

THE MWANANCHI-GHANA E X P E R I E N C E

USING INNOVATIVE COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES TO
ENABLE CITIZEN PARTICIPATION IN GOVERNANCE



Published in Ghana by:

The Mwananchi Ghana Project
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PROJECT BACKGROUND

Mwananchi (pronounced mwah-nah-‘nchee) is a Kiswahili word meaning ‘citizen’. As D. Masolo explained in 1986, mwananchi is “a term designating a class of people considered as ‘ordinary’ because they do not have any outstanding (political and/or financial or administrative) powers and privileges in public or private sectors”. The word mwananchi, therefore, is used to emphasise the common woman or man. If ordinary citizens are the basis of every society, and therefore the basis of each democracy, the functioning of each society depends on its ordinary citizens. The more politically aware and involved all citizens are, the stronger the society and its democracy become.

ODI’s Mwananchi Project was a five-year project, funded by the Governance and Transparency Fund (GTF) of the UK Department for International Development. It worked in six African countries Ethiopia, Ghana, Malawi, Sierra Leone, Uganda and Zambia with the purpose of ‘increasing the ability of civil society, the media and elected representatives to enable citizens to effectively express their views and hold governments to account for their actions’. The Project was also defined by an issue-based and action learning approach, seeking to engage ordinary citizens in gathering and then using evidence to define and bring change. Within this overall framework each country, led by a national coordinating organisation (NCO) evolved its own area of focus and worked with several local partner organizations that developed their own projects to fulfil the country objectives.

In Ghana, the Mwananchi Project was managed by Participatory Development Associates (PDA) Ltd, as the National Coordinating Organization (NCO). Mwananchi Ghana focused particularly on innovative approaches to using information and communication to improve governance systems as the “mortar” between the “bricks” of governance. This involved building connections between community, district and national decision making processes. By this, it sought to strengthen the legislative and policy dialogue between citizens and other stakeholders.

Mwananchi Ghana worked with nine NGOs and two community radio stations located in six of Ghana’s ten regions: BasicNeeds Ghana, Choice Ghana and Grassroots Sisterhood Foundation in the Northern Region, BEWDA in the Upper East Region, ATCWAR, Conservation Foundation and Friends of the Nation in the Western Region, Socioserve Ghana in the Eastern Region, ToYACE in the Volta Region and Radio Ada and GNAD in the Greater Accra Region.

Mwananchi Ghana not only had an impact in the six regions in which its partner organizations are located and working, but the partner organizations spread their work to other regions too, and, in some cases, even managed to influence stakeholders at the national level. Together and individually they worked tirelessly to strengthen the capacity of Ghana’s citizenry to hold their elected representatives accountable, thereby strengthening their communities and contributing the improvement of Ghana’s governance.

Message from Mwananchi Ghana Coordinator at PDA



As the Mwananchi Ghana project comes to an end, we would like to take the opportunity to share some of the experiences we have had along the way. Over the past three years Mwananchi Ghana's Grant Partners (MGPs) have used innovative communication strategies to enable citizen participation. The spirit in which the work was carried out and the results that were achieved can without hesitation be described as amazing. From the outset, MGPs worked as a team, not as competitors, to achieve their goals. In areas that overlapped, they cooperated and they supported each other throughout the project.

This team-spirit, as well as their dedication and hard work resulted in outstanding changes: traditional authorities and the youth started to communicate, resulting in transparency of land demarcation (Choice

Ghana), women had land registered in their own name for the first time (Grassroots Sisterhood Foundation), the dowry price for women in the Bawku area was critically reviewed and gradually reduced leading to many women no longer being regarded as their husbands property (BEWDA), the situation of mentally ill people in Ghana was exposed and brought to the public's attention and the Mental Health Bill was passed into law (BasicNeeds Ghana). The role and standing of Queen Mothers was strengthened by giving them a platform to address community matters, such as the better protection of women and children (ATCWAR), the issue of artisan fishery and overfishing of our seas was addressed with fisher folks and traditional authorities (Friends of the Nation). A more sustainable link was established between local government and traditional authority in the Western Region (Conservation Foundation). The role and responsibilities of Assembly Members was clarified and the vulnerable and excluded people were supported to interact with them to ensure their involvement in decision making (SocioServe Ghana), challenges relating to governance of the Songor Lagoon were opened for discussion with the traditional authorities (Radio Ada), children were given a voice to address issues relating to their human rights or other basic needs (ToYACE) and the necessity of making progress in Ghana with sign language as an official language with interpreters for the deaf in hospitals and other public institutions was raised (GNAD). You can find more details on the several projects, the methods that were used and how they worked in the following articles by the members of Ghana's Mwananchi family.

In addition to the projects of the MGPs, critical and engaged representatives of the media joined the Mwananchi Ghana family and became the Media for Good Governance (MeGG) network which started off with 21 members and rose to about 50 in six regions by the end of the project. MeGG aims to promote and improve media coverage of good governance and development and amplify the voice of the 'mwananchi'. Its members have been working closely with the MGPs and try to create opportunities for the voices of marginalized people to be heard. It also seeks to support journalists working outside urban areas to bring their stories to national attention. For more information about their work, please take a look at their website: <http://www.megg.com.gh/>

It has been a great collaborative journey, and it is not over yet. More work lies ahead of us on the path to good governance in Ghana. It is for all of us to pick up the baton!

Nana King
Coordinator, Mwananchi Ghana

Message from Mwananchi Project Director at ODI

Launching the Mwananchi programme at ODI offices in London in 2008, we were fixated on 'strengthening citizen demand for good governance' according to what we put in the log-frame when applying for the one-off DFID Governance and Transparency Fund grant. However, the complexity of implementing the programme in six differently governed countries (Ghana, Sierra Leone, Uganda, Ethiopia, Malawi and Zambia) quickly became apparent because even though all are African countries, the contexts are not exactly the same. We quickly adopted a learning process approach and started using the log-frame flexibly in combination with the more outcome-driven tool called Outcome Mapping so that National Coordinating Organisations (NCOs) such as PDA in Ghana, and the local grantees are provided much space to allow their innovations to emerge; while also sharing lessons with the other five countries who were equally locating their project designs in their country contexts. As a result the commonalities with other African countries have emerged from analysis of empirical experiences as well as sharing of lessons; which we can then trace to the various historical, political, cultural parameters.



Five years since the programme started, the Ghana programme has offered the overall Mwananchi programme results as one would expect of the citizen voice and accountability projects. However, more importantly, the Ghana experience has shown us the unique features for understanding how these results happen. A key distinctive for me is how almost all of these projects are rooted in local governance institutions and structures, ranging from working with queen-mothers to enhance girls education (the Blendan Bo cultural practice), working with assembly men and women (councillors) in developing a manual for their effective communication (and hence effective representation) with their constituents, to making fishing policies appropriate for fishing families, to mention a few. As a result, we have learnt how to enhance citizen power based on people's meanings which are intricate parts of their life-worlds; as a key part of what makes effective interlocution of accountability relations between citizens and state actors.

It is in these intangible and yet meaningful realities of everyday life that people construct their understanding of power and how to negotiate accountability relations in various spheres of their lives, including with government (which also makes their understanding of citizenship) for improving their livelihoods. Through this approach, it is not only possible to see progress in terms of the specific project outcomes but also in the growth in partner grantee organisation's capabilities, as evident mostly in their choice of strategies for building alliances with many other actors (including those in government and media) for addressing collective action problems. It is these strategies that gave birth to the network of journalists called Media and Good Governance (MeGG) in Ghana, for instance, from which all other countries that are facing challenges on how to work with the media are learning.

For practical progress in Africa's governance experiences (going beyond the externally crafted indicators and indices) there is need for re-engaging in people's own meanings of their everyday governance, based on narratives that they work with in their daily lives, in which their visions and passions to engage are embedded. In order to get to this way of working, national programmes can make a difference but it is small programmes that look experimental in nature that offer much more in terms of demonstrating practical life changing rules of the game. What the projects in Ghana and elsewhere in Mwananchi have shown is that it is these projects that enable organisations as well as citizens to incrementally learn what works and does not work for building citizenship from a position of power and not getting caught up in the foreign templates of what makes 'good accountability'. In my view, what has happened in Mwananchi Ghana has created a platform for local organisations to then go on to scale-up practices that work in working with other actors, while continuing to interrogate situations as they emerge, because life situations are dynamic and hence there cannot be one solution to all problems.

Fletcher Tembo
Research Fellow, Research and Policy in Development Group, ODI, UK.



DEAF INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION ACCESS IMPROVEMENT PROJECT (DICAP)

Ghana National Association of the Deaf (GNAD)

GNAD is an umbrella organisation of deaf associations in Ghana with a membership of 7,000 plus. GNAD's vision is to "achieve an active and productive deaf community with access to education and information and steady economic activities that can sustain and maintain quality and security of life."

Among the major challenges facing the deaf community in Ghana is how to access quality health care. Even though Sections 31-35 of the National Disability Act 715 (2006) make provision for free and accessible health care for persons with disability (PWDs), the provisions are limited to persons with severe disability. Consequently persons with latent disabilities, such as deafness, are not considered. Yet deaf people face major challenges in their quest to access basic health care including communication barriers between deaf patients and hearing medical personnel; affordability of health care due to low income levels, limited knowledge of the deaf and stigma against deaf people. This is compounded by the limited number of sign language interpreters (SLI) in most public hospitals across the country.

In Ghana, the deaf are restricted from taking part in political activities because information relating to election campaigns and opportunities for participation are not available to them due to communication barriers. This limits their ability to realise and contribute their full potential to society.

