

# LAND AS A “GOD”: THE GENDER DIMENSIONS OF ITS WEALTH CREATION AMONG THE DAGAABAS IN NORTH - WESTERN GHANA

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## Abstract

The gender dimension of land as “god” and its wealth creation is what this study seeks to investigate. Among the peoples of Africa especially Ghana, there is a traditional concept of land worship which is linked up with land ownership. Significantly, the Ghanaian regards the earth as a “god” or “Mother Earth”, offering prayer in the form of libation pouring before cultivating the land and during harvest. Hence, data was collected through focus group discussions, key informant interviews, in-depth interviews and participant observation. The findings were that, in the Dagaaba people belief system, any person or group of persons that do not have the right to offer sacrifices to the earth ‘god’ through the ancestors cannot own land. There are some calibers of persons especially women in the Dagaaba land that are said not to have an ancestor and therefore cannot sacrifice to the ‘land god’ as a result of their spatial platform. Also, these classes of people cannot own some animals nor cultivate some crops that are classified as ritual animals and ritual crops. These belief systems are the basis of land tenure arrangements in the area and may have serious implication on wealth creation and ultimately affect development in the region.

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**Keywords:** Land as ‘god’, Ancestors, Ritual Animals, Ritual Crops, Development.

## 1. Introduction

Land is a basic natural resource available to humanity from which most of their sustenance is drawn. It has provided the platform for economic activity and market systems to operate. In many developing countries, insecure land tenure prevents large parts of the population from realizing the economic and non-economic benefits of land. The situation of peoples affected by hunger and malnutrition arises from their lack of access and insecure land tenure system which inhibits or makes them agriculturally landless (World Bank, 2004; United Nations, 1994).

Customary land tenure system in Ghana, as in many African states, is characterized by its unwritten nature, based on local practices, flexible, negotiable and location specific. It is usually managed by a traditional ruler, land or earth priest, council of elders, family or lineage head, as the case may be. In the case of Dagaaba in the Upper West Region of Ghana, land is managed by the earth priest in conjunction with the council of elders. However, individual family heads are the sole primary rights holders of family lands (Kasanga 1993).

## **2. The Study Methodology**

The study was purely a qualitative research. The strength of qualitative research is its ability to provide complex textual descriptions of how people experience a given research issue. It provides information about the “human” side of an issue – that is, the often contradictory behaviours, beliefs, opinions, emotions, and relationships of individuals. Qualitative methods are also effective in identifying intangible factors, such as social norms, socio-economic status, gender roles, ethnicity, and religion (Guba & Lincoln 1989; Patton 1990 cited in Holtzhausen 2001; Marshall & Rossman 1998). The three most common qualitative methods used include; observation, in-depth interviews, and focuses group discussions. The types of data these three qualitative methods generated are field notes, audio recordings, and transcripts. Each qualitative method of the data collection is particularly suited for obtaining a specific type of data.

- Non-participant observation was appropriate for collecting data on naturally occurring behaviours in their usual contexts.
- In-depth interviews were used to collect data on individuals’ personal histories, perspectives, and experiences.

- Focus groups were also effective in eliciting data on the cultural norms of the groups and in generating broad overviews of issues of concern to the cultural groups or subgroups represented.

The Focus Group Discussions were conducted from eleven sampled Dagaaba communities in four districts of the region. They consist of 11 elders (men) and 11 women focus groups. The communities include; Kaleo, Sankana, Goli, Daffiama, Jirapa-Akoro, Jirapa Konkuo, Jirapa-Vuoyiri, Lawra-Yikpe, Yeleyiri, and Piisi. Some in-depth interviews were also conducted with thirty individual elders and twenty individual women across the four districts. Participant observation was used to find out the processes involved in paying and receiving bride wealth.

### **3. Literature Review**

#### **3.1 The concept of land tenure**

Land tenure system according to Kasanga (1988) is the various laws, rules, and obligations governing the holding and/or ownership of rights in land. The system provides a superstructure within which the rights and interests are exercised or left dormant in the use, development and transfer of land. To greater extent land tenure forms the basis not of agricultural production but also of the social and economic system. “Land is valued not for itself alone; its possession is a form of security, a symbol of prestige, and a source of power. Land is therefore at the core of livelihood systems. It is valued not for itself alone; its possession is a form of power.” Land tenure system indicates the terms and conditions on which land is held, used and transacted. These terms may be defined by statutory or customary norms of the society. In most African societies, the two (Statutory and Customary Systems) co-exist and operate side by side and in some cases together. The customary land tenure, which is the subject of this paper, is the dominant institution that regulates land relations in most African societies. Customary land tenure system is not simply a type of land holding but also has wide ramification for the social systems, way of life, and beliefs of the people. Land tenure system also embodies those contractual or customary arrangements were by individuals or organizations gain access to social or economic opportunities through land. In the context of the study, land tenure is used to mean a customary practice whereby individuals and households own land and have the rights to either lease or sell it for a means of living.

