Female Traditional Leaders (Queen Mothers) and Community Planning and Development in Ghana

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Abstract

Women play significant roles in the society and their involvement in community planning and development are well appreciated by many international bodies. This paper sought to explore the contribution of female traditional leaders (queen mothers) to community planning and

development which often tend to focus on their male counterparts (kings or chiefs). Twenty-five (25) queen mothers in the Akuapim North District in Ghana (study area) were selected for the study. As a cross-check and to get a true picture of the contribution of queen mothers, 125 residents in the area were also randomly selected for the study. Questionnaire and in-depth interview guide constituted the research instruments. In all, the queen mothers contribution centred on gender related issues in community planning and development such as provision of housing, education, healthcare, water, and transport networks. However, the activities of the queen mothers towards community planning and development were found to be limited by financial constraints. The paper concludes that there is a need to support and actively involve queen mothers in the planning and implementation of community development projects. Their rich experience and support can be harnessed and utilized to enhance sustainable community planning and development.

Keywords: Queen mothers, traditional leaders, community, planning, development, Ghana

1. Introduction

Active participation of women in planning and development of communities has been recognized as a key contribution to sustainable development of communities (Hassan & Silong, 2008). The UN Agenda 21 stressed on this and highlighted the need for women to be involved in all aspects of community development ranging from socio-economic to environmental issues. The need for women to be at the forefront of development is not as a result of their preponderance in the world's human population but because of the realization that for effective national development to be achieved, the entire human resource should be fully mobilized to participate actively as agents as well as beneficiaries of development. In the 21st century, the focus of town planning has been oriented to factor in the participation of women in the planning process so as to make planning an effective tool for governments and local authorities to achieve sustainable development at the national, regional and locals levels (UN Habitat, 2012). The World Bank (2005) recognize women's contribution to community planning and development as essential since their disengagement from the development process often stifles development in the society. In many developing countries, community development projects cover the provision of wide range of social amenities that most communities lack such as roads, school buildings, clinics, electricity, pipe-borne water, market centres and other social infrastructure (UN Habitat, 2012; Ozor & Nwankwo, 2008; Ajayi & Otuya, 2006). At the local level especially within rural communities, good leadership through local or traditional leaders helps to provide a successful community planning and development. According to Udensi et al. (2012), and Ozor and Nwankwo (2008), for a successful community planning and development to be achieved, community leaders or traditional leaders should be actively involved since they act as pioneers of development projects and also play an influential role to source funds for development projects and motivate the local people to participate in the development process.

In Ghana, female traditional leaders and for that matter queen mothers play significant roles in the traditional set up of the Akan society. According to Odotei and Awedoba (2006), the chieftaincy system which serves as the basis of traditional political system of the Akan

society is a medium for expression of social, political, religious and to some extent economic authority vested in chiefs, queen mothers, priests, religious practitioners and other traditional functionaries in Ghanaian communities. A queen mother in the Akan society in Ghana is recognized as the co-ruler in the traditional political system and has joint responsibility with the king or chief to run the affairs of their communities (Gibson, 2010). In times of a sudden death of a chief, the queen mother assumes full control of central authority to govern her community. The position of queen mothers makes them important agents in the planning and development of their communities. In the field of development studies, it has long been recognized that traditional institutions have a lot to contribute to the development of the society. This acknowledgement has led to an exploration of the roles played by traditional leaders in the development process. However, most of the efforts to explore the roles of traditional leaders to community planning and development often focus on male traditional leaders who are kings or chiefs to the neglect of their female counterparts (queen mothers). For example, in Ghana, the promotion of educational development programmes by the Ashanti King (Otumfuo Osei Tutu II), environmental conservation and climate change programme and projects by "Okyehene" (Osagyefo Amoatia Ofori Panin), and value added agricultural production and processing programmes by "Juabenhene" (Centre for Indigenous Knowledge and Organisational Development, 2010) highlights the contribution of chiefs to community planning and development with no account on the contribution of queen mothers.