The objective of Deaf Information and Communication Access Improvement Project (DICAP) was to empower deaf people in the Ga East Municipality to engage with the government at the national and local levels to encourage better understanding for the communication needs of the deaf and the importance of sign language as the medium through which deaf people access their human rights, especially health care. DICAP also aimed to challenge policy makers into action. The Project sought to increase public awareness about the challenges facing the deaf community and to engage key social service institutions such as the district assemblies (DAs), the Ghana Health Service (GHS), and the Department of Social Welfare (DSW), to incorporate the communication and health concerns of the deaf community into their local development agenda.

Media engagements and training were key to this project. The capacities of leaders of associations of deaf persons were built to lead advocacy efforts by the deaf community for recognition, respect and protection of their rights. Also, 16 selected nurses from the Ga East Municipal Hospital were trained in deaf culture, Ghana Sign Language (GhSLI) and methods of communication with the deaf.

During the project, the DICAP team, lead by Robert Sampana, a deaf person, engaged authorities at the National Council of Persons Living with Disabilities, TV Africa, Ga East Municipal Assembly, the regional and municipal health directorates of the Ghana Health Service. Prior to the project the Ga East Municipality, for example, was only dealing with the physically challenged and sometimes the blind; the needs of the deaf were never considered in their planning.

As a result of such engagements significant progress was with the Social Services Sub-Committee of the Ga East District Assembly and some measure of success achieved through the Project. The training of nurses has improved services they have rendered to deaf people who visit hospitals they operate from. As a result GNAD members in the Ga East Municipality have been enjoying improved healthcare. Unlike in previous years (e.g. 2000-2010) no deaths of deaf people have been recorded in the municipal hospital since the Project was implemented.

“GNAD’s vision is to “achieve an active and productive deaf community with access to education and information and steady economic activities that can sustain and maintain quality and security of life.”

Training leaders of GNAD in the Ga East Municipality to access information with which to advocate for the needs of its members, led to the release of a share of the two per cent District Assembly Common Fund (DACF) reserved for PWDs. This enabled the deaf to carry out various activities. The engagement of the DSW and the Municipal Assembly has also resulted in the signing of a memorandum of understanding between leaders of deaf persons and the District DSW to ensure timely and regular release of the share of DACF meant for the deaf.

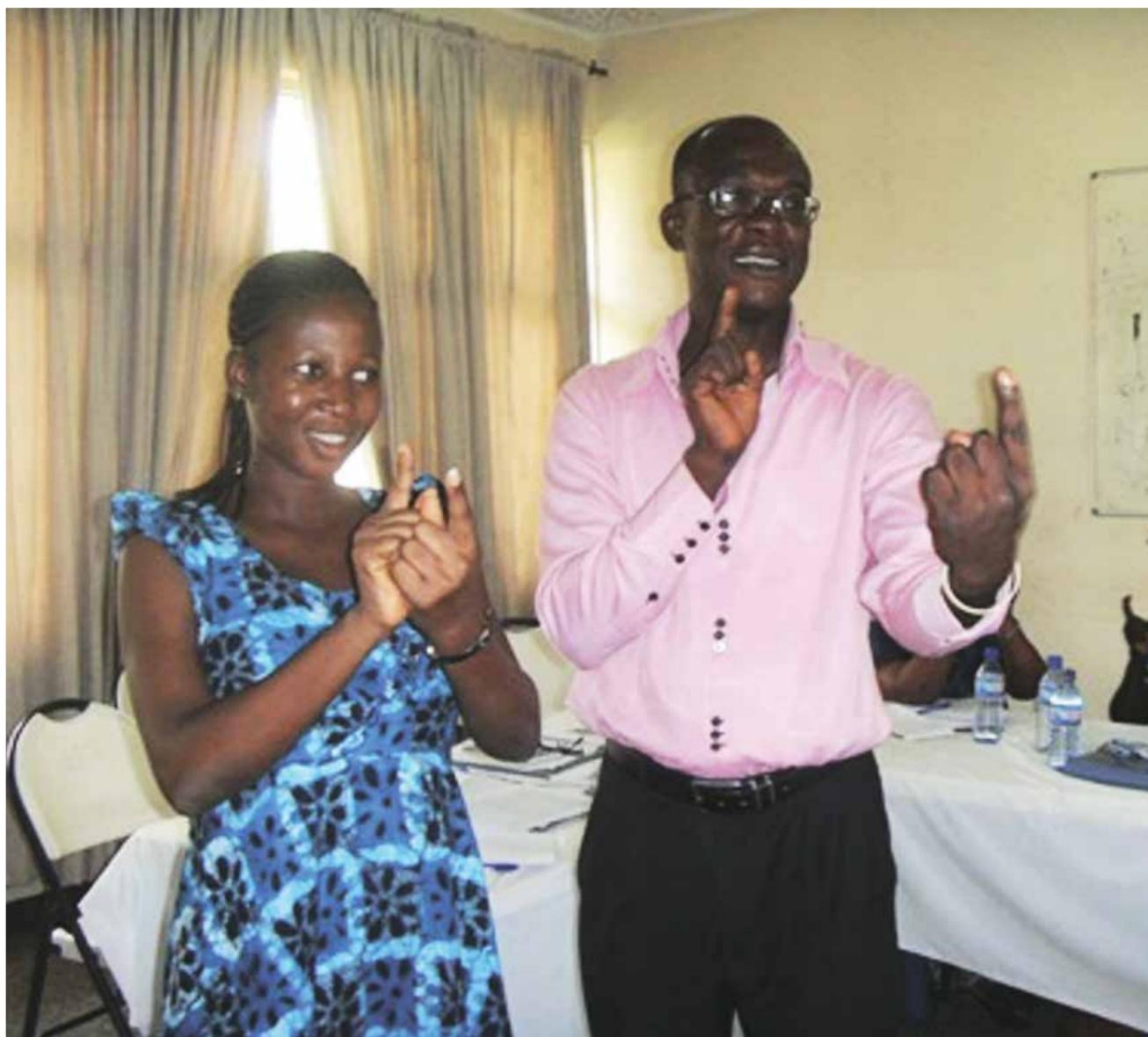
DICAP training of selected nurses has paved the way for other health centres to welcome the deaf. For example, nurses at Pantang Mental Hospital in Accra, who did not benefit from the training, learned from their colleagues and now appreciate issues of the deaf. Nurses who participated in the training had confidence to continue with what they learned.

“My communication skills have been enriched and it has provided me with the ability to communicate with patients who are deaf”, said Iris Sekyere, a beneficiary of DICAP sign language training. “It has equipped me to socialize with the deaf and also understand them better. I have gained knowledge to become an advocate for the deaf in the community.”

At the national level, the GHS now appreciates the need to mainstream GhSLI services into the healthcare delivery system and has agreed to partner with GNAD to mainstream GSL training in their programme of activities. In addition there has been significant coalition building for a unified front of deaf persons aimed at influencing local government authorities to mainstream the health concerns of the deaf into their development agenda.

Significant lessons have been learnt from DICAP processes also. By providing information on the needs and entitlements of the deaf and by creating ongoing opportunities for dialogue with policymakers GNAD succeeded in inserting the interests of the deaf on the agenda of the Municipal Assembly. GHS institutions also now understand the need to mainstream GhSLI into their programmes of activities. Another important lesson was the need to build the capacity of the deaf themselves by equipping them with skills and information that they can use to advocate for their own needs.

However, as Robert Sampana argues, policymakers still lack knowledge on the health concerns of the deaf in Ghana. According to Sampana despite the impact DICAP has started making, it is still evident that society has a very poor and stereotypical attitude towards deaf



GNAD officials training health personnel on sign language and sign language interpretation.



A planning session on deaf information and communication access activities.

people. The DICAP team leader explained that being deaf and leading a project is a huge challenge.

“Most stakeholders when invited to meetings do not respond and so one has to always follow up to their offices to meet with them,” said Sampana. “Most stakeholders do not have any knowledge on issues of the deaf in Ghana and how they can be helped.”

In general, larger structural issues relating to the deaf remain in place and this limits the quality of their voice and their capacity to demand accountability. On the basic level many deaf people (especially in rural areas) grow up without a language or proper tool for communication, apart from rudimentary gestural communication, which does not provide a strong foundation for language development. This is due to isolation and lack of proper education. Many have little contact with other deaf people and this is detrimental as it results in severe deprivation that greatly affects socialization, psychological growth and overall well being of deaf individuals. Indeed some families do not include their deaf in family activities due to language barriers, leaving them isolated.

At the local and national governance levels also no structures exist to include deaf people in public life. Still, GNAD’s engagement has led to a platform of dialogue to be created at the Ga Assembly for the disabled, although this needs to be sustained long term.

In sum, despite the relative success of DICAP, significant challenges still face the deaf in Ghana when they try to participate in the economic, political and social spheres of life. These barriers emanate from prejudice, negative perception and poverty. Especially unique to the deaf, is the paramount problem relating to communication and information. The deaf have specific needs concerning communication and information and it is only through the medium of sign language that a person with hearing disabilities can enjoy and exercise his/her human rights and play an active role in society. Unfortunately, the initial aim of the project to have sign language recognised as a national language proved too ambitious to achieve during the lifespan of the Mwananchi project, thus this challenge remains to be addressed.



PROMOTING EFFECTIVE COLLABORATION BETWEEN YOUTH AND TRADITIONAL AUTHORITIES

CHOICE Ghana

CHOICE GHANA was founded in 2005 and is based in Salaga in the East Gonja District of the Northern Region of Ghana. Its vision is to help build a community where everyone, including the youth, has a choice. It aims at improving governance and reducing poverty in its areas of operation thus Choice Ghana works with communities for sustainable socioeconomic development through a rational choice led approach to human needs.