Fundamentally, land ownership in Ghana is based on absolute “allodia” or permanent title from which all other lesser titles to, interest in, or right over land derive. The traditional arrangement for making land available and accessible for uses in Ghana consists largely of the existing customary practices or land tenure system. In this system the principle of first clearance or conquest is applied to establish rights of ownership. On the basis of allodial ownership, rights and administration, two main types of customary land tenure systems may be distinguished in Ghana: stool and skin land, where the stool and paramount chiefs are the allodial owners and *tendana* or land priest, where the allodial owner is a titular head. In Ghana land ownership can broadly be divided into four main categories. These are customary ownership, state ownership, private ownership and vested ownership. Customary lands form about 78% of the total land area in Ghana and consist of both stool and family lands. Family lands together with individual lands form about 35% of the total lands in customary ownership (Kasanga and Kotey, 2001; MLFG, 2003, cited in Zackaria, 2010).

In Northern Ghana, two broad types of customary land tenure institutions may be found. Firstly, the allodial title to land is vested in the communities, which are represented by the various paramount skins as found in the centralised states such as Dagbon, Manprugu, Nanumba and Gonja, with the exception of the Waala Kingdom. The second type is found in the politically less centralised states among the Tallensi, Kusasi, Sissala and Lobi-Dagaaba in the Upper East and Upper West Regions, where the allodial title to the land is vested in the *Tendana* or earth priest. Generally, in northern Ghana, inheritance and succession to property are determined by patrilineal systems Kasanga.

Studies have shown that customary land tenure relations in Northern Ghana are undergoing rapid transformation even in the remotest of villages. The commodification of land in urban and peri-urban areas, the increase in token values for farm land, the recall of lands by land owners, the increasing inaccessibility of land to some social groups and the conflict-ridden growing land markets are some of the features of contemporary tenure relations in Ghana (Yaro & Zackaria 2007, cited in Zackaria, 2010).

The customary land management institutions in Northern Ghana are the paramount chiefs in Dagbon, Manprugu, Nanumba, and Gonja in the Northern region and the *tendamba* among the tribes in the Upper East and Upper West regions. These authorities enforce the rules binding land acquisition, allocate land rights and arbitrate conflicts arising therein. They derive their legitimacy from ancestral lineages either as the first settler or as rightful heirs of a royal family. However, as a result of state policies, technological and demographic change,

penetration of neo-liberal factors, the dominance of these land management institutions has profoundly changed.

Though traditionally, tendamba and chiefs are the sole authorities responsible for land administration, the practical management of land is done by family heads. The latter ensures that every family member has access to land and that disputes are settled. They are usually the most senior male members of the family, who acquire their position through patrilineal inheritance. Therefore, they are also custodians of the land at the family level. However, the content, scope and size of individual members' rights to land within the family groups are determined by age, gender and proximity to family heads. In their allocation of land to various members of the family, certain factors are considered. These include group income generation, moral responsibility to younger family members once they begin farm work; levels of control ceded to derived rights holders (Quan in Cotula ed 2007, cited in Zackaria, 2010). However, in recent times, these intra family relations have changed in divers' ways. Family heads no longer appear responsible for the allocation of land to family members, and age, gender and other traditional attributes no longer play a role in land access within the family.

In northern Ghana land is transferred traditionally through inheritance, gifts and customary leases to strangers and other community members. While in Northern Ghana patrilineal inheritance patterns remain dominant across the three regions, the requirements for transferring land varies across the region and among the different cultures and depends on the receiver of the land. Among the Dagaaba in Jirapa in the Upper West Region, the traditional items provided in exchange for the use of land include 3 fowls, 1 goat or sheep and some pieces of kola, though this may vary from family to family and depending on the relationship with the land acquirer. At Kajelo, a rural settlement of Kasem speakers in the Kassena Nankana District, land is acquired simply by approaching a land owning family with the traditional gifts of cola nuts and drinks. For residential plots, the protocol greeting with tobacco, cola nuts, guinea fowls and fowls needs to be repeated two to three times before the land is given out (Zackaria, 2010).

In short, customary land tenure is gradually evolving into a fully-fledged Western style property right system as depicted by the evolution school. There are varied implications of these dangers for the land owners and users as well as for the policy making processes. There is imminent landlessness among the poor farmers as most are selling their lands for cash because of the high demand for land and the need for cash to meet other nonfarm needs. Since most of them do not have other skills, assets and resources, poverty is likely to increase

among peri-urban dwellers in northern Ghana since land which is the only resource they possess is being transferred to rich and powerful members of the society in exchange for cash.

### **3.2 The Land Policy**

In recent times Land Policy in developing countries tends to emphasize the importance of recognizing and building on customary tenure systems in order to achieve equitable land management in the context of poverty reduction (Deininger and Biswanger 1999; Toulmin and Quan 2000; Whitehead and Tsikata, 2003). Against this background, the government of Ghana, after decades of piecemeal legislative and state management measures, formulated its first comprehensive National Land Policy in 1999 (Ministry of Lands and Forestry, 1999) and has embarked upon a Land Administration Project (LAP). This project is intended to reform land institutions so as to provide greater certainty of land rights for ordinary land users and enable greater efficiency and fairness in the land market ( Ministry of Lands and Forestry 20003; World Bank 2003, cited in Zackaria, 2010).