The role of the female traditional leaders (queen mothers) in community planning and development has not been given much attention. The female traditional leaders are mostly an addendum to discussions which are mainly male dominated. The few works which seek to explore the role of female traditional leaders in Africa have also concentrated on issues such as their participation in the national government system and gender issues (Bari, 2005; Gyimah & Thompson, 2008). There is therefore a knowledge gap on the activities of female traditional leaders towards community planning and development as their activities are overshadowed by their male counterparts. This paper is an effort to bridge this knowledge gap by exploring the contribution of female traditional leaders specifically queen mothers to community planning and development in Ghana using the Akuapim North District as a case study. The contribution of this paper is that it helps to expand the existing knowledge base on community planning and development by way of highlighting the various ways that queen mothers contribute to the development of their communities. It also draws attention to the crucial roles played by queen mothers to enhance the well-being of their communities aside their cultural or traditional roles.

2. Community Development, Planning and Women Leadership

The term "community" is often used broadly in different contexts to mean different things. For example, it is used in geographical context to denote a group of people in one geographical area or region. Sometimes too it is used to refer to units of social organizations such as community associations, workers in an organization, and cultural groups having one religion or faith (Rao, 2012). Development on the other hand has been variously defined by different scholars. Ponsioen (1968) defined development as a multidimensional concept comprising economic, social and political dimensions. He further sees development as a

policy-guided phenomenon with the government machinery as the main development agent. Seers (1969) believe that development occurs when there is decline in poverty, unemployment and inequality over a period of time. Amartya Sen, a Nobel Prize winner on the other hand sees development not to only focus on economic indicators such as Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and per capita income but include matters of human freedom. He described development as achievement of human freedom and abolishment of "unfreedoms" such as poverty, famine, lack of political rights, poor economic opportunities, systematic social deprivation, and neglect of public facilities (Sen, 1999). The human freedom was used by Sen (1999) to cover issues such as political freedom, social facilities, economic opportunities and protective security. The varied views expressed on the two terminologies "community" and "development" makes the meaning of community development a contested one. However, one of the widely accepted definitions of community development put forward by the United States International Cooperation in 1956 described community development as a process where members of a given community combine their efforts to plan and take actions to address problems facing their community. In furtherance to the above definition, the United Nations (1975) conceptualized community development to mean a process whereby combine efforts of community members, supported by efforts of national governments and non-governmental organizations provide economic, social, and cultural development in communities (Hassan & Silong, 2008). A comprehensive definition by Maimunah Ismail as cited in Rao (2012: 198) defined community development as:

a process of community activities that are planned and organized in such a way so as to raise the quality of life in the community in terms of economy, social, culture, spiritual and the environment through initiatives and active participation of the community members and with minimum outside help.

The various conceptualizations of community development are anchored on members of a given community spear-heading development activities with or without external support to improve the living condition in the community.

Gender and development issues represent an important subject in community or town planning. This is because the involvement of women helps to address some components of community planning which are gender responsive such as mixed land-use, accessibility, mobility, safety and security, distribution of services, community buildings and infrastructure, housing, water and sanitation, land tenure, livelihoods, employment and transport (UN Habitat, 2012; Malaza et al., 2009). In community planning, Gallent and Robinson (2012) view communities as networks of social change and it is through these networks that community action is realized. Community actions are therefore achieved through committed efforts by community leaders which play a major role in catalysing interest around planning, development and broader social services. This makes leaders in communities' vital agents for community planning and development as they help in mobilizing community members and often takes lead in development projects initiated in their area. Community leaders' views, concerns and assistance are often sought on all matters revolving around the well-being of their communities. According to Growe and Montgomery (2000), leaders provide vision and embody the ideals toward which communities or organization strives. Different forms of

leadership have been identified. Transactional leadership focuses on interactions between the leader and followers with rapports established through exchanges such as rewards system for meeting particular objectives or goals (Buns, 2010). Transformational leadership on the other hand concerns itself with charismatic and visionary individuals who lead, motivate their followers in several ways and stimulate others to produce exceptional work (Lai, 2011; Burns, 2010).

