear slippers throughout the training because the gods are like angels who always visit them so they are expected to be holy and pure.

During training they used “bosa” i.e. chewing sponge, for sponge, mashed suckers as towel. They also used lemon for soap and palm oil for pomade. They bath with cold water no matter the weather conditions. They bath between 10 p.m and 3 a.m. They with bath cold water even in the harmattan season.

Under training they perform all kinds of household chores for the mistress. They are sent on errands on long distance on foot. A Me god priestess noted the hardship she went through during training because she did all kinds of jobs, going on errands on long distances on foot.

#### **6.6.4 What Goes into Training**

During training the initiates are taught the following:

- The various leaves for healing.
- How to dance to the various tunes of songs.
- The do’s and don’ts of the gods.
- How to communicate with the gods.
- How to worship and how to perform rituals.
- How to pour libation and offer prayers.

They are taught divination by observing the trainer do so. They are not allowed to practice it themselves. They only begin divination during the initiation when they return from the forest.

#### **6.6.5 Prohibitions During Training**

There were a number of prohibitions during training These included not eating sweets to enable them to concentrate and to prevent them from getting fat so that they will be smart when dancing.

Adherence to the prohibitions of the gods, particularly food items. The god Sempani prohibits mud fish,

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sea turtle, odoi and electric fish. Also on the days of the gods, which varied, they do not eat fermented and leftover foods.

They are also prohibited from any sexual relations during the training to enhance concentration. If this is violated Akon god for instance exposes the trainee.

They do not relate to or communicate with their families because being under training is like being in prison so even when they visited they communicated through the mistress. The initiates are not allowed to associate with their family members because the initiates associate with the dead (ghosts) and could cause the death of their relatives.

#### **6.6.6 How the Shrine Treats those who are not able to Complete the Training**

According to respondents, if one did not complete the training she can go mad, become a sickler and can even die. One could also become a thief. The person will also be confronted with series of problems which would affect her progress in life and will not be able to marry if she was already not married, because she is spiritually married to the god possessing her. Libation is also poured to evoke the gods and other spirits to protect them and see them through the training, so when one does not complete the training she is thus not under the protection of the gods, hence can go mad and will not progress in life.

According to another participant in the FGD when one is not able to complete the training, the other gods will ridicule the other god possessing the victim hence in the process it will destroy her- she can go mad, fall sick for a long time or even die. Thus people who die during training bring enormous burden on families.

A contrary opinion was expressed by one Asafoatse who pointed out that any intended consequences could be averted by sending the items that should have been collected by the trainer and rituals performed to avert any future consequences. But the chief on the other hand said even if it was averted the victim was still not safe.

#### **6.6.7 When Training is Deemed to be Completed**

Duration of the training depends on the trainee's ability to master whatever she is taught. One participant spent five years while another spent nine years in training. Other factors such as ability of family to pay for initiation rites as well as make other payments to mistress or tutor also come into play. As one participant pointed out, ' Because I was always conscious of my position I always ensured that I kept very carefully any monies I had, I used to keep the monies close to my private part to prevent detection by my mistress. Where money on me was large I sent word to my contact person who I secretly sent money to give to my parents without my mistress knowing''.

When it is certain that the trainee would graduate the mistress decided on the items- (i.e. cash, drinks, sheep etc), which she will collect and this depends on the relationship between the mistress and the trainee.

Then the trainee's family, other priestesses, dadefoi and mawafoi are invited. Amidst drumming and singing the victim is made to dance from morning to evening to prove that she has really mastered whatever she was taught. This dancing performance continues throughout the week every evening

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After the initial dancing performance the mistress will tell the family all that she has taught the trainee during the period.

Every evening, water is placed on a fresh grave in the cemetery for the trainee to bath. She goes alone. But before she gets there the ghost in the cemetery would have already bathed into the water. As soon as she finished bathing the god will possess her again and bring her back naked. So the one serving as her blafo will meet her on the way with a strip of cloth to cover her. For seven days this continued at 10 p.m.

On the seventh day amidst drumming and singing she is ushered into the forest possessed in the evening to get the herbs/leaves she will use for healing, divination and other rituals. Announcement was thus made so that nobody will go to the farm or to hunt because whatever- animal or anything she met on the way, she fought and took some of its fur. In the forest she just does not pluck from the tress. Before plucking some of the leaves, white clay, “ayilo” powder was poured on the leaves, some were sung to, and coins put on some, while others were plucked with the priestess naked. Some of the leaves also spoke to the priestess, that is, the leaves draw the attention of the priestesses to themselves.

While still in the forest the drumming and singing continued till she returned. When she was due to return, all the fetish priestesses will go into the forest ringing a bell known as “nawa” to draw her home.

She often returned still possessed, naked and with the herb/leaves. A return from the forest naked was claimed by some of the fetish priestess as proof of their success.

From the forest while still naked she danced and mentioned the names of all the animals she fought in the forest.

Before then she gave the herbs and fur she brought to her blafo, who covered it with white calico and immediately hid it since people struggle for it. After mentioning the names of the animals, she was then covered with a strip of white calico and a sheep slaughtered on her head, then she bathed after a while.

On return the victim engaged in divination from about 7.00 p.m to around 4.00 a.m. In the course of this she consulted the dead relatives of some of the people around. To do this she looked into the pot put before her, in her possessed state. She mentions the names of the people she saw in it. The spirits thus communicated with their living relations through her. She did that till 4.00 p.m when the ghosts/spirits were gone. Another sheep is slaughtered to see the ghosts/spirits off.

On the eighth day she is dressed in beautiful clothes and all kinds of minerals and sweets put before her. A sheep is also slaughtered and cooked. The victim and other priestesses ate it on the fire while it is still boiling. This was referred to as “dadedro”.

After the training the victim is accompanied by other priestesses, her mistress, a pot for divination and other belongings are brought to the family. On her arrival it was a complete festive occasion which was celebrated for days – a week or two. She was later sent to the family shrine for divination to prove to the family she had really undergone training. Aflie- beads were put on her two wrists to indicate that she had fully qualified to be a priestess. Later on “klo”-pot was given to her from which she divinated and consulted the departed spirits of people who came for consultation.

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### 6.6.8 Effects

Apart from the physical effects the training has on initiates and traditional priestesses they go through social and emotional problems. Socially, as one participant indicated her social life had been affected in the sense that she has no good relationship with her relatives because of her association with the devil. Her relations abhor the fact that when possessed she strips herself half naked. Though she is not happy about it, nothing can be done.

Emotionally, one fetish priestess indicated that during the training process the mistress fined the victim at the slightest offence. This did not make one happy. But victims develop good human relations and they related with people in humility.

Financially, some mistresses are not financially sound or might not even be working to be able to take care of the initiate. So the victim or trainee will have to work to assist her. If the mistress noticed that the initiate had money she took it from her. The victim is not allowed to work during the training and all her burden becomes that of the family.

The whole passing off (initiation) ceremony is very expensive; large quantities of drinks, money, sheep and other food items are provided for the visitors who accompany her from the place of training. These visitors normally stay throughout the period. A good number of sheep are also slaughtered at specific points on the way from the village.

### 6.7 Role of Traditional Priestesses

Priestesses, referred to variously as agbayei, dzranoyei and woyei (singular woyo) are at the service of the gods. These are the mouthpiece of the gods. They are 'mediums' who from time to time are entered into and possessed by the gods and deliver messages from them. They are the passive instrument of the gods and carry no authority whatever except when they are possessed. The Wulomo himself is never possessed. He receives messages of the woyei and acts on them. Each god has at least one woyo, her appointment is an official one.

One major role of the fetish priestess is in the installation and outdooing of the chief. At the installation of chiefs, Asafoatse, Djaasetse, Mankralo and Shippie, all elders of the community play a major role. It was however the fetish priestess who puts "komi" around the neck of the person to be installed. When the chief is confined the fetish priest teaches him the rituals of the various gods, so that during homowo he will know exactly what should be done. They perform rituals for the various gods to usher in Kpledzoo festival.

The Wulomo is more or less the father of the priestess but he is installed by the priestess. When the priestess gets possessed it is the Wulomo who performs purification rites to pave the way for the god and he is always present when the priestess is operating. So when the priestess is possessed it is the Wulomo who interprets her actions. Whatever is brought to the priestess by people who consulted the priestess is presented through the Wulomo.

Other roles are that, priestesses ward off any evil that befell the community such as sudden death, sickness or outbreak of epidemics. They play a leading role in the worship of the gods just like pastors. They also play a significant role in the installation of chiefs and other elders of the community i.e. asafoatse. They serve as fortune tellers i.e. the gods communicate through them. They see vision. They are the

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moderators between the living and the gods. They pour libation/pray. They also perform divination and purification rites

## **6.8 Tradition and Change**

Respondents acknowledge that with education and modernisation some challenges have come their way. Groups like Afrikania Mission are promoting their cause as their mode of worship is just like the shrine and deities. Those opposed to their worship, Christian groups especially the Charismatic groups, openly preach and condemn their mode of worship.

A number of NGOs and the Christian groups were also said to be critical of some of their practices which they characterise as dehumanising. The aspects that relate to initiation that could be characterized as dehumanising include: The stripping naked of the possessed woman to dance in public during the initial initiation ceremony and the final stage – the outdoor ceremony; The prohibition of the trainee–priestess from wearing dress or blouse throughout the period of training, thus exposing them to the cold weather conditions.

As trainees they bath with cold water always and this could undermine their health, especially those susceptible to anaemia and pneumonia. As trainees they always walk barefooted and this also exposes them to all manner of dangers. Also the forced dreadlocking of the hair of the trainee – priestess amounts to deprivation of freedom. During training the trainee – priestesses are barred from talking to any member of their family, not even the husband, except one person who is designated as the spokesperson between the trainee, her family and the shrine owner.

During training the trainee – priestess is almost enslaved by the master. She is almost like a slave girl undertaking all types of jobs for the master without any payment or reward. Perhaps top on the list is the ushering of the trainee priestess into a thick forest in the night barefooted, with great likelihood of being attacked or devoured by wild animals. This is thus a clear disregard for human life, a violation of Article 13 of the Constitution which lays emphasis on protection of right to life. Tales of many trainees not returning from the forest makes continuity of the practice even more deadly and a violation of human rights, hence the call for modification of initiation rites.

**Table 6.1 Demographic Data of Respondents**

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Group 1</b>	<b>Group 2</b>	<b>Group 3</b>	<b>Total</b>	
<b><i>Sex</i></b>					
Male	-	6	9	15	
Female	5	-	-	5	20
<b><i>Age</i></b>					
Below 21	-	-	-	-	
21 – 30	-	-	-	-	
31 – 40	-	-	-	-	
41 – 50	-	1	2	3	
51 – 60	2	2	1	5	
61 +	3	3	6	12	20
<b><i>Educational Background</i></b>					
No Formal Education	5	3	2	10	
Primary	-	-	-	-	
JSS/Middle	-	2	3	5	
Secondary/ Vocational- Post Sec./Training Coll.	1	2	3	6	
Tertiary	-	-	2	2	
Any Other, Arabic	-	-	-	-	20
<b><i>Occupation</i></b>					
Student	-	-	-	-	
Farmer/Fisherman	-	4	3	7	
Teacher	-	-	-	-	
Civil/Public Servant	-	-	4	4	
Trader/Businessman/Artisan	5	1	2	7	
Unemployed	-	-	-	1	
Any Other	-	1	-	1	20
<b><i>Marital Status</i></b>					
Single	-	-	-	-	
Married	5	6	7	18	
Divorced	-	-	2	2	20
Widowed	-	-	-	-	
Separated	-	-	-	-	
Any Other	-	-	-	-	
<b><i>Religious Background</i></b>					
Christian	-	-	5	5	
ATR	5	6	4	15	20
Muslim	-	-	-	-	
Any Other	-	-	-	-	

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## **Chapter 7**

### **Okuoko Cult Among the Adele and Challa**

#### **7.0 Introduction**

The chapter examines initiation into the Okuoko cult and some observances and beliefs of members of the cult. The study was conducted in the Nkwanta District in the Volta Region. It took the form of focus group discussions among three sets of people: cult members; traditional rulers and priests of the shrine; and opinion leaders and leaders of youth group associations. Out of 19 respondents, 10 were male while 9 were females. Almost 50 per cent of respondents were within the age group 41 – 50 years, with those in age group 51 – 60 accounting for 26.3 per cent with those in age group 31 – 40 and 61 and above accounting for 15.7 per cent each. A large number (63.2 per cent) of respondents were adherents of African Traditional Religion with 36.8 per cent being Christians. All but two respondents were married, of those two not married one was single whilst the other was a widow. Almost three out of four respondents were fishermen/farmers with three being teachers. In terms of educational background (15.8 per cent) were without any formal education, with 42.1 per cent being MSLC holders and same per cent being secondary school and post-secondary.

The Nkwanta District lies in the northern part of the Volta Region. It covers an area bounded in the west by the newly created Krachi West District, from which it is separated by the Oti arm of the Volta Land, to the south by the Kadjebi District and the north by the Nanumba District (which is in the Northern Region). It also shares boundaries to the east with the Republic of Togo. Nkwanta is the district capital. The 2000 Population and Housing Census put the population of the district at 151,276 made up of 82,798 males and 77,127 females. The district is agriculture with almost 80 per cent engaged in agriculture. The district is composed of the Adele, Challa, Atwode and Ntrubo who together constitute 70 per cent whilst others are the Ewe, Konkomba, Kotokoli and Akan.

#### **7.1 History of the Cult**

The cult practice is centred around two gods, said to be black and red, the red is known as Olijia or Alidzi and the black Okubalaajo or Alogu. Okuoko is a form of greetings by adherents of the shrine, which has now become the name for the cult. The god is believed to have the power that can control one's destiny, do good, predict, destroy and shower blessings on a person's life. The god and its cult originated from Nigeria from where it went to Benin and was adopted from Anyanga in Togo by one of the paramount chiefs in Ghana. Though the time of its introduction is not known, it is generally agreed that the practice has been in existence in the country for generations. The Chala were the first to adopt the practice but it spread gradually to other parts of the district. It is now common among the Akyode, Adele, and Ntrobo of the Nkwanta District.