It chose to try an innovative strategy by triggering youth-led engagement of traditional authority in its area of operation. Traditional Authority in Ghana is a sensitive institution and mostly the preserve of the elderly therefore the youth are mostly excluded from participating in decision-making. However, in contemporary times some positive opportunities are emerging. As chiefs (especially those in the Northern Region) do not always have the requisite administrative and technical know-how to respond to the needs of contemporary society on their own, it has become imperative to find an effective approach to get the youth involved in decision-making processes given that the youth are the future leaders of the community.

Most chiefs in the project area are not development-oriented, and always keep adjusting with the status quo. They do not plan, organize, initiate and/or source for support to bring about improvements within their communities. The chiefs wield control over the lands in the mist of no institution or structure to manage resources of and from the land. There is a general lack of information on the development of the area, arbitrary sale of communal lands by the traditional authorities and no accountability process to promote transparency of 'community funds.' For example, until the project was initiated, none of the proceeds from land transactions were given to the community. It was spent exclusively by the paramount chief and his family. Despite this it fell on the youth to defend the community from outside aggression when in 1990 through to 1994 there were ethnically-induced land disputes. Besides, on account of the hierarchical nature of the society, members of the community, particularly the youth and women, are seldom involved in community level planning and decision making.

The objective of the project was to promote youth involvement in traditional governance in the Kpembe community by facilitating a collaborative working relationship between the Traditional Authority on one hand and the Youth and marginalised within the community on the other hand.

Given the sensitive nature of traditional leadership and authority in the project area, strategic lobbying

and dialogue strategies were employed to successfully implement the project. In executing the project Choice also relied on its newly established relationships with other Mwananchi grantees, especially those who had a longer track record of engagement with traditional authorities. The experiences of the Belim Wusa Development Agency (BEWDA), which was working with traditional authorities in the Bawku area of Upper East region, were helpful in shaping Choice's engagements with traditional authority. BEWDA has expertise in peace-building because of protracted conflicts in Bawku, partly due to chieftaincy conflicts, and thus was able to offer insights into the sensitivity and informal workings of the chieftaincy system. Another Mwananchi partner – Grassroots Sisterhood – which is working with traditional authorities on securing land tenure for women, was an equally valuable source from which Choice could draw.

In the initial stages community scanning was conducted to identify some of the development problems within the community related to the project objectives. The ground was softened also through visits to a number of influential chiefs to whom the Project was explicitly explained. The Kanyasewura, who is a sub divisional chief of the traditional area and a well-respected chief, was indispensable in this lobbying process. A number of occasional informal visits to him with a conscious effort to build friendship followed the more formal visits. This was a strategy to win the cooperation of the traditional authorities. Careful attention was paid to traditional protocols as any premature attempt to make demands

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or assert rights could be seen as disrespect and could degenerate into sectional disagreements or conflicts.

It was determined also that the most effective way to achieve project objectives was to bring together all the community stakeholders such as traditional authorities, community members including the youth and women and members of the district assembly to decide on community priorities. The District Assembly and sub-chiefs were able to identify their stake in the project also, seeing in it opportunities to strengthen their own role and voice in demanding accountability from the Paramount Chief. The fact that other sub-chiefs were concerned about accountability issues regarding land but felt powerless to raise it with the paramount chief made them natural allies of the youth.

Capacity building was critical to the process as citizens needed to appreciate and understand the issues at stake. The youth were sensitized on the need to get organized to advocate their involvement in development processes. The training also helped the youth to understand the 'concept of power' and how to cooperate with it. They were trained to employ advocacy as a strategy to win the support of the power holders rather than adopting

head-on confrontation with them. Issues raised included a clear sense of purpose, a community-driven interest or concern, an innovative approach of achieving results and disciplined disposition towards leadership.

Beyond the local level it became important to engage the Northern Regional House of Chiefs. This was aimed at influencing the chiefs to think developmentally and to foster collaborative working relationships with the media and civil society organisations. Chiefs and elders from the Kpembe area present at the regional engagement were very cooperative at the meeting. A dialogue platform that allowed for communication and information sharing between chiefs and elders, youth and the community was created. Youth leaders were also put in place to serve as the link between the youth, and the community as well as traditional leadership.

An integrated Community Development Plan was developed at one of the dialogue platforms. This enabled the community to identify its needs and determine an Information Communication and Technology (ICT) centre and a palace for the community were among their top priorities. Also a community account was opened to demonstrate the value of transparency and accountability

in the mobilization of community resources. The choice of signatories for the account underscored also the new objective of community inclusiveness. Instead of the usual three signatories for such accounts, five signatories were chosen, including a woman and a youth, two marginalised groups of interlocutors who are often not included in such official responsibilities. The youth also successfully advocated for a percentage of the chiefs' royalties from the sale of lands and other donations to be paid into the community account. The youth are currently being consulted in decision-making processes for development initiatives also.

To help sustain the dialogue platforms created and to ensure inclusiveness and community ownership Choice Ghana facilitated the establishment of the Kpembe Development Secretariat (KDS) to act as an intermediary between traditional authorities and the community and to bridge the gap between the assembly and traditional authority so they can better engage each other. The composition of the Secretariat was done during a community forum and members were identified by the community.

In sum, the Choice Ghana project is innovative because it succeeded in institutionalising a regular dialogue platform among stakeholders in the community and opening a community account through which development funds can be channelled and utilized. In spite of the successes stated, major challenges exist. The first is the reluctance of traditional leaders to fully open up for youth involvement despite the fact that there has been some progress on this score. For example when a Brazilian company came to the district to invest in bio fuel, the discussions pertaining to the sale of the land was kept away from the youth. Some leadership of the youth could have been involved in the negotiation process. Another challenge is getting the youth to behave responsibly to ensure continuous and effective collaboration with the chiefs in decision-making processes. New found 'power' could easily intoxicate them and thus should be managed tactfully. Finally, despite the degree of transparency achieved during the project there is still lack of regular information on how community resources such as land are being managed and planned.



Chiefs and local government authorities discussing community development issues at a forum in Tamale



Queen mothers dancing after a days forum in Tamale



BREAKING THE MYTH AROUND DOWRY SYSTEM

Belim-Wusa Development Agency (Bewda-Ghana)

Belim-Wusa in the Kusaal local language means “Sustained Livelihood” and Belim-Wusa Development Agency (BEWDA) is an organisation that emerged as an umbrella organisation of women groups with the aim of strengthening capacities of women and increasing their access to resources.

The traditional dowry system in the Bawku Traditional Area, comprising Bawku Municipality, Garu-Tempane and Bawku-West districts in the Upper East Region, requires a groom to pay four cows to the family of the bride. For most men in those communities four cows is exorbitant. This system, practiced over generations, has negative implications for women, the girl-child and the family as a whole. The repercussion of this practice over the years has been that men consider their wives as “slaves” that they have bought and paid for outright. This has contributed to infringements of the rights of the women through abusive acts such as beating and exclusion from participating/consultation in household decision-making. Bride price practices have also led to many girls’ educational progression being cut short as parents push their daughters into marriages in order to receive ‘juicy’ dowry. Family feuds are common, particularly for those who are unable to meet payment of the dowry. In most cases, the outcome of this unfortunate development is the return of the bride to the family home notwithstanding her status as a mother or not.

With peace being paramount to development, the project sought to influence change to the traditional dowry system in the Bawku Traditional Area in particular, and the Upper East Region as a whole, with the aim of addressing gender inequality and promoting peaceful co-existence among families. The project is innovative because it is providing space for open and inclusive community discussion on the sensitive topic of dowry for the first time. Major stakeholders involved in the project were traditional authorities, state agencies such as Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ), district assemblies, the National Commission for Civic Education (NCCE), Department of Social Welfare (DSW) and the media. Others were women-victims of the practices, youth groups who are also potential victims, queen-mothers and citizens’ pressure groups like BONABOTO association (Grunne speaking pressure group).

“Bride price practices have also led to many girls’ educational progression being cut short as parents push their daughters into marriages in order to receive ‘juicy’ dowry. Family feuds are common, particularly for those who are unable to meet payment of the dowry.”

A key strategy that was used was engagements with all the stakeholders to share the project goals and objectives and to solicit their cooperation towards the process. Relationships were built through these engagements and dialogue sessions, especially between BEWDA and various stakeholders. Helpful in engendering trust with key interlocutors within the community was the fact that BEWDA was well versed in social norms and how to conduct proper community entry and to engage communities. It had a good track record on dealing with sensitive issues, especially conflict, and this helped to navigate thorny issues that emerged during the Project.

Another approach was to identify victims of the dowry practice and build their capacity to lead advocacy on the issue and to effectively bring out the challenges confronting victims. Partner media organisations were identified and trained so that they could highlight efficiently the issues for public awareness and collaboration.

The media was strategically used in providing platforms for oral testimonies from those who had been adversely affected by dowry practices. Through the media and the creation of other dialogue platforms women victims of the practice were able to share experiences, challenges and frustrations confronting them. This really supported the engagement processes. Key participants at the dialogue platforms were the traditional authorities,



BEWDA officials interacting with the paramount chief and elders of Bawku aimed at reducing the bride price from 4 to 2 cows.

including queen-mothers, and relevant state agencies. Traditional authorities were willing allies because earlier some Bawku chiefs, recognising the corrosive effect excessive dowry demands were having on their subjects and had tried but failed in reforming dowry practices.

The platform created for dialogue yielded more information on the issues that were not in the public domain, such as behind the scenes preparation of brides by their mothers, which often involved the purchase of high-value items such as clothing and cooking utensils and also demands from the heads of family of brides to provide additional items such as guinea fowls even after the actual dowry price has been paid. Such additional demands could go on for a while thus escalating the cost of the dowry.

Engagements between victims and traditional authorities influenced the traditional authorities within the project area to begin the processes of consultations with their community members

and the development of resolutions at the level of each traditional area. Community members began discussing the issue and groups like the BONABOTO raised it at their own meetings. Interestingly, traditional authorities themselves began advocating for change of the practice during celebrations of annual festivals like the Samampiid in the Bawku Traditional Area.

