

# **GHANAIAN TRADITIONAL WOMEN LEADERS AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: THE CASE OF NADOWLI DISTRICT OF GHANA**

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## **Abstract**

The unequal power relations between men and women in modern political administration have implications for sustainable development and specifically, under representation of women in traditional institution's decision making process also has effects on traditional governance. Most traditional authorities in Africa and to be specific are made up of both male and female leaders; however a close examination of the traditional political history of the Dagaabas of Northern Ghana reveals that women traditional leaders have played less significant roles as compared to their counterparts in the south. This is due to some endemic cultural perception of the position of women in public life. Consequently, sensitization and training programmes to empower these women leaders have been made by governments and civil society groups to include them in the governance system and structures of the country. In spite of these efforts the results are low. The extent to which culture plays a role in determining the effects of such efforts is the focus of this paper. It does so by examining the roles, achievements and challenges of contemporary traditional women leaders in Ghana using Nadowli district as a case study. Primary and secondary data were collected and data analysed qualitatively. The women play educational, political and economic roles using the training skills learnt. However, their challenges reflect on their level of achievements which is very low. This demonstrates that cultural belief systems play a role in the impacts of women traditional leaders' contributions to nation building.

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**Keywords:** Traditional Women Leaders, Sustainable Development, Nadowli District, Ghana, Gender

## **Introduction**

Strengthening democracy at the grassroots level is important for nation's development, and for that matter traditional leaders both male and

female are part of this developmental agenda. History gives account of how both sexes have moved the world forward economically and socio-politically. In Africa, many traditional women leaders have contributed to bring their society to where they are at the present. Remarkable among such women in Ghana are Nana Yaa Asantewaa of Ejusu who led the Ashanti Kingdom to war against the British in 1900 and Nana Hima Dekyi XIII, (1964 to 2002) Omanhene of Upper Dixcove, in the Ahanta West District who, for 38 years of her reign, never saw or experienced any chieftaincy disputes in her traditional area.

However in most traditional societies in Africa, women are expected to play complimentary or subordinate role to their male counterparts in leadership. They only become substantive leaders when there are no men. In Ghana the level of the discrimination is ethnic and cultural specific, whiles women participation in decision- making are encouraged to some extent among the matrilineal societies in the south, their counterparts in the patrilineal societies in the north are constrained. This is so because culturally the latter is a patriarchal society and do not recognised women in public life according to their traditions and customs. Historically most ethnic societies in the north example the Dagaabas did not have anything like queen or queenmother in their culture, it is a new invention and so men in the society find it difficult accepting it. However as noted by Odotei (2006), the traditional structures of governance in many societies in Africa are not an exclusive male preserve.

Studies have shown the dynamism of Ghanaian women's traditional leadership from pre-colonial, through colonial to post-colonial periods (Brobbe 2008, Odotei & Awedoba, 2006, Awumbila, 2001). The influence of Western civilisation through colonial administration has had detrimental effects on the leadership role of women in Africa. Becker (1997) noted that the alliance between the colonial administration, male members of the traditional elite and the Christian mission and Islamic religion worsen the situation in gender relations that favoured male domination of decision-making structure. In addition, the policies of African leaders after independence continued to undermine women's traditional leadership thereby eroding women's traditional authority.

Nonetheless some progress has been made towards addressing areas of concern and gender inequalities in Africa including Ghana. The 1976 UN Conference on Women stressed on gender equality, this was pronounced in its domestic law and its international legal obligations. The 1992 constitution of the Republic of Ghana recognises the queen mother as a chief in its definition of chief in article 277 of the constitution. There have been also a series of interventions such as the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action which sought to address the grave disparity in power between women and men in

public affairs. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, in its Article 7, called upon states and parties ‘to take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the political and public life of the country, in additionally Ghana has a professed commitment in implementing the decisions of 2000 Beijing Plus 5. (<http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/3b00f05938.html> [accessed 25 March 2012]).

These and other pressures from other area have necessitated a change of how women traditional leaders are perceived in modern era. Key among them is the Multinational bodies, Governmental and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs). They have also supported various programmes to improve women’s situations in Ghana. Some of these are UN, UNFPA, GTZ, CIDA and DANIDA. They have all engaged in sensitization activities to increase the participation of women at decision-making levels within the family, community and the nation.