Even though only girls are made to undergo the practice there are men involved as trainers, administrators and drummers. The head of the shrine is the Olammi who has subordinates, mainly men, who help in the daily running of the shrine. The Olaami may convene a meeting at any time necessary to discuss issues of the shrine.

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## 7.2 Selection into the Cult

There is no clearly defined rule to determine on whom the spirit will descend. The victim-girls range from the baby at the back of the mother to the elderly, irrespective of where they are. The fetish takes new victims, especially at the funeral of old deceased members.

The victims when possessed by the Okuoko spirit, run to the shrine and there fall into coma and can only be revived when brought to the shrine and kept in a room, and there, made to undergo ritual bath.

A participant revealed that at a point the practice became so popular in the society that victims feel proud going through it, hence mode of selection into the cult became corrupted with some buying their way into it. Some men even paid money to the *Olaami* (chief priest) to subject their girlfriends to the initiation. Men who are interested in a woman may also see the *Olaami* with some money to subject the girl under initiation. The men will later marry the particular lady in question. The position of *Olaami* is by inheritance, thus only people from a particular family could rise to that position.

## 7.3 Training

The girls (victims) after being possessed are carried to the shrine and subjected to various forms of training designed to instill in them discipline. During the training:

- The girls are taught to speak the Okoku dialect and use it as the only medium of communication in the cult.
- They are taught dancing and other practices related to the cult.
- They cut the hair very low.
- They wear calico around the waist exposing the breast.
- They are given a cut (V-Shape) at the back to identify them. This cut eventually turns into a permanent scar.
- They are made to tie beads on the waist, arms and legs, and have small bells tied to their legs. The bells ring as they move about.

The initiation rites last 3 months within which time they learn the history, nature and practices of the cult. The training is deemed completed when after the victims had gone through all the necessary processes designed for the training, the victims remain in the shrine until graduation ceremony is performed. The graduation ceremony may be postponed to enable the victim and their family to have ample time to prepare. The training could take between 6 months and 1 year to enable a victim to qualify for graduation

### 7.3.1 Prohibitions During Training

Some of the prohibitions are:

- The victims are supposed to stay away from sex throughout the period.
- They are not supposed to lie.
- They are not allowed to undertake any economic activity.
- They are not allowed to eat rat.
- Snakes especially python are not entertained by the cult. They consider it as bad sign for the cult.
- Chameleons are highly prohibited in the cult. Cult members and initiates alike including the chief priest are not supposed to come into contact with the animal. Failure will bring disaster on the person.

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### 7.3.2 Inability to Complete Training

Participants were in unison that there is no such case as one failing to complete the rites. They said all who go through the rites complete them. They however think that failure to complete the training would result in severe punishment. They couldn't mention exactly what the punishment would be.

### 7.4 Effects

The **positive effects** of the rites are:

- Victims become free psychologically.
- They are respected in the society.
- Those not yet married are prepared for marriage.

The **negative effects** mentioned were:

- The victims obtain a scar at the back for the rest of their life. The scar is obtained from a cut at the shrine to identify them. This scar could develop into a serious complication.
- Drop-outs from formal education increase since victims from school fail to go back.
- The financial burden is placed on the shoulders of victim's parents. The victims are supposed to send a substantial sum of money to enable them to meet the cost of the graduation ceremony. They have to borrow money in most cases to finance the ceremony.
- Emotionally, the victims enjoy going through the rites initially based on the acceptance by the society. However some of them feel bad after some years upon reflection.

### 7.5 Tradition and Change

The spread of Christianity has affected the practice. Many people in the district shy away from being members of the cult. Ministers of the gospel use the pulpit to preach against the cult practice. Others who feel the practice should be refined or abolished are Christians, highly educated people, and people who had one time or the other travelled outside the area.

Given aspects of the cult such as incision on bodies of cult members and some of which are practices which can be classified under Article 26 as cultural practices which dehumanise or are injurious to the physical and mental well-being of a person' and which are prohibited, the NCCE which is charged with educating people on the principles and objectives of the Constitution needs to sensitise the people to know the negative effects of the cultural practices.

**Table 7.1 Demographic Data of Respondents**

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Group 1</b>	<b>Group 2</b>	<b>Group 3</b>	<b>Totals</b>	
<b>Sex</b>					
Male	1	6	3	10	
Female	4	-	5	9	19
<b>Age</b>					
Below 21	-	-	-	-	
21 – 30	-	-	-	-	
31 – 40	2	1	-	3	
41 – 50	3	2	4	9	
51 – 60	-	1	3	4	
61 +	-	2	1	3	19
<b>Educational Background</b>					
No Formal Education	2	1	-	3	
Primary	-	-	-	1	
JSS/Middle	3	3	2	8	
Secondary/ Vocational	-	1	4	5	
Post Sec./Training Coll.	-	1	2	3	19
Tertiary	-	-	-	-	
Any Other, Arabic	-	-	-	-	
<b>Occupation</b>					
Student	-	-	-	-	
Farmer/Fisherman	4	5	5	14	
Teacher	-	1	2	3	
Civil/Public Servant	-	-	-	-	
Trader/Businessman/Artisan	-	-	1	1	
Unemployed	-	-	-	-	
Any Other	1	-	-	1	19
<b>Marital Status</b>					
Single	1	-	-	1	
Married	3	6	8	17	
Divorced	-	-	-	-	
Widowed	1	-	-	1	19
Separated	-	-	-	-	
Any Other	-	-	-	-	
<b>Religious Background</b>					
Christian	-	3	4	7	
ATR	5	3	4	12	
Muslim	-	-	-	-	
Any Other	-	-	-	-	19

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## **Chapter 8**

### **Widowhood Rites Among the Asante**

#### **8.1 Introduction**

The chapter looks at the practice of widowhood rites and its effects among the Akans in the Ashanti Region. The study was undertaken in the Manhyia sub- metro of the Kumasi Metropolitan and the Ejisu-Juaben District.

Manhyia is one of the four sub metros of the Kumasi Metropolitan Assembly. It is located in the central part of Kumasi. The palace of the Asantehene is located here. It has a population of 405,629 made up of 205,962 males and 199,667 females. The population is predominantly Asante.

The Ejisu- Juaben District is located in the central part of Ashanti Region with a population size of 124,176 made up of 59,286 males and 64,890 females. It covers a total area of 637.42 square kilometres and is made up of 86 settlements most of which are farming communities. The population is predominately Asante (82.5 per cent).

The study took the form of focus group discussion with three groups of people, namely widows, caretakers of widows and traditional rulers, and opinion leaders. A total of six focus group discussions were held with three each in a district. Fifty-one respondents (51) were involved made up of 31(60.8 per cent) females and 20 (39.2 per cent) males. Respondents were aged from 21 – 60 with the largest age group being 41-50 (45.1 per cent). In terms of educational background 72.5 per cent of respondents had formal education while the rest (27.5 per cent) had no formal education. Table 8.1, depicts the demographic data of respondents.

#### **8.2 History**

Tracing the evolution of the widowhood rites was difficult since participants of the focus group discussions had little or no idea on that. However, a folktale told by a sub chief of a suburb of Offinso has it that the practice was learnt from a bird “antrohwe”.

According to the story a hunter on an expedition heard the persistent loud screams of this bird and upon locating it saw a female type besides a dead male type. The hunter was surprised and sent the message to his townsfolk upon which the people adopted a system of mourning departed partners.

#### **8.3 Nature of the Rites**

##### **8.3.1 Observers of the Rites**

Both widow and widowers are expected to observe the rites but it was found out that “male rites” were not elaborate like “female rites” This reason attributed to the differences in observation of rites found its meaning in the marriage culture of the people. According to a chief who was a participant, women culturally are expected to have one husband where as men can have more than one wife. On the death of a husband a woman loses completely her marriage partner whereas a man may still have

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some wives. The loss in terms of magnitude is more for the woman than the man. The word ‘Kuna’ used in the Ashanti (Akan) language sums up the literal meaning as the married woman who now lacks a husband. Therefore “Kunaye” means a process whereby the society collectively declares a person as lacking or wanting a husband as a result of the death of her previous one. “Kunaye” was therefore originally attributed to women.

It is also expected that one performs the rites anytime he/she loses a partner even though it is agreed that after three times of losing a partner a person is regarded as living with a bad omen and as such not worthy to be married. Such a person is regarded to have erected a “Buchia Mmiensa “ i.e tri-stand local stove with three arms.

### 8.3.2 Exemptions from the Rites

Groups of people who are not allowed to perform the rite are:

- **Chiefs/Queenmothers:** It is believed that the stool and its occupant represent the soul of the empire comprising both the living and the dead. Certain practices observed during the rites such as starving or fasting on food if done by a stool occupant represent starvation of the gods and ancestors since they feed through the occupants of the stools and this may bring calamity to the community. It is also expected of a King not to weep in public as done by those who observe the rite as weeping signifies defeat and sorrow which the gods and ancestors abhor. An example was cited at Ejisu where a woman claimed that she has been selected to observe the rites for a queenmother before. Royals who participated in the discussions confirmed the above assertion.
- **Fetish Priests:** With the sacred role they play in society and their strong links with the gods and ancestors, they are also exempted.
- **Partners who cursed husband,** did not care for him during their sick period, were not customarily married i.e. marriage rites were not performed are “prevented” by the man’s family from observing the rite in order to ensure that they do not inherit any property of the man or gain financially in terms of donations during the final funeral rites.

For those who are exempted from observing the rite a member of their family is appointed to perform the rite.

### 8.3.3 Rites Performed Before Burial of Corpse

Before the burial of the corpse these are some of the rites the widow performs:

Immediately after the announcement of the death of the husband a caretaker is appointed from the man’s family to look after the woman. Apart from ensuring the welfare of the widow the caretaker is also to ensure that all rites are followed by the widow especially in cases that the man’s family is not in good relationship with the woman.

The woman on hearing of the death of the husband changes into mourning cloth which is worn until the burial and fortieth day celebration is over. A male participant in Kumasi cited an instance where the wife of her dead brother wore the same cloth throughout the funeral activities. He intimated that she was smelly at times. Widows are generally unkempt, shabby and unattractive. This is done with the notion

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that she will not be made attractive to the husband's ghost. A widow is at times shaven clean and this normally happens to wives of royals who are expected to observe the rites completely

It is expected that a widow will bath three (3) times a day specifically at dawn before communicating with anybody, noon and before 5:00 p.m. in the evening with cold water. A widow said in her case the weather during the observation of the rites was so cold that she could not bath at dawn. The bathing was also for cleansing purposes.

She eats once a day at the instance of the caretaker and when there is no weeping in the house. The meals should be "light" and normally include porridge, beverages, eggs and white kenkey prepared from fine dehusked corn. She is not allowed to eat root tubers for it is believed that those crops are for merry-making and are favourites of the ancestors, therefore eating them draws one closer to them. The food should be eaten before evening 4:00 p.m. So in cases the food is delayed or the caretaker refuses to give food to the widow she goes hungry.

There was an instance cited by a widow at Ejisu where it was even the caretaker who was to supply her chewing stick for cleaning her teeth and mouth. She recounted that for days that she forgot or refused to give her the chewing sticks she had to resort to water only to clean her mouth. Another striking example given by a widow was the exploitation by her in-laws of a widow always joining people who are crying to mourn the deceased to prevent her from eating. Anytime she is given food one of the in-laws starts crying and she had no option than to forgo the food and join her. This often weakens her taste for the food and she forgoes it. The widow is prohibited from handling things and doing things for herself so that she can concentrate on mourning the husband.

The widow is given a lot of alcoholic drinks. These drinks are sometimes mixed with herbs to increase their efficacy. A widow is to take this drink with her eyes closed since it is believed she may see her husband's ghost in it. It is believed that the drink will aid her in her weeping. A woman talked about a case where her daughter almost died after drinking an alcoholic concoction given to her by her husband's family. She said she fell into coma and it took a long time before she was revived.

A widow is expected to weep to mourn the dead husband everyday and at short intervals before his burial. In situations where she doesn't reside in the husband family house she has to get up at dawn and in the company of the caretakers and other attendants, go to weep in the family house of the deceased where the funeral is sited.

The widow is never left alone; she should be indoors by 6:00 p.m. and should not be called by name after 6:00 p.m. since it is believed her name will help her husband's ghost to locate her. She sleeps with a lot of people in a room, where footwear of a male is placed at the entrance to tell the spirit of the dead husband that she is in a new relationship with a man and will not entertain him.

A widow is not expected to handle money before the burial of the husband because it is believed her husband will whisk it away. This it is believed will lead to loss in trade. In times past the widow was forbidden to engage in economic activity for one year. The period has been shortened nowadays.

The widow is made to wear widowhood regalia which include a kind of talisman ("Kuna Suman") prepared from "Emee" (a kind of sharp smelling leaves", cob of corn roasted to burning state, and "Prekese" – all tied together. The widow carries the talisman about on her shoulder and puts it by her

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while sitting or sleeping. She is expected to put the first morsel of food on it during meals before she starts eating. She also wears another “Kuna Suman” (talisman) on the wrist.

A ‘Kuna toma’ waistband prepared out of palm tree, padlock and keys is placed on a red cloth and worn around the waist by the widow. The padlock is positioned on the part of the genital to signify that the organ is locked from entry even to the ghost till after the full completion of the widowhood rituals.

The woman cannot have sex. The red cloth also signifies that she is in her menstrual period and also cannot have sex since she is regarded as unclean. In some instances the genital part of the widow is smeared with ‘Ntwoma’ red clay to signify that her menstrual period is on. It is believed this will let the spirit of the dead husband stay away from her. An instance was cited by a woman who said her mother smeared her private part with red clay at Nkawie in the Ashanti Region during the observation of the rites.

### **8.3.4 Rites Performed on Burial Day**

On the day of burial the widow sends “Adesiedie” burial items to the family of the late husband. These items include soap, ring, bucket, towel, singlet, pants, perfume and cloth which are to be used to bath and dress the dead. It was said that the items are collected at the instance of the man’s family and could be rejected.

The widow is the first to take a look at the husband’s corpse after being laid in state where it is expected she weeps and converses with the ghost of the husband to bid him farewell to the land of the ancestors. An example of a woman who collapsed on seeing the corpse of the husband was cited to draw home the point on the trauma widows go through. This is repeated before she is also put into the coffin

It was recounted by some participants that in the olden days, especially on death of Kings, widows spend time with the corpse at where it is being kept or laid in state in company of two elderly people. An instance was cited where a widow was made to bath with the water used to bath the husband’s corpse.