Continuous education on the need to see the benefits of the change to themselves and their subjects rather than considering the immediate benefits that come to them and their accompaniments during engagement sessions was emphasised.

The potential for sustainability of this long-term campaign lies in the structures that have been established and the relationships built between traditional authorities and relevant state agencies.

A prime example is the link that has been created with traditional authorities at the regional level. This

has increased support for the issue and gingered the interest of other traditional authorities not within the BEWDA project area in reforming aspects of traditional practice that are inimical to development. After a meeting between the Northern Region House of Chiefs and Mwananchi-Ghana CSOs working in the North at which BEWDA was present, other chiefs who had a similar dowry practice asked for BEWDA's support in tackling their dowry problem. BEWDA has subsequently therefore expanded its project area to accommodate the demand for reform in other areas.

Even though the project objective is on the reduction of the bride price, the issue of gender inequalities that emerged as added information has to be addressed. Attempts to have a customary law to mandate the reduction of the bride price complements advocacy efforts and helps to ensure sustainability of the initiative.

One of the key lessons emerging also is that since the practice is deeply rooted in the culture of the people, to successfully influence change requires continuous persuasion, persistence, patience and time.

Information on the nature and debilitating consequences of excessive dowries arising from dialogue platforms has been key also in persuading the community of the need for change. For example,

information emerged about other activities behind the scene not in the public domain, such as bride preparations by the mother and offering of other presents for as long as the family of the bride wishes.

Resistance by some community elders has been a challenge. However, there has been continuous education and targeting of the youth who are potential victims in the future to influence them to embrace change.

Another challenge is weak understanding of the processes leading to the promulgation of customary laws by the traditional authorities. Also, working with traditional authorities is quite expensive because it demands regular contacts/visits, and the protocols associated with accessing them and their sizeable retinues have cost implications.

However an important tool to use in sustaining the momentum of the project and is to mobilise the support of literate groups within the traditional authorities to influence others. Changing perceptions requires long-term sustained efforts, including regular interactions between project implementers and key stakeholders such as the traditional authorities, media and citizens of the target communities as a whole.



Chiefs making commitments in support of reducing bride price from 4 to 2 cows.



Francis is a 48-year-old teacher. Though he suffered psychosis, it is clear that he is keenly intelligent, widely-read and very articulate. His psychosis was believed to be substance induced. Francis is now back to the classroom and plying his trade as a professional teacher.

GHANA - A PICTURE OF MENTAL HEALTH

BasicNeeds-Ghana

BasicNeeds-Ghana is a mental health and development advocacy organisation that aims to transform the lives of people with mental illness or epilepsy by providing access to integrated mental health care, social and economic services in the poorest communities of Ghana. Basic Needs empowers individuals, involves families and communities in social change, and partners with government and other organizations to influence public opinion and policy in order to enable people with mental illness or epilepsy to live and work successfully in their communities. There are an estimated 2.4 million people living with mental disorders in Ghana and generally the quality of health care given to them is extremely poor; only two percent of Ghana's mentally ill have access to institutional care.

Under a project titled "Ghana - A Picture of Mental Health," the organisation used photographic evidence to illustrate the living circumstances and conditions of care of people with mental illness or epilepsy in Ghana. The photo-book is now being used by groups of people with mental illness or epilepsy to direct the attention of duty-bearers to the realities of mental health in Ghana.

Through a three-week intensive photo-shooting exercise, BasicNeeds gathered and produced a thought provoking collection of images on poor treatment of mental health patients as well as encouraging signs of proper care. It also carried out trainings on advocacy for leaders of Self-Help Groups (SHGs) of people with mental illness, aimed at enhancing the use of the photo-book for mental health advocacy. A civil society platform was also created for discussing issues of mental health and development and advocating for the speedy implementation of legislation aimed at improving mental healthcare in Ghana.

Overall, the project experience has provided useful lessons. The value of selecting a development-oriented professional photographer, who with his camera lenses, could see beyond just ordinary images to capture and present the advocacy issues at stake, was demonstrated. There were also delicate issues relating to the privacy of the mentally ill and the intellectual property rights of the photographer that had to be negotiated. These challenges however, were overcome because of the reputation BasicNeeds has gained in working with people living with mental illness. Persons photographed were identified and selected with the support of BasicNeeds' community volunteers and in some cases, health workers and community opinion leaders. Francis Kuubilla Pii, whose picture is on the cover of the photo-book, for example, was identified with the support of the mental health worker at the Bolgatanga Regional Hospital, who could not help Francis due to his family's inability to purchase medication for his treatment. The process

of documenting this publication marked the beginning of Francis' two years ordeal in solitary confinement. He now feels liberated and is quickly putting his life together. Looking at his own photos in the publication, he remarked, "I only survived this by the grace of God because at some point, I thought I was going to die in that dark room. But as you can see, I am back to the classroom and it is all because of your work and efforts."

By using powerful images, which could not be ignored, the project transcended the boundaries of age, literacy, politics, social and economic status of the Ghanaian society in communicating the situation of mental health to stakeholders through awareness raising sessions, presentations, and dissemination of information and photographs via organisational and social media sites.

The production of the photo-book has led therefore to some substantial outcomes. Firstly, it provided powerful evidence not only for advocacy engagements by Self-Help Groups but other pro-mental health interest groups such as the Alliance for Mental Health and Development. It was also used as an educational tool by community

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health workers as part of their community mental health education programmes.

Importantly also leaders of Self-Help Groups used the photo-book to communicate their situation to the Parliamentary Select Committee on Health, the Ministry of Local Government, the Ministry of Health and eight metropolitan-municipal and district assemblies across Ghana. This contributed to the passage of the mental health law, ACT 846 and the inclusion of mental health into the Medium Term Development Plan (MTDP) template of the District Assemblies (DA).

The use of the book for discussions among groups of people with mental illness or epilepsy on their own conditions and related issues affecting their needs and rights has increased their confidence and skills in advocacy and enabled them to engage with duty bearers to receive from them their entitlements. The Builsa District Association of People with Mental Illness and Epilepsy, for example, received GHc 6,200 from the

District Assembly Common Fund (DACF) to support their members to engage in various livelihoods activities. This is significant and was only possible with the new found confidence they got from the book.

Stakeholders of the project (elected representatives, CSOs, media personnel, traditional authorities etc.) who hitherto could be described as project 'boundary partners' who needed to be influenced, felt part of and responsible for mental health issues. This opened their doors to engagement on issues of mental health and even led to them initiating their own actions to mitigate certain situations. For example, the Director of the National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS), presented health insurance cards to some inmates at the Pantang Psychiatric Hospital. This gesture was seen as a complete shift from the initial reluctance by some scheme managers to grant audience to groups of people with mental illness to discuss their registration in the NHIS.



28-year-old T... was abused by her husband. When she fell ill with schizophrenia [TBC] he drove her out, and her father found her a year later wandering the streets. Her recovery is being hampered by her refusal to take her medication - she insists there is nothing wrong with her - and she is kept shackled to prevent her from running away. She had four children, but only one survives.



A delegation from the Mental Health Society of Ghana engaging members of the Parliamentary Select Committee on Health. In the picture is Madam Montana Minatu (right) presenting copies of the photo-book to the Deputy Chairman of the committee, Hon. Wisdom Gidisu (left)

The intense media interest, which was galvanised following the publication of the photo-book, put mental health prominently on the media agenda and increased the number of stories that were published or broadcast on mental health

issues for advocacy at the national level. This has widened their foothold as a representative user-led organisation in Ghana. The average person living with mental illness now has a voice and a place in the community.

A final outcome of the photo-book has been the strengthening of the National User Movement to take on



IMPROVED DECENTRALIZED FISHERIES

Friends of the Nation (FoN)

Friends of the Nation (FoN) established in 1993, is a registered service delivery, non-profit-making, non-governmental development-oriented organization based in Takoradi in the Western Region of Ghana. FoN envisages a world where communities manage their environment in a sustainable and healthy manner and where equal opportunities exist for all people in the use of natural resources. The organisation serves as a catalyst towards increased action for sustainable natural resource management and a healthy environment, by providing services to institutions and communities through education, training, networking and advocacy.

The work philosophy of FoN is guided by a rights-based approach to sustainable development as well as the principles of technology of participation (ToP) which involves mobilization and participatory strategic planning with beneficiary communities.

Building on previous gains from engaging fishing communities in 2007-2009 on the Rights and Voice Initiative (RAVI) project in eleven coastal fishing communities in the four coastal regions of Ghana, the Improved Decentralised Fisheries Project was designed to further enhance the voices of fisher folks and create enabling environments for them to exercise their voices at the local government level.

The project, which was implemented in the Shama District and the Sekondi-Takoradi Metropolitan Area (STMA), advocated for the inclusion of fisherfolk in decision-making, since fisheries contribute significantly to local coastal economies. The project also sought to enhance their voice by creating awareness among fisherfolk and other stakeholders on fisheries policies and laws, and the responsibilities of stakeholders towards sustainable resource management. It was believed that information in best practices in natural resources and environment governance would help coastal communities better participate in policy formulation and enforcement and better engage with duty bearers. The project thus tried to strengthen communication channels among beneficiaries (the coastal communities engaged in fishing) and interlocutors, primarily comprising government officials working in fisheries-related ministries, departments and agencies, as well as the district assemblies.

Both national and local government remain distanced

from the people in the coastal fishing communities and unresponsive to their needs. This neglect has led to a situation that has negatively impacted on coastal and fisheries livelihoods and resulted in poverty for a large number of those working in the fishing industry. The recent discovery of oil in the region constitutes a potential threat to the fishing industry because of the risk of oil spillages.