Local NGOs, such as Leadership and Advocacy for women in Africa (LAWA) in 2004 delivered a position paper to the Attorney -General regarding the Chieftaincy Bill, aiming to help women gain a voice in traditional institutions of government in Ghana. In the three Northern regions of Ghana for instance, The Center for Indigenous Knowledge and Organizational Development (CIKOD) has embarked on a programme to integrate women’s leadership into the traditional governance institutions. The purpose is to empower women in the northern part of Ghana to partner the men in leadership roles in their societies, as it is the case of the matrilineal system in the south, and to contribute meaningfully towards the development of their regions and the country as a whole.

Owing to the above efforts, women’s responsibility as leaders of their communities has taken on new dimensions to meet the challenges of globalization, democracy, westernised structures of governance, urbanisation, migration, poverty, illiteracy and disease. They have intensified their advocacy for gender equity. Many queenmothers in these areas and other traditional women leaders are making efforts to eliminate outmoded customs that harm women, such as female genital mutilation (FGM), trokosi, and widowhood rites.

In all these, women’s impact in decision-making at the traditional level remains low especially the northern part of Ghana, as noted by Aidoo, (1981), McCaskie (1995) and Odotei (2006). Women in northern part of Ghana continue to suffer the burden of discrimination. Traditional practices and attitudes towards women throughout have hampered their quality of life, and continue to impair their ability to change the situation through hindrance of their access to public life. The consequences are that women are under-represented in high political offices and decision-making positions such as in

government, the military, central banks and regional organizations. These stem from the fact that their participation at the grass root level is minimal.

The question is: why do women traditional leaders in northern Ghana have less achievement at the local level? This question among others motivated the researcher to investigate into the present statuses of traditional women leaders in northern Ghana using Kaleo traditional society as a case study.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### *Culture, Education and Global Norms and Human Rights*

There is no society without a culture, in every society it is their culture that guides their way of life and how to live in harmony among one another. Culture is define as ‘that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society’. ([http://anthro.palomar.edu/culture/culture\\_1.htm](http://anthro.palomar.edu/culture/culture_1.htm)) The body of cultural traditions distinguishes one specific society from the other. In most cases, those who share your culture do so because they acquired it as they were raised by parents and other family members who have it. Mr. O. Keng Yong, former ASEAN secretary- General, speaking at the Public Academy of Singapore (12/11/2003) said ‘culture is our legacy and our future; we draw upon it to shape our identities.... as individual, as a nation and as region. Culture defines our heritage and helps in personal and national development. An essential part of our culture is our value system.....’([www.aseanfoundation.org./documents/brochure/Rev-culture](http://www.aseanfoundation.org/documents/brochure/Rev-culture)).

His statement summarises culture, because without culture it will be difficult for one to know your identity. This answers why many traditional leaders defend their value systems and oppose change even if it is for the betterment of the lives of their people. Applying this to most cultural values in the north of Ghana the male traditional leaders for some time opposed to women in public life as it was not part of their cultural heritage. This is manifested in their basic institutions, traditional institutions in the north, composed of only men, important decisions regarding women are made by men due to this many customary practices were harmful to women because women are not involved when such decisions are taken. The traditional leaders of Upper West first embraced queenmother concept in 2009, this was made known in a one day workshop organized by the centre for Indigenous Knowledge and Organisation Development (CIKOD)(GNA,2009). Most people of northern Ghana are patrilineal society and this position made the women vulnerable eg inheritance and succession pass through the male line female genital mutilation (FGM), it is still practiced amongst many of the ethnic groups. Domestic violence is considered to be a normal part of married life and

women are not able to make important decisions concerning their lives – such as decisions regarding reproductive health, their children and family planning. Traditionally, women do not own property, large livestock or land and so are unable to support themselves and their families. For those that are married they must rely on their husbands for support.

However Mbalcogu (2004) see culture from a different perspective, to him culture is network of traits that could be learnt through a long interaction with others from different culture. He argues that people unconsciously learn attitudes, values, goals behaviours outside their culture and these shape our personality. In this light this can also be seen in modern times through interaction and influence from other culture especially from the southern part of Ghana most northern part of Ghana have realised the importance of queen mothers and have incorporated this system into their cultural values. The installment of ‘Puanaba,’ as queenmothers as called in the Northern Region and Upper East Region and ‘Pognaa’ in the Upper West Region, had been received with great joy since its a way leading to women serving in the traditional councils.