Studies on leadership have come out with different traits and qualities that female leaders possess. For example, cross-cultural studies on female leaders in Norway, Sweden, Australia, USA and Malaysia found female leaders to more likely focus on facilitating interaction than male leaders (Salim, 2007; Esa, 2007; Gibson, 1995). Female leaders have also been observed to exhibit leadership styles such as supporting a more participatory approach to development, more democratic, allow for power and information sharing, sensitive, more nurturing than men, focus on relationships and enable others to make contributions through delegation (De la Rey, 2005; Growe & Montgomery, 2000; Tedrow & Rhoads, 1999). Tedrow and Rhoads (1999) noted that female leaders are better in conflict management, have better listening skills, and show more tolerance and empathy in their activities. They also advance individual and community development initiatives, and build coalitions in their relational styles. A study by Hassan and Silong (2008) concluded that female leaders normally practise leadership styles such as shared, participatory, collective, collaborative, cooperative, democratic, fluid and connective leaderships. At the core of this style of leadership are practising stewardship and service, supporting relationships, empowerment, and commitment to individual development. Despite the unique ways that female traditional leaders go about their activities some challenges have been observed to serve as barriers to their leadership roles in community planning and development. Udensi et al. (2012) and Hassan and Silong (2008) pointed out some of these challenges to include financial constraints, resistance from community members, difficulties in balancing their role as women and leaders, and non-involvement in the planning process. Other challenges found to affect local or traditional leaders such as female traditional leaders in the area of community development and planning are incompatible government policies or programmes with community programmes, gender discrimination, illiteracy or low educational qualifications, political interference of activities, lack of cooperation among stakeholders, and poor communication structures (Ozor & Nwankwo, 2008).

3. Materials and Methods

The study centred on Akuapim North District which is located in the south-eastern part of the Eastern Region of Ghana. It is about 58km from Accra, the capital city of Ghana. The Akuapim North District shares boundaries to the northeast with Yilo Krobo, north with New Juaben Municipal, southeast with Dangme West, southwest with Akuapim South Municipal, and in the west with the Suhum-Kraboa-Coaltar District. The district covers a land area of about 450 sq. km representing 2.3 percent of the total area of Eastern Region of Ghana. The Akuapim North District has about 230 settlements with Akropong being its capital (Ghanadistricts.com, 2006a). It has a total human population of 136,483 (Ghana Statistical Service, 2012).The district boast of several infrastructural development projects. For example,

the district is endowed with first class road networks in the "big towns" especially "Akropong" which is its capital whilst in the smaller towns most of the roads are not in the best of conditions. There are about 253 schools in the Akuapim North District with about 66 of them been nursery or kindergarten schools, 112 primary schools, 60 junior high schools, and 10 senior high schools. Besides, there is a training college and three special schools - school for the blind, secondary/technical school for the deaf and demonstration primary/junior secondary school for the deaf. The Tetteh Quarshie Memorial Hospital which accommodates large number of patients is located in the district. The district also has five health centres, two community clinics, and five maternal and child health clinics. Basic infrastructure such as electricity, pipe-borne water and access roads are widely available in the district. Commercial banking institutions operate a wide range of financial intermediary services in the district (Ghanadistricts.com, 2006b). Markets of different sizes and varieties abound in the district. The district has locational advantages because of its proximity to Accra and Koforidua. The "Adawso" and "Asenema" markets are the dominant markets in the area. This high level of infrastructural developments in the Akwapim North District made it an ideal place for the study so as to explore the contribution of female traditional leaders (queen mothers) to the development of these projects and many others in the district.

The study was based on descriptive research design which Neuman (2003) described as representing a picture of the specific details of a situation, social setting or relationship. Descriptive designs are employed to gain more information about a particular feature within a particular field of study. The process involves gathering data that describe events, organizing, tabulating, depicting, and describing the data collected. Descriptive design allows the use of visual aids such as graphs and charts to aid the reader in understanding the data distribution (Krathwohl, 2009, Association for Educational Communications and Technology, 2003). Information obtained from the Akuapim North Traditional Council indicated that there are 25 queen mothers in the area. Based on the focus of the paper, all the 25 queen mothers were involved in the study. To collate different views about the contribution of queen mothers in development activities of the Akuapim North District, a sample of the residents in the district were also selected. Using Fisher et al. (1998) sample size formula which took into consideration the total number people in the district, 125 residents were randomly selected for the study. In all, 150 respondents were utilized. Questionnaires constituted the main research instrument for data collection. However, some in-depth interviews were also conducted on the queen mothers to probe further some major issues that emerged from the study. The Statistical Product and Service Solutions software (SPSS version 16) was employed to process the questionnaires. In line with the principles of descriptive research design, summations, averages, tables and charts were used to present the results.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Profile of the Queen Mothers

This was done to help identify the socio-demographic characteristics of the queen mothers since it has been observed that these characteristics influence one's contribution in the society. Key socio-demographic characteristics covered in the study were age, educational

background, and number of years spent on their thrones as queen mothers.