When the corpse is being conveyed to the cemetery, the widow follows at the tail end carrying “Kuna Kukuo” a cooking pot filled with stones. On reaching the last junction of the cemetery the widow drops the pot on the ground breaking it into pieces. This is to signify to the ghost of the husband that the widow has no cooking arrangement with him since the pot he bought for her is broken and moreover they have taken different ways at the junction to signify break in relationship. The widow is to return home not looking backwards since it is believed looking back will nullify the earlier act of breaking the pot.

In the case of a widower, he carries a talisman in hand instead of “Kuna Kukuo” which he throws away and returns in the same manner.

On the day of the final funeral rites, the widow is smeared with white clay and wears a whisk made from raffia (Edoahye) around each elbow and dances about whenever the occasion calls for asking for donations or appreciating donors.

### **8.3.5. Rites Performed After Burial**

After the final funeral rites the widow is bathed at a riverside by women amid pronouncements that the

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husband has nothing to do with her and the gods should deal with anyone who takes the form of the husband to harass her. All the cloths used for the rites are thrown into the river after the caretaker has taken what she wants. She is shaved and clad in white cloth to signify a successful observation of the rite. The widow then moves to town to thank all who mourned with her. The process of thanksgiving differs from culture to culture for whereas some carry sand from the riverside in which they were bathed and drop it at the doorsteps of people others use salt.

For the woman to have her right to engage in economic activity restored especially concerning buying and selling, she after thanking the society moves to the market where she buys shea butter (Nkuto), mixes it with herbs (wisa), smears some on her hand and throws the rest away to signify the cleansing of her hands to handle money. She then proceeds to buy some items from the market without bargaining to ensure success in trade.

The “Kunatoma” waistband worn around the waist is torn in different ways. In some cultures it is torn by the man who has sex with the woman for the first time after the observation of the rite. This man is banned from having sex with the widow again and is cursed if he does so. In other cases the waistband gets torn naturally as a result of wear and tear or by a relative of the widow. The waistband is torn either after 40 days or one year depending on the prevailing tradition.

#### **8.4 Motives**

The motives for observing this rite are interwoven in the strong belief of life after death held by the Akans. It is also believed that there is a linkage between the living and the ancestors.

For the widow the rites are:

- To cleanse her and ward off her husband’s ghost from haunting her since it is believed that there is a relationship between her and her husband’s ghost.
- With all its harsh aspects, to prepare the widow to face the hardship of single parenthood since she now loses the support she was receiving from the husband.
- To qualify her to receive a share of the husband’s estate, show appreciation of the care and support received from him and show her faithfulness to the husband.

For the deceased and family the rites are to

- Honour the deceased and family for the good care they took of the widow.

#### **8.5 Opting Out of the Rites**

People who refused to perform the rites are regarded as unfaithful to their husband and are shunned by the society. Such women are denied any share of the husband’s estate and are sacked from the husband’s or family house if that is where they are staying. The family also refuses her children maintenance. It is believed that bad omens follow such people and they will experience mishaps such as decrease in harvest, may fall sick or go insane.

Such people are thought of as being disrespectful to society as well as disregarding social norms. Even though no specific instance was cited by participants because they thought every sane person would go through the rites they believed the gods, ancestors and ghost of the husband will never leave the person in peace and may even come for her

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## 8.6 Effects

Effects on the widow are varied and depend on the type of specific rites she performs. A lot of restrictions are placed on the widow. She is kept indoors, cannot move about on her own even in the compound where she is staying, is not expected to talk, eat specific foods and this affects her general well-being. For instance the rationing of food and starving makes widows lose a lot of weight. This also affects their health. In the cold season it's very uncomfortable to bath with cold water at dawn.

The widows suffer deprivation in instances that they are sacked from the house of the husband with their children and are refused their share of estate of the husband.

People who also undergo the rites also experience financial losses since they are not supposed to engage in any economic activity for some period of time and are debarred from handling money. Also the cost of the burial items is very expensive and unaffordable for most widows.

Widows also suffer mentally and psychologically since they are abused verbally and maltreated when the family of the husband are not in good relations with her.

Depending on how the rite was enforced on the widow, relationship with the family of the husband is strained since she harbours a bad feeling towards them if she is maltreated.

Among the positive effects are the honour and respect given to the widow by the society and her qualification to inherit a share of the husband's estate.

Furthermore a societal obligation is fulfilled and this brings some inner satisfaction.

## 8.7 Intervening Factors and Suggestions for Modification

Religion, Education, Urbanization, and cultural adulteration were found out as some factors which have reduced the intensity of the rite.

Through the teaching of religious groups people have come to regard some of the practices as heathen as well as learn good neighbourliness. They therefore do not take delight in molesting, maltreating or cheating people which is regarded as ungodly. Also Christianity has driven away the fear inherent in people if they don't perform all the activities connected with the rites. Christian participants said they did not put on any talisman or waistband and nothing disastrous happened to them

Education with its attendant transfer of knowledge coupled with democracy which guarantees fundamental freedoms and rights of people has also contributed to reduction in the intensity of the rite. People now know their rights and can mount a challenge if these are infringed upon.

Furthermore the advent and usage of wills as well as the passage of PNDCL 111 to share property after death has led to a decrease in litigations on property sharing which was one major reason this rite was enforced.

Urbanization and cultural adulteration have also led to the modification of the rite. Whereas in the past every activity of the rite was followed in detail, presently aspects like wearing talisman and raffia on the funeral days, sleeping with corpse, among others, are not practiced to the letter.

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On ways to modify the practice since as a culture it cannot be completely abolished, the following suggestions were made:

- The period used for the observation of the rite which spans a year should be reduced to at most three months so that widows will be free to go about their daily activities.
- Items for burial collected from widows should be reduced and clearly spelt out in the traditional laws of areas to reduce the financial burden on widows.
- The state, district assemblies, and traditional councils should enforce laws enacted against harmful cultural practices.
- All concerned, especially traditional councils who are the bastion of our culture should mount intensive public education on the harmful effects of aspects of the widowhood rites.

**Table 8.1 Demographic Data of Respondents**

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Group 1</b>	<b>Group 2</b>	<b>Group 3</b>	<b>Group 4</b>	<b>Group 5</b>	<b>Group 6</b>	<b>Totals</b>
<b>Sex</b>							
Male	4	-	4	-	7	5	20
Female	2	8	6	9	1	5	31
<b>Age</b>							
Below 21	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
21 – 30	-	1	3	-	1	2	7
31 – 40	1	2	2	1	-	2	8
41 – 50	2	4	4	4	5	4	23
51 – 60	3	1	1	4	2	2	13
61 +	-	-	-	-	-	-	51
<b>Educational Background</b>							
No Formal Education	-	4	4	5	1	-	14
Primary	-	-	-	2	-	-	2
JSS/Middle	3	3	1	2	3	3	15
Secondary/ Vocational	1	1	-	1	4	10	3
Post Sec./Training Coll.	-	-	1	-	-	2	3
Tertiary	-	-	2	-	1	1	4
Any Other, Arabic	-	-	1	-	2	-	3
<b>Occupation</b>							
Student	-	-	1	-	-	-	1
Farmer/Fisherman	1	-	2	2	3	2	10
Teacher	3	-	2	-	1	2	8
Civil/Public Servant	1	-	-	1	1	3	6
Trader/Businessman/Artisan	1	5	5	4	3	3	21
Unemployed	-	3	-	2	-	-	5
Any Other	-	-	-	-	-	-	51
<b>Marital Status</b>							
Single	1	-	3	-	2	3	9
Married	4	-	6	-	6	5	21
Divorced	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Widowed	-	8	-9	-	-	17	-
Separated	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Any Other	1	-	1-	-	2	4	51
<b>Religious Background</b>							
Christian	4	7	9	8	5	8	41
ATR	-	-	-	-	1	-	1
Muslim	2	1	1	1	2	2	9
Any Other	-	-	-	-	-	-	51

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## Chapter 9

### Laws Protecting Women and Perceptions About Women

#### 9.0 Introduction

Women empowerment has been an agenda which has been vigorously pursued at the international, national and local levels over the last four decades. Many governmental, intra-governmental and non-governmental organizations had been in the forefront of these struggles. These organisations include National Council of Women and Development (NCWD), Federation of International Women Lawyers (FIDA), Federation of African Women Entrepreneurs (FAWE), 31<sup>st</sup> December Women's Movement (DWM), Women's World Banking (WWB). Through the advocacy of these bodies several laws have been passed to promote the welfare of women.

Over the years women have attained great heights in the country. A few examples of such Ghanaian women are the late Mrs. Justice Annie Jiagge (1<sup>st</sup> Female High Court Judge in the Commonwealth), Mrs. Justice Bamford-Addo (1<sup>st</sup> female Supreme Court Judge of Ghana), Dr. (Mrs.) Esther Ocloo (industrialist of high repute), Prof. (Mrs.) Florence Dolphyne (educationist and first female Pro-Vice Chancellor of University of Ghana), and Prof. (Mrs.) Akua Kuenyehia (member of the International Criminal Court, The Hague)

One expects that the success of these women and several others will influence the perception of society especially men about women. Against this fact is the reality that culture dies hard especially in the traditional Ghanaian society where women are perceived as more suitable as domestic workers and for upbringing of children and other secondary roles in society.

This section of the report deals with the analysis of structured questions that seek to determine respondents' knowledge about laws passed to protect women and perceptions on women.

#### 9.1 Constitutional Rights and Cultural Practices

Chapter Five of the 1992 Constitution talks about Fundamental Human Rights and Freedoms. Article 12 (2) states that "every person in Ghana whatever the race, place of origin, political opinion, colour, religion, creed or gender shall be entitled to the fundamental human rights and freedoms of the individual as contained in this chapter but subject to respect for the rights and freedoms of others and for the public interest".

Since the coming into force of the Constitution, efforts have been made in varying degrees by various stakeholders to promote the respect of these rights. It is a known fact however that some cultural practices and social norms are militating against the promotion of these rights.

The question asked was which cultural practices promote or inhibit the right to own property (Article 18), Right to engage in economic activity (Article 24), right to vote (Article 42), and general fundamental freedoms (Article 21).

Respondents who mentioned a cultural practice that promoted a constitutional Right were 283 (50.5 per cent), whereas 278 (50.1 per cent) mentioned a cultural practice that inhibits a constitutional Right.

The low response rate to the question may be due to the low level of knowledge of respondents on the constitutional rights making linkage with cultural practices difficult.

**Table 9.1 Cultural Practices Mentioned by Respondents as Promoting or Inhibiting Constitutional Rights of Women in Percentages**

<b>Constitutional Rights</b>	<b>Promote (%)</b>	<b>Inhibit (%)</b>
Protected from sexual abuse	26.8	2.1
To own property	18.4	6.8
To Vote	13.0	3.8
Engage in economic activity	12.5	10.5
To be Voted for	8.8	8.6
Practice any religion	7.9	22.9
Belong to society of choice	7.0	16.4
To Education	5.6	28.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

From Table 9.1 above the right to education had the highest score of 28.9 per cent in the cultural practices inhibiting constitutional rights. The Others were: Right to practice any religion (22.9 per cent), Right to belong to society of choice (16.4 per cent), Right to engage in Economic activity (10.8 per cent), Right to be voted for (8.6), Right to own Property (6.8 per cent) Right to vote (3.8 per cent) and Right to be protected from sexual abuse (2.1 per cent).

From the above statistics, it is heartwarming to know that there are cultural practices that encourage people to vote in general elections, making it the third highest right promoted by cultural practices. The practices so identified include marriage and puberty rites. Given the important role that voting plays in multiparty democracy through selection of leaders it will be in the right direction for such cultural practices to be identified and promoted in the society.

From the data, the most hindered constitutional right is the right to education. Practices so identified include parents relinquishing the upbringing of their children to others due to poverty, giving children out as househelps, and such cultural practices as betrothal and fostering. All these go a long way in contributing to the low enrollment rate among girls in schools and equally high drop-out rate and consequently the low literacy rate among women in the country.

A study of the individual rights shows that the cultural practices that promote the right to own property most were marriage (56.8 per cent), puberty rites (20.4 per cent) and Lapomi (4.9 per cent), whereas those which inhibit it most were matrimonial inheritance (23.2 per cent) and betrothal (21.4 per cent).

That marriage is seen as one cultural practice that promotes the right to own property may be due to the fact that with the promulgation of PNDC Law 111 and the possibility of spouses leaving behind Wills, married people have access to property of partners. Most often the majority of properties of deceased partners are transferred to surviving spouses. Puberty rites and Lapomi are mentioned due to the monetary and material gifts, people who go through, receive. These monies and gifts can be used as start-up capital for businesses and to acquire property.

On the other hand, matrimonial inheritance (a practice where nephews regarded as next of kin, inherit properties of deceased husbands) hinders transfer of property to partners and it is not surprising it was

the highest mentioned as inhibiting the right to own property. Betrothal is also mentioned as a hindering practice because it makes for the total dependence of the betrothed person on the guardian, resulting in the woman's inability to own property as an individual.

To further test respondents on the right to own property with reference to women, four items namely farm, land, house and livestock were listed for them to choose which one woman are allowed to own. The result is shown in Table 9.2.

**Table 9.2 Properties Women Are Allowed to Own in the Community as Stated by Respondents**

Properties	Allowed		Not Allowed		Total	
	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%
Farm	535	95.5	25	4.5	560	100
Land	430	76.3	130	23.7	560	100
House	487	87.0	73	13.0	560	100
Livestock	496	88.6	64	11.4	560	100

The data indicates that 95.5 per cent of respondents say women are allowed to own Farms. The others are: Livestock (88.6 per cent), House (87.0 per cent) and Land (76.8 per cent).

Even though all the four items had a relatively high percentage ownership rate for women, the fact that land is the least among them all calls for concern since it plays a central role in investment and if owned by women will empower them economically.

