# INDIGENOUS INSTITUTIONS AND CONTEMPORARY DEVELOPMENT IN GHANA: POTENTIALS AND CHALLENGES

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## Introduction

Development has been variously defined by different actors to mean different things to different people. While the western economists define development in terms of economic growth and income per capita, the politician may define same as the provision of roads, hospitals, schools, etc. In the context of a Ghanaian community, development is usually described in terms of the well-being of the individual and the community or opportunities for improving livelihoods. Whatever the differences may be among these definitions, the underlying fact is the need for effective leadership and organizational cohesion be it at national or community level to be able to initiate and sustain the processes that lead to development.

In Ghana, in spite of a modern national political organizational system, the majority of the people (in the rural areas) are organized around various indigenous institutions for carrying out the activities that are important for their development and wellbeing. In fact, civil society in rural Ghana is embedded within these indigenous institutions and they are key to the organization of people at the rural level for their socio-economic development.

In Ghana, decentralization as the tool for creating the enabling environment for speeding up development at the local level took concrete shape in 1988 with a focus on decentralizing both political authority and the financial means to the district level. Studies however point to the fact that although some successes have been achieved, so far decentralization has largely failed to achieve the objective of enhancing local participation in the development process (Kendie and Mensah, 2008). One reason is that indigenous institutions around which rural people organize their lives have been largely ignored in the decentralization strategy (Kendie and Guri, 2006, 2007).

This paper reviews indigenous institutions in Northern Ghana and the implications for development in the context of Ghana's local government system. As a start, we map indigenous institutions in northern Ghana as they exist today, indicating their potentials as agents for development. Secondly, the chapter reviews and discusses the changes that have occurred to these institutions over the years and the resultant new dynamics in relation to their potential for addressing contemporary development problems. We then examine current development challenges vis-à-vis the role of these indigenous institutions and propose areas for capacity building to release their potentials and address the challenges facing them. We then conclude with the implications for development policy, research and development action.

This chapter draws heavily on a survey that was carried out in northern Ghana by the Center for Indigenous Knowledge and Organizational Development (CIKOD) in 2004 to

map the existing indigenous institutions as well as functional local organizations and assess their organizational capacities so as to identify areas for capacity building to enable them to contribute more effectively to the development of their communities. Examples are also taken for comparative purposes from a similar exercise that was done for southern Ghana and described in Kendie, Ghartey and Guri (2004).

**Indigenous Institutions, Functional Organizations and Development – A Conceptual Overview**

This article concerns itself primarily with indigenous institutions and local functional organizations and their potential as change agents. It is thus important to give a clear understanding on these terminologies.

The term "institution" according to the western conception, has been defined as the **rules, roles and structures** developed by people to organize their joint activities (see Kendie and Guri, 2005 for a review). Olson (1965) refers to institutions as the collectively agreed upon social arrangements that govern the interactions among members of a given group of people. Berger and Neuhaus (1984:251) refer to these as 'mediating institutions' – "those institutions standing between the individual in his private life and the large institutions of public life". Building on this, in this chapter, indigenous institutions shall refer to the societal norms, values, beliefs and cosmovisions that guide human interaction in any particular community or locality. Indigenous institutions also refer to the leadership structures within the community (chiefs, queen mothers, *tindanas – the traditional land-owners* - elders, clan heads, etc) and their functional roles which ensure that the norms and values of the community are respected. It also includes practices such as the rituals and rites of the people, the funerals, the dowry system, festivals, and the shrines or places of worship of the people. Put together, these may be loosely described as the indigenous knowledge system or culture of the people that structure the incentives in human exchange and behaviour in any particular society, be it political, social or economic. Institutions also take the form of Local Organizations (LOs) in which case they refer to the structures that form the units of organization in the community. Uphoff (1988) as well as Olson (1965) describe them as 'organizations which act on behalf of and are accountable to their membership and which are involved in development activities'. Such local organizations may be formally created with official requirements such as constitutions, statutes, common laws and governmental regulations, which may be externally enforced (Pejovich, 1995). In Ghana, these are variously referred to as Community Based Organizations (CBOs), Farmer Based Organizations (FBOs), Co-operative Unions, etc.