4.1.1 Age of the queen mothers

Age is an important indicator which is emphasized in considering employment opportunities and certain positions in the society. Whilst some job opportunities or positions give preference to young and energetic individuals, other positions prefer elderly individuals because of maturity, experience, and advisory reasons. Out of the 25 queen mothers who were involved in the study, majority (52%) were between the ages of 50- 59 years. It was followed by those within the 40 – 49 age bracket with those between 30 – 39 years bracket been the least (4%). Table 1 shows the age distribution of the queen mothers.

Table 1. Age distribution of the queen mothers

Age (years)	Frequency	Percent
30 – 39	1	4
40 – 49	5	20
50 -59	13	52
60 – 69	4	16
70 and above	2	8
Total	25	100

Source: Fieldwork, 2011

The ages of the queen mothers ranged from 38 years to 76years. The mean age was 53 years implying that most of the queen mothers were elderly people. This finding is due to the fact that in the Akan traditional set-up, preference is normally given to the elderly when choosing someone to occupy the position of a queen mother. This is because this position is highly respected and prestigious in the traditional political system and as such the responsibilities attached to it such as taking vital decisions to enhance quality of life in the community, makes mature women the preferred choice.

4.1.2 Educational Background

The level of education has also become one criterion that king- makers or elders of the royal family take into account when selecting a prospective chief, queen mother and other individuals for various positions in the African society. This is because high educational background often helps one to have much exposure and well abreast with various issues affecting his or her community and hence contribute in diverse ways to address those issues. More than half (52%) of the queen mothers in the study area had attained basic level education (Figure 1).
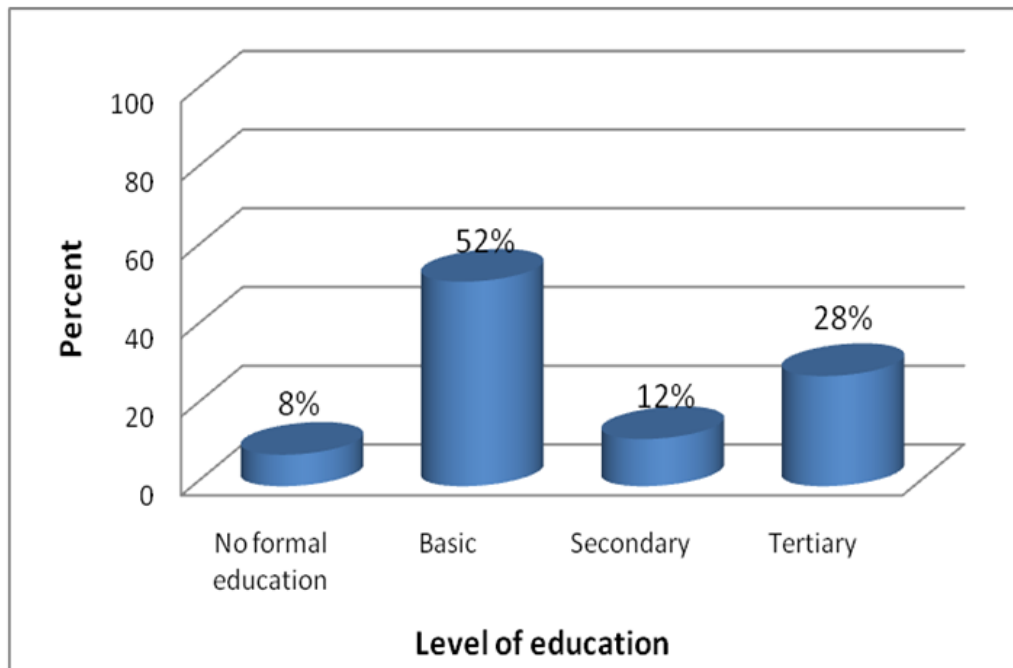
Figure 1. Level of education of the queen mothers

Source: Fieldwork, 2012

Next to basic education was tertiary education; about 28 percent of the queen mothers had tertiary education. The least was those with no formal education (8%). Overall, the level of education of the queen mothers was found to be low with only a few of them haven pursed their education beyond the basic level. This supports the 2008 Ghana Living Standard Survey (GLSS) report, which revealed that basic education is the highest educational level that most Ghanaians have obtained.