Under the LAP, there is an ongoing institutional reform involving both land sector agencies and customary land tenure institutions. All land sector agencies have come under one umbrella under a one-stop-shop concept, and Customary Land Secretariats (CLSs), with appropriate governance structures, are being established as part of the government's initiative to improve land management and administration in the country for local communities. This is to ensure institutionalized community-level participation and accountability in the use of communal land and the revenue it generates. Government, by establishing these structures, is divesting itself of the responsibility for the management of communal land transferring it to the Customary Land Secretariats (CLSs). The transfer of responsibility for the management of stool lands from Land Sector Agencies (LSAs) to CLSs is in tune with recent emphasis on recognizing and building on customary tenure systems to ensure tenure security, equity in land access and reduction in land conflicts in Ghana. The CLSs are manned by a team of local people who adopt simple land management procedures and keep land records that are made available to all members of the community. A land policy that provide equitable land ownership and secure tenure, offers direct benefit for the poor as indirect benefits via improved resource management, economic growth, and strengthens local governance (World Bank, 2004). Other policies like the National Land Policy (1999), the Ghana Food and Agriculture Sector Development Policy (2001) and the Land Administration Policy (LAP-1) are all intended for effective utilization of land.

### 3.3. Dagaaba Territorial Space

As depicted on the Table 1.1, the Dagaaba is the largest ethnic group in the Upper West Region and the second largest in Northern Ghana. The 2000 Housing and Population Census indicates that the total number of the Dagaaba in Ghana is 641,926 persons; the second largest ethnic group in northern Ghana after the Dagomba. In the Upper West Region, the Dagaaba occupies three districts: Jirapa, Lawra/Nandom, Nadowli; and in the Wa West district, however, majority of the Dagaaba are living in the Wa Naa and Dorimon Naa lands in the Wa West District but they are the majority in the area Fig 1.1. Many of the Dagaaba also live in the remaining four districts dominated by the Wala and the Sissala's.

The Dagaaba people (singular Dagao) as an ethnic group are not only in Ghana but other West African nations such as Burkina Faso and La Cote D'Voieur. They speak the Dagaare language, made up of the related Northern Dagaare language, Southern Dagaare language, a number of sub dialects. They are related to the Birifor people and the Dagaare Diola. The language is collectively known as Dagaare (also spelled Dagare, Dagari, Dagarti, Dagan or, Dagao). One historian, describing the former usage of "Dagarti" to refer to this community by colonials, writes: "The name 'Dagarti' appears to have been coined by the first Europeans to visit the region, from the vernacular root *dagaa*. Correctly 'Dagari' is the name of the language, 'Dagaaba' or 'Dagara' that of the people, and 'Dagaw' or 'Dagawie' that of the land."

Table 1: Population of UWR Projected from 2000 Census Population (GR-1.7%)

District	2000 Census Figures	2005 Projection	2006 Projectio n	2007 Projectio n	2008 Projectio n	2009 Projection	2010 Projectio n
Jirapa	96,834	105,350	107,140	108,962	110,814	129,652	159,693
Lawra	87,525	95,222	96,841	98,487	100,161	117,188	137,110
Nadowli	82,716	89,990	91,520	93,076	94,658	110,750	129,577
Sissala East	85,442	55,216	50,065	50,916	51,782	60,585	70,884
Sissala West			37,740	45,227	45,996	53,815	62,964
Wa East	224,06	63,795	54,383	55,900	56,162	65,710	76,881
Wa	6	103,059	110,509	112,049	114,513	133,980	156,757

Municipal							
Wa West		85,448	83,023	84,180	85,741	100,317	117,371
UWR	576,583	627,293	637,952	648,797	659,827	772,197	911,237

Source: GSS 2003, UWR, Wa.

The combined population of the Northern and Southern Dagaare speakers, was estimated in 2003 at over one million spread across the Northwest corner of Ghana and Sud-Ouest Region in Southwestern Burkina Faso. The Southern Dagaare is a people of around 700,000 living in the western part of Upper West Region of Ghana. The Northern Dagaare speakers, with an estimated population of 388,000 (in 2001) live primarily in Ioba Province, but also in Poni, Bougouriba, Sissili, and Mouhoun provinces. In Ghana, several waves of internal migration, beginning in at least the late 19th century and spiking in the 1980s, have brought a sizable Dagaaba population to towns in the southern part of the nation; notably Brong Ahafo Region where 115,900 Dagaaba domicile and 45,998 also lived in Ashanti region (2000 Housing and Population Census). The larger communities of Dagaaba in the Upper West Region are Kaleo, Naowli, Jirapa, Lawra, Nandom, Hamile and Han. Some other large communities are also found in the Wa Municipal, Wa West District and the Tuna/Kalba District of the Northern Region.