**Table 9.3: Properties Women Are Allowed to Own by Region in Percentages**

Regions	PROPERTIES							
	Farm	Land	House	Livestock				
Ashanti	96.9	89.4	10.6	94.4	5.6	85.1	14.9	-
Eastern	98.8	1.2	95.0	5.0	98.8	1.2	100	-
G/Accra	100	-	100	-	100	-	100	-
Northern	88.8	11.2	48.8	51.2	61.3	38.7	78.1	21.9
Volta	98.7	1.3	64.9	35.1	98.7	1.3	93.5	6.5

From Table 9.3 Greater Accra scored 100 per cent in all cases. This may be explained by the cosmopolitan nature of the area in which the questionnaire was administered. There possession of particular property is more a function of one's ability to pool the necessary resources rather than any other factor.

For Northern Region to record the lowest of 48.8 per cent saying women can own land could be explained by the fact that culturally land is vested in only males. This calls for great concern because of the role land plays in the economic life of people. Land serves as a source of collateral for accessing capital. It is also used for amassing wealth through activities like farming and putting up buildings. For women in that area to be empowered economically, ownership of land is very important and all efforts should be made by concerned stakeholders to revert the situation.

In the area of freedom of religion and freedom of association, cultural practices mentioned as promoting them were: Marriage (38.7 per cent), Widowhood Rites (20.5 per cent) and Puberty Rites (20.5 per

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cent). On the other hand, Marriage (58.8 per cent) Okuoko (24.9 per cent) and Betrothal (7.4 per cent) are top among practices said to inhibit the right to practice any religion. The right to belong to a society of one's choice had similar results. Marriage (30.5 per cent), widowhood rites (22.7 per cent) and puberty rite (21.8 per cent) were mentioned as promoting, whereas marriage (59.6 per cent) Okuoko (16.2 per cent) and Betrothal (5.9 per cent) are seen as inhibiting it.

The role that marriage plays in connection with the above rights differs. Whereas a section of respondents see it inhibiting their right because men force women to practice their religion and join same societies, others see it as promoting such rights since partners support each other in the practice of one's faith. Widowhood and Puberty rites are mentioned as promoting freedom of association as a result of the supposed "freedom" one enjoys after going through such rites. The restrictive nature of Okuoku cult and the fact that one has no freedom in opting out may have influenced people to mention it as inhibiting these rights.

The right to engage in economic activity had the following responses in terms of the cultural practices promoting it: Marriage (48.9 per cent), puberty rites (14.9 per cent) and elopement (7.1 per cent); the cultural practices that hinder it are marriage (38 per cent), widowhood rites (32.4 per cent) and Okuoku (11.5 per cent). Elopement may have been seen as promoting economic rights because after the people involved run away from the town, they both have to work to earn money to live on. They need money to perform the marriage rites later. It is not surprising at all that widowhood rites is mentioned as inhibiting economic rites since people who go through such rites do not handle money or engage in any economic activity for a period of time.

Cultural practices that promote the right to vote are marriage (36.4 per cent), widowhood rites (19.7 per cent) and puberty rites (14.4 per cent). On the other hand marriage (50 per cent), widowhood rites (18.8 per cent) and fostering are mentioned as inhibiting it.

The right to be protected from sexual abuse had marriage (25.3 per cent) and Okuoko (20.6 per cent) as some of the cultural practices promoting it. Okuoko stands out as protecting people from being abused sexually due to the fact that the cult "strengthens women spiritually" and thus makes it almost impossible to suffer sexual abuse. It is a belief that whoever forcefully abuses a cult member has calamity visited on him. He would suffer series of untold hardships until he goes to confess his 'sins' to the olami and performs necessary purification rites and pays necessary compensation to the victim. In the area of marriage it is almost a taboo to sexually abuse a married woman and the perpetrator of such an act is most likely to suffer sanction by society and also be punished by the husband of the woman.

Educational rights are promoted most by puberty rites (34.1 per cent), and hindered by fostering (46 per cent), betrothal (35.3 per cent) and Okuoko (32.4 per cent). People who go through puberty rites are seen as having brought honor to the family and society. It is not far fetched therefore that they will be given all the needed support to further their education. On the other hand, fostering where the child's upbringing is on the non-biological parents, makes such a fostered girl-child have limited opportunities in terms of education.

## **9.2 Laws Promoting Women's Rights and their Impact**

Article 26 of the 1992 Constitution, though allowing the promotion of cultural rights and practices, states, "All customary practices which dehumanize or are injurious to the physical and mental well-being of a

person are prohibited.” The PNDCL 90 Section (a) amending Section 88 of the Criminal Code, Act 29 (1960), provides 88A(i) “whoever compels a bereaved spouse or a relative of such spouse to undergo any custom or practice that is cruel in nature, shall be guilty of a misdemeanor”. The Children’s Act 1998, also stipulates Part 1 (13) that “No person shall subject a child to torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment including any cultural practice which dehumanizes or is injurious to the physical and mental well-being of a child “ Part 1 (14) also states that No person shall force a child a) to be betrothed, b) to be the subject of a dowry transaction; or c) to be married.

These laws in totality are to prevent the practice of harmful cultural practices. Their impact is yet to be felt either as a result of low knowledge of them or poor enforcement by the concerned authorities. The survey therefore sought to seek respondents’ knowledge about these laws and their impact. The question asked was “Do you know of any law (s) or bye-laws that has been passed to protect women against harmful cultural practices?”

**Table 9.4: Knowledge of Laws Passed To Protect Women By Level Of Education**  
**Knowledge of Laws/Bye-Laws**

Level of Education	YES		NO	
	Freq	%	Freq	%
No Formal Education	67	27.9	173	72.1
Primary	17	50.0	17	50.0
J.S.S/Middle	69	46.9	78	53.1
Secondary	30	54.5	25	45.5
Post Secondary	36	67.9	17	32.1
Tertiary	21	84.0	4	16.0
Others	4	66.7	2	33.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>244</b>	<b>43.6</b>	<b>316</b>	<b>56.4</b>

To this, 244 (43.6 per cent) of respondents said yes whereas 316 (56.4 per cent) said no. More males (51 per cent) as compared to females (39.6 per cent) said laws have been passed to protect women against harmful cultural practices. That only 39.6 per cent of females know that laws have been passed to protect them calls for concern since it is women who suffer most in terms of cultural practices. With such a low knowledge of such laws only a few can take advantage of such legal provision to insist on not performing such rites. An intensive mass education involving traditional councils will increase people’s knowledge on these laws and further enhance their enforcement.

Knowledge of respondents on laws passed tends to increase after the JSS. From Table 9.4, the proportion of respondents who knew of the laws were in JSS/Middle (46.9 per cent), Secondary (54.5 per cent), Post Secondary (67.9 per cent), and Tertiary (84 per cent). Respondents with No Formal Education had the lowest proportion of 27.9 per cent. It is thus obvious that as one climbs up the educational ladder, knowledge on issues increases as he/she comes into contact with such issues through formal or informal means. It will be useful if a conscious effort is made to introduce civics into the curriculum of schools so that such laws on harmful cultural practices as well as other principles of the constitution and nation building can be taught in the schools.

The data looked at from regional basis, reveals that Greater Accra (67.1 per cent) was the highest in terms of proportion of respondents who said yes. Others were Ashanti (55.9 per cent), Eastern (36.3 per

cent), Volta (31.2 per cent) and Northern (28.8 per cent). It is not altogether surprising that responses are skewed in favour of the urban population due to general exposure to knowledge through channels like radio, television and the print media. Nevertheless, knowledge about these laws is needed more in rural areas where various cultural practices are upheld as compared to the urban areas with their cosmopolitan nature and a resultant diminishing nature of cultural practices.

To further test respondent's knowledge on the laws, they were asked to mention the laws passed to protect women against harmful cultural practices.

**Table 9.5: Laws Mentioned as Protecting Women Against Harmful Cultural Practices**

Reasons	Freq.	Per cent
PNDCL 111	109	19.5
Law on FGM	34	6.1
Law on rape	33	5.9
Criminal Amendments Code	23	4.1
Laws on Human Rights	6	1.1
Others	35	6.3
No Idea	320	57.2
Total	560	100

The most mentioned law as protecting women against harmful cultural practices was PNDCL 111 (45.4 per cent). The other laws, as indicated in Table 9.5 are: Law on FGM (14.2 per cent), Law on Rape (13.8), Criminal Amendment Code (9.6 per cent), Laws on Human Rights (2.9 per cent) and others 14.6 per cent. The frequent application of PNDCL 111 and the intensive education done on it after it was passed may have contributed to its popularity among the respondents. A similar approach to all laws on cultural practices will yield such a result.

**Table 9.6: Impact of Laws Passed to Protect Women**

Impact	Per cent
Promotes women's welfare	36.6
Fair share of property	32.5
Elimination/Modernization of harmful cultural practices	8.0
Any other	23.1
Total	100

Out of the 186 respondents who answered the question on the impact of the laws, 36.6 per cent said the laws have promoted women's welfare, 32.3 per cent said they have led to a fair share of deceased's property and 8.0 per cent said they also led to the modernization and elimination of harmful cultural practices. A total of 23.1 per cent gave other reasons such as it has brought peace to the society, led to low respect for our culture.

### 9.3 Sharing of Deceased's Property

In 1985, the PNDC passed the Intestate Succession Law, PNDC Law 111. Before the law there was tension between the nuclear family and the traditional extended family unit as to the appropriate line of devolution of property on the death intestate of a member. By customary law, there was very little protection for a surviving spouse. Neither spouse had a right to the property of the other. Children,

especially those from a matrilineal system, had no more than a right to maintenance by their fathers' customary succession and a right in their father's house subject to good behavior.

The Customary law conception of marriage did not regard a wife as part of the husband's economic unit. Therefore the wife's claim on the husband's property was also limited. The provision of the marriage ordinance Cap.127, though providing some protection for the wife and children, did not identify any specific item of the estate as definitely going to the wife or children or the family, and there were often confusion and undue problems after the death of a spouse especially the man. The marriage of Mohammedan Ordinance Cap. 129 under which some Muslims married though providing for specific properties to wife, children and family, was hardly enforced because of the complicated nature of the rules on distribution of property. What existed prior to the passage of the Intestate Succession Law was that the type of marriage contracted had major implications for the maintenance of wife, children and other dependants.

PNDCL Law 111 removed all these anomalies that had existed in relation to intestate succession and gave a larger portion of the estate of the deceased to the spouse and children than was normally the case. The law also removed the distinction between succession by widows and widowers which existed under both Cap. 127 and Cap. 129 and the same scheme applied whether man or woman. It also provided for uniform intestate succession that became applicable throughout the country irrespective of the class of the intestate and the type of marriage contracted by him or her. The 1992 Constitution incorporates the Intestate Succession Law under the general human rights of the individual, specifically Article 22 outlines the property rights of a spouse. The PNDCL 111 as promulgated in 1985 has been in existence for almost two decades. This survey therefore sought to know the extent to which it has been applied.

**Table 9.7: Respondents Views on How Property of a Dead Spouse is Shared**

How Property is Shared	Freq.	Percent
Given to surviving partner/Children/ Family	105	18.8
Given to surviving partner &Children only	74	13.2
Taken by next of kin	66	11.8
Taken by deceased's family	44	7.9
Family and surviving spouse struggle over property	22	3.9
Shared by a will	20	3.6
Shared by PNDCL 111	14	3.3
Others	4	1.1
Don't Know	213	37.7
Total	560	100

As shown by Table 9.7 above, when respondents were asked about what happens to the property of a deceased spouse, 18.8 per cent said it is given to the surviving partner/children/family, 13.2 per cent said it is given to the surviving partner and children, and 11.8 per cent said it is taken over by next of kin. Other responses were that: It is taken by deceased's family (7.9 per cent), the family and surviving partner struggle over the property (3.9 per cent), Shared according to a Will (3.6 per cent), shared according to PNDCL 111(3.1 per cent), and other reasons (1.1 per cent). A considerable proportion of respondents (37.7) had no idea of what happens to the property of a deceased.

The data indicates that there still exist problems even after the coming into force of PNDCL 111. This is evident by the proportion of respondents who gave responses contrary to the law and talked specifically

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about struggles over property by family and surviving partner, and taking over of property by next of kin. The proportion of respondents who had no idea about the issue sends a signal that there is still need for further education on the law. It can also be said that the law is not being applied either as a result of low knowledge on it or people are not in agreement with it.

A review of the law in terms of proportions, leading to a fair balance for the surviving partner, children and family will enhance its acceptability and usage. Furthermore all concerned stakeholders should pursue a consistent programme of education of the masses on the law.

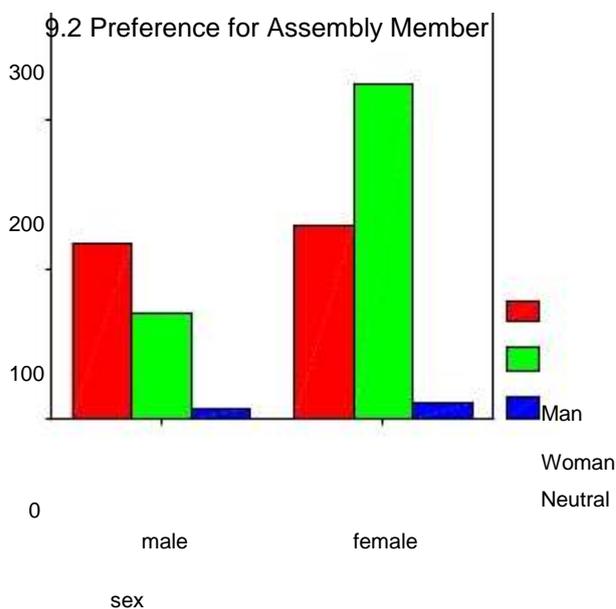
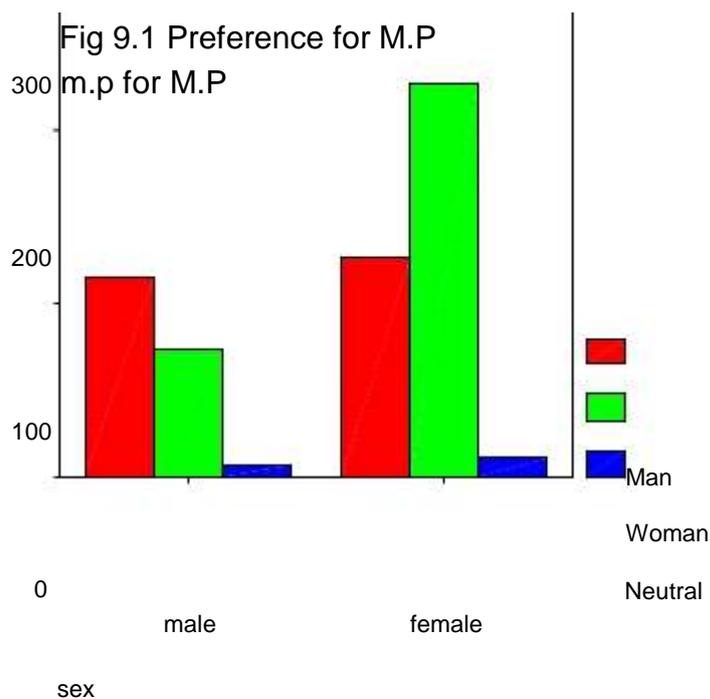
#### **9.4 Women's Political Empowerment**

The 1992 Constitution (Article 93) stipulates the establishment of a Parliament of Ghana consisting of not less than one hundred and forty (140) elected members. Membership is open to any citizen of Ghana who has attained the age of twenty one, is a registered voter, has resided in the Constituency for which he/she stands as a candidate for not less than five years or hails from that constituency and also fulfills all his tax obligations.