The district assemblies pay scant attention to the industry despite its importance to the local economy. Not only is there non-enforcement of fisheries regulations, there is little transparency in the utilisation of the Fisheries Development Fund by government for the benefit of fishing communities. A legislative instrument – LI 1968 – which bans the application of some specified methods in fish extraction (e.g. light, chemicals and small-sized mesh net) was passed in June 2010 to address some of the threats to fishing. The L.I. is good for

“...there is little transparency in the utilisation of the Fisheries Development Fund by government for the benefit of fishing communities. A legislative instrument – LI 1968 – which bans the application of some specified methods in fish extraction (e.g. light, chemicals and small-sized mesh net) was passed in June 2010 to address some of the threats to fishing.”

the long-term sustainability of fishing but in the short-term it has adversely affected the operations of local fishermen, who constitute only a small proportion of perpetrators of unsustainable fishing practices. The bigger culprits are the pair trawlers

and foreigner-manned fishing vessels who continue to disregard fishing regulations and get away with it. The discontent of local fisherfolk has increased the risk of conflict in fishing communities.

To address these problems FoN used a well-targeted information, education and communication (IEC) strategy to avoid conflict and to facilitate the adoption of the desired knowledge, behavioural change, attitudes and practices required for a sustainable exploitation of fisheries resources. The strategy included meetings, durbars, workshops, drama productions and media programmes on governance issues in the fisheries sector. Opportunities for dialogue among key stakeholders were created to encourage more transparency on the management of the fisheries sector, including the utilization of the Fisheries Development Fund.

To improve the capacity of the media to play a strategic role in providing information FoN organised a capacity building workshop for journalists on natural resource governance and coastal /fisheries

issues. The Fisheries Commission was included in the workshop and the workshop resulted in increased publication of articles on fisheries and oil and gas in the newspapers, radio (and the internet). A radio-programme, which included a phone-in segment, gave the opportunity to many fisherfolk to express their concerns with regards to the fisheries regulations and to ask questions on them.

An important and innovative platform for dialogue was created through the use of drama by the fisherfolk. This enabled them to identify the issues, act them out, entertain the community and in the process, raise awareness. Some of the drama sessions were aired on radio, thus expanding their reach beyond the physical locations in which they were enacted.

FoN's strategy of collaboration with the Fisheries Commission and the Ghana Navy in raising awareness contributed to the success of the project. Through the various processes of engagement, deeper collaboration between fisher groups,



Artisanal fishermen and women discussing their problems at a group interaction.

Fisheries Commission and the Security Agencies was established.

Along with creating awareness on their rights, the project re-educated the fisherfolk on sustainable fishing practices and on how to dialogue for space in policy formulation. Fisherfolk gained more awareness on regulations and policies and eventually agreed on their own mechanisms for voluntary compliance of fishery regulations as well as sustainable fishing practices.

Despite these positive outcomes FoN faced some challenges, and the biggest, perhaps, was the inability to establish exclusive sub-committees responsible for fisheries. During the course of project implementation FoN collaborated with the Fisheries Commission with the aim that District Based Fisheries Management Committees (DBFMCs) would be included in monitoring control and surveillance activities and in how the Fisheries Development Fund would be utilised. However DBFMCs were never established but FoN got sub-committees of the assemblies to recognize fisheries contributions and allowed them participation and involvement in decision-making processes of the assemblies. Such sub-committees of the assemblies responsible for fisheries had their capacities developed on the Fisheries Act 625, Fisheries LI 1968 and relevant portions of Local Government Act 462.

By these efforts, these sub-committees, together with fisherfolks were able to draft fisheries bye-laws for the consideration and adoption of the assemblies.

One of the key lessons emanating from the Project therefore was the importance of sensitising marginalised people on their rights as well as responsibilities in context of governance and helping them to organise and mobilise in order to have more clout. FoN not only simplified fisheries laws and educated fisherfolk about their importance, the organisation taught them to take pictures of illegal pair trawlers with which to confront the Navy in a bid to get them to better implement



School children being educated about negative fishing practices and their effects on the community

the fisheries regulation. Fisherfolk also learned through capacity building activities how to organise press conferences and thus were able on their own to convene a press conference to state their position on fisheries governance.

Another useful lesson from the project is the importance of providing good information and building knowledge of interlocutors. When, for example, the knowledge of the district assembly on the needs and resources of fisherfolk was built, it resulted in the assembly being more responsive to their issues and including fisheries in district assembly plans. A canoe registration exercise in six western region districts also demonstrated the numerical strength of canoe fisherpersons and helped in persuading the assembly fisherfolk were an important constituency to pay attention to.

In an attempt to scale up fishery sector issues and increase the chances that gains would be sustained the project, in the run-up to Election 2012, brought together all aspiring parliamentary candidates in three constituencies of the project area to debate their positions on fisheries, coastal and oil-and-gas management. FoN intends to support those who are now in power with facts and figures from the grassroots and also to continue to provide regular interface between the elected representatives and the local fisherfolks for dialogue in a bid to make fishery sector issues more prominent in the 6th Parliament of the Fourth Republic.



BRIDGING GAPS IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT FOR IMPROVED COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Conservation Foundation

Conservation Foundation (CF) is a Ghanaian environmental non-profit non-governmental organisation (NGO). CF seeks to promote fundamental socio-economic development that enhances self-sufficiency and self-reliance for advancement of people within a sustainable framework of development. Its areas of operation are: water, sanitation and hygiene promotion, forestry and environmental conservation and management, and governance. Gender and youth development, HIV and AIDS awareness, training and research are carried out in all CF activities.

In the course of its activities CF discovered that power struggles between Unit Committees and traditional authorities, was making it impossible to bring local communities together to plan for their development needs. Community leaders' were no longer able to organize the community for action and community members no longer attended to communal labour.

The "Bridging Gaps in Local Government for Improved Community Development" Project CF implemented sought to address the problem by creating a common platform for citizens, traditional authorities and assembly members to meet to discuss their concerns in planning for their community's development. Specifically, CF was interested in assisting traditional authorities and unit committees under the local government system to understand each other's roles and responsibilities in the decentralisation process. It also aimed at strengthening information flow and communication among these stakeholders and citizens, and supported chieftaincy and traditional systems of governance to complement modern local government systems better.

At the start of the Project, CF conducted a study into what kind of information community members would like to receive, from whom and how. The findings from the study informed training programmes, for each stakeholder group.

The main strategy CF used to achieve Project objectives was to create interface opportunities among stakeholders through training workshops, as well as stakeholder, individual and community meetings. Initial contacts were made with the opinion leaders (chiefs and elected representatives) and separate

“...It also aimed at strengthening information flow and communication among these stakeholders and citizens, and supported chieftaincy and traditional systems of governance to complement modern local government systems better.”

meetings were held with each of the stakeholders based on the issues identified with the various stakeholders during initial meetings with these stakeholders. For example, experience sharing meetings were organised for the chiefs and separate meetings were also held between the elected representatives, and the opposing groups (community members who have made allegations against the Chief) identified in the community and their chief. Also a training session was held for Queens on their roles and how to support chiefs to be accountable and transparent to the people as well as a final meeting



Traditional authorities and Assembly Members sharing ideas on ways of working together at a forum organised by CF.



Assembly members and chiefs with members of the Mwananchi National Steering Committee and some staff of Conservation Foundation during a monitoring visit.

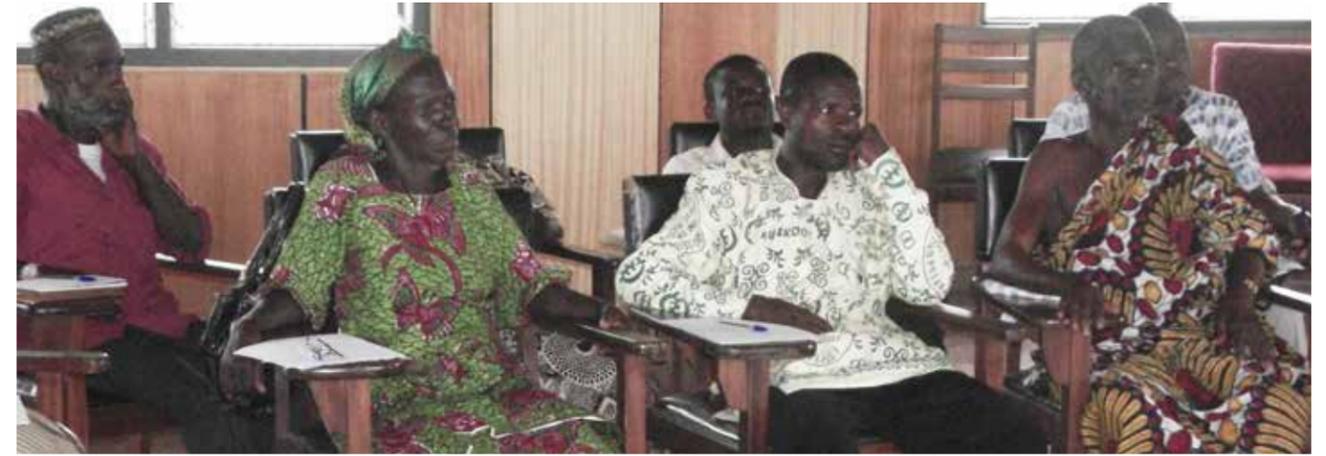
convened between all the stakeholders to look at the way forward. Similarly a meeting between government agencies and the chiefs was used to address issues relating to the involvement of chiefs in planning for development needs. In addition, individuals involved in planning against the Chief for his inability to render accounts on some lands leased to some people for development were also identified and engaged in one-on-one dialogue and later as a group.

A critical strategy used to improve information flow was to involve the media as part of the process and this helped in getting them to contribute more meaningfully to support the project by reporting and organizing radio programmes on some of the governance issues being discussed in the communities.