In this chapter, the focus is on Functional Indigenous Organizations (FIOs) and would refer to indigenous organizations such as *nnoboa* (community self-help) groups, *asafo* (community security) groups, susu (community savings and loans) groups, clan networks, hunters groups and so on that are the structures through which rural families organize their social, economic and political lives. These are indigenous self-help groups established by local people based on their own criteria in response to the need for mutual support to tackle individual/community problems. They are not usually dependent on

external support and will always exist even where there is no external support. The resilience of rural people in spite of the serious deprivation at the rural level may be largely attributed to these institutions and forms of organization. These indigenous organizations are self-initiated, self-help groups that are based on traditional norms of trust and reciprocity. The challenge to governments is to overcome the marginalization of these institutions and to confront the reality that, in rural areas, indigenous institutions have strong influence on the population. The greater challenge is for public policy to seek to utilize these local institutions for the realization of social and economic progress (Kendie, 1993:321). Ironically, we observe that local political structures are often heavily relied upon by national political leaders to garner political support when it is time for national elections, and this is often to good effect.

The opportunities for sustainable local and community organization have been undermined and ignored over the years by policy makers. In recent times, however, the relevance of indigenous knowledge and institutions for development is increasingly being recognized by both development theorists and practitioners although the conventional development paradigm does not even recognize their existence.

*Role of indigenous knowledge and institutions in endogenous development*

Undisputedly, the dominance of western knowledge system has largely led to a prevailing situation in which indigenous knowledge is ignored and neglected. It has therefore been easy to forget that, over many centuries, human beings have been producing knowledge and strategies enabling them to survive in a balanced relation with their natural and social environment. They also evolved the institutions to ensure law and order and harmony within the human world and between this and natural and spiritual worlds. This interconnectedness of the human, natural and spiritual worlds provides the philosophical basis of the endogenous development movement, which is discussed in chapter … of this volume. Endogenous Development (ED) is defined as 'development from within, based mainly, though not exclusively, on locally available resources, values, institutions and knowledge'. Indigenous knowledge (IK) and indigenous institutions are recognized as essential in the sustaining development initiatives. There are many failed projects in developing countries designed based on the top-down perspective to warn development practitioners to rethink theories and modus operandi.

The rest of the chapter is divided into three pars. The next section presents the methodology employed for the study. This is followed by an analysis of the types, functions and linkages of the different indigenous institutions (IIs) found in Northern Ghana. The gender presentation of these institutions is recognized as either supporting or being a hindrance to female empowerment. We conclude the chapter with a discussion on the role of IIs in local leadership development, in local governance and in general local level development.

## Methodology- Community Institutional Mapping (CIM)[iii]

The CIM methodology was adopted in this study. It is essentially a participatory baseline study on community based institutions and organizations. In the first phase of the study process, community institutional mapping exercises were conducted in eight sampled communities. These communities are well spread out over Northern Ghana and include Kalbeo, Bowko, Tanchara, Kpembe, Tangsia, Nangodi/Sakote, Wulugu and Nalerigu. Drawing predominantly on a qualitative research approach, a comprehensive checklist was prepared and administered in each of the eight communities to opinion leaders and community based groups in the form of interviews. The outcome has therefore, been the collection of qualitative data on indigenous institutions and community based organizations which were further subjected to cross validation. The second phase of the process then entailed a synthesis and collation of the community reports, the outcomes of which are reported here.

## Indigenous Institutions and Organizations

As already mentioned, IIs provide important platforms for engaging communities of people for their development. However, conventional development has traditionally sought to marginalize these institutions preferring to introduce new structures such as co-operatives, water committees and village development committees based on formal organizational rules. And so development practitioners are largely unaware of the types and dynamics of IIs as they operate at the community level. Externally imposed committees have often failed because they tend not to appreciate community political, social and economic organization and lack credibility in the eyes of the people they purport to serve (Kendie and Abane, 2001). The next sections provide information of the types of IIs, their functions and linkages to demonstrate to intricate web of structures thet exist.

### *Male Traditional Leaders*

The chieftaincy institution is the most celebrated traditional institution in northern Ghana. The chief as traditional political leader of his or her community is variously called among different ethnic groups in northern Ghana. The chief for instance is called ‘Naa’ among the Dagaaba, ‘Kuoro’ among the Sissala, ‘Naaba’ among the Frafra, ‘Naab’ among the Kusasis and Mamprusis, Naa among the Dagombas and Wura among the Gonjas.