4.1.3 Number of years served as queen mothers

In the Akan society and similar societies in Ghana and Africa, the position of a queen mother is a monarchy that one occupies until she dies or misconducts herself before a different person is selected to occupy such a position. In view of this, most queen mothers occupy their positions for a long time. The findings of the study revealed that the majority of the queen mothers have served for quite a long time. Nearly half of the queen mothers (48%) have occupied their thrones for between 11-15 years (Figure 2).
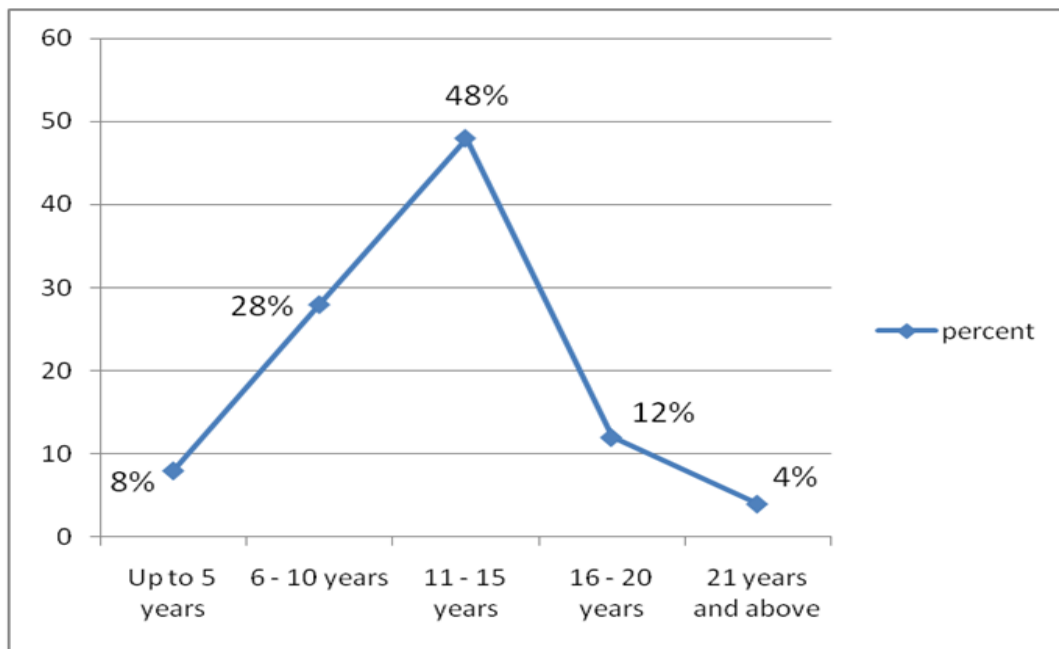
Figure 2. Number of years served as queen mothers

Source: Fieldwork, 2012

The queen mothers who have served for 6 -10 years were next (28%). Only a few of the queen mothers (8%) had occupied their positions for up to 5 years. This shows that most of the queen mothers in the Akuapim North District have occupied their seats for quite a long time and therefore are aware of the expectations from them as queen mothers and the need to contribute to the planning and development of their communities. The finding also suggests that the queen mothers have gained enough experience which they can use to help in the planning and implementation of development projects in their respective jurisdictions.

4.2 Roles Played by Queen Mothers in Community Planning and Development

To ensure that development activities are successfully executed, queen mothers are expected to be fully involved in the planning and development process. The roles they play may vary depending on the nature of the project. To ascertain the various ways that queen mothers contribute to the planning and development of projects in the Akuapim North District, information was sought from both the queen mothers and members of the general public in the study area. Views of general public were included to ensure that a fairly balanced picture is obtained in respect of the contribution of queen mothers. Table 2 gives an account of the roles played by queen mothers in community development and planning at Akuapim North District.