**Fig 1: Areas with Majority of Dagaaba Residents**



Source: GSS 2003, UWR, Wa

The source of Dagaaba communities in the pre-colonial era remains a point of debate. The evidence of oral tradition is that the Dagaaba are an outgrowth of the Mole-Dagbani group which migrated to the semi-arid Sahel region in the fourteenth century CE. They are believed to have further migrated to the lower northern part of the region in the seventeenth century.<sup>[7]</sup> From well before the appearance of Europeans, the Dagaaba lived in small scale agricultural communities, not centralised into any large state like structure. Ethnological studies point to oral literature which tells that the Dagaaba periodically, and ultimately successfully, resisted attempts at conquest by states in the south of modern Ghana, as well as the Kingdoms of Dagbon, Mamprugu and Gonja in the north. One thesis based on oral evidence is that the Dagaaba formed as a breakaway faction of Dagbong under Na Nyanse. The colonial borders, demarcated during the Scramble for Africa, placed them in northwestern Ghana and southern Burkina Faso, as well as small populations in Côte d'Ivoire

(Dagaaba People From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Upper\\_West\\_Region](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Upper_West_Region)).

Within the Dagawie homelands, the Dagaaba have traditionally formed sedentary agricultural communities. Modern Dagaaba lineages consist of ten clans encompassing over one million people. Some of the major clans are; Kusiele, Nayire, Manluore/Metuolee, Gbielume, Zagee among others.

### **3.4. Dagaaba Traditional Political System**

Traditional Dagaaba communities are based on the "Yir" subclan or household group, a series of which are clustered into the "Tengan", an earth deity shrine in a form of a sacred growth with different species of trees located in the community. The Tengan system, a constellation of roles usually inherited within the same household group is called the *tendaalun*. The head of these shrine area systems, the *tengan sob* (sometimes *tindana*) fulfilled the role of community elder and priest, along with the *tengan dem*, the ritual custodian and maintainer of the ritual centre. Other priestly/elder roles within the *tendaalun* include the *suo sob* who performs ritual animal slaughter on behalf of the clan to the earth deity, the *zongmogre* who performs rituals at the sacred market centres, and the *gara dana* or *wie sob* who is ritual leader among hunting societies.

The first compound in the community build by the ancestors called "Yikpon" is where the "traditional family altar" is located. It is from this compound that the other family members hived out to form new communities or build new compounds with time. All political issues, land issues, marriage, funeral rites performance, resource management and decisions for peace or going to war all gravitate around this compound – first house. It is in this house that the council of elders usually meets for strategic decisions; it mostly serves as seat of the council of elders. Women are not represented in council sittings because it is forbidden or a taboo. No settler or a 'bastard' is also permitted in such sessions of council. Until the latter part of the nineteenth century when institutional chieftaincy evolved (and was later imposed by colonial administration),<sup>[12]</sup> broader Dagaaba communities functioned under the system of councils of elders (Kpieta, 2006; Dagaaba People From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Upper\\_West\\_Region](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Upper_West_Region))).

### **3.5. Religious Affiliations of the Dagaaba**

Dagaaba communities historically have practiced African Traditional religions until the advent of modern religions such as Christianity and Islam, which began to make

incursions into their communities. However, the African Traditional religions still remains the dominant religion among the Dagaaba. For example, Jirapa traditional area where the Catholic Church first entered in 1936 is still home to about 43% of the people who still profess to be adherents of African Traditional Religion (2000 Population and Housing Census).

### **3.6. Major Occupations of the Dagaaba**

Communities in Dagaaba homelands remain primarily small scale agricultural, with family farming plots tilled by the family themselves using rudimentary tools such the hoe and the machetes. In the modern era, off-farm wage income is often used to supplement trade income and subsistence from farming. Fishing communities of Dagaaba persist along the Black Volta, a de facto boundary of Dagaaba lands. Because the communities are found along historic coast-to-Sahel trade routes, trade has long been an important occupation, but largely in local goods. Markets in larger towns are on Sundays, with others on a six day cycle (Kasanga, 1999; Kpieta, 2011).

Some contemporary Dagaaba communities of northern Ghana are notable as the last West African communities to still use Cowries shells as currency, alongside the modern Ghanaian cedi. Cowries are used not only for traditional ornamental and ceremonial purposes (as other West African communities do, but for payment of bridal wealth. It is also serves as an inflation proof form of internal savings and as a safe medium to trade across national (and currency) boundaries which may divide Dagaaba communities (Dagaaba people From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Upper\\_West\\_Region](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Upper_West_Region)).