### *Female Traditional Leaders*

The chieftaincy institution is a predominantly male dominated institution. Most chiefs are males but in rare instances there are few female chiefs. The female chief, a rather rare type of office holder in traditional circles, may either be the chief for the community in some cases or in other cases, co-exists with a male chief. Examples of female chiefs are the Sigbun Wuriche and Lepo Wuriche both in Kpembe Traditional Area in the Northern Region. In other instances such as in Tanchara, there is a female chief, ‘Poge Naa’ who co-exists with the community chief. The ‘Magazia’ is yet another important type of

indigenous women's leader in northern Ghana particularly in communities where there is a considerable Muslim population. The 'Magazia' may derive her power from the chief. For example the 'Magazia' in Kalbeo derives her power from the chief and constituents of women and religious leaders based on her credibility in character, deeds, resourcefulness, ability to lead and social affluence.

As a chief, power in the exercise of traditional authority is basically derived through "ascription" but the community must sanction inheritance and enthronement of the skin. For instance, ascription to the skin requires that the paramount chief in collaboration with the 'Tindaana', (Custodian of the Land and Spiritual Leader) preside over the succession and "enthronement" processes. This is a prerequisite and basis for the legal and social approval of the chief's authority to rule in the community. Irrespective of whether a chief is male or female, they generally hold equal power and authority except in cases where a female chief co-exists in the community with a male chief. In such instances, the female chief derives her authority from the community chief who often installs and enthrones her in collaboration with other traditional office holders. In January 2007 for instance, the Loho 'Naa' (male chief of Loho village) in the Upper West Region enthroned a "Poge Naa" (women's leader or chief) for his community. In such instances, the female chief is responsible to the community chief who derives his authority from the people he rules over. According to Gyekye (1996), the authority of the chief usually derives, functionally, from the people so that there is often a close relationship between the ruler and the ruled in matters of the exercise of political power. Although the people do not often directly choose their rulers, many African sayings lend credence to their closeness to chiefs. The Ndebele of Zimbabwe have a popular saying that: "The king is the people; to respect the king is to respect oneself; he who despises our king despises us; he who praises our king, also praises us" (Gyekye, 1996:110).

*Social Mobilization Institutions*

Singing and dancing groups constitute part of the cultural heritage of the people of Northern Ghana. In Bowko for instance, there are two traditional singing and dancing groups: the "Jongu" dancers, who are mostly women. The men play the drums whiles the women do the dancing. The other group comprises both men and women who dance the "Simpa", "Damba" and "Tohowaa" dances. In Tanchara, a number of music and dancing groups exist. These include the "Doro" and "Bag-bine" groups, drumming and xylophonist groups, the latter locally known as "Gobr"; and praise singers groups. All these groups perform at various social functions such as during festivities, funerals.

Findings from the study reveal that there are youth groups and associations in the study communities that have existed for a long time. One prominent type of youth group includes area or community development associations. Membership of these types of associations is often area or community wide. In some instances, clan groups come together to form such development associations such as in the case of the "Kalbeo Youth Association" in Kalbeo. Eight clan groups from eight sections of the community have come together to form this association. In Tanchara, such groups include 'Tanchara Pole" and Tanchara Youth and Development Association (TYDA).

*Social Control institutions*

The 'Tindaana', literally meaning the 'custodian of the land' is probably the oldest traditional institution in northern Ghana and predates colonialism. Just as the chief is variously called among different ethnic groups, so do different ethnic groups variously call the custodian of the land. He or she is called the 'Tindaana' or 'Tingansob" among the Dagaaba, and the "tortina" among the Sissala. The 'Tindaana' is the spiritual leader of the community who holds the most important economic asset – land - in trust for the people. Prior to the institution of chiefs in most communities of northern Ghana by the colonial authorities, the institution of 'Tindaana' existed. This institution provided both spiritual and organizational leadership for most communities.

The "Tindanpogo" refers to the female 'Tindana', another rare variation in the institution of the 'Tindaana'. In situations where there is a female 'Tindaana', she co-exists with her male counterpart and jointly holds land in trust for the people. It is reported that the "Tindanpogo" holds equal powers as her male counterpart but does not participate in sacrifices in which the chief is part of the team. She may work hand in hand with the "Tindana" on all matters relating to land and land resources including sacrifices. It is notable to observe that the concept of "Tindanpogo" in traditional institutions is rather limited to the East and West Mamprusi Districts of Northern Ghana. This may perhaps be related to the fact that Mamprusi has a long tradition of centralized political organization in Northern Ghana, most societies being a-cephalous until the advent of slave raiding and colonial rule, which forced centralized organization.