Culture is also dynamic and gives the understanding and order to our social institution and make traditional religious practices genuine (National Commission on Culture 2004). In Ghana the traditional political systems, the respective roles and powers of men and women have undergone transformation under the impact of colonialism, increasing commoditisation of the economy and other processes of social change (Callaway, 1976). Most of these social changes were made possible through modern socialisation processes organised by government, nongovernment and other civil societies. They made a conscious effort to empower women leaders to take up roles to compliment what their male counterparts are doing to bring about development.

Most of these empowerments were in the form of training through non-formal education to complement traditional informal education. As argued by Freire (1970, 1985) that, for sustainable development, there is the need for education because it facilitates critical thinking for public involvement in resource management and policy formation. This process empowers local communities to take greater control of resource use decisions and social reformation that directly affect them. For example, Huckle and Sterling (1997) argue that education that is sustainable helps people and communities to examine critically the technologies, systems of economic production, cultural systems of reproduction, laws and politics, and ideas and ideologies they currently employ for living with the rest of nature. They indicate that it also helps the people to reflect and act on viable alternatives. According C. Shukla (1980) the NFE imparts a change in behaviour and mental attitude, which raises the social significance of a

person. Revolutionary political parties in socialist countries, both before and offer their revolutions, have initiated large programmes for changing the consciousness, skills and organisation of their people.

To Shukla (1980) the success of any society depends up on a well informed and enlightened citizen. The non-formal contents also contribute to social life. The social needs of the people are their desirability in society, compatibility with other people and usefulness. According him the non-formal contents also contribute to social life. The NFE imparts a change in behaviour and mental attitude, which raises the social significance of a person. Revolutionary political parties in socialist countries, both before and offer their revolutions, have initiated large programmes for changing the consciousness, skills and organisation of their people.

Our society demands that we learn to live together in harmony with different cultures in highly populated areas. This is not always easy. Institutions for non-formal education often contribute to Cultural assimilation programmes and to the dialogue between different social groups. Providing education and a platform for discussion about health issues helps in the prevention of accidents in and near the home. These and many others have our traditional women in Ghana received to empower them to bring positive change in their communities.

In addition to education other pressures from global norms and human rights conversions have necessitated new roles for traditional leaders in Ghana; notable among them are: UN Beijing platform of Action (1995) which emphasised on advancement of women and equality between men and women. UN'S Founding Charter with a declaration for fundamental human person and equal right for both men and women of all nations (UN status on women 2007).

In Ghana, the implementation of the conversions made the wrong perception about women to take a new dimension with pragmatic policies put in place to integrate them into the mainstream of society. This became possible when the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs in collaboration with the District Assembly, and other civil societies such as Women in Law and Development in Africa (WILDAF), Abantu for Development, Women in Self-Empowerment (WISE), World Vision, Plant Parenthood Ghana (PPHG), and National Board for Small Scale Business (NBSSI) supported and organised capacity work shop for women traditional leaders to empower them socially economically and politically. This has resulted in the formation of many women groups in the districts. Most of these groups have been empowered with entrepreneurial skill training, agro - processing machines and financial support to actively engage in small scale economic activities to improve upon the standard of living of their members. This has promoted the interest of the vulnerable in the society particularly women and children.

They have also used the knowledge gained in ensuring good governance in their area.

### **Research Design and Methodology**

The study used fieldwork/qualitative approach; it collected both primary and secondary data. The target population were mainly traditional leaders such as chiefs, queen mothers, market queens, ‘magajias’ and queens from the study areas (Nadowli districts). Assembly members, NGOs and governmental institutions in charge of training women leaders were also part of the study. Kaleo (Dagaaba) traditional area was purposively sampled from Nadowli district. This was so because the researcher saw that it has true reflection of the people of northern Ghana ie a patrilineal society. It also has cultural values and belief system practiced by most of the ethnic groups in the area.

The target groups were purposively sampled because such groups had specific knowledge important for the study. Techniques used for collecting data were interviews, focus group discussion and personal observation. The data collected were analysed qualitatively.