## **3.0 Findings and discussion**

### **4.1. The Concept Land and Land as a ‘god’**

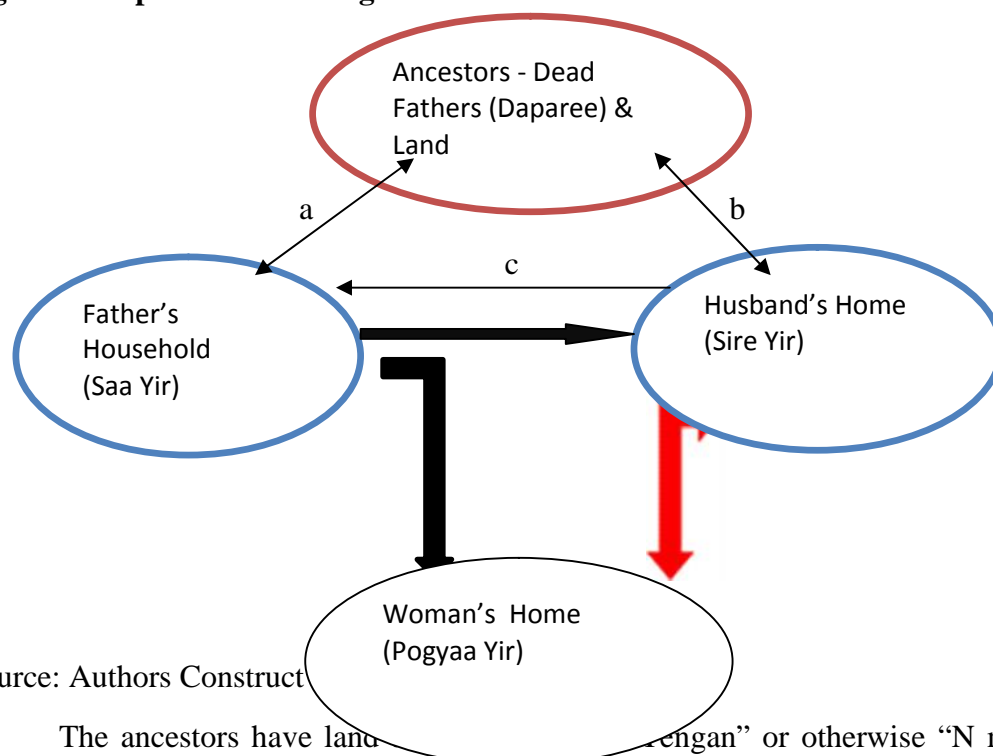
Among the peoples of Africa especially Ghana, there is a traditional concept of land worship. Significantly, the African regards the earth as a “god” or “Mother Earth”, offering prayer in the form of libation pouring before cultivating the land and during harvest. Different peoples all over Ghana use festivals at harvest or after harvest to commemorate the generosity of the Mother Earth or “god”. (Gyasi et. al., 2004).

As depicted in Fig 1.2 the entire family identity of an individual in the Dagaaba ethnic group begins with the ancestors/spirits of the land as the head of the clans, families and households. Each clan head or family heads are answerable to the ancestors while the

ancestors are also responsible for the wellbeing of the clan or family members. This symbiotic relationship is represented by the double head arrows ‘a’ and ‘b’. The ancestors are family members who live and died and are believed to be in another world call “Dapare” – home of the ancestors.

To qualify as an ancestor, the person must be a man, married in his life time, and gave birth to a son who is currently alive to continue with the family tree. Before the burial of a dead man, a bow and three arrows are ritually placed into the hands of the son who will intend placed it into the hands of the corpse; after the burial, the bow and arrows are kept in the ancestral traditional home ‘Yikpong’ in a sacred room of the ancestors – thus, enabling the dead man spirit to qualify to join his ancestors as an ancestor. But if that dead man was unable to give birth to a son but only girls, the bow and the three arrows are cut into two and thrown away before his burial. Signifying the dead man’s name is cut off from the family tree. He will never be remembered in the family anymore, neither will his name be mentioned at the ancestral altar. It is therefore a huge task on men of Dagaaba origin who never have a son before their death; they may want to go at all length to have a baby boy in other to qualify as an ancestor at death.

**Fig 2: Concept of Land as a ‘god’**



Source: Authors Construct

The ancestors have land “N ma tengen” or otherwise “N ma tengan” – mother earth - through whom the living family members are sustained and protected. The living are required to offer sacrifices in the form of thanks given offerings, first fruits

offerings, and guilt offerings to the Mother earth “Tengan” through their ancestors as they cannot go direct to mother earth – Tengan. The earth ‘god’ has a shrine called ‘Tengazu’ where the earth priest offers the periodic and yearly clan offerings to the earth god through the ancestors. The earth god is therefore responsible to provide adequate rain on the land, protect the people against witches and wizards, and attach any family member or stranger who is attempting to bring evil gods (juju) in to the land. When there is a drought, the women of the land are to prepare cakes, millet flour water and march to the earth shrine wailing and crying – thus calling upon the ancestors to tell the earth god to send rain upon the earth. The earth priest or rainmaker will then receive their offerings from their hands and sprinkle on the shrine and the rains will begin to fall according to the elders. Every disaster situation is sent to the earth god through the ancestors. Also, any found item or animal in the land must be sent to the earth priest who intend will send messages to all community members and near-by community members for subsequent identification and collection. If nobody turns up for the found item or animal, the earth priest and the council of elders will send it to the earth shrine (Tengansu) where permission is sought from the earth god through the ancestors before the items are shared among the clan heads/and or if is an animal it is slaughtered and the blood offered to the earth shrine and the meet shared accordingly.

#### **4.2. Ancestral Wealth of Dagaaba**

The ancestors have ancestral wealth which is administered by the male family members on their behalf; these are called ritual animals and ritual crops. As shown in Table 1.3, the ritual animals include cattle and sheep; these animals known as “donsoglaa” or “dongsu” - literally, it means a black animal but in a deeper sense a ‘sacred animal’ belongs to the ancestors. Traditionally, no person has the right to sell or slaughter a cow or a sheep for his personal use without first offering the first fruit (a bull or a ram) to the owners - his ancestors. These ritual animals are mostly offered to the earth god through the ancestors. The ancestral animals - called sacred animals are bequeathing as an inheritance to only sons (men) as ancestral wealth.