The number of female MPs in the first Parliament (1993-1997) of the Fourth Republic was 16 (representing 8.0 per cent of the 200 MPs). In the second Parliament (1997-2001) there were 19 women representing 9.5 per cent and in the current (third) Parliament (2001-2005) there are 18 female MPs, representing 9 per cent. The low representation of women in Parliament has been a cause for concern since females form the bulk of the Ghanaian population. It is an undeniable fact that our cultural practices and customs have fashioned out some specific jobs for women and tagged those who opt out of those jobs for more challenging ones or male dominated ones as "hard women". Added to this is the "dirty" way that politics is practiced in our infant democracy which makes a lot of women of substance and high repute to shy away from it.

Further more the decentralisation of governance through the district assembly concept has been in progress for over two decades. Assembly members are either elected or appointed by the President. Women are still under-represented in the assemblies due to several factors among which are people's perceptions that they are the weaker sex and men are born to lead.

Several efforts have been made by concerned stakeholders to rectify this imbalance in representation and the survey sought to collate views on the issue. The questions asked was "Whom will you prefer to vote for as your MP, man or woman?" and "Whom would you prefer to vote for as an assembly member for your area, man or woman?" The responses as indicated in (Table 9.8 and Fig 9.1) show that 301 (53.8 per cent) said women, 241(43 per cent) said men and 18 (3.2 per cent) were neutral for MP whereas 52.7 per cent said women, 43.9 per cent said men and 3.4 per cent were neutral for assembly member.



In terms of responses by sex of respondents on preference for MPs, only 37.8 per cent of men said they would vote for women whereas 58.7 per cent will vote for men and 3.6 per cent will be neutral. On the other hand 62.4 per cent of women said they would vote for women whereas 34.6 per cent said they would vote for men and 3.0 per cent remained neutral.

The desire to maintain the status quo of male dominance could be said to have influenced the decision of males to vote for men. It is a good sign to know however that compared to assembly member (43.9 per cent) people are more willing to vote for females as MPs (53.8) as Table 9.8 indicates.

**Table 9.8: Sex and Respondents Preference for Assembly Member and MP**

Sex	Assembly Member					MP				
	M	%	F	%	N %	M	%	F	%	N %
Male	117	59.7	71	36.2	8 4.1	115	58.7	74	37.8	7 3.6
Female	129	35.4	224	61.5	11 3.0	126	34.6	227	62.4	11 3.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>246</b>	<b>52.7</b>	<b>295</b>	<b>43.9</b>	<b>19 3.4</b>	<b>241</b>	<b>43.0</b>	<b>301</b>	<b>53.8</b>	<b>18 3.2</b>

Regional distribution of responses shows that Northern Region had 65 per cent of respondents ready to vote for women M.Ps. The other regional responses were as follows: Eastern (56.3 per cent), Ashanti (49.7), Volta (48.1 per cent) and Greater Accra (42.7 per cent).

**Table 9.10: Reasons for Preferring a Female MP**

Reasons	Freq.	Per cent
Women's Political Empowerment	62	20.5
Women are Patient/Sympathetic/Careful	58	19.1
Women Will Show Concern for Women Issues	48	15.8
Women are Accountable	25	8.3
Women can do What Men Can Do	24	7.9
Women are Committed	20	6.6
Women Possess Leadership Skills	13	4.3
Others	53	17.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>298</b>	<b>100</b>

From Table 9.10, political empowerment accounts for the highest response of 20.5 per cent. It thus seems to suggest that rectifying the imbalances in political representation in terms of sex is the underlying factor in people's choice of women MPs. There is also a perception that males in political positions are not adequately pursuing women's concerns. This is making people yearn for a change since they are optimistic that women will champion their cause. It thus can be foreseen that gradually women's political representation may increase and stakeholders who are championing them should redouble their efforts.

**Table 9.9: Reasons for Preferring a Male MP**

Reasons	Freq.	Per cent
Men are Courageous and Bold	110	45.5
Men are Born to Lead	69	28.5
Men Have Time for the Work	27	11.2
Men are Wiser than Women	18	7.4
Men are Approachable	5	2.0
Men can Mobilize People	3	1.2
Others	10	4.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>242</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 9.9 gives respondents' reasons for preferring men as MP. Top on this list is that men are bold and

courageous (45.5 per cent) and men are born to lead (28.5 per cent). Thus a major factor for voting for men is the perception that women are the weaker sex and are not strong enough for some roles and duties. However, this perception of the superior nature of man is debatable since women have risen to the task of performing challenging roles on all fronts of the nation's life.

A person's capability (93.3 per cent) was the major reason why respondents who remained neutral will vote for an MP. This assessment is also a healthy sign for our infant democracy and a deviation from the voting biases of relationship such as tribe, schoolmate and party lines. If this attitude permeates the whole society it will lead to the right caliber of people being chosen for leadership roles.

When respondents were asked their preference for assembly member, 59.7 per cent of males said they would vote for men, 36.7 per cent for women and 4.1 per cent were neutral. For females 61.5 per cent said they will vote for women, 35.4 per cent for men and 3 per cent were neutral.

In terms of educational background, all groups had more respondents having preference for women as assembly member. The group with the highest proportion of respondents was post secondary with 60.4 per cent followed by primary with 55.9 per cent. Secondary had 54.8 per cent and No formal 49.6 per cent.

On regional basis, women were more preferred than men in three regions, Ashanti men (49.7 per cent). Eastern (56.3) and Northern (65 per cent as compared to two, Greater Accra (42.7 per cent) and Volta (48.1) who preferred men.

The above statistics is a healthy sign towards women's active participation in the decision making process. Coming from a background where even though women form the majority of the population they are under represented in our district assemblies, Parliament and Executive, it will be very encouraging if people put to action their willingness to vote for women in elections.

An interesting development however occurs when the reasons for voting for assembly members for the sexes as shown in Tables 9.11 and Table 9.12 below are examined. It is seen that whereas physical attributes and cultural dimensions were underpinning the reasons for voting for men, leadership qualities were the major reasons respondents will vote for women.

**Table 9.11: Respondents Reasons for Preferring a Male Assembly member**

<b>Reasons</b>	<b>Freq.</b>	<b>Per cent</b>
Men are Courageous and Bold	109	44.6
Men are Born to Llead	70	28.6
Men Have Time for the Work	29	11.8
Men are Wiser than Women	15	6.1
Men are Approachable	5	2.0
Men can Mobilize People	4	1.6
Others	13	5.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>245</b>	<b>100</b>

**Table 9.12: Respondents Reasons for Preferring a Female Assembly Member**

<b>Reasons</b>	<b>Freq.</b>	<b>Per cent</b>
Women's political empowerment	58	19.5
Women are patient/sympathetic/careful	57	19.1
Women will show concern for women issues	55	18.5
Women can do What Men Can Do	29	9.7
Women are Committed	26	8.7
Women are Accountable	17	5.7
Women Possess Leadership Skills	12	4.0
Others	44	14.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>298</b>	<b>100</b>

The major reasons people will vote for women assembly members were for women's political empowerment (19.5 per cent), women are patient, sympathetic and careful (19.1 per cent) and women will show concern for female issues (18.5 per cent). Other reasons were women can do what men can do (9.7 per cent), women are committed (8.7 per cent), women are accountable (5.7 per cent), women possess leadership skills (4.0 per cent) and other reasons like women can mobilise people and women can bring about development had 14.8 per cent.

For people to vote for women because of qualities of accountability and commitment is a plus for women's political empowerment and an admission of the fact that some leaders have not been accountable and committed to the cause of the people who voted for them.

Reasons why people will vote for men were that men are bold and courageous (44.6), they were born to lead (28.6 per cent), men are wiser than women (6.1 per cent), men are approachable (2 per cent), men can mobilize (1.6 per cent) and other reasons (5.3 per cent)

What is obvious from these responses is the existing notion held by people that men are superior to women and have some natural attributes of leadership. This is clearly amplified by about 35 per cent of respondents who will vote for man because they are born to lead or are wiser than women. The role our custom and culture has given women in that they are to care for the home and children has contributed to their being regarded as unfit for leadership roles by some section of the society and every effort through socialization, female education, female empowerment and mass education should be made to erase or minimize such entrenched thoughts about females.

Respondents who did not have any sex preference for voting for an assembly member had the person's capabilities (86.7) and honesty (13.3 per cent) as their reasons.

### **9.5 Girl-Child Education**

Girl-child education has been on the national agenda for some time. Intensive campaign has been mounted through the media to educate the populace on the need to educate the Girl-child. This has culminated in the present government appointing a Minister of State in charge of Primary, Secondary and Girl-child Education. Alongside the campaign to get the girl-child educated there also exists the FCUBE programme that makes basic education free and compulsory for all citizens. It is believed that

the FCUBE programme will compel a lot of parents and guardians to send their wards to school.

Against these programmes is the traditional attitude that relegates the girl-child to the background in the field of education. Many people hold the traditional view that the role of the woman is to handle domestic affairs and she can learn this properly at home. Child socialisation in many societies would encourage the boy-child to do his homework, whilst the girl-child will be given a lot of house chores to perform.

The survey sought to collate respondents' views on girl-child education to determine if much change has been made on views on girl-child education given the vigorous education that has gone on over the years. The question asked was, "If you were financially constrained after your children's JSS education, which one of them would you support to go further". In response 301 (representing 53.8 per cent of respondents) said they would educate the boy-child, whereas 232 (41.4 per cent) said girl-child, with 27 (4.8 per cent) being neutral. In terms of sex, both males (60.2 per cent) and females (50.3 per cent) had higher proportions opting to educate the boy child further.

Among the reasons given for furthering the education of the boy child as shown in Table 9. 13 was that the girl-child will become pregnant (35.5 per cent), Boy will prosper and help family (22.4 per cent), Girl will marry (13.8 per cent), boy is more determined (8.9), Bear family name (6.6), Girl Child education is costly (4.6) Girl will help at home/trade (3.3) and other reasons (4.9 per cent).

From the reasons given, it could be seen that culture and customs on the status of female in the society have informed respondents' view. This is further given credence by a considerable number (17.1 per cent) who said the girl-child can marry or help at home/trade.

**Table 9.13: Respondents Reasons for Furthering Boy-Child Education**

<b>Reasons</b>	<b>Freq.</b>	<b>Per cent</b>
Girl Will Get Pregnant During her Education	106	35.5
Boy Will Prosper and Help Family	68	22.4
Girl Will Marry	42	12.1
Boy Child is More Determined	27	8.9
Boy Child Will Bear Family Name	20	6.6
Girl Child Education is More Costly	14	4.6
Girl Will Help at Home or Trade	10	3.3
Others	15	4.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>304</b>	<b>100</b>

Another revelation from the statistics given was respondent view that girls education is expensive as compared to boys. This perception may have arisen from the high fees charged by Girls' Secondary Schools and the fact that authorities in such schools insist on the child having all the items listed on their prospectus. Furthermore, the girl child may be more particular about items she carries to school unlike the boy who is willing to do with whatever little he has.

Measures such as girls secondary schools charging the approved government fees and reducing items on the prospectus to the barest minimum will go a long way to reduce cost of girl-child education and erase any wrong impressions.

**Table 9.14: Respondents Reasons for Furthering Girl-Child Education**

<b>Reasons</b>	<b>Freq.</b>	<b>Per cent</b>
Girl Will Care for Family in Future	84	36.6
Promotes Girl Child Education	67	29.1
Girl May Get Pregnant if Education is Delayed	27	11.7
Educate the Whole Nation	19	8.3
Girl Will Get Good Employment	15	6.5
To Break Male Dominance	12	5.2
Others	6	2.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>230</b>	<b>100</b>

Respondents who said they would educate the girl-child further (Table 9.14 above) will do so for the following reasons: The girl child will care for family (36.6 per cent), Girl child education (29.1 per cent) girl child may get pregnant while waiting (11.7 per cent) when you educate a woman you educate a whole nation (8.3 per cent). Others will do so for girls to get good employment (6.5 per cent), break male dominance (5.2 per cent) and other reasons (2.6 per cent).

Table 9.15 shows regional distribution of respondents views on furtherance of Boy or Girl Child Education when financially constrained. Northern Region tops the list of those in favour of furthering girl-child education with 58.8 per cent, Volta Region had (40.3 per cent) Eastern (40 per cent) Ashanti (31.1 per cent) and Greater Accra (30.5 per cent).

**Table 9.15: Respondents Views on Furtherance of Boy or Girl-Child Education when financially constrained by Region**

<b>Region</b>	<b>Boy</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Girl</b>	<b>percent</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Per cent</b>
G. Accra	57	69.5	25	30.5	-	
Volta	46	59.7	31	40.3	-	
Eastern	48	60.0	32	40.0	-	
Ashanti	84	52.2	50	31.1	27	16.8
Northern	66	41.2	94	58.8	-	
<b>Total</b>	<b>301</b>	<b>53.8</b>	<b>232</b>	<b>41.4</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>4.8</b>

Against a background of many cultural practices and socio-economic factors that debar females from attaining higher heights in education, it is encouraging to know that respondents from Northern Region top the list of those who wanted to further the education of the girl-child. This perhaps may be a resolve by respondents to change prevailing cultural situations. A change of attitude to girl-child education is needed across the country, especially as traditional reasons for preferring boys' education to that of girls persist. There is need for more vigorous education by NGOs concerned about promoting women's rights. The Religious bodies especially the Churches need to join the campaign in stressing on the equality of the sexes.