*Institutions for economic development*

Hunter groups were identified as one category of key economic activity groups. Individuals as well as groups do hunting. A group of hunters interviewed, indicated that stringent traditional rules were observed in the past. Hunting in Kalbeo for instance was done only after the 'Tindaana' and the chief of Pusu-Naba had performed rituals to lift ban on burning. Thereafter, hunters start to hunt for wild life by tying a piece of string with cotton on a lizard and allowing it to run into the bush. This ceremony is performed by the chief and referred to as "Akansogu". Interviews with youth groups also revealed the waning interest in hunting. Group hunting has been a major challenge in the communities as far as bushfires are concern. It has been the main source of bushfires in northern Ghana to the extent that traditional authorities are considering enacting additional community by-laws and to enforce existing ones to check group hunting. It should be noted that, hunting was not only meant for meat, but symbolized prestige and demonstration of bravery and manhood. The number of animal horns displayed exhibits a man's greatness. Recent creation of game reserves limit opportunities for the hunt. Outside the game reserves, however, the ban on hunting is imposed only during the breeding period. The numbers of hunters are reducing not only due to these developments, but more importantly because young men are going to school and seeking formal sector jobs.

Women and men groups exist in each of the study communities, with a predominance of women groups. In Tanchara examples of women groups include "Matara Womens's group, Suntaa-Nuntaa Group, and Kpangyangna women's group. These women groups evolved from within the communities but in some instances their formations have been supported by external facilitating agencies. The formations of these groups are usually dual – social protection and solidarity and economic production.

Another category of community based indigenous organizations are labour pooling groups for farming. The male youth usually form such groups, in order to pool their labour in support of each others farming activities. Such groups are called "Asongtaaba groups" literally meaning "help one another" among the Dagaaba of North-western Ghana. These groups reportedly number about fifteen in Kalbeo with the number of group members ranging between 5 and 15. Their activities are seasonal - functioning during the farming season (usually from May-October). These are traditional self-help groups, mostly age sets that exist in all rural communities in Ghana. They are generally called *nnoboa* in southern Ghana. In northern Ghana, each tribe has a name for such groups.

**Indigenous Institutions and Organizations – Structure and Functions**

Indigenous institutions and organizations evolved their own internal management structures over time and play specialized roles in community development. While the evolution of culturally related groups such as kinship, singing and dancing groups are closely linked to the preservation of culture, and reflects the inbuilt specializations among social groups, social groups such as women and youth groups turn to have general orientation towards community development in most communities of northern Ghana.
The typical structure of traditional political systems in Northern Ghana is a decentralized structure that embodies and stipulates a hierarchical order of office holdings and associated responsibilities. At the apex of the structure is often the paramount chief who is supreme over all other chiefs in the area, considered paramountcy, which in most cases coincide with what are known as traditional council areas in official circles. The second level of authority constitutes Divisional Chief office holders, who have under them sectional heads/sub-chiefs and household heads. Under this structure, chiefs and heads at lower levels of the hierarchy pay allegiance to chiefs at the next higher level. Drawing from the findings for example, the sub-chiefs usually accompany their Divisional chiefs to the Kpembewura's Palace (Paramount Chief of the Gonjas) on Mondays and Fridays to pay homage to him as a way of showing loyalty and allegiance.

Each level on the hierarchy of chiefs (paramount, divisional, and sectional) are assisted by a council of elders in decision-making and governance of their respective areas of jurisdictions. The council members, at the highest levels (paramount and divisional levels) often comprise of a very important office holder "the Tindaana" (Custodian of Land), and the divisional and sectional chiefs in the case of a Paramountcy, and the sectional chiefs in the case of a Division. Even at the levels of sectional chiefs or heads, they often have their council of elders who basically constitute the landlords of various Compounds (head of all households within the Compound).

*Roles and Functions of Male Headed Traditional Authorities*

From the findings it can generally be summarized that the following are the functions of the male headed traditional Authorities: :

- Decision making on matters relating to community development
- Make and enforce rules in the community.
- Provide traditional judicial services.
- Conflict resolution and settlement of disputes (The chief and elders – clan heads – constitute the court of adjudication which is open to the public. Cases are heard in public and judgment must be agreed upon by the chief and the elders and endorsed by the people in court at each occasion)
- Perform funerals of burnt sacred groves particularly the 'Tindaana'
- Custodians of land and land resources particularly the 'Tindaana'
- Call community meetings to discuss development issues
- Supervise and monitor community development initiatives
- Protect and maintain cultural norms and values – watchdogs on anti-social behaviors in their sections
- Oversee mobilization of community resources – e.g. development levies

*Roles and Functions of Female Chief-Poge Naa and Tindanpogo*

The females in various traditional authority roles perform the following:

- Organize and supervise women to undertake communal works
- Call meetings to discuss and advice on women roles in community development
- Organize women into activity groups' to undertake small-scale agro-processing activities – eg. Weaving and shea-butter extraction,
- Support organization of festivals in terms of food preparation as in the case of Kpembe community in the Northern region of Ghana
- Offer advice to their male counterparts on traditional matters, e.g. enskinment and settlements of disputes in the case of Kpembe

**Traditional Institutions and development**

Clan and kinship, singing and dancing groups and hunters are closely culturally related indigenous institutions. These institutions turn to have common internal structures. Clans turn to be a network of kinship and families that transcend community boundaries. Membership to clan and kinship groups is exclusively by birth. One born into a particular clan group automatically belongs to the clan, which might have special talent in a particular aspect of culture. In this respect, certain clan groups in the evolution of culture have assumed certain responsibilities and roles accordingly – singing and dancing, drumming and xylophone playing and hunting. It is worth noting that in contemporary times, people who have the interest in participating in any of these cultural activities are often admitted into the groups, but leadership rights are often reserved for the clans that have special talents in the particular activity in question. Clan leadership positions are life long. It is the old who assume the leadership of clans and such positions are held for life.

In respect of roles in development, clans first and foremost become focal institutions for uniting clan members – families - and promoting a sense of belonging among people in rural communities. In order to sustain this, the common cultural attributes of clans are preserved as part of their ancestral heritage – and this a major obligation of clan leaders. Aside the internal dynamics of clans, clans are open institutions and relate to other clans on a social and cultural basis. For instance there are kinship ties between different clan groupings in some parts of northern Ghana. This is very common among the Dagaaba speaking people. As earlier stated, clans also turn to have various specializations as part of the culture and as part of their contribution to community development.

For instance, clans may specialize and provide leadership in music and hunting. For music related clans, they exhibit outstanding skills in singing and dancing, instrument playing – e.g. Xylophonists, and thereby emerge naturally as leaders. Similarly, hunting related clans exhibit superior skills in hunting and therefore, emerge as leaders in the trade. The essence of hunting is not only game which provides meat for meeting the nutrition needs of people, but these clans most often are the warriors who provide leadership to their communities in the event of external aggression and defense. The presence of such clans promotes sense of security among communities. For singing, dancing and music instrument playing groups, their major function is to play music but for varied purposes. These reasons include entertainment, education, evaluation of the years' activities, praises and criticism of achievers and wrong doers respectively, documentation of events and facts and performance during social functions (marriage ceremonies, festivals and funerals). Through the power of music, music and dancing groups are able to mobilize the youth and act as agents of social change and control. Given this overview, it is clear that clans provide the leadership for recruitment and training in the socialization process. They preserve customs and traditions by ensuring that there is recruitment and training of new members and that they perform during social and cultural functions

The basis of formation of social groups is usually for reasons of unity and social cohesion – for community development. Depending on the nature of the social groups, they also nurture economic interests and objectives as a means to advancing social objectives. This is particularly true for women groups and 'kotaa' (labour pooling groups). With the exception of 'kotaa' groups, these types of indigenous organizations are typically managed by management committees or executives that occupy democratically electoral positions or in some cases appointments by consensus. However, appointments by consensus are often an option only after consideration of the benefits that can be derived from involvement of such persons.

Some distinctions in the nature of these organizations are however worth noting. The membership of youth associations is characteristically natives residing from within the community and those who have migrated to distant places for employment. The migrant members because of their affluence and ability to raise more funds for the organization usually drive the operations of these youth associations. At the group level, women groups often have their leadership structure as represented by their executive

management bodies - an element of modernization and adaptation that enables them to establish linkages with external development agencies. In instances where the traditional women's leader, or 'magazia', is a member of a women's group, she often chairs the executive body or at least is a member of the executive body but this usually has the tendency to draw all women into that particular women's group so that there are no competing women groups in the community. In some instances, women groups co-opt a man into the executive body – but this must be for varying reasons ranging from the provision of secretarial services, winning the confidence of their husbands in their activities to enhancing the maintenance of group cohesion. For women groups, members are often community based. For 'kotaa' groups, members are usually peers and may range in size from 5 to 7 members. Seniority in age is important for assuming a leadership position. 'Kotaa' groups are not formal as youth and women groups are. So they often have a loose leadership structure but one that effectively works on the basis of social solidarity for advancing the social and economic interest of members.