The dog is an animal that is owned by both men and women in the area. It serves as the last resort in times of emergency for food or financial crises where it is sold. However, dogs play very significant role in soul cleansing. It is specially used for sacrifices to bring back a soul purported to be “out or wandering” or haunted by witches/wizards. The ritual is performed with the blood of a dog. Again, a dog is sacrificed when some caliber of men

happen to die. These classes of men are considered warriors’, they ever killed a person or people in a battle or secretly. This is to prevent them of being haunted by the people they have killed. The meat of such a sacrificed dog is eating by only ‘men’ – such as people who also ever killed people and went through the fortification.

Table 1.3: Ritual and Non-Ritual Ancestral Wealth

Ritual Animals	Cattle and Sheep
Non-Ritual Animals	Goats, dog
White Animal	Pigs
Ritual Crops	Yams, Millet, Beans and Guinea corn
Non-Ritual Crops	Rice, Groundnuts, Bambara-beans

Source: Field Survey, 2010

The sacred crops which also include; yams, beans, millet and guinea corn are deemed sacred because they are used traditionally to prepare food and drinks and offered to the ancestors and the land-god “Tengan”. These are also special crops offered to the dead to carry with him/her to the ancestral land. It is therefore required that the first fruits of the ancestral wealth be offered to the ancestors and the earth god yearly before new crops are eating. Among the people of Upper West Region, the most celebrated festivals after harvesting of crops are the “Kobina” and Kakube festivals celebrated by the indigenes of Lawra and Nandom Traditional areas. Items such as water for pouring libations, food to be sprinkled (cakes, yam and TZ), pito (local beer), animals and fowls are amongst the offering to the ancestors’ award to the earth god called “Tengan”.

A goat is a non-sacred animal which can be owned by women but subject to the husband’s use for sacrifices with or without permission from the wife. Animals such as pigs recently introduced into the region as exotic animals - called “white animals” which are forbidden to be used for any sacrifice whatsoever are mostly reared by women. Pigs are fed with pito mash – the by-product of the guinea corn used in brewing the pito, but pito is solely brewed by women as they have control over the pigs feed.

Non-ritual crops like rice, bambara beans, groundnuts and vegetables are available for women to cultivate, but the challenge of having access to suitable and also the time to work on her own farm becomes difficult. How can a woman leave her husband’s farm work and go to work on her own? She can only do that after all work in the husband’s farm is done and

permission is granted before she could also work on the marginal planting the non-ritual crops.

### **4.3. Pacification of the First Fruits**

Before households and families begin to eat new crops, it is required that the first fruits be offered to the ancestors to pacify the Tengan or Mother Earth for her generosity. Any person or group of persons that do not have the right to offer these first fruits unto the Mother Earth (land god) through the ancestors cannot (or are not land owners) own land. They can only access land and use it but cannot own it. Every clan in the Dagaaba land has an ancestral altar in addition to the Tengan where all sacrifices and pacifications on behalf of the clan are made to the ancestors. These ancestral altars are located in a single house called ‘Yikpong’ – house of origin. It is from this ancestral altar that the council of elders will always seek protection from the ancestors for all the clan members.

However, it is not all people that are qualified to offer the first fruits to the ancestors and the earth god. The groups of people that have the legitimate right to offer first fruits to the earth god are the primary right holders of land. Any person or group of persons that are forbidden to make an offering to the earth god means they don’t have an ancestor and can therefore not inherit land and own it, neither can they own ancestral wealth and these groups of people are the secondary rights holders of land. The classes of people excluded from making such offerings include; women, daughter’s son cruelly called ‘sensenbie’ - means ‘bastards’ and settlers also known as ‘noore’ – strangers.

In addition, secondary rights holders of land are again not permitted to plant any kind of economic fruit trees on the land they occupy. The planting of fruit trees accordingly signify ownership of the land and in most cases the primary rights holders of the land will not allow a woman, settlers or ‘bastards’ to plant economic trees on the land. The changing trends that are emerging now in relation to land ownership are the land markets or commoditization of land. Any class of persons (women, settlers, and bastards) who are able to purchase a land own it and also have the right to plant economic trees on it.

### **4.4. Gender and Ancestral Wealth Holding**

A woman in the Dagaaba traditional belief system cannot own these sacred animals or cultivate ritual crops because she has no ancestor to offer the first fruits. Non-sacred crops such as rice, groundnuts, bambarabeans and vegetables are available for women to crop after she has fulfilled her duty of putting the husband's farm. A woman is born into the father's home (saa yiri) as indicated in the Fig 1.2, but she is not considered a member of the father's household. A woman is called somebody's house person – nie yiri nie; the ancestors of the father do not include her as their own person, neither do the earth god. As such women do not have ancestor and do not have a god.