Information provision to interlocutors was a key strategy also. Information was provided to elected representatives

regarding their work and their role in planning for community needs, while traditional authorities were given information with regards to their roles in the community and in the work of the unit committees. The traditional authorities were supported to render accounts of their stewardship to the people and they in turn called on the elected representatives to do the same. Government agencies were also sensitized on the importance of visiting the communities in which they work, to take their concerns into account in planning for development needs and to incorporate them into the Medium-term Development Plan (MTDP).

The strategies discussed above have yielded encouraging results. Having been involved as strategic partners in the Project, the media have used the issues at stake as subjects for discussion in some of their afternoon programmes, which have attracted wide audience contribution. The project has inspired the media to visit communities on



their own or with field staff of Conservation Foundation to monitor progress.

The level of accountability of elected representatives has improved as they have started rendering accounts of revenue from sale of water and arrests of stray animals among other revenue generated regularly and have become more transparent by informing the people ahead of time on any action they want to undertake. They no longer struggle with the chiefs for power. The same can be said for, traditional authorities. Chiefs are cooperating better with the unit committees and are now able to call for communal labour, which is well attended by citizens. Chiefs are also more willing to engage with ordinary citizens in public spaces and to be more accountable to their people. For example, a local chief in the Project area of his own volition rendered accounts to his people. The one-on-one meetings that were organized by CF made ordinary people feel very important and recognized. The fact that their leaders were beginning to meet with them to update them on policies and actions also gave them a sense of empowerment. All the stakeholders – government officials, elected representatives, chiefs and citizens – now realize that involvement of all people in every aspect of planning is very critical in development planning.

In spite of these achievements, there is still lingering mistrust for community leaders by citizens fuelled by rumours about lack of transparency and accountability to the people by their leaders. There are Chiefs who do not reside in their communities. They live elsewhere, like Accra, and occasionally visit their communities. Working in such communities was a big challenge to our project as the community was divided into fractions of people who claimed to be representing the Chief and those who wanted favours from the Chief. Each fraction gossiped about the other, making it difficult for the community to unite to undertake any activity. Another group was those who feed the caretaker with information from the community since the caretaker also does not stay in the

community and also visits there occasionally. However, meetings were held with the factions individually during which examples were cited on how development projects can be stalled if such divisions continue to exist. The absence of unit committee members in some communities has also affected development projects but in some cases the chiefs were encouraged to organise communal actions by themselves.

These challenges notwithstanding, there is potential for sustainability of some of the Project achievements. The willingness of the leadership, especially the chiefs, to regularly consult the community to discuss their development needs and to regularly account to them gives hope for sustainability. The skills that have been acquired by elected representatives and chiefs through capacity building initiatives is also likely to continue to make a difference in how they play their roles and address issues whenever they arise. The continuous presence of CF in the district and also the communities is a source of encouragement and motivation for them to sustain the gains made because they can always draw on the organization for clarifications and assistance if need be.

Prior to the end of the Project, some chiefs from Pretsea, Butre, Sese Akatakya and Adjumako among others asked CF why they were not part of the project and requested that we replicate the project in their communities. This was after a meeting with the Ahanta Traditional Council where chiefs, who had been part of the Project, shared their experiences with their peers. In a similar vein, CF was invited to help pilot the project in a community in the Central Region after it had made a presentation at the National House of Chiefs in Kumasi. The engagement with the National House of Chiefs was convened by the National Coordinating Organisation (NCO) of Mwananchi-Ghana for grant partners who were working with traditional authorities.



LISTENING TO THE POOR AND THE MARGINALISED THROUGH AN EXPANDED COMMUNICATION CHANNEL- BALANDAN BO PROJECT

Advocates & Trainers for Children and Women Welfare Advancement & Rights (ATCWAR)

ATCWAR is an NGO based in the Western Region of Ghana, which exists to promote and advocate for the rights of women and children. Under the Mwananchi-Ghana Project it executed a project titled “Listening to the voices of the poor and marginalized through Belandan-Bo platform.” Belandan Bo, which in the Nzema language means “under the community hut”, was a traditional communication and information sharing channel where people met from day-to-day at twilight to discuss matters of salience within the community. No one could be sanctioned for things said at ‘Belandan Bo.’ Belandan Bo was influential because discussions there got to the ears of the traditional authority (i.e. the chiefs and elders of the community) and contributed to the shaping of policies and rules of the traditional authority. However, as men were constantly antagonistic to women over the lateness of evening meals, it became impractical for women, even queen-mothers, to participate in the discussions. Gradually by default ‘Belandan Bo’ became an exclusive male social platform and was also irregularly convened. The project aimed at contributing to the creation of space for women and children’s issues to be discussed and thus sought to revive and expand the Belandan Bo platform to include women and children so that such marginalised groups could channel their rights fulfilment issues to the attention of recognized authorities.

Traditionally, queen-mothers represent the voice of women and children, although over time they have been marginalized and their authority subverted. It was therefore important to make queen-mothers the agents of change in this Project. To achieve this, ATCWAR conducted research into the traditional scope of the authority and role of queen-mothers and widely disseminated the findings to members of the Project community. The objective of the research was to gather evidence on the scope of authority of the queen-mother, and how it can be used to positively inspire issues of child protection, maintenance and trafficking within the project area. The research suggested that traditionally the queen-mother’s role used to be similar to that of a specialized committee in the modern district assembly system. This view meant that queen-mothers could be encouraged to become natural allies of the assemblies within the Project area and to be catalysts for change. The research results showed the queen-mother played varied administrative and ceremonial roles, ranging from the keeper of almanacs to the protection of the stool. Such findings were used in creating awareness in the communities and persuading male-dominated traditional authority to provide space for queen-mothers to operate without hindrances. A queen-mother peer review platform (PRP) was subsequently created to

spearhead the dissemination of the study results at the community and paramountcy level.

One of the main strategies ATCWAR used as a way of including the voices of women and children in decision-making within the community was to revitalise Belandan Bo. The Project identified community elders who bore testimony to methods of consensus building in the past through Belandan Bo. Meetings with identifiable groups in the community were then convened with the aim of examining the existing communication channels that existed in the community and how useful they would be in addressing the problems confronting the community.

“...Traditionally, queen-mothers represent the voice of women and children, although over time they have been marginalized and their authority subverted.”

The Belandan Bo emerged as one such communication platforms and thus ATCWAR was able to mobilise the community to re-institutionalise it.

In order to facilitate information flow on Belandan Bo and the issues raised there, ATCWAR engaged the services of Community Public Address System (COMPAS) operators in the districts because the districts are poorly served by conventional media such as radio stations. The COMPAS thus became a tool in social mobilization and behavioural change, and worked as an alternative media channel for people at the grassroots. An important

strategy was to build the capacity of COMPAS operators in advocacy and lobbying on the issues of child protection, maintenance and trafficking and to use them to engage community leaders as well as to educate the community. COMPAS operators are currently engaged in the dusk and dawn broadcasting of messages on child protection. They also run quiz competitions for children and give away prizes, which are provided by the Project. Similar to radio stations, the COMPAS operators do phone-in sessions, allowing the listening public to make inputs into the issues under discussion. Through the COMPAS therefore, awareness has been created on developmental issues such as education, health, gender, rights and protection.

Traditionally, children in the communities are one of the most voiceless groups of citizens. In order for them to realise their rights and to participate in Belandan Bo effectively child rights clubs were formed and about 250 children trained in drama skills. Training enabled the children to produce trigger sketches on child protection issues, including child labour and child participation in decision-making during Belandan Bo.

The Belandan Bo platform is organized once a month and brings together ordinary citizens, including women and children, as well as elected and appointed representatives and traditional authority. It has become a space where community members engage their leaders, and women and children are able to gain access to the queen-mothers. Queen-mothers have linked up with the Assembly, the Presiding Member and Planning Officer who are now regular attendants at the platforms. This interface has resulted in one of the communities – Nyamebekyere – getting two mechanized wells, and the school’s roof repaired. Azulenuanu, another community in the Project area, has had seats for existing public toilets provided making it possible for children and the aged to use the facility.

Queen-mothers have linked up with school authorities also to monitor children’s attendance and parents are summoned by the queen-mothers when their children are absent from school. In Azulenuanu absentees from school are announced on the COMPAS after school every day. This has reduced the rate of absenteeism and dropout rates.



A general outcome of the Project is that women’s mobilisation has been stepped up while at the same time queen-mothers are asserting more leadership within the community.

However, chieftaincy disputes in the area constitute a significant risk factor in working with traditional authorities. Due to chieftaincy disputes in two communities initially targeted as project areas ATCWAR was unable to mobilise the traditional authorities with whom it needed to work and had to narrow the reach of the Project.

Another challenge was the low level of knowledge, and therefore lack of support on issues of child rights amongst parents, teachers and other service providers in the project communities. ATCWAR largely overcame this barrier through sensitization training targeted at them.

One of the biggest challenges the CSO had to confront was the lack of adequate local media support because the project area, unlike other project areas, is media poor. Even though ATCWAR compensated somewhat for this

deficit by using the COMPAS, it failed to get much media mileage on the issues because the COMPAS is limited in reach and its ability to produce the kinds of news and programming that mainstream media can.

Still among the valuable lessons learnt is how to adapt local resources such as the COMPAS for advocacy purposes and the importance of building capacity and sensitizing stakeholders in order to get desired results.

The use of research-based evidence to underpin advocacy has also been demonstrated by this Project. By providing evidence of the scope of authority of the queen-mother and the merits of Belandan Bo as a traditional platform of engagement ATCWAR has been able to revitalise an important dialogue platform which, because of its roots in tradition, is likely to be sustained.