### *The Study Area*

Table 1 summarizes the characteristics of the study area; it gives the summary of the characteristics of one has to know in the area at a glance which helps with the later analysis.

**Table 1: Socio-demography characteristics of the study area**

<b>Name of area</b>	<b>Kaleo</b>
<b>District</b>	Nadowli
<b>Ethnicity</b>	Dagaaba
<b>Population</b>	3,476
<b>Inheritance</b>	Patrilineal
<b>Type of kingship</b>	Chieftaincy
<b>Title of chief/queen mother</b>	Naa/Pognaa/magajia
<b>Status of women leaders</b>	Achieve
<b>Climate</b>	One rainy season
<b>Vegetation</b>	Savannah
<b>Economy</b>	Agrarian
<b>Sector</b>	Northern

**Source:** Researcher’s own construct, 2012

### **Traditional History of Women in Traditional Leadership in Ghana**

In Ghana the role and statuses of traditional women leaders depend on the belief system and the worldview, ethnic identity and the community (Odotie, 2006). Example, within the Akan matrilineal societies, succession

within a clan was essentially through the female descent although males are usually the chiefs of the communities. However when there are no male candidates; women are considered and made chief. A case in point is that from 1919-34, Nana Afia Boatemaa, then queen mother of Asiakwa assumed the mantle of leadership as a chief of Asiakwa because there was no male candidate for the position in terms of age and experience. In addition, every lineage male head in the area has its female counterpart who saw to the women and girls issues. In the case of the Dagaaba, like some traditional areas in the northern regions, succession within a clan was essentially through the male descent. Males were usually the chiefs of the communities and had no queen mother position in the past and the lineage heads did not have their female counterparts. However the oldest wife of the lineage head took responsibility for women issues. In spite of the above, there are some parts of the north where chief positions are exclusively reserved for women. Examples of such societies are Mamprusi and Dagomba. Also traditionally, the Gonjas, Chokosi, Nawuri and Nchumburu have had queen mothers.

In Akan traditional society, the chief, elders and queen mother constitute the administrative, legislative and judicial authority of the community, presided over by the chief. However, under special circumstances, the queen mother or 'obaapanin' becomes the head of the traditional administrative machinery. The 'Obaapanin' is figuratively the mother of the traditional political office bearer. Also known as 'ohemmaa,' she performs important functions in the traditional society. The 'ohemmaa' nominates successors to the 'stool' from the clan, lineage or family and also acts as adviser to the reigning occupant of the 'stool' – the chief. Metaphorically, the image and authority of Ghanaian women is personified in the office of the 'ohemmaa.' According to Busia (1952), in the traditional patriarchal social order, the woman is an intermediary figure and symbolises the unifying force in the political culture of the Akan people.

According to Arhin (1990), among the Akan, the military organization was synonymous with the political institution. Towns and villages were settled by segments of matriclans. One matriclan was dominant in every town or village, owning the stool and appointing the 'Ohene'. The Akan operate a hierarchical council which directed the affairs of the people. Female stools complement the hierarchy of male stools and occupants. The Ohemmaa is responsible for women, children and domestic affairs. She leads the selection of the 'Ohene' and acts as his adviser.

More importantly, the first and most crucial requirement and qualification for assuming the highest political office; as a chief, is that one's mother is of royal blood and royal lineage of the community. This fundamental importance of women in the socio-political organization was



expressed in proverbs like ‘Obaa na owoo ohene’ (It is the woman who gives birth to a chief).

On the other hand the queen mother is a recent phenomenon among the Dagaaba, even though among some of the ethnic groups of Northern Ghana, women were entitled to hold public office and discharged public functions. The Dagomba, Mamprusi, Gonja and Nanumba have skins preserved for women chiefs, however the exact role of women in public and political affairs, and the type of employment and jobs which females perform vary in each locality. Among the Mamprusi, Dagomba and Nanumba, some of the women chiefs have been accorded divisional chief status. Women continue to play important roles as fetish priestesses in almost all the ethnic groups in the North ( Ewusin 1981:83). Odotei (2006) notes that the Nanumba female chiefs (Pona) adjudicate in cases in her own court with the assistance of her linguist and she is a member of the traditional council.