The developmental roles of these indigenous organizations are numerous. Youth associations are essentially social organizations and usually pursue social development objectives - they rarely have economic objectives. The formation of these youth associations often emanates from the recognition among the youth to take up challenges that will bring about development of the entire community. Reportedly, these associations generally meet only on festive occasions such as Christmas, New Year and festivals to discuss development issues and plan the way forward. These associations are involved in various developmental activities in the community. Some of the activities undertaken by these associations among others include: the protection of natural resources in the community i.e. water bodies, economic trees against bushfires, anti-bushfire watchdogs, protection of crops by ensuring that all animals are quarantined during the rainy season, construction of social infrastructure (schools and health facilities) and feeder roads. Women groups are engaged in self-help projects in the communities and also support group members through granting of soft loans from group resources or acting as a medium for the disbursement of credit from external agencies in support of individual members varied economic activities. These economic activities generally include shea butter processing, pito (traditional drink) brewing, dawadawa spice processing, weaving of mats and baskets, petty trading, livestock and poultry, crop farming and fuel wood collection. They also organize themselves to provide communal or group labour in farming related activities- sowing and harvesting on their husbands farms, construction, rehabilitation and plastering of houses in the off-season. 'Kotaa' groups assist individual members by pooling labour to assist each other to carry out farm work and construction related works. These groups seek to benefit from the principle of synergy by pooling labour for economic production.

**Institutional and Organizational Linkages - Scope and Mechanisms**

The findings of the study show that a number of institutional linkages exist among the indigenous community based institutions/organizations, and between them and non-indigenous organizations. Working relationships between the different hierarchies of

traditional authorities in the study communities is generally cordial. The relationship is one of loyalty and obedience on governance and spiritual related issues evidenced in the system of loyalty to the Kpembewura (Paramount Chief of Gonja) discussed earlier. It is however worthy of noting that Northern Ghana has its fair share of chieftaincy disputes and in such instances, such cordiality as described takes a back seat. It was also observed that links exist between traditional authorities and other community based institutions and organizations. The reason being that, some traditional office holders particularly sub-chiefs, youth leaders or women traditional leaders are often members of community based institutions and organizations. Although such kinds of linkages accordingly provide a window for considering views of traditional authorities in community development initiatives, one can not draw a conclusion that there exists a working relationship between traditional authorities and community based organizations given the absence of any institutional arrangements.

In-spite of the fact that district assembly sub-structures are supposed to function as instruments for facilitating community participation in local governance and development, it is reported that community based organizations in Bowko for instance did not seem to have any working relationship with the assemblyman and unit committee at the institutional level[iv]. Whatever the circumstances, it is only prudent that unit committees, in their effort at community development, collaborate with community based organizations that are already playing vital roles in community development and vice versa. From the study, it appears that the level of coordination between the IIs and the formal government institutions is low such that duplication exists in terms of projects implemented in the communities. This phenomenon leads to mismanagement, duplication of projects, unhealthy competition and rivalry in community development. This problem should not be viewed in isolation but in the context of emerging problems in the implementation of the decentralization policy.

The findings further show that some community based organizations and communities have developed collaborative and cordial working relationships with non-governmental organizations and government agencies. The report on Bowko documents that, community based organizations have developed links with external development agencies and service providers such as Banks, Social Investment Fund, Village Infrastructure Project, CARE International and PAS-L. In the Bowko report, reference is further made to CRS and Breast Feeding Mothers Club collaboration through which, support and care is given to pregnant and lactating mothers. In the light of current participatory development approaches, the interactions between most community based organizations and non-governmental organizations is mostly informal so that there are no rigid contractual agreements governing collaborative linkages. It is noteworthy that although this is a significant achievement, the development agencies themselves have often been instrumental in developing these links as a mechanism to utilizing the group approach to development intervention. This raises a capacity question on the capability of community-based organizations to negotiate and develop working links with non-indigenous and more formal organizations such as government agencies and non-governmental organizations.

## Implications for Local Governance

This section discusses the implications of the findings for local governance and community development. The discussion centers on a number of emerging issues and themes arising from the analysis. In order that indigenous institutions can be viable to enhance local governance, there is a need for reforms that will make their operations more effective and transparent so as to fit into the present democratic dispensation.

*Democratization – Broad-based Participation in Decision-Making*

Broad-based participation in decision-making must be a guiding principle in the chieftaincy institution in Northern Ghana. The chieftaincy institution already has a decentralized structure so that drawing on the strengths of this structure; more people can be involved in decision-making processes. This is particularly, important as the power of the chief derives from the people. It therefore stands to reason that while decision-making was predominantly at the level of the chief and council of elders, the new orientation should enable participation of sections of the population, particularly, women and the youth who for cultural and social reasons will always take back bencher positions in decision-making processes in which elders are involved. However, decision- making on traditional, spiritual and defense matters must be the preserve of the councils of elders on the grounds that most Northern communities are patriarchal in nature.