EXERCISING COMMUNITY RIGHTS FOR LEADERSHIP THAT SUSTAINS LIVELIHOODS: THE CASE OF ADA SONGOR THE SALT PEOPLE OF GHANA

Radio Ada

Radio Ada is a rural, non-partisan, non-sectarian and development-oriented community radio station based at Big Ada, in the Greater Accra Region. The station represents the voice and cultural resource for its listening community and stands out as the single institution linking together the seven Dangme cultural communities, which are now divided into seven political districts in two regions. Through participatory news, music and programmes in the Dangme language, the communities have been brought closer together and are relating better to one another. Radio Ada is the first community radio to be established in Ghana, in 1998, and broadcasts 17 hours daily.

The Ada area is home to one of the most important natural salt-producing lagoons in West Africa, the Songor. This resource has been at the heart of the identity of people of Ada since pre-colonial times. In fact, the ownership and control of salt has been the subject of the only major wars the Adas and other Dangmes have ever fought. In recent times the issue of the control of salt resources has continued to be a critical concern to the Ada people, not only because it is the main source of livelihoods for a vast majority of Dangme people, but also because it occupies an important place in the spiritual identity of the people. Control of the salt produced by the Songor has been an issue of contention with state administrations and among different elements of the traditional leadership of the Ada. Conflicts reached their peak during the 1980s when clashes with external industrialists led to a revolt by ordinary citizens who were demanding that salt-winning continue to be communally accessible. Restricting communal access to the lagoon has dire economic and identity impacts on the people, especially the most poor and marginalized in the society, who are often women and children.

A law was subsequently enacted to control the lagoon for the people. This law inspired part of Ghana's 1992 Constitution that describes natural resources as being "held in trust for the people of Ghana." It is this notion of holding a resource in trust that Radio Ada's Mwananchi activities seek to explore.

Radio Ada has identified a governance problem with the nature of trusteeship of the Songor Lagoon. A key aspect of the problem was that the Traditional Council, the official congregation of chiefs which oversees the allocation and management of communal resources, was not functional. The resulting lacuna encouraged individual exploitation of the salt lagoon at the expense of the larger community. Through the Mwananchi Project, Radio Ada is using the power of radio to reduce communal tensions by instigating open discussion on the issue and advocating for greater accountability and

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transparency of trusteeship in the Songor by national, local and traditional governance structures.

Some of the key strategies that Radio Ada has used include mobilising a movement by organising citizens to generate content for programming, which projects voices of those most affected by poor governance of Songor resources. As part of that process influential allies at the local and national levels were identified and convinced to participate and take ownership of the process. Also, key institutions and individuals were engaged to appreciate and share their concerns on trusteeship publicly. Throughout, positive traditional values and statutes were employed as the standard for education and practice of resource governance. The Ada Songor Advocacy Forum (ASAF) emerged from this process.

Radio Ada then propagated and highlighted the issues that were brought out of the mobilization process through creative programming where sensitive issues were creatively adapted for education, communication and further engagement. A weekly drama series covering a period of 30 months served as the main vehicle for expression, updates and responses to community concerns regarding trusteeship of Songor. Radio Ada also instigated networking opportunities to ensure sharing with strategic media houses to broaden the scope of dissemination of the issues nationally and even internationally.

The actions of Akpetiyo, a non-literate, salt-winning 58-year-old mother of four, illustrate some of the strategies the radio station used to support community members to demand accountability in the management of salt in Ada.

Akpetiyo is a traditional salt-winner from Matsekope, one of the salt communities surrounding the Songor lagoon at Ada. She can no longer look after her family, not only as a single parent but also as a grandmother. This is because she draws her main income from salt collected from the communal salt-winning fields in the Songor Lagoon. For the past seven years, however, some traditional leaders have conspired with a few individuals to take over the communal salt-winning sites, chopping up land into pieces of disorganized, self-serving, private salt-winning plots and siphoning off the diminishing salinized lagoon water in highly concentrated amounts to produce their own salt supply in an enclosed area – a practice known as “Atsiakpo”. There have been fights over the “Atsiakpo” plots and salt produced from them, a practice which defiles tradition. Atsiakpo has thus become a source of community conflict. Akpetiyo has asked the family not to go near “Atsiakpo salt” because to her the practice is an abomination.

In the midst of the chaos, the Ghana Government in the early part of 2011 introduced a divide-and-rule engagement; it got some chiefs to secretly sign attestation letters to enable government to secure tenure for salt companies without any community participation. Part of the secret plan was to relocate the communities living around and drawing their livelihood from the Songor.

Akpetiyo therefore joined the Ada Songor Advocacy Forum (ASAF), who by then were using the open-air studio of Radio Ada as their meeting venue to address the issue of salt trusteeship in Ada. She began to sing self-composed traditional patriotic songs as her contribution to bring awareness to the wrongs of trusteeship gone sour. On the 7th of June 2011, in the middle of one such community meeting, her voice rang out:

Hark Almighty, put on the sunlight; I say Almighty Radio Ada, put on the sunlight forever. Whatever is under water through you comes to light. Whatever is underground through you comes to light. [...]

Look behind us, there comes Government after us Okor (salt) People. I repeat, turn and look behind, Dangme People, Government is catching up with us. But what is the issue? Atsiakpo is consuming the whole Songor. And all attempts to stop it have proved futile, the fire rages on. Government then stepped in. They told our Elders, they are going to take over Songor. Radio Ada heard of this development, took on their broadcast armour, mobilized us; we entered the communities and started informing the people; we are spreading it.

Akpetiyo and her people, the Ada Songor communities, have resolved to exercise their communal rights to salt as a livelihood, while ensuring there are improved trusteeship practices by leaders at all levels. Radio Ada and the ASAF have played an integral role in supporting this resolution, and in communicating the voices of those like Akpetiyo who sing for change.

The Station projected women as the “face” of the struggle. For example, last August, for the first time in the 75 years that the Ada people instituted the annual Asafotufiam festival, the Ada Songor Advocacy Forum put up an exhibition on the importance of salt and the challenges in the Songor, Akpetiyo and other women went on a procession at the festival grounds carrying salt and salt-winning tools to draw attention to their loss of livelihood. As a result, the Regional Minister and other officials visited the salt exhibition stand to listen to them. Radio Ada broadcast the proceedings live.

Akpetiyo has immortalised community concerns in her songs, which are aired on Radio Ada regularly. Like her, other women now act as spokespeople for ASAF in meetings with the chiefs and in activities of the National Coalition on Mining (NCOM, a national pressure group on mining issues).

Resulting from these various interventions and actions are some outcomes that can be attributed directly to the work of ASAF and Radio Ada. The two Members of Parliament representing Ada at the time have publicly condemned the divide-and-rule approaches initially used by the Minerals Commission and other government officials. Their support and that of others have led to suspension of relocation plans that the Government had wanted to implement. Also, DESPA, a local salt-pan owning association, has begun engaging with ASAF, and has paid for the flooding of the lagoon to induce more salt production, an initiative it had not undertaken in the last 18 years. The Ghana’s Minerals Commission has shifted from being an outright adversary, speaking publicly of relocating communities in the Songor area, to now contributing funds to improving the knowledge of ASAF members and traditional leaders on salt-winning techniques being developed elsewhere in Ghana.

Importantly, the Radio Ada Mwananchi Project has contributed to the Ada Traditional Council becoming functional again. The Council is now a site of productive discussion about the future of the resource and has come out openly on the side of the communities living around the Songor.

Despite these achievements there have been some challenges. Contestation over the governance of Songor has a long history and multiple dimensions – cultural,



Cross-section of community members at a durbar to discuss management of salt resources in Ada

governance, climate change effects, technical education, sanitation, livelihood, land, legal etc. More recently the discovery of oil in Ghana has increased the stakes because salt is crucial in petro-chemical processes and demands for salt have gone up. These factors have bred various vested interests and a high level of distrust among the different interlocutors, some of whom conceive of the problem very narrowly and are interested only in finding short-term solutions. Consequently, and despite intensive community engagement on the part of Radio Ada, not all community members and traditional leaders are supportive of the project because some are atsiakpo practitioners and benefit from poor governance of the Songor resource. So while publicly, these leaders position themselves as allies who want to address the problem, privately they are engaging in the practice and undermining the accountability process.

Various levels of trustees, ranging from the District Chief Executive, to Members of Parliament, and national level bureaucrats in relevant ministries, departments and agencies (MDAs) continue to hold closed meetings with traditional authorities, thereby withholding information on negotiations and decisions relating to Songor trusteeship issues from the community.

Party politics have compounded this general atmosphere of mistrust and sensitivity. The District Assembly Directorate, for example, hold appointive positions which they seem to perceive to being at risk from any

bold actions to help address the problem. Radio Ada lost a key political ally they were counting on to help take the issue to the national level (Parliament) when one of the MPs in their constituency who had hitherto been supportive lost his ministerial job and later his seat in Parliament.

The confused nature of the issue has also led to some community members to wonder if Radio Ada is working with the government’s plan to eject them, a perception which has been traced back to the political leaders holding closed meetings. The station has effectively countered this disinformation by using its medium and community dialogue sessions, as well as its long-held reputation of consistently standing with the people.

The challenges notwithstanding, Radio Ada’s intervention has clearly helped to make a bad situation much better. In a multi-stakeholder evaluation seeking to understand the import of the work of Radio Ada the question was posed: “If Radio Ada were not there at all to work with you, would there be any difference?” Participants did not wait for the translator to finish before answering. “Yes!” said an Elder in the group, echoing the general sentiment. “We would have lost our Songor and our community.”. “And there would have been bloodshed,” concluded a youth who was also present.