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# Chapter 10

## Institutions Active in Women's Rights Issues

### 10.0 Introduction

Over the last decade various institutions have sprung up promoting the rights and welfare of children and women. These organisations can be classified into two: public institutions and non-governmental organisations. The former is made up of constitutional and other legal bodies, while in the latter are NGOs and church organisations.

### 10.1 Constitutional and State Bodies

Under the 1992 Constitution and other laws of the country a number of institutions had been charged to promote rights of women and children; four of such institution are: National Commission for Civic Education (NCCE), Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ), Ghana National Commission on Children (GNCC), National Council on Women and Development (NCWD), Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs and Women and Juvenile Unit of the Ghana Police Service (WAJU).

#### 10.1.1 National Commission for Civic Education

The National Commission for Civic Education (NCCE) was established by Act 452 of 1993 to ensure the education of the populace on civic responsibilities.

The functions of the Commission as stipulated in its Act are to:

- Create and sustain within the society the awareness of the principles and objectives of the Constitution as the fundamental law of the people of Ghana;
- Educate and encourage the public to defend the constitution at all times against all forms of abuse and violation;
- formulate for the consideration of Government, from time to time programmes at the national, regional and district levels aimed at realising the objectives of the Constitution;
- formulate, implement and oversee programmes intended to inculcate in the citizens of Ghana awareness of their civic responsibilities and an appreciation of their rights and obligations as free people; and assess for the information of Government, the limitations to the achievement of true democracy arising from the existing inequalities between different strata of the population and make recommendations for re-dressing these qualities.

The head office of the Commission is located in Accra and it has 10 regional offices and offices in all the 110 districts of the country.

#### 10.1.2 Commission for Human Rights and Administrative Justice

The Commission for Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ) was established by Act 456 to address issues with administrative justice. Its functions as stated in the Act are to investigate and remedy complaints arising from:

- Violation of human rights and freedoms, injustice, corruption, abuse of power and unfair treatment of any person by a public officer in the exercise of his official duties;
- The functioning of the Public Services Commission, the administrative organs Of the State,

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the offices of the Regional Co-ordinating Council and the District Assembly, the Armed Forces, the Police Service and the Prison Service in so far as the complaints relate to the failure to achieve a balanced structuring of those services or equal access by all the recruitment of those services or fair administration in relation to those services;

- Practices and actions by persons, private enterprises and other institutions where those complaints allege violation of fundamental rights and freedoms under this Constitution;
- And to take appropriate action to call for the remedying, correction and reversal of instances specified in paragraphs (a), (b) and (c) of this subsection through such means as are fair, proper and effective, including
  - a. Negotiations and compromise between the parties concerned; Causing the complaint and its funding on it to be reported to the superior of an offending person;
  - b. Bring proceedings in a competent Court for a remedy to secure the termination of the offending action or conduct, for the abandonment or alteration of the offending procedures; and
  - c. Bringing proceedings to restrain the regulation by challenging its validity if the of fending action or conduct is sought to be justified by subordinate legislation or regulation which is unreasonable or otherwise ultra vies;

The head office of the CHRAJ is at the old Parliament House in Accra, and it has offices in all the 10 regional capitals, but only 75 district offices.

### **10.1.3 Women and Juvenile Unit of the Ghana Police Service (WAJU)**

The Women and Juvenile Unit of the Ghana Police Service better known by its acronym WAJU is a specialised unit within in the Ghana Police Service. It was established in October 1998 in response to the increasing number of cases involving abuse and violence against women and children. WAJU works closely with the Department of Social Welfare, FIDA and the Legal Aid Board. Its crucial functions are:

- To investigate all female and children related offences.
- To handle cases involving domestic violence.
- To handle cases of child abuse.
- To handle juvenile offence
- To handle cases of child delinquency.
- To prosecute all such cases where necessary and,
- Any other functions as may be directed by the Inspector General of Police.

Among cases WAJU deals with are: defilement, rape, incest, abduction, criminal abortion, assault/wife battery, forced marriage, threatening behaviour, unnatural carnal knowledge, indecent assault, child trafficking, causing harm\causing damage, failing to provide the necessaries of health and life.

The head office of WAJU is located at the Ministries Police Station and it has offices in all the 10 regional capitals.

### **10.1.4 Ghana National Commission on Children (GNCC)**

The GNCC was established in 1979. It was designed to be the principal government institution for advancing the general welfare and development of children. To that end, the GNCC was assigned three major review of legislation in areas of children's rights, privileges and benefits in Ghana" (AFRCD 66 section 2c).

Secondly, the GNCC was granted a coordinating role entailing close collaboration with agencies responsible for implementing policies and programme for children. Finally, it was tasked to provide encouragement and assistance in establishing and regulating facilities for children such as crèches, day-care centers, homes for the disabled, playgrounds and specialized facilities for gifted children. The Commission was also expected to encourage the establishment of centres which would offer diagnostic and welfare services to children.

The head office of the GNCC is located at Ridge in Accra; it has offices in all the 10 regions.

### 10.1.5 The Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs (MOWAC)

The Ministry was established on January 7, 2001 by Executive Instrument 18. The mission of MOWAC is to enhance its contribution to the development of Ghana by achieving equal status for women, enforcing the rights of children and women, and promoting the survival, development, protection and increased participation of both children and women in the development process.

*The functions of MOWAC include:*

- Formulation of national development policy framework for both women and children.
- Formulation of national development plans (strategic, medium and short term) concerning women and children's programmes.
- Monitoring and evaluation of both the process and impact of women and child specific plans being implemented.

As a Central Management Agency tasked with spearheading gender and children's development issues in the country, the National Council on Women and Development (NCWD) and the Ghana National Commission on Children (GNCC) become departments under MOWAC.

The MOWAC is located at the ministries and it is located in the regions in the form of GNCC and NCWD.

## 10.2 Level of Knowledge of Institutions

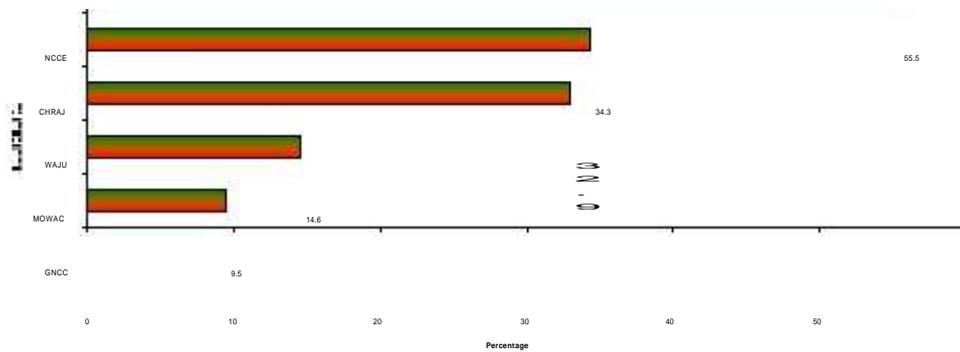
As a way of determining the level of knowledge in respect to the work of these governmental bodies, respondents were asked to state the work they do. First, the results indicated that only a small proportion (6.4 per cent) of the respondents could state the work all the five institutions do. In contrast, those who could not state any thing at all constituted 31.3 per cent of the total respondents. Whereas 25.9 per cent could state only one, 23.0 percent of the sample was able to state the work of two institutions. Those who stated three or four institutions were 8.6 per cent and 3.9 per cent respectively.

**Table 10.1 Number of institutions Selected by Respondents**

No.of Inst.	Frequency	Per cent
Zero	65	11.6
One	145	25.9
Two	129	23.0
Three	48	8.6
Four	22	3.9
Five	36	6.4
Six	5	0.9
Totals	560	100.0

The survey results further reveal that more than half (55.5 per cent) mentioned the NCCE with the work they do. Those who knew of CHRAJ and WAJU were made of 34.3 and 32.9 per cent respectively. For MOWAC, even though it is a new institution, quite an encouraging proportion (14.9 per cent) of the respondents knew of it as compared to GNCC which had only 9.5 per cent (see figure 10.1 below).

**Figure 10.1 Know ledge of Institutions**



### 10.3 Knowledge of Areas of Work of the Institutions

In terms of specific areas of work these public institutions do, the responses are presented in the table 10.2.

**Table 10.2: Area of Work by Governmental Institutions**

Areas of Work	NCCE	CHRAJ	WAJU	MOWAC	GNCC
Protect Women & Children from Violence	0.6	4.1	60.0	4.8	1.8
Civic Education	91.0	3.6	1.0	0.0	0.0
Educate People on Human Rights	6.0	56.0	0.0	1.2	0.0
Resolves Disputes	0.3	15.6	20.0	23.0	0.0
Promotes Women Welfare	0.9	5.2	13.0	56.6	24.5
Protect People from Cheating	0.0	11.4	1.0	0.0	0.0
Promotes Children Welfare	0.3	0.5	2.0	8.4	62.4
Others	0.9	3.6	3.0	6.0	11.3
Totals	100	100	100	100	100

From the table 10.2, the majority (60 per cent) of the people who selected WAJU pointed out that WAJU was established to protect women and children from abuses and violence. Those who said they were to settle disputes constituted 20 per cent while those who said they were to promote women’s welfare made up 13.0 per cent.

The overwhelming majority (91.0 per cent) of those who selected NCCE attributed civic education as their function and 6.0 per cent said they educate people on human rights. The NCCE is mandated to discharge five main functions. Apart from its last function that deals with research activities, the rest are mainly public education activities. It is no doubt that the respondents recognised the NCCE as such.

From the results, CHRAJ was seen as an institution that plays several roles. Notably, a little more than half (56.0 per cent) of the people who mentioned CHRAJ said it is the institution that sought to educate

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people on human rights, another 15.6 per cent said it resolved disputes. Of the same group, 11.4 per cent assigned it the protection of people from being cheated. There were others who said they promote welfare of women, protect women and children from abuse and violence, and undertake civic education. They also constituted 5.2 per cent, 4.1 per cent and 3.6 respectively. This is not surprising because CHRAJ plays diverse roles and it served as the main contact point for many people in the rural areas to address grievances and disputes. That is why the proportion of roles assigned by the respondents spread over many functions.

It is refreshing to note that the people interviewed have known MOWAC that was established barely two years ago. More than half (56.6 per cent) of the people who stated MOWAC said it was established to promote the welfare of women with instances given that MOWAC has empowered women by giving them loans or credit facilities to engage themselves into income generating activities to be able to take good care of their children going to school. Another 8.4 per cent said they were established to promote the welfare of children while 23.0 per cent said they resolved disputes.

GNCC does not have district offices. They are functional mainly at the regional levels; meanwhile, the survey was conducted at the district levels. Notwithstanding, 62.4 per cent of those who mentioned it said it is an institution that was established to promote the welfare of children. Of this group 24.5 per cent said GNCC promotes the welfare of women. On this note, we can confidently say that all the institutions are known for their core functions.

#### **10.4 Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)**

There are numerous Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) in the country. Most of them provide social services that are crucial for human survival because the state with the limited resources is unable to meet the demands of the society. Basically, they do not take over these responsibilities from the state, rather, they undertake activities to support the efforts of the state. The most prominent in promoting the welfare of women and children in the area of our survey were: World Vision International, Plan International and Action Aid.

##### **10.4.1 World Vision International**

The World Vision concerns itself with drilling of boreholes to provide communities with potable water. It assists deprived communities to put up school buildings. They educate people on health related issues.

##### **10.4.2 Plan International**

Plan International seeks to ensure the survival, protection and healthy development of children and adults, especially, women of childbearing age. It seeks to promote and strengthen responsive, sustainable community-managed primary health care systems, which encourage changes in health-related behaviour and attitudes. It also works towards eradication of gender-based inequalities in opportunities and the access to and control over resources. It seeks to increase food security and family disposable income, to enable families to improve their children's welfare. It does this through enlarging productive opportunities and increasing access to resources for Plan families and communities. Specifically, Plan International focuses on the child survival, primary health care, early childhood care and development, water and sanitation, disseminates information on the right of the child, among others.

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### 10.4.3 Action Aid

Action Aid is an international Non-Governmental Organisation which operates in 33 countries in Africa, America and Asia. It works with the poor with the tools empowering them to take control of their developmental agenda. In her work, Action Aid Ghana emphasizes partnership and capacity building at the grassroots levels of Ghanaian society. Action Aid supports all aspects of basic education and made considerable impact in introducing Peace Education into the school curriculum. It collaborates with other NGOs to advocate for reform of oppressive systems and structures that work against advancement of women, men, boys and girls. It also believes that gender and the ensuing equity issues are among the root causes of poverty. It is therefore consciously tackling the problem to ensure that both men and women obtain appropriate access and control of productive resources such as land, training and education.

Some of the NGOs are community based in the sense that they are formed to do specific work in that community among these are Konkomba Youth Association (KOYA), Integrated Development Center (IDC) and Rural Integrated Literacy and Development Programme (RILADEP).

### 10.5 NGOs Operating in Study Area

Having in mind the existence of a host NGOs, both local and international, working in various parts of the country, the survey sought to collate information on these NGOs with a focus on their area of operations.

Among the NGOs that came up were those presented in table 10.3 below.

**Table 10. 3 Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)**

NGOs	Frequency	Percentage
World Vision	51	19.3
Community Based Organisations	51	19.3
Plan International	20	7.5
KOYA	20	7.5
31 <sup>st</sup> December Women	19	7.2
Others	19	7.2
Action Aid	18	6.8
Traditional Council	14	5.3
Rotary International	10	3.8
IDC	10	3.8
RILADEP	16	6.0
Virgin Club	6	2.2
Danida	4	1.5
FIDA	4	1.5
GILBIT	2	0.8
Totals	264	100.0

The ‘others’ category in table 10.3 above is made up of Family Health International, Queen Mothers Association, YMCA, Ghanaian Demark Co-operation, Freedom from Hunger, GRASP, UNICEF, CRS, GHACOE Women ministry, Amasadina Self Help Organisation, Rains Camfed and Matan Tudu and Women Development Agency.