Among the Dagaabas it was the eldest wife of every lineage known as (yii daponma) that had some functions to play. The male counterpart (‘yidandon’) is the household head in the family. In the olden days the major responsibility of the ‘yidando’ was to see to the day to day welfare of the lineage including paying the dowry of the wives of the young males, providing cloths for funerals and other expenses of the funeral. The (yii daponma) used to accompany him to funerals, saw to the cooking of meals during marriage and funeral ceremonies. She also took care of newly married women into the lineage. Any decisions made were subject to the approval of the lineage head (yiidaama). Also, among the Frafra and Mamprusi, the chief’s wife plays a role in the enskinning of a new chief. In Mamprugu, the Paani is responsible for the regalia.

### **The Roles of Women in the Traditional Leadership in Contemporary Ghana**

In modern Ghana, women’s traditional leadership takes two main forms, the ascribed form and the achieved form. Both the ascribed and achieved bear the name chief or nana in *Akan*, meaning chief and *magajias* in most parts of the north. The ascribed chiefs occupy the highest positions of authority in a society. They may also appear as queen mothers who compliment the chief as seen in the *Akan* in communities (Odotei 2006). These positions are through consanguinity and conjugal ties, i.e., by blood ties and marriage ties respectively, depending on the society. The achieved position comes in the form of personal endeavour, resourcefulness and capacity building. Such women can be found in many communities in Ghana especially in the northern part of Ghana. They appear as market leaders or even specific commodity queens e.g., plantain queens or ohemaa in the south or yam queen or magajias in the north. These women, whether ascribed or

achieved strife hard to make an impact in their community. They act as role model to their fellow women and also give assistants to other women and children. However, in pursuit of their duties the achieved women faces more challenges than the ascribed because the latter is recognised by tradition as leader.

In recent times many, both the ascribed and achieved women leaders, have been empowered by both governmental and non-governmental organisations so as to be able to compliment efforts made by their male counterparts (chiefs) to bring development into their communities and the nation as a whole. They have received income generating skills, health techniques and knowledge in leadership to enable them work effectively to make useful contributions to the socio-economic development. They are often invited to lectures, for example on 1<sup>st</sup> July, 2011, the organisers of the 8<sup>th</sup> William Ofori Atta Centenary lecture on the topic: ‘Women and Traditional Leadership in Modern Governance in Ghana’ for National Council of Women Traditional Leaders (NCTWL) in Accra (<http://www.ghananewagency.org>). Again, on Wednesday July 6, 2011, a workshop aimed at building the capacity of women traditional leaders to participate effectively in governance was held in Wa, the Upper West Regional capital, with a call on the government and various traditional authorities to intensify efforts to get more women into positions of authority. The workshop, which was under the theme, ‘Strengthening traditional authorities for national development: Role of the women’ was organised by the centre for Indigenous Knowledge and Organisation Development (CIKOD) in collaboration with the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS) ([www.dailguideghana.com](http://www.dailguideghana.com)).

**Figure 1: Traditional Women in Contemporary Ghana**



**Source:** Members of Council of Women Traditional Leaders (NCTWL) (Picture at William Ofori Atta Centenary lecture, Accra 2011)

These conferences, workshops and seminars have made traditional leadership undergo profound changes with women leadership which is going through modifications to make it more relevant to address current challenges such as urbanisation, divorce increase, and child abuse. Some of these changes e.g. women empowerment and women in decision-making however

contradict with long held beliefs and values, thereby creating tension between tradition and modernity. Women traditional leaders in Kaleo Traditional area have played key roles in these conferences and workshops.

### **The New Roles Played by Women Traditional Leaders in Kaleo**

Recently, women leaders play diverse roles in their communities. In addition to serving as counsel to Chiefs and elders of societies they also mediate and participate in negotiations on issues important to the people in general, and are directly responsible for overseeing family matters in particular issues around women and children among others. Some of the critical roles of traditional women leaders include mobilising other women for communal labour, embarking on income generating activities eg brewing pito, soap making etc, organizing women group meeting for development, giving civic education/information dissemination, sensitizing women to fight for their rights, organizing women to access credit facility and educating women on child and maternal health. Below is discussion on the above-mentioned roles.