When a man is asking the hand of a maiden in marriage, the man's parents will approach the girl's parent to ask for her hand in marriage to their son. The most common statement to the parents of the girl from the boy's parents is:

*“We are coming to ask for the hand of your daughter into our home to fetch water for us” or “We are asking for a fetcher of water into our home” –“kuong onno la ka te buoro.”*

The date for the payment of the bride wealth is fixed; the council of elders will be informed to gather to receive the bridal wealth. The bridal wealth vary significantly in the area, but it ranges between twenty (20,000) and thirty (30,000) thousand cowries which is converted to the cedi equivalent, if the husband cannot afford all in cowries. Before the bride wealth is sent to the maiden family, a sample of the cowries between ten and thirty units are sent to the council of elders with a number of fowls and goat(s). The sample cowries are placed on the ancestral altar in the Yikpong and pacified with the sacrifices, thus, invoking their ancestors to accept the visitor (woman) coming into the family or clan as their own and property. They also invoke blessing on the incoming bride making her fruitful in the womb and industrious with her hands and also be protected from any harm from the unseen forces and an 'evil eye' – supposed witches and wizards. The sample cowries are then added to the money (cowries) and sent for the payment of the bride wealth.

A compromise date for the departure of the maiden from her father's house to her husband's house is reached. On that day the mothers of the bride will adequately prepare her with cooking utensils and accompany her to the husbands' house with the items. The black thick arrow connecting the fathers house and the husband house in the Fig 1.2 represents a



fowl (mostly black) known as ‘pog sore nuo’ – a fowl that see off a woman leaving her parents’ home and going into marriage into the husband’s home.

Children (emphatically boys) that are born by such a wife belong to an ancestral home, and, thus, they have ancestors. These are classified legitimate clan members who have the absolute right to inherit land – ‘the earth god’ from their ancestors through their parents. Any woman whose bride price wasn’t pacified and paid is not a wife of the clan or family. And children that are born through such union are ‘illegitimate’ children – they are deemed not to have identity (ancestors). Such children have no inheritance in the family and even in the event of death their dead body cannot be conveyed to the father’s house for the traditional funeral rites. These are the core issues of land tenure arrangements amongst the Dagaaba.

A woman generally from birth is called “Nie yir nie” - Someone’s house person by her parents and brothers, and when she is married the husband’s home people also calls her ‘nie kang yir nie’ - from somebody’s house – means a stranger. The bridal wealth symbolically places the stranger (woman or wife) in the hands of the husband’s ancestors as a property, thus, owned by the ancestors – “*Pog ba sooro o menga.*” Any property the woman happened to accumulate in her lifetime is for the ancestors, and such property must be transferred into the hands of her husband and the family members to administer it on behalf of the ancestors. Being an asset herself disqualifies her from owning property such as land and ancestral wealth.

Issues of gender are fundamental in the Dagaaba communities. When a child is born the first question asked the midwife is “*te nie la bii, kye bii nea yiri nea kong onno la*” which means, “is the child ours or somebody’s house person for fetching water? If it is a boy – “*doo bie la*” (is our own), but if it is a girl child that is “*nie yir nie*” – that is somebody’s house person. As established by the traditional belief systems a woman therefore do not have an ancestor and cannot inherit land which is a ‘god’ from her parents and cannot also inherit land from the husband’s home because she herself is an asset to her husband. A woman cannot also cultivate ancestral crops because she has no ancestor to offer the first fruits.

The question of women inheriting land has been an old issue with humankind. In the nation of Israel provision was made for daughters to inherit their parents land. A man by name Zelophehad had five (5) daughters and died without a son to inherit him. The daughters approach Moses the servant of God with a petition concerning land inheritance.

*“One day a petition was presented by the daughters of Zelophehad—Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah... These women stood before Moses, Eleazar the priest,*

*the tribal leaders, and the entire community at the entrance of the Tabernacle. Our father died in the wilderness, they said... But he had no sons. Why should the name of our father disappear from his clan just because he had no sons? Give us property along with the rest of our relatives. So Moses brought their case before the Lord. And the Lord replied to Moses. The claim of the daughters of Zelophehad is legitimate. You must give them a grant of land along with their father's relatives. Assign them the property that would have been given to their father. 8 "And give the following instructions to the people of Israel: If a man dies and has no son, then give his inheritance to his daughters... This is a legal requirement for the people of Israel, just as the Lord commanded Moses" (New Living Translation Bible - Numbers Chapter 27:1-11).*

The petition of these young women was granted in Israel and institutionalized and canonized. However, there was a protest from the clan heads through Moses the servant of God,

*"Then the heads of the clans of Gilead... came to Moses and the family leaders of Israel with a petition. They said ... But if they marry men from another clan, their grants of land will go with them to the tribe into which they marry. In this way, the total area of our tribal land will be reduced. So Moses gave the Israelites this command from the Lord ... Let them marry anyone they like, as long as it is within their own ancestral tribe. None of the territorial land may pass from tribe to tribe, for all the land given to each tribe must remain within the tribe to which it was first allotted. The daughters throughout the tribes of Israel who are in line to inherit property must marry within their tribe, so that all the Israelites will keep their ancestral property. No grant of land may pass from one tribe to another; each tribe of Israel must keep its allotted portion of land."...The daughters of Zelophehad did as the Lord commanded Moses... all married cousins on their father's side (New Living Translation Bible - Numbers Chapter 36:1-12).*

A conditional provision for a woman to inherit land was to marry into her clan or family in Israel; but in the cultural context of the people of the Dagaaba, it is a great taboo and incest for such a marriage. This therefore implied that women cannot inherit land from their parents in the Dagaaba land because of out-marriage from the clan.