In-roads have already been made towards further democratization in the traditional political systems in Northern Ghana; but what is now required is its institutionalization – recognition and consolidation of the participation of women and the youth in decision making concerning community development within the framework of the traditional political system. Decision making within community-based organizations is already broad based in nature often involving executives convening meetings with members of the organizations. The focus of institutional development policy should be the consolidation of the process.

*Leadership Development*

The leadership situation among indigenous institutions and organizations points to two critical capacity concerns. These are chieftaincy succession problems and the lack of or low formal education levels of community based leaders. The numerous chieftaincy succession problems emanate from the lack of a well-documented and streamlined system of succession. The policy direction for institutional development points to an urgent need to develop a reliable documentation system of succession rights for traditional political systems, which draws on a combination of hereditary rights and electoral procedures. While the issue of documentation particularly applies to the former, the latter equally requires documentation for future references. Lack of documentation on these issues has led to the many cases of chieftaincy disputes in Ghana. Many conflicts have occurred and lives and property lost as a result of non-royals suddenly claiming royalty and insisting on becoming chief when vacancies occur largely because there are no documents on lines of succession in many communities in Ghana.

As pointed out earlier, one critical issue is the low educational backgrounds of leaders of community based institutions and organizations implying the need for training central for leadership capacity building. Although formal education exclusively is not a criterion for assessing capacity for good leadership, there are numerous advantages and benefits that can be derived from having leaders who have attained some levels of formal education. In instances where leaders of community based organizations lack some level of education, be it formal or informal, it is plausible to believe that there is always a social gap between such organizations and formal institutions that are purposefully established to support the former. Consequentially, this adversely affects the development of an effective working relationship, to the disadvantage of community based institutions and organizations. This scenario therefore, calls for a kind of bridge-in through informal education and functional literacy for leaders of community based organizations, including traditional leaders. The subject areas for training that are critical for guiding institutional development policy include group dynamics and conflict resolution, resource mobilization, planning, information management, negotiating skills, knowledge of the development policy framework and possible sources of development support. The acquisition of these skills and knowledge, can better prepare community-based institutions and organizations to link – up with relevant development agencies, so as to position them to explore the benefits of resource support from development agencies.

***Developing a Reliable Accountability System***

*Institutionalizing Accountability*

The increased need and role of traditional authorities in community development processes implies that more of community resources will have to be managed by traditional authorities. This poses a challenge to the present accountability system, which is not reliable, and stable enough to enable people have confidence in the system. The process of strengthening the accountability system can explore two levels. Inbuilt system within the traditional political authority structure such as in the case of the Maasu, in which the structure allows for exchequer office holders to serve as checks and prevention of abuse of power by traditional leaders. This system however, has a very limited application in Northern Ghana. In considering the success story of the “Tindaana” in ensuring that traditional authorities conform with culturally and prescribed spiritual norms of the communities in matters relating to land, it is also possible for this office, with the relevant training to play the role of ‘internal auditor’ to the chief and the traditional council. The experience of “Tindaana” indicates that there are bright prospects that such an initiative can succeed. For now most traditional authorities in Northern Ghana are not managing any substantial community based resources comparable to the scale in southern Ghana. With any increased mobilization of resources for community development, it is plausible to believe that given the qualities of individuals that are considered before chieftaincy is bestowed on one, chiefs will embrace a mechanism of transparent management and auditing of the use of community resources – as this will enable them do away with unfounded speculations and maintain the fame among chiefs.

The other policy option will be to explore the potential role of the Council of Elders. In the present traditional political system, the Council of Elders basically plays an advisory and supportive role to the chief in his exercise of traditional leadership. In the light of this, can the Council of Elders play an effective role in serving as a check in the exercise of traditional leadership particularly, in a system when council members are either sub-chiefs or elders and should pay allegiance to the chief under whom they serve? Although this remains an option, its feasibility will require that, it is linked to developing a regular and institutionalized community forum for relating information on resource management to communities and also to provide opportunities for people to seek clarifications as a means to building a transparent system of local governance.