#### *Mobilising other women for communal labour*

One important ways a leader can do to help his or her community is to mobilise his/her community members to do things that can help the place in good shape. Women leaders in Kaleo when interviewed gave mobilization of other women groups to embark on diverse forms of communal labour as one major role they play. Most widely seen is the mobilization of other women to embark on activities such as farming, construction works, organization of festivals and funerals etc. In Kaleo, women traditional leaders were able to mobilize other women to undertake communal labour on a four unit urinal EU project, the women carried sand, stones and water while the men moulded blocks.

#### *Embarking on economic activities*

In modern Ghanaian societies, the traditional role of women is taking a turning urge from just the household activities of cooking, washing and taking care of children, to other external activities such as Pito Brewery, Shea butter processing, extraction of palm kernel, training on book keeping skills, family life education, entrepreneurship skills among others geared towards raising income levels and building upon their capacity to support their families.

In Kaleo, women form groups such as Suntanutaa group, 'Pito Brewers' Association, Market Women Association, and Hairdressers' Association. The leaders of these groups are known as magajia. Through these group leaders, the other women are able to undertake economic

activities that generate income to support their livelihoods. For example, Pito Brewers Association is an association consisting of all women who brew Pito. These women come together to embark on financial activities such as savings mobilization, loan acquisition and disbursement and repayment of loans. These magajias also serve as leaders in training other women in extraction of shea butter and the production of dawadawa.

Poverty is high in the northern part of Ghana than in the south because there is only one rainy season. Although farming is the major occupation these women embark in these other economic activities to sustain their family during the dry seasons and as a supplementary during the main farming season. It is therefore obvious these traditional women leaders in Kaleo are in a way helping to alleviate poverty in their community and in the nation as a whole. However, the kind of activity that they embark on is dependent on the nature and type of raw materials available in their area. In Kaleo, the presence of shea and dawadawa trees serves as the main source of raw materials for their economic activities.

#### *Community Education*

Another important role played by women traditional leaders is the undertaking of community education on important aspects of life of women in their communities. Some of these include civic education aimed at sensitizing women and increasing their assertiveness to participate in the local governance, improve their health status and to lead in developmental projects in their area. In addition to this, it is meant to ensure that their views are represented in the implementation of programmes and policies. The education/training is also geared towards the acquisition of leadership and public speaking skills to enhance their communicative competence against the abuse of women's rights and their perpetrators.

In Kaleo traditional areas, women traditional leaders have been able to make use of the training received from PPHG, CIKOD, World Vision and Ministry of health in educating their fellow women on ways of improving health status in terms of reduction in number of children, eating nutritious food and the using of insecticide mosquito net and attending antenatal and post natal clinic. Moreover, women are educated on how to speak, read and write their local language and simple English and how to apply modern techniques in their farming activities.

#### *Political and Decision Making Role*

The political role played by women leaders of Kaleo traditional area is based on achievements rather than ascription. The queen mother of Kaleo had been enskined to lead all the magajias and also to sit in any discussion and ceremony organized by the chief of Kaleo. Her position is purely an

achieved one. She got the position because she is educated; a nurse midwife by profession and has a lot of experience in women health to educate the other leaders. She is also a role model for girls in the community and a mentor to the other women.

However, unlike what is seen among women traditional leaders in Kaleo, in Akan society, the statuses of the traditional women leaders are both ascribed and achieved. The ascribed queen mothers are nieces, sisters or mothers to the ruling chief. They still wield substantial influence in the enstoolment and destoolment of their chiefs.

### **Analysis of Achievements of Traditional Leaders in Kaleo**

The researcher observed that the roles played by the traditional leaders of Kaleo are similar to that of their counterparts from the south. However, due to socio-cultural differences the level of impact is not very encouraging. The table below shows the level of their achievements.

**Table 2: Level of socio-political achievements of traditional leaders of Kaleo**

<b>Items</b>	<b>Level of Achievement</b>
<b>Political</b>	Low
<b>Education</b>	Moderate
<b>Economic</b>	Moderate
<b>Health</b>	Moderate
<b>Family life</b>	Moderate
<b>Marriage life</b>	Moderate
<b>Communal work</b>	High

**Source:** Researcher's own construct 2012

In table 2, the socio-political achievements are rated accordingly; it can be seen from the table that they performed moderately in education, this might be due to the fact that most of the women traditional leaders themselves have low level of education. About 60% of the traditional leaders studied have had no formal education. However most of them have received non-formal training organised by government and NGOs. On the centrally, most of their male counterpart have had formal education. This confirms the male preference culturally in Kaleo traditional area.