#### **4.5. Daughters House ‘Son’ – Sensenbie (Bastard) and Inheritance**

In the event of divorce, as indicated by arrow ‘c’ the woman returns to the father’s house; but she still remains the property of the husband’s ancestors until the full repayment of the bridal wealth by her parents to the husband’s family. Any property or wealth accumulated by a divorce woman whose bride wealth is not returned belongs to the woman owners – husband’s ancestors (her husband). If the woman happens to have a child with another man, such a child still belongs to the husbands ancestors – this is shown by the double red arrow connecting the divorced woman’s household and the husband’s house (sire yir) - signifying that the child has a home and can inherit land from his ancestors. But if the bridal wealth is returned to her for husband’s family then such a woman stands out as the head of her own household.

On the other hand when children are born into ‘pogyaa yir’ – woman’s household, the children will have no ancestor because they have no home. Such children are called pogyaa bie – a daughter’s son or cruelly called ‘sensenbie’ – ‘bastard’, this is represented by the arrow connecting the father’s house and the woman’s household. Such children are considered social out-cast amongst the mother’s kin. If the baby happens to be a girl, the mother’s family members will celebrate because they simply will give her out quickly into marriage and share the bride wealth among the council of elders for spending. But if the unfortunate child happens to be a boy, the family will closely monitor the child up to a point, before the young man can get into marriage, he will be send away by the uncles to settle not too near to them. It is said that these illegitimate children – ‘pogyaa bie’ has a very strong spirit in them, and possibly some curses; if such a person settles in the family house with the uncles, disaster will struck them. All the legitimate boys in the house will die and the ‘bastard’ will eventually inherit all that their ancestors left behind including land. But the simple logic is that because the mother’s bride wealth did not pass through the ancestral altar the boy therefore does not have an ancestor and cannot inherit or own land.

If a divorce woman happens to die, her dead body belongs to the husband’s family to convey it and perform the traditional funeral rights and buried in the husband’s home unless the full refund of her bride wealth was done. The husband’s family may reject the corpse by sending a black fowl to the dead wife parents symbolizing the fowl that saw her off to the husband’s home; this is to notify the ancestors of the father’s ancestors to accept the corpse for burial in their territory. The only way a woman can be free from the ownership of her

former husband's ancestors is for her full bridal wealth to be returned to her former husband's family by her parents.

#### **4.6. The Legitimate 'Queen-bee Wife'**

Women whose bride prices are not paid by their husband are subject to abuse by her fellow women. She cannot freely associate with other 'legitimate' wives in the village, she cannot freely harvest fuel wood from the village land without been abused by other supposed wives, in times of picking shea tree fruits which is an economic venture mostly to women – her fellow women will prevent her from picking in the ancestral land. Likewise women whose husbands are settlers in the land, such women suffer the greatest abuse in the hands of fellow women whose husbands are the land owners - Tindaamba. It is a common seen at riverside, the hand-dug well water collection points or the borehole. Such settler women are only allowed to fetch water after the 'real women' has finished fetching. At the least provocation, children of settlers are subject to molestation and sometimes inhuman treatment by "legitimate wives" of the land. And due to increasing population resulting into pressure on land, settlers' families are at the mercy of their host. Women are obviously seen in the area as the people who rather perpetuate these systemic traditional norms against their fellow disadvantage women. As stated by Langwe (1997),

*"These few women who have gone ahead of their sisters, in-turn, exploit their sisters. These few women who have reached the top are schooled to behave as 'honorary men' and are schooled to believe that women have equality with men. They become 'queenbee' not wanting other women to follow their track. Such 'honorary male' even contributes to the continuation of the system that subordinates their sisters."*

Settlers are considered 'noore' – strangers, it does not matter how long they settled on the land. There are many communities still declared settlers even though they have settled the land between 50 to 100 years. Because the land on which they settled is an ancestral god to the original or first settlers of the land, the strangers cannot own it. Many of these settler families have actually lost close contact with their ancestral homeland, thus, making them alliance in their own country.

For many Dagaaba settlers to pacify their ancestors before eating the New Year crops, they often fetch the soil of their ancestral homeland and add a stone to it. These are carried to the new settlement they have migrated and placed at a sacred location in the house as an

ancestral altar which symbolizes their ancestors and the earth god from their homeland. When new crops are ripening for harvest or consumption, the first fruits are offered upon that altar before they eat. This is to prevent the often traveling back to their ancestral homeland to offer their first fruits.

#### **4.7. Conclusion**

The consequential effect of land tenure arrangement amongst the Dagaaba has succeeded in alienating women, settlers, and bastards from the creation and distribution of wealth in the Dagaaba land. The resultant effect is the high poverty incidence among these classes of people in the area especially women. It is also a push factor for people who don't 'belong' to always want to migrate to the south of the country to escape these social gender divide and spatial platform that genders to discrimination and marginalization.

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