PROMOTING INCLUSIVE-DECISION MAKING IN RURAL COMMUNITIES; ERADICATING MARGINALISATION AND VULNERABILITY THROUGH CONSTRUCTIVE ENGAGEMENT

Tongu Youth and Children Evangel (ToYACE)

ToYACE is a pro-youth and children development community-based non-governmental organization (NGO), operating since 1989 in the North, Central and South Tongu districts of the Volta Region of Ghana. The primary goal of the organisation is poverty alleviation among youth and children with specific interests in promoting and protecting children's fundamental rights, youth empowerment and integrated community development.

ToYACE recognised that local government authorities have not effectively involved ordinary citizens in the development of their communities and this has resulted in an uneven development of communities. On the level of formal governance, for example, there is no feedback from elected representatives to community members during or after district assembly and parliamentary sessions. Also basic services to communities remain poor. For example, the standard of basic education in public schools has been falling for years, but duty bearers do little to correct the problem. Meanwhile rural communities remain unaware that their children have the right to quality education and do not understand that the public schools in their communities are theirs. This ignorance stems from deficient information and communication sharing by their duty bearers. On the level of traditional society, ToYACE identified also that traditional authorities sell stool lands without accounting to community members.

The objective of the Project, therefore, was to empower ordinary citizens to hold elected representatives, local governments and traditional authorities accountable, as well as empower children to know and constructively assert their rights.

Children were trained to hold duty bearers and their own parents accountable, and to demand their rights. This was done by equipping them with radio theatre (drama) and radio journalism skills. The latter involves learning the skills of interviewing, hosting and handling phone-in programmes. Through ToYACE's initiatives communities were also empowered to form committees to organize community town hall meetings to discuss issues affecting them. Duty bearers were invited to these community town hall meetings and compelled to respond to the concerns raised by community members and to meet some of their demands.

By bringing communities together with their representatives and creating a platform for them to share information and dialogue, ToYACE was able to achieve some significant outcomes from this Project. In a marginalized island community (Avadiwe-Kome) in Central Tongu that had been neglected by elected

representatives and local government authorities the Project brought the District Chief Executive and his senior officials to the community for the first time. This resulted in the people requesting and getting from their representatives a large boat to enable their children to attend junior high school on the mainland. They also had their needs for solar panels to generate electricity and a public toilet facility met. A project to connect the community to the national electricity grid is also under way.

“The objective of the Project, therefore, was to empower ordinary citizens to hold elected representatives, local governments and traditional authorities accountable, as well as empower children to know and constructively assert their rights.”

Similarly, the interface provided through town hall meetings facilitated by ToYACE has led to the South Tongu District Assembly providing another community (Agave-Asidovui) with portable water and electricity. The Assembly has also approved the construction of a market, police station and a secondary school for the community.

The children's programme which is aired on Radio Tongu, a ToYACE owned community station, has encouraged more children to go to school, reduced absenteeism and paved the way for children to finish school successfully. In the long-term, improved levels of education induced by the Project will reduce poverty in the communities. Also, children in the Tongu area, particularly those who have participated in the children's



Young children staging some traditional performance

clubs and radio programmes initiated under the Project, have developed a positive self-esteem and are able to speak publicly as well as interview duty bearers such as the DCE and the chiefs.

The School Management Committees (SMCs) now understand their roles and responsibilities better, especially that their respective schools belong to the communities and not the government, and therefore they need to account to their communities. This has helped them respond to issues affecting the schools in their communities more effectively.

The implementation of the Project has drawn a number of lessons that are relevant for the implementation of similar ones in future. Key among these is the fact that citizens, especially the marginalized, have a real potential to promote good governance at the local level and to demand and realise their rights in Ghana if interface opportunities are created for them to meet with their representatives. This was made clear from the appreciation which community members expressed during the evaluation regarding the work that Community Town Hall Coordinating Committees (CTCC) and children clubs, which were created by ToYACE under

this project, had been able to do. Members of CTCCs and children clubs also appreciated especially the capacity building and skills training initiatives that the programme supported.

This project revealed also that projects that work with communities and local government structures at all stages have high chances of sustainability unlike those that by-pass communities and government structures.

The Project demonstrates that greater impact is achieved with the use of radio because ordinary people, especially parents and children even in communities not targeted by the Project, can derive benefits from the project just by turning on radio to listen to discussions on educative and advocacy drama programmes.

Capacity building support that CTCCs and children clubs received is the most acclaimed achievement of this project. The skills gained will likely lead to subsequent better service delivery to the communities in Tongu area after the lifespan of the Project.

However there have been some challenges that have beset the Project, the biggest of which was how to



Young children discussing community development issues on Radio Tong

sustain the continuous interest of the volunteers to remain committed to the process.

Still, the Project has created a ripple effect in the listening communities of Radio Tongu. For example, Plan International's Ghana Office has set up a children's rights and protection programme in the South Tongu District and asked Radio Tongu to help showcase the programme.

Most important of all, poor and marginalised communities now feel emboldened to question the actions of their elected representatives as well as their traditional leaders publicly on radio or at meetings. ToYACE and Radio Tongu plan to involve several other communities in future initiatives in order to create a much bigger ripple effect.



ENHANCING TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY IN LAND MANAGEMENT – THE RIGHTS OF WOMEN IN LAND ACCESS AND CONTROL

Grassroots Sisterhood Foundation

Grassroots Sisterhood Foundation (GSF) is a women’s rights advocacy organization working to ensure improved gender equity and grassroots participation through good governance in rural communities of Northern Ghana. GSF is headquartered in Tamale and works with over 3,000 women on five thematic areas of Governance, Human Rights, Health, Natural Resources and Climate Change Risk Reduction.

Working within the traditional rural setting, GSF recognized that the increasing value of land has brought many actors to the land market thereby reducing opportunities for women and the vulnerable to access and control land for housing and other livelihoods. Compounding this are such factors as the indiscriminate sale of arable and prime lands; non-transparent and unaccountable land deals; allocation of poor arable lands to women and their exclusion from land related decisions, as well as the negative cultural practices that reinforce allodial rights to men and boys and encourage gender blind inheritance policies and practices on land.

Under the customary land administration system, women are often not consulted and therefore are not involved in taking decisions that have a bearing on land administration in their communities. In certain cultures the system ignores women’s holding rights to land completely. Consequently women and the vulnerable face discrimination under the formal and informal customary system of land tenure.

In response to these realities, GSF undertook a project titled, “Enhancing Accountability and Transparency in Land Management – The rights of women in land access and control.” The Project was undertaken in nine communities of the Nantong traditional area and it sought to improve women’s voice and visibility in land related dialogues, enhance community support for reviews and reforms of gender blind and negative customary practices that exclude women in land governance while building linkages for information and communication sharing among male and female traditional rulers, women leaders and their communities to improve citizen engagement.

The project adopted innovative participatory learning and action processes such as training workshops, mapping using the scorecard, media campaigns, peer exchanges, review meetings, shifting partnerships, networking and coalition building to empower grassroots members and groups to lead efforts at ensuring good land governance, enhance their understanding of women’s land rights while establishing a sustainable system of citizen engagements for community development and women’s security of land tenure. Capacity building and strengthening workshops were

held for 20 selected community members comprising women leaders, the youth and assembly members as community facilitators on the use of the scorecard methodology. The women-led team of community facilitators assessed negative customary practices that exclude women in community decisions, validated these findings through local to local dialogues, peer exchanges, and media campaigns (drama and radio). These discussions generated debate on women’s land rights in the rural communities. The Media campaigns used stories of the struggle of women for recognition at the community decision-making levels and the benefits of having security of tenure of land to illustrate to other communities the need to facilitate engendered customary land governance.

These strategies, which promoted debate in accountable land governance, enabled the creation of community platforms comprising the Women’s Advocacy Platform (WAP), the Chiefs Platform (CP) and Community Land Development Committees (CLDC).

Also GSF facilitated peer exchange between women leaders and female chiefs, a novelty that bridged the gap between the two leadership structures which were expected to work together but unfortunately distrusted each other. The use of peer exchanges brought community women leaders and female chiefs together to set agenda on grassroots participation and advocacy on security of land tenure.

The Project also used interfaces, conversations and consultations among community, divisional and paramount chiefs of the traditional area, stakeholders in land administration and management such as the Lands Commission, Customary Land Secretariat, and

“Under the customary land administration system, women are often not consulted and therefore are not involved in taking decisions that have a bearing on land administration in their communities.”



the Survey Department. The media was often included in these dialogue sessions because they were perceived as strategic partners who could highlight the issues and the solutions to them.

GSF understands how community leaders have used culture as a cover to perpetuate a 'culture of silence' and to sanction those who break or overlook certain gendered cultural practices. In view of this, GSF adopted the use of drama and radio discussions to share information on identified gender issues which could otherwise not be discussed openly with traditional authorities (including queen mothers), such as women's exclusion from land decisions, as well as fraudulent, speculative and exorbitant land deals. Consultative meetings and review meetings were also used to reach CSO groups, particularly youth and women, elected representatives, and officials of the Lands Commission. These systematic interventions and approaches show how ordinary people can take their development into their own hands and direct its growth for the benefit of all, especially women.

The outcomes of the various interventions include the fact that women in the Project area have improved upon their legal literacy and confidence to challenge the status quo, questioning their exclusion in land governance, security of land tenure and their participation in community conversations and decisions. Importantly, 20 women in the Wamale community have received land offers and allocation letters and 40 other women are expected to receive theirs in the Sanzirigu and other Nantong communities.

Largely because of the Project, there is now a land advocacy coalition in the traditional area, which serves

as a mouthpiece on issues affecting the poor and vulnerable. The coalition also supports the allocation of land to especially widows, orphans, single mothers and the poor. These community-based advocacy platforms now serve as avenues for consensus building, agenda setting on the issues of good land governance, grassroots participation and collective decisions. They also offer opportunities for women and the vulnerable to