Politically the traditional women in Kaleo performed poorly and are rated low; this is also due to the fact that culturally women were not to be seen in public life. The women traditional leaders do not perform the important role in matters related to land, conflict resolution, revenue mobilization and the maintenance of law and order, as such convincing their community to vote for them in national politics is not easy or getting their voices heard is not easy. This is due to the fact that there are cultural values that would not be compromise for change. Especially in terms of how they value women participation in decision making and public life. Values and

belief systems affect the extent to which these women accept new ideas. Economically their performance is also moderate because of cultural values, climate and ecological reasons. Culturally, women do not own land but can work in their husband's land. This is worsen with harsh agro-climatic conditions, low output per capita, limited options beyond small scale farming, less urbanisation and service provision, combined with strongly patriarchal family structures. Also the women's lack of influence in decision making, and a history of male outmigration which has tended to increase women's labour burden have resulted in limited options. These are explained in details in the challenges faced by these traditional women discussed next.

### **Challenges Facing Women Traditional Leaders in Kaleo**

The women traditional leaders when interacted with outlined many setbacks and challenges they face in political, economic, and educational dispensation, that hamper their progress; even though they are being encouraged by the government and many other civil societies. Some of the challenges are elaborated in the subheadings below.

#### *Challenges on Political role of women traditional leaders*

The Kaleo traditional women leaders have a great urge to enter into public politics but they complained that their men do not support them. This explains why they do not even have one woman assembly member or parliamentarian to their credit. The only woman who was a former assembly woman for one term lamented that even though she was doing very well both men and women in her area pleaded that she should step down for his male opponent. These are some words from the woman: 'I tried my best with my little salary to help the women in my community but both the women and the men came to beg me to step down for my male opponent to go in the next assembly'. She said true to their words they did not vote for her at the second term.

According to the traditional women leaders in Kaleo, their male counterparts do not encourage nor recognize them as leaders; not even their husbands do. For instance they would not allow them to express their views in public, even the women whose interest they represent, sometimes object to the idea of women being leaders; therefore they will not listen or recognized them as their leaders. This confirms how cultural values are cherished and therefore very difficult to let go even though it can be harmful sometimes.

Even though the traditional women leaders are invited to functions and meetings they are not allowed to talk or contribute to decision making when men are around. One traditional woman leader complained that this has compelled many of the women's groups to appoint men as their spokespersons.

They also pointed out that the chiefs did not trust them and suspected any women who wanted to assume leadership position as their opponent who wants to usurp their powers and authority. In this regard, the study revealed that the cultural value systems of the Kaleo traditional area do not make room for the recognition of women rights in public. It is interesting to note that even some women in the area do not recognize or accept their fellow women as leaders. Thus, cultural values in the area take precedence over modern ideologies that women have the equal right to participate in public affairs in the Kaleo traditional area.

On the other hand, traditional women leaders in the south do not face many of the problems faced by their counterparts in Kaleo. For instance, they are respected by all including men and their husbands. They have a say in decision making in their lineages, clans and communities. This is because traditionally and culturally women in the south practice matrilineal inheritance which gives room for women to be part of decision making.

#### *Economic challenges faced by Women Traditional Leaders*

Traditionally, women leaders in Kaleo and for that matter in most women leaders in northern part of Ghana have to be economically sound to remain leaders, as the traditional leadership is an achieved position. They noted that one needed to be on her toes; working hard to feed the poor, clothe them and give them money to pay their children's fees in order to maintain their status. If one relaxed she would become unpopular', said one of the women. This is partly so because poverty is very common among women in the Kaleo traditional area as the Northern region turns to experience severe rates of poverty among women than in the southern sector of Ghana. As such economic challenge is in ascendency. Even though they are able to train their follow women in income generating skills such as soap making, pomade, dress making, hair dressing etc, financially the trained women find it difficult to start their own business since poverty is in ascendency in the north. Accessing loan is also not very easy since most financial institutions would like to take collateral security. This is difficult because culturally women do not own landed property. Although this has changed a little in these modern times, still women are yet to find their feet in terms of financial empowerment. Example the farming skills learnt by these women need a larger scale farming, hence the need for forming themselves into groups to have group farm. This would have been the best, however, the lands the individual women are using for their farming activities do not belong to them, it is for their husbands/ brothers/fathers, so they cannot give it out for large scale farming, and this poses a challenge for the women traditional leaders. One of them lamented. 'I wish to give the land I am using to my group but that land is not mine, also, although I have money to pay for it, my