*Leadership - Appointment and Replacement*

Ascription to traditional leadership positions border to a very large extent on hereditary rights that may in some instances be combined with electoral processes in the event that a number of prospective candidates show up. The policy direction here should not be to change the system of appointments as that will be at variance with tradition and has the potential for generating conflict situations. Nonetheless, traditional systems always outline offences and associated sanctions that go with such offences – so that this provides a window for strengthening the system of checks on traditional authority for prevention of abuse. This requires that inbuilt institutional structures are strengthened to get the mechanism working but this can benefit enormously from linking up with national or regional chieftaincy institutions such as the Regional Houses of Chiefs. What roles can the regional Houses of Chiefs for instance, play to ensure that chiefs conduct themselves as expected of them? Is there any code of conduct governing the chieftaincy institution? Will the system ensure that chiefs who step out of bounds be sanctioned and in the worst case scenario, be stripped of their “skins” so that this can serve as deterrents to chiefs? What role can paramount chiefs play? Paramount chiefs must be supported and strengthened to over see good conduct of sub-chiefs. These questions point to focal points for possible interventions.

***Institutional linkages and co-ordination***

As traditional authorities and community based organizations that have an interest in promoting community development, their scope and mechanism of institutional linkages must take into consideration the existing legal, policy and institutional framework for development planning and management. The most desired institutional linkages ought to point to a network scenario, involving mutually supportive and collaborative working relationships between a wide range of development authorities, institutions and agencies. The following collaborative relations between development institutions and organizations are discernable from the existing framework:

- Collaboration between traditional authorities and community based organizations;
- Collaboration between district assemblies (sub-structures) on the one hand, and traditional authorities and community based organizations on the other hand;
- Collaboration between community based organizations themselves in development efforts;
- Collaboration between the traditional authorities and community based organizations on the one hand, and non-governmental organizations on the other.

Particular reference is made of the Unit Committee members and assembly-persons neglecting traditional authorities in some of their development activities. In the light that district assembly sub-structures have a responsibility for facilitating community participation in local governance and development, non involvement of traditional authorities and community based organizations can have a number of adverse implications- generating conflict between assembly persons and traditional authorities in a power struggle; duplication of development efforts; development efforts failing to utilize the resource base of community based organizations or render them non active in the development process. Given the contribution and potentials of traditional authorities and community based institutions and organizations, the policy direction must be to enhance increased community based co-ordination between development actors. Such an effort rather than being developed around personalities, ought to be institutionalized for its sustainability.

***Resource Mobilization***

The findings show that community based organizations certainly have a low financial resource base. This is a development constraint to sustainability of the organization and implementation of their programmes. It is vital that any capacity building process incorporates financial capacity building. Such initiatives ought to explore mobilization of resources from both internal and external sources. In the domestic front, cooperation with traditional authorities and the local government sub-structures should be a guiding principle. There are a number of resourceful development agencies that community based organizations can seek support from. As already assessed, community based institutions and organizations need to firstly know which these organizations are, and secondly, how to lobby and negotiate on terms favorable and consistent with sustainable development principles. Given low educational orientations of community based leaders and the consequences of social gaps between community based organizations and external

development agencies, leadership development of community based organizations will be central to the success of such a resources mobilization drive.

**Conclusion**

In an era where endogenous development has become an attractive development policy option among policy makers and development practitioners, community institutional development is emerging as a sine qua non for strengthening the capacities of communities for self-initiated mobilization and development. In Northern Ghana, the chieftaincy institution or what is also known as the traditional political authority is pivotal as an indigenous institution for organizing local governance. Aside this, there are other indigenous institutions that can broadly be categorized into community based self-help groups and social and cultural groups that play complementary roles in community mobilization and development. Some of these groups, particularly social and cultural groups in some instances have specialized roles to play in the process of community development. However, these community based institutions and organizations in general do have challenges that hold back their full potential in contributing to the development process. These challenges and potentials impinge on institutional development, and need be given consideration in the formulation of institutional development policies and programmes.

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**End-Notes**

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[iii] This is a Culturally Sensitive and Participatory Approach to Community Entry and Diagnosis developed by CIKOD and its associates.

[iv] Ghana's local government system hinges on the District Assembly as the lowest level political set up for administration. There are currently 138 Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies (MMDAs) in Ghana. Each MMDA is composed of elected and appointed Assembly members. The Assembly provides the platform for deliberation on local development issues and is headed by a Chief Executive, appointed by the Head of State and approved by two-thirds of the Assembly members present and voting. Below the

Assembly are Area Councils and Unit Committees which provide avenues to discuss community development problems and source funding from the Assembly or other sources for implementation. Members to the Area Councils and unit Committees are also elected or appointed on the same basis as the MMDA.