Table 2. Roles played by queen mothers in community planning and development

Role	QM (n=25)		GP (n=125)	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
Take part in decision making on planning and development of projects	17	68	63	57
Acting as liaison between governmental and non-governmental agencies and the community for financial and technical assistance	14	56	63	50
Raising funds through levies, donations, launchings, etc. to finance projects	13	52	61	49
Supporting agricultural activities	12	48	52	41
Maintenance of peace and harmony in the communities	22	88	73	58
Settling of family disputes	23	92	85	68
Assist in organizing communal labour	21	84	96	77
Protecting the welfare of women	24	96	111	89
Assist in organizing workshops for the community on development issues	11	44	47	38
Supporting education developments in the community	24	96	106	85
Assist in addressing health problems in the community	15	60	57	46
Assist in addressing water and sanitation problems in the community	20	80	95	76

Source: Fieldwork, 2012   QM=Queen-mothers, GP=General public

From Table 3, three roles emerged as key roles that queen mothers perform to support community planning and development. Among these roles, protecting the welfare of women was the dominant.   The majority of the queen mothers (96%) and the general public (89%) attested to this. Supporting educational developments in the community was the next important role performed by queen mothers in the Akuapim North District. About 96 percent and 85 percent of the queen mothers and the general public confirmed this respectively. The other key role was organizing communal labour which deals with mobilizing community members to come together to perform specific services to support the development of the

community. To have a deeper understanding on the protection of the welfare of women which emerged as a predominant role of the queen mothers, some of the queen mothers were engaged in in-depth interviews to throw more light on that role. Some of the queen mothers had this to say:

> In protecting the welfare of women in this district my fellow queen mothers and I mostly provide financial and physical assistance to address most of the critical problems that confront many women such as poor housing conditions and matters relating to their livelihoods. Recently I have to step in to ensure that several women who were homeless can get a place to lay their heads (Queen mother A, Akuapim North District).

> As a queen mother apart from my role in ensuring the successful development of this community, I also serve as the first lady in this area so matters on women welfare are dear to my heart. I have helped to put up employment training scheme that has given many women some vocational skills for their living. Through my efforts and some assistance from philanthropists I have been able to support some women to have easy access to health care (Queen mother P, Akuapim North District).

> One important way that I have helped women in this district is creating market for their goods and services. This was achieved through championing the course for improved road networks in this district. The improved roads enable women to get easy market for their goods and services (Queen mother Y, Akuapim North District).

The interactions with the queen mothers showed that most of their roles on protecting the welfare of women were centred on housing, healthcare, transport and helping women to acquire vocational skills for employment. This conforms to gender issues that the UN Habitat (2012) and Malaza et al. (2009) have observed to be addressed in community planning and development when women are engaged in the planning process. A closer look at the roles of the queen mothers realized that most of them demonstrated much enthusiasm and committed efforts to support the development of Akuapim North District. This were exhibited through their efforts in raising funds to aid community development, playing intermediary roles (acting as a liaison) to get development projects into the district and also taking part in the decision making process to solve urgent community problems. These qualities have made the queen mothers to be role models for the young ones which equates to transformation leadership style that Gallent and Robinson (2012), and Lai (2011) highlighted to motivate many individuals and hence stimulate them to participate in community development programmes.

4.3 Achievements of Queen Mothers in Community Planning and Development

Female traditional leaders in different capacities contribute in one way or the other in the development of their societies. Sometimes some of their achievements are notable and lauded by the general public. In some instances too they are criticized for decisions and actions their

constituents do not support. Ajayi and Otuya (2006) have found that the achievement of women in community development is often associated with projects on agricultural developments. What was found in Akuapim North District was different. The predominant achievement of queen mothers in the district was the promotion of girl child education. About 44 percent of the queen mothers and 51 percent of the general public confirmed this (Table 3).