brother said it cannot be possible since traditionally women do not own land'. These are a few of the economic challenges facing the traditional women leaders in Kaleo although they working very hard.

### *Challenges to Community Education*

Challenge in community Education comes in the sense that women are not allowed by their husbands to make use of ideas that they learn from the process of community education. For instance the use of contraceptives and condoms are not allowed by husbands of these women. The traditional women in both areas lamented that the women's attendance to meetings is very poor because either their husbands would not allow them or the household chores are too much for them to get extra time for learning. These challenges faced by women traditional leaders make them feel sad since they limit their impact and also slow their progress of bridging the gap between men and women in their areas.

### *Challenges on Health role of women traditional leaders*

The health of people especially women and children are very important for every society and for that matter the nation as a whole. To address the health situation in the communities the women traditional leaders have received trainings on health and sanitations. Notable among them are good nutritional eating habits, family planning methods, food preservation and keeping their environment clean. The Kaleo queen mother being a chief nurse herself has taken pains to train her fellow leaders most of these health issues. However she lamented that the impact of her toil is low, she attributed this to poverty and high illiteracy among the women and cultural value system and superstitious beliefs. For instance it a well known belief among the people that pregnant women should not take too much protein eg. eggs with the reason that the child will become a thief when the mother takes eggs during pregnancy. For family planning the women are afraid to introduce it to their husband for fear of branding them as prostitutes, beside the decision of the number of children one woman could have is a sole provocative of her husband. So her worry was that although they get the training but implementing what they learn becomes a problem.

### *Challenges connected with Family and Marriage*

Kaleo is a patrilineal society where women do not inherit property, also the marriage system is such that husbands are the family heads and they take most political, social and economic decisions. Example women prepare the food but the quantity to cook in most traditional homes are measured by the family head, some family heads even share the fish/meat after cooking. For this reasons the women have to rely on their husbands for decisions



connected in many social, political and economic issues. Even when they want to attend the literacy classes, those who are regular at classes are those whose husbands allow them. One women told an interesting story which needs to be shared. She said ‘previously our husbands were the only ones who were buying the cooked pork meat at the market places and during funerals because they were in charge of family money, it was a taboo for a woman to buy the cooked pork meat in the public places. These days when we worked we keep our own money so can also buy some of the pork meat.’ This was expressed to show that things are better now due to modernisation and sensitisation.

### **Conclusion**

Women traditional leader have existed from pre-colonial time to modern times, their performers differ from the past and the present and from place to place. They perform more roles at the present times than in the olden times and this is possible because of gender sensitisation, women empowerment and training. This empowerment has helped them to solve modern problems such as poverty, high population and disease control among others. However, the women in Kaleo lamented that they cannot have the greatest impact expected even though they are playing additional roles outside those roles conferred on them in the traditional realm, geared towards development in their family, community and the nation at large. These are due to challenges hampering their progress. The study revealed that these women are committed to the development of their community and work with all seriousness. However, their impacts on the other women in the communities are minimal due to the challenges. The research revealed that the challenges are cultural specific and need gradual changes. The support given by government and NGOs has supported them to make some remarkable achievements. Their ability to help other women and address many problems stem from the training, education and sensitisation sessions they have been taken through. However there is still more room for improvement in terms of the acceptance, encouragement, cooperation and support from their male counterparts as co-developers and part and parcel of decision making processes. Women in patrilineal society of Kaleo worked hard to attain the status as queen mothers and still have to be on their toes to maintain their position. Due to this, they still need some external push to pursue their work for a better achievement. However, the change should be gradual and conform to the culture of the people.

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