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From the survey results, World Vision is operating in three districts. These include Manhyia, Saboba Chereponi and Savelugu Nanton.

The survey results show that out of seven districts selected, Plan International is working in only one, that is Manya Krobo District in the Eastern Region.

Respondents from three districts, namely, Manhyia, Saboba Chereponi and Savelugu Nanton said Action Aid is working in their communities.

Local based NGOs such as KOYA, RILADEP and IDC are working in only the Saboba District.

### **10.6 What NGOs are Doing**

Generally, the respondents said NGOs provided school buildings, supplied books, bicycles to girls to ride to school, food aid, second hand clothing, school uniforms and allowances to voluntary teachers. Others are helping to give vocational and income generating skills to women and the youth. Their activities can best be categorised as provision of financial support (28.3 per cent), organisation of public educational programmes (25.6 per cent), Skills development programmes (19.1 per cent), community development projects (9.5 per cent) with provision of water and sanitation projects (5.0), among others. (Refer to table 10.4 below)

**Table 10.4 What NGOs Have Done**

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Provided Financial Support	68	28.3
Organized Public Education Programmes	85	25.6
Skills Development	46	19.1
Women Empowerment	6	2.5
Community Development	23	9.5
Others	12	5.0
Totals	240	100

Several people have debated for and against the efforts of NGOs to assist vulnerable people to discover and thereby enhance their development capabilities and socio-economic conditions. It is evident from the discussions above that the NGOs, be they community or national, have contributed in diverse ways to the needs of developing the communities in Ghana. They are humanitarian institutions and must therefore be dealt with prudently.

### **10.7 Religious Bodies Operating in Study Area**

Religious bodies were also captured by the study. The main religious bodies that have been identified are Catholic (20.1 per cent), Methodist/Presby 16.0 per cent, Pentecostal churches 10.5 per cent and Ghana Muslim Groups 6.1 per cent. The category of “others” referred to one-man and community churches.

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**Table 10.5 Religious Bodies Mentioned**

Religious Bodies	Frequency	Percentage
Roman Catholic	69	20.1
Pentecostal Churches	36	10.5
Ghana Muslim Groups	21	6.1
Methodist/Presbyterian	55	16.0
Others	163	47.3
Totals	344	100.0

### 10.8 Activities of Religious Bodies

In terms of their activities, it was found that a little over 50% of those who responded to this question said religious bodies educate women. Another 18.5 per cent said they settle disputes among members and non-members. Those who said they counsel married couples formed 12.3 per cent. Other activities mentioned were promotion of girl-child education (4.6 per cent), provision of skills training 3.0) and provision of financial support 6.1 per cent

**Table 10.6: Activities Religious Bodies Are Engaged In**

Activities	Frequency	Percentage
Educate Women	166	51.5
Settle Disputes	60	18.5
Marriage Counseling	40	12.3
Provide Financial Support	20	6.5
Promote Girl-Child Education	15	4.6
Provide Skills Training	10	3.0
Others	13	4.0
Totals	324	100.0

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# Chapter 11

## Field Experiences

### 11.0 Introduction

The Research Officers of the Commission who were briefed in specially organised training sessions in the regions were tasked as part of their assignment to submit a report at the end of the survey. Among other things the report was to touch on the mode of operation. It was expected that 80 questionnaires would be administered in each District. The 80 would be distributed at a rate of 65 for women and 35 for men. Sixty of the questionnaire should be administered outside the district capital.

For purposes of administration of questionnaire a categories of respondents were identified. These included **Traditional rulers**, which consists of chiefs, sub chiefs, elders, queen mothers, king makers and stool fathers; **Religious leaders**, made up of Traditional, Christian and Muslim; **Opinion leaders**, from persons such as Teachers, Unit Committee members, Assembly members/chairman of social sub-committee and Youth group leaders; **Victims and Women groups leaders** either in churches or NGOs

Research Assistants were also to take note of important or noteworthy information that caught their attention during administration of questionnaire, and suggestions or comments on the execution of future projects. In making the above request of research officers, the Department took cognisance of the invaluable addition that such a report will make as it was expected to provide the general political, socio-economic environment within which the survey took place. In the following, an attempt is made to represent some of the salient issues raised by respondents as captured by research Officers.

### 11.1 Response to Survey

In general, response to the exercise by respondents was satisfactory. A major reason for this was the procedure adopted by research assistants. At every community, the assembly member was the first point of call. He in turn directs or at times appoints somebody to accompany the Research Assistant to help locate the specific respondents for the research. Generally, the Research Assistant was welcomed by most of the respondents and respondents took pride and satisfaction in the Commission's effort and expressed interest in being part of efforts to identify and eliminate harmful cultural practices. As with exercises of this nature, there were a few exceptions; in the Muslim Community of Aboabo No. 1 a woman refused to talk because the husband was around.

There were also some difficulties in locating the specific respondents in the entire Manhyia Sub-Metropolitan Area. Some respondents especially the traders were too busy with themselves, thus not having much time for the Research Assistant.

### 11.2 Socio-Economic Issues

#### 11.2.1 Infrastructural Development/Provision of Services

A major problem in the Northern Region is poor condition of the roads. The Saboba. Tamale to Saboba is 191 kilometers; about seventy per cent of the road is untarred. The road that links Yendi to Saboba, which is forty miles, is the most deplorable. Most parts of the road are prone to flooding during the rainy season. During this period many villages become cut off as even four-wheel drive vehicles find the road terrible.

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The whole district has only one telephone at the District Assembly office and it even functions only once in a while and this makes communication expensive as all messages to Tamale had to be hand delivered. The poor state of roads was also a major complaint of respondents in Nkwanta.

### **11.2.2 Review of PNDC Law 111**

It was suggested by some respondents that the government should take a second look at the PNDC Law 111. Though this law is good for settling quarrels during property distribution after the death of a spouse, it is disintegrating the external family system, which is cherished by the Asantes because most of the property (2/3) goes to the widow and children, thus leaving only 1/3 for the entire family, both maternal and paternal. The Department of Social Welfare was asked to speed up investigations and settlement of cases before it.

### **11.2.3 Widows**

Though there is a law prohibiting maltreatment of widows this practice still persists. As a way of solidarity the government should come to the aid of widows through the setting up of widows clubs.

### **11.2.4 Insecurity in Dagbon**

There were complaints by some respondents about the effect the conflict at Yendi and the attendant curfew have had on the people in the Dagbon area. There were calls for government to speed up the process of bringing those who committed the regicide to book.

### **11.2.5 Checking Teenage Pregnancy**

Several respondents expressed concern about decline in observance of puberty rites. Some were of the opinion that it is partly responsible for rise in teenage pregnancy. Others put the blame on indecent dressing by the girls and called on the Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs to check the way the females dress. There was also a call on the government to enact a law to sanction any school-age girl, who becomes pregnant, as well as the boy or man who impregnated her.

### **11.2.6 High Fuel Prices**

Some respondents in the Nkwanta and Savelugu districts expressed their dissatisfaction about the almost yearly increases in the price of fuel. They called on the government to do something about the fuel prices since any increase has a ripple effect on all sectors of the economy.

### **11.2.7 High Cost of Living**

In Savelugu in the Northern Region and Manhyia of Kumasi in Ashanti Region some respondents complained about the general high cost of living; more specifically they lamented the high cost of food, farm inputs, health care, building materials and appealed to the government as a matter of urgency to deal with the high rate of inflation.

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### **11.2.8 Education**

Across the country many respondents complained about the lack of information on various national issues. The much older respondents pointed out that in the past, cinema vans etc. went round to educate the people on issues. They therefore called for this. For those among them who are aware that the NCCE was set up for the purpose of public education, they called for the provision of resources to the Commission to enable it to undertake that important task of public education.

A number of respondents in Greater Accra and Northern regions expressed concern about the high drop-out rates among JSS pupils and appealed to the government to do something about it.

A number of respondents, especially students, expressed the view that the number of tertiary institutions should be increased. They suggested that every region should have at least one polytechnic.

### **11.2.9 Health/Sanitation**

Some respondents in the Kumasi Metropolitan District complained about the privatisation of KVIP by the assembly member for the area. A person is expected to pay ₵30.00 on every visit to the place of convenience. The consequence of this is that residents who cannot afford the fee (i.e. ₵30.00) use the Owabi stream as their place of convenience. Residents expressed great worry about the state of affairs and the possibility of an outbreak of epidemic since the Owabi river which flows through the town also serves as a source of drinking water for some residents in Kumasi.

### **11.2.10 Bushfires**

Respondents in Nkwanta were worried about the frequent bushfires which often destroy life and property. They pointed out that once again the houses of many people in the community had been razed down. They therefore called on the authorities to take steps to check rampant bushfires that often lead to loss of lives and property worth millions of cedis.

### **11.2.11 Award of Contracts/Corruption**

In the Nkwanta district some of the respondents were not happy about the performance of the District Chief Executive. There were allegations of corruption in the purchase of various sanitary items for the assembly.

## **11.3 Political Issues**

### **11.3.1 Politicization of Issues**

Some respondents in Manhyia lamented the politicization of all issues citing especially the case of World Bank loans contracted on behalf of the Asantehene by the NPP government. In the same vein respondents in Manhyia and Nkwanta lamented the fact that issues like IFC loans and Health Insurance were looked at from a partisan position without the ruling government giving a hearing to genuine complaints of the minority parties, especially the NDC.

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### **11.3.2 Performance of District Chief Executives**

In Nkwanta some respondents complained about the performance of their District Chief Executive and called for his removal. (The said DCE was removed from office not long after the interviews)

### **11.3.3 Common Fund**

Across the country, many respondents who were assembly members complained about the way the Assembly Common Fund was being disbursed. Most assembly members interviewed in the Manya Krobo and Tema Districts were peeved about the way the Executive Committee has marginalised them in the management of the District Assembly Common Fund. Some, in addition, were not happy about the way contracts have been awarded. They said contracts are only awarded to NPP faithfuls who are not often competent. There was a complaint about several millions of cedis wasted in fencing a refuse dump on the way to Kpone.

In Kumasi Metro, Manya Krobo and Tema respondents indicated that there was lack of information on the disbursement of the monies from the Common Fund. A respondent in Kpone in Tema Municipality complained about the high estimates of assembly funded projects.

Whilst assemblymen complained about lack of information on their assemblies' share of the common fund, the electorates also lamented the inability of the assemblymen to inform them adequately on monies allocated for developmental work in their electoral areas. They advised that a special committee be set-up in each electoral area to manage the disbursement of the funds allocated to their electoral area for developmental work.

Respondents in the Manya Krobo District could not differentiate between Common Fund projects and other projects funded from the assembly's traditional sources so as to make it possible for the electorate to monitor the work of their assembly members and the assembly as a whole.

## **11.4 Suggestions/Recommendations**

Research Assistants complained about the duration of the research as being too short looking at the length and number of questionnaires to be administered during the period. Duration for a similar exercise in future should be extended.

It was also suggested that the research should be extended to cover all the facts of rites of passage and those cultural practices that affect women's constitutional rights in the entire country as there are differences and degrees of them in regions.

Research Officers expressed gratitude to sponsors of this project and were of the opinion that the survey has been a very healthy and wealthy exercise in terms of the subject matter and the target group. It is hoped that a lot more of such exercises concerning women and children (the vulnerable) would be undertaken and findings made known for implementation by appropriate authorities. The NCCE, they appealed to donors, should be financed to carry out more surveys. The Commission on its part, however, must make strenuous efforts to provide the necessary logistical support like motorbikes and vehicles to enable research assistants to effectively discharge their responsibilities.

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## Chapter 12

### Conclusion and Recommendations

This pilot survey is purposed to assess cultural practices and how they affect the rights of women under the Fourth Republican Constitution. The assessment was specifically based on the nature and the effects of the cultural practices on women with an attempt to point the way forward.

The survey identified a number of cultural practices affecting the rights of women in Ghana. These included the following: Widowhood rights, Puberty rites, Family Marriage, Exchange of sisters in Marriage, Early Child Betrothal, Elopement, Fostering of girl-child, Return to parents after delivery, Lapomi, Okuoku, Pregnancy rituals, Kyirbra, Funerals and Naming ceremony.

Several of the cultural practices relating to women were seen as negatively affecting women. Top on list of the rites considered harmful were widowhood rites (64.5 per cent), exchange of sisters (89.9 per cent), Betrothal (57.1 per cent). Elopement (79.1 per cent) and Kyiribra (61.5 per cent).

Widowhood rites were generally singled out for criticism because of its restrictions on widows, the deprivation suffered by widows, the financial loss occasioned by observance of the rite, and the mental and psychological effect on widows.

Marriage on the whole was seen as a cultural practice that positively affects women. It was generally seen as honouring women (37.1 per cent), providing women with companionship (0.9 per cent) and providing them capital for trading and other activities (70.4 per cent). Outdoor/naming ceremonies were also considered on the whole as good. Its good aspect accounted for 92.7 per cent as against 7.3 per cent for harmful.

In spite of criticism of funeral rites as been too costly it was also generally acknowledged as good. In the same vain, though there were complaints about aspects of puberty rites especially the exposure of breasts and parading girls in partial nudity, it was generally seen as a good practice. Among principal reasons for people cherishing the practice is that it promotes sexual abstinence (16.3 per cent), prevents unwanted pregnancy (14.7 per cent), honours women (16.1 per cent) and provides opportunity for suitors to marry 13.0 per cent and gives opportunity for young ladies to get donations which sometimes can be capital for trading and others (4.4 per cent).

The practice of Betrothal was common among various ethnic groups. From the survey, the Konkomba still observe the practice. The system is said to build good and cordial relationship between two families as a man who betrothes a girl in any family is bound to be loyal and respectful to that family. In spite of benefits, the practice is seen as having several drawbacks as it violates the right of girls to free choice of life partners. Several stories of suicides by betrothed girls were also recounted, as some girls chose to die than marry people most of who were often not of ages of the partners.