Table 3. Achievements of the queen mothers in community development

Contribution	Queen mothers		General public	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
Promotion of girl child education	11	44	64	51
Infrastructural development	3	12	13	10
Health programmes	3	12	7	6
Environmental cleanliness	6	24	36	29
Agricultural developments	2	8	5	4
Total	25	100	125	100

Source: Fieldwork, 2012

Following the promotion of girl child education was environmental cleanliness; it had 24 percent and 29 percent responses from the queen mothers and the general public respectively. The queen mothers' achievement in agricultural developments was the least (8%). A further probe through in-depth interviews revealed that the promotion of girl child education by most of the queen mothers was as result of their personal funding of the schooling of many girls in the area and also advising parents to send their girl child to school. In addition to this, it was revealed that many of the queen mothers pay the school fees of some brilliant but needy students at basic level of education and provide them with learning materials as well. One of the queen mothers remarked:

> *I did not have the opportunity to go to school because my parents were poor and also thought that education is mainly meant for men. I do not want the girls in this community to go through the same problems I faced so at the moment I personally sponsor more than 20 girls in this community to go to school. I pay their school fees and also provide them with books, pens and other learning materials for them to have good studies at school. In addition to this I frequently provide advice to parents to send their girl child to school* (Queen mother C, Akuapim North District)

This achievement was found to be influenced by the demands of the position of a queen mother. Queen mothers are recognized as the embodiment of motherhood and women in the Akan society (Stoeltje, 2003) and in view of this taking good care of girls and women is a priority. The achievement of the queen mothers were found to associate more with human development issues such as helping to reduce social deprivation and poverty which Sen (1999) stressed as important component of development that must be looked at to improve the welfare and freedom of individuals.

5. Challenges Facing Queen Mothers in Community Planning and Development

With respect to community planning and development, quite a number of challenges confront queen mothers. These challenges ranged from economic to social difficulties. Table 4 shows the challenges hindering the planning and development activities of queen mothers in the study area.

Table 4. Challenges queen mothers encounter in their development efforts

Challenge	Queen mothers		General public	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
Incompatibility of government policies with community programmes	1	4	5	4
Financial constraints	13	52	71	57
Lack of cooperation among stakeholders	7	28	29	23
Interference by opposition groups in the community	2	8	7	6
Inadequate logistics	2	8	13	10
Total	25	100	125	100

Source: Fieldwork, 2012

Two main challenges were found to have constrained the development efforts of queen mothers. These were financial constraints (52 % queen mothers and 57% general public indicated this) and lack of cooperation among stakeholders (28 % queen mothers and 23% general public confirmed this). The other challenges had less than 10 percent responses from the respondents. Excerpts from the in-depth interviews revealed how the severity of financial constraints obstructs development initiatives of the queen mothers. Some of the queen mothers remarked:

> *Over the past five years, many of the initiatives that I planned to put in place to support development in this community always end up not been executed due to woefully lack of funds. A typical example is building a market complex to enhance trading activities in this community but it has not came to pass due to financial problems* (Queen mother Y, Akuapim North District)

> *It is my sincere wish to assist all members in this community to have access to many health facilities but due to lack of funds I can only support a handful of my community members* (Queen mother W, Akuapim North District).

This finding parallels the observation made by Udensi et al. (2012) on community development in Nigeria where lack of funds was identified as a predominant factor that thwart the efforts of local community leaders in their quest to achieve successful community development. Thus, limited finance limits the capacity of queen mothers in the Akuapim North District to expand their development initiatives to benefit the entire community members.

6. Conclusion

In all, queen mothers in the Akuapim North District play critical roles in the development of the district. Their involvement in community planning and development was found to have benefited the district in diverse ways. Many gender issues in town planning such as housing, health care, transport networks and employment were addressed by the queen mothers. Their exemplary roles in raising funds to support community development, serving as liaisons between different stakeholders to get development projects to the district and also taking part in the decision making process to address problems in the district have made them role models for the young ones.

However, efforts by the queen mothers to improve community development and planning were hindered predominantly by financial constraints. The paper recommends that the activities of queen mothers in community planning and development should be financially and physically supported by stakeholders in community planning and development including government bodies, private organizations, NGOs and benevolent organizations. This is because the contribution of queen mother helps to address gender related problems such as poor housing conditions, healthcare, education, employment and transport network which often negatively affect the well-being of many women and also undermines the overall purpose of community planning and development.   The paper concludes that there is a need to involve queen mothers in the planning and implementation of community development projects. Thus, the rich experience of the queen mothers with respect to development planning can be harnessed and utilized to achieve sustainable community planning and development.

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