Many Betrothed girls on coming of age are forced to stop schooling, thus negatively affecting their education. Section 14 (i) of The Children's Act, Act 560 explicitly provides "No person shall force a child (a) to be betrothed (b) to be the subject of a dowry transaction; or (c) to be married" penalty for contravening this is fine not exceeding ₵5 million or a term of imprisonment not exceeding one year

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or both. It is important for laws of the country to be observed in practice through enforcement rather than on paper only.

The Lapomi System practiced by the Krobo was seen to be adversely affecting children. Accounts at the focus group discussions point to the high bride wealth as a factor in men not fully performing marriage rites of concubines before conception and birth of child. This bride wealth needs to be looked at. Many young men run away from women they impregnate because of inability to bear full cost of bride wealth. Parents need to be educated to relax things so that men can take care of impregnated daughters and also the child when it is born. The Children's Act 560 stipulates clearly in sections 2 on the child welfare principle that "The best interest of the child shall be paramount in any matter concerning a child, and 2 (2) states" the best interest of the child shall be the primary consideration by any court, person, institution or other body in a matter concerned with a child."

The insistence on payment of considerable bride wealth, leading to children being born without performance of marriage rites of daughters and consequent declaration of such children as 'Yobi' is an issue that needs discussion. The Yobi becomes a victim of circumstances and his/her interest is hampered. Refusal of some grandparents to release children to biological fathers with several excuses even when the father has ability to look after the child is a clear violation of Section 5 of the Children's Act, Act 560 which stipulates "No person shall deny a child the right to live with his parents and family and grow up in a caring and peaceful environment unless it is proved in court that living with his parents would (a) lead to significant harm on the child; or (b) subject the child to serious abuse; (c) not be in the best interest of the child." Section 7 of the Children's Act, 1998, Act 560 also states 'no person shall deprive a child of reasonable provision out of the estate of a parent whether or not born in wedlock'.

The issues highlighted in the focus group discussions need the attention of the traditional council for it to look at customary/cultural practices in the light of modernity and constitutional/legal provisions. The NCCE, as a body charged with education of citizenry on the Constitution and laws, can be a good collaborator with traditional councils. It could help disseminate conclusions and decisions of the chiefs to ensure that cultural practices conform to provisions in our laws and the Constitution.

It was also noted that initiation into traditional priesthood violates rights of women in several respects. Among these are that they bath with cold water always and this could undermine their health, especially those susceptible to anaemia and pneumonia, walking barefooted and this also exposes them to all manner of dangers. During training the trainee – priestesses are barred from talking to any member of their family, not even the husband, except one person who is designated as the spokesperson between the trainee, her family and the shrine owner.

During training the trainee – priestess is almost enslaved by the master, she is almost like a slave-girl undertaking all types of jobs for the master without any payment or reward. Perhaps top on the list is the ushering of the trainee priestess into a thick forest in the night barefooted, with great likelihood of being attacked or devoured by wild animals. This is thus a clear disregard for human life, a violation of Article 13 that lays emphasis on protection of right to life. Also as highlights of the initiation and outdoor sessions she dances naked before the public.

All these are done in spite of Article 26 (2) of the Constitution which states that "All customary practices which dehumanize or are injurious to the be physical and mental well-being of a person are prohibited". The Constitution in Article 13 (1) talks about the sacrosanct band nature of right to life, but again as

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part of the training session a trainee priestess is led into a thick forest in the night barefooted with great likelihood of being devoured by wild animals and the chance that she might not return at all.

The Okuoku cult among the Adele, Challa and Ntrubo in the Nkwanta District of the Volta Region is praised for its spiritual empowerment of women and its strict sexual code where members who engage in infidelity and adultery are severely punished. Aspects of the Cult like the V shaped incision made at the back of cult members were mentioned as violating rights of women. Today the spread of Christianity has affected the practice. Many people in the District are shying away from being members of the Cult. The NCCE which is charged with educating people on the principles and objectives of the Constitution needs to sensitise the people to know the negative effect of the cultural practices.

The fostering system as observed by various ethnic groups was praised. Among others the practice maintains cohesive social relations in the society. The fostered child keeps track of the family and clan history and lineages. The system avoids creating orphans after the death of biological parents when children are young. The institution also provides a childless couple happiness and keeps the marriage intact. This much cherished institution is no longer appealing because many parents are not economically resourceful, the extended family system seems to be gradually giving way to the nuclear family They are also discriminated against as compared to the auntie and her children. They are also denied education and overworked, thus retarding their growth.

This clearly violates Section 6 (3) of the Children's Act, Act 560 which states "every parent has rights and responsibility whether imposed by law or otherwise toward his\her child, which include the duty to (a) protect the child from neglect, discrimination, violence, abuse, exposure to physical and moral hazards and oppression, and (b) provide good guidance, care and maintenance for the child and assurance of the child's survival and development".

Section 8 of Act 560 also stipulates "No person shall deprive a child access to education, immunization, adequate diet, clothing, shelter, medical attention or any other thing required for his development". Though economic hardships and others may have helped contribute to undermining the most cherished institution of fostering in the country, it is important that bodies like the NCCE educate foster parents on the Children's Act to ensure that they do not undermine the welfare of children.

It was also noted that the right to education is the top on the list of rights inhibited by cultural practices. A total of 28.9 per cent of respondents mentioned that cultural practices such as betrothal and fostering, parents relinquishing the upbringing of their children to others due to poverty, giving children out as househelps, all go a long way in contributing to the low enrollment rate among girls in schools and equally high drop-out rate and consequently the low literacy rate among women in the country. Other rights that are inhibited are: Right to practice any religion (22.9 per cent), Right to belong to society of choice (16.4 per cent), Right to engage in Economic activity (10.8 per cent), Right to be voted for (8.6), Right to own Property (6.8 per cent), Right to vote (3.8 per cent) and Right to be protected from sexual abuse (2.1 per cent).

There are however some constitutional rights which are deemed to be promoted by cultural rites which are deemed to promote the welfare of women.

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## Recommendations

One of the cardinal objectives of the study was to elicit information that will help point the way forward. Of great importance is to make this information available to the public, policy makers and the government. Nevertheless, the results of the study will equally inform the Commission's educational programmes.

The respondents offered a number of useful suggestions. Even though some could not offer any there were some who provided one or two, a few others provided as many as three suggestions. As many as 43.3 per cent of the total suggestions of 762 was on the issue relating to the law. About a quarter (18.6 per cent) of the responses suggested that the government should enact implementable laws to arrest the problems of cultural right and constitutional rights of women. Another 10.1 per cent recognised the existence of the law.

Among important existing laws that protect rights of women are Article 13 of the 1992 Constitution, Children's Act, Act 560, the Criminal (Amendment) Code. Provisions of these laws are observed more in breach than in practice. But the laws should be enforced and punitive measures be taken on offenders. On one hand, only one out of thousands of girls under 18 years can send their guardians or parents to the law enforcement agencies should their parents fail to send them to school or fail to pay their school fees. Those who have ever tried it did not only pay dearly for it, but the society also does not see them as true Ghanaians.

On the other hand, some officers working with the law enforcement agencies are imbued with the Ghanaian cultural traits. Cases that needed appropriate legal actions to deter perpetrators are often referred to the chiefs, religious leaders and family heads to resolve amicably. This underscores the point that laws should be enforced to accomplish their purpose. Similarly, 13.6 per cent called for the abolishment of the practices. These people held the view that the Constitution is the supreme law of the country; therefore, any cultural practices that are inconsistent with the provisions of the Constitution must be abolished.

Close to the points raised on the law is public education. This accounts for 38.8 per cent of the responses. It was pointed out that many people engage in these cultural practices without knowing the implications of them. They behave the way they do because that is what their community accepts. The fight against these things should take the form of awareness creation because education is the proven means by which cultural practices can be changed or improved.

Culture in a sense is a way of life. It is not static but dynamic. In view of this, 10.2 per cent of the responses are suggestions that proposed transformation of the cultural practice to conform to modern trends of life. Another 4.2 per cent referred the handling of the problems of unconstitutional practices in our communities to the chiefs and traditional councils. They are the custodians of the cultural practices; they must be called to play a leading role in any attempt to abolish or modernize the practice.

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**APPENDIX A**  
**NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR CIVIC EDUCATION**  
**QUESTIONNAIRE**

TITLE OF RESEARCH: CULTURAL PRACTICES AFFECTING WOMEN’S RIGHTS IN GHANA

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(PLEASE BE ASSURED THAT YOUR RESPONSES WILL BE TREATED WITH  
UTMOST CONFIDENTIALITY. CONSEQUENTLY, YOU NEED NOT PROVIDE  
YOUR NAME)

NAME OF INTERVIEWER.....
DATE OF INTERVIEW.....
<u>PLACE OF INTERVIEW</u>
REGION.....
DISTRICT.....
PLACE OF RESIDENCE.....

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## Section A

### 1. Age

- 1 Below 21
- 2 21 – 30
- 3 31 – 40
- 4 41 – 50
- 5 51 –60
- 6 61+

### 2. Sex

- 1 Male
- 2 Female

### 3. Marital Status

- 1 Single
- 2 Married
- 3 Divorced
- 4 Widowed
- 5 Separated
- 6 Any Other (Specify)

### 4. Education

- 1 No formal Education
- 2 Primary
- 3 JSS/ Middle
- 4 Secondary (SSS, Vocational)
- 5 Post Secondary (Training College, Polytechnic)
- 6 Tertiary (University, Professional)
- 7 Any Other (Specify)

### 5. Religion

- 1 Christianity
- 2 Traditional
- 3 Muslim
- 4 Any Other (Specify)

### 6. Occupation

- 1 Student
- 2 Farmer/Fisherman
- 3 Teacher/Lecturer
- 4 Civil/Public Servant
- 5 Businessman/Trader/Artisan
- 6 Unemployed
- 7 Any Other (Specify)

7. Ethnic Group

[ ]

- 1 Akan
- 2 Ewe
- 3 Ga-Dangme
- 4 Gurma
- 5 Mole-Dagbani
- 6 Grusi
- 7 Mande-Busanga
- 8 Guans

### Section B

8. Please list some cultural practices that have to do with women in your area.....

9. Which of these cultural practices do you consider as harmful to women and why?

Cultural Practices	Reasons
1	
2	
3	
4	

10. Which cultural practices would you say help to promote women’s welfare?

Cultural Practices	Reasons
1	
2	
3	
4	

11. Which cultural practices in your area promote/inhibit the following rights of women as enshrined in the 1992 Constitution?

Constitutional Right	Cultural Practices	Promote	Inhibit
1. Right to own property			
2. Right to practice any religion of your choice			
3. Right to belong to society of your choice			
4. Right to engage in economic activity of your choice			
5. Right to vote			
6. Right to be voted for to occupy any public office			
7. Right to be protected from sexual abuse			
8. Right to education			

12. Do you know of any law(s) or byelaws that has been passed to protect women against harmful cultural practices? 1= Yes 2=No

13. If yes, mention the law(s).....

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14. What do you think is the impact of the law(s) on the cultural practices that are harmful to women in your area?.....

15. Which of the following bodies are active in women's rights issues in your area?

<b>Bodies</b>	<b>Areas of Work of Bodies</b>
1 Women and Juvenile Unit of the Ghana Police Service (WAJU)	
2 National Commission for Civic Education (NCCE)	
3 Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ)	
Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs (MOWAC)	
4. Ghana National Commission on Children (GNCC)	

16. Which non-governmental institutions have assisted in protecting women against harmful cultural practices in your area?.....

17. Mention specifically what they have done.....

18. Do you know of any religious groups active in protecting women against harmful cultural practices in your area?.....

19. Mention specifically what they have done

## Section C

20. In your community which of the following are women allowed to own?

- i. Farm
- ii. Land
- iii. House
- iv. Livestock
- v. Fishing Boat
- vi. Fishing Net
- vii. Any Other (Specify)

21. Who would you prefer to vote for as assembly member in your area, Man or Woman

22. Give Reasons for your answer?

23. Who would you prefer to vote for as MP in your area, Man or Woman

24. Give Reasons for your answer?

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25. If you were financially constrained after your children's JSS education, which one of them would you support to go further

- (i) boy-child
- (ii) girl-child

26. Give Reasons?

27. In your area, on the death of a spouse (male and female) what happens to:

- (i) The deceased's property
- (ii) The children

## **Section D**

28. What do you think should be done to prevent harmful cultural practices?

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## **APPENDIX B**

### **SURVEY PERSONNEL**

#### **RESEARCH CO-ORDINATORS**

1. Gertrude Zakariah-Ali (Mrs) - Director, Research
2. Kojo Tito Voegborlo - Deputy Director, Research

#### **OTHER RESEARCH OFFICERS**

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2. Kingsley Senyo Agomor
3. Benjamin Ato Afful
4. Kojo Stephens
5. Stanley Quaynor

#### **CODING**

6. Kingsley Senyo Agomor
7. Benjamin Ato Afful
8. Stanley Quaynor
9. Praise Dzunu

#### **RESOURCE ASSISTANTS**

1. Ben Ako Odoi

#### **SECRETARY**

Lucy Awuku (Mrs)

#### **ASHANTI**

##### **KMA**

1. P. H. Mensah
2. E. Nti Berko
3. Stephen Dogbe
4. Doris N. Asare

##### **EJISU**

1. Kofi Amoakohene
2. Asiedu A. Marfo
3. Johnson Opoku
4. Ama Konadu (Mrs.)

#### **GREATER ACCRA**

##### **TEMA**

1. Tetteh Wayo
2. Lucille Annan (Mrs.)
3. Praise Mensah(Mrs.)
4. Alex Nii Annan
5. Enoch Mensah-Adjei

##### **VOLTA -NKWANTA**

1. Togbe Ayite-Duamey
2. Vincent Ayisi-Mensah
3. Samson Kunda
4. Vincent Dovia
5. William Kudji

**NORTHERN  
SAVELUGU**

1. Salifu Fuseini
2. Issah Iddrisu
3. Mahama Fuseini
4. Bawa Abass

**EASTERN  
MANYA KROBO**

1. Margaret Mamle Kodji (Ms)
2. Sammy Appey
3. P.N.K. Lawer
4. A. K. Ansah

5.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

Kate M. Sulemana (Ms)

**SABOBA**

Alex Kojo Mimborti

Daniel Kontan

Joseph Bimiyam

P. k. Boame

Kofi Amadu

Thomas Tayormi

## 5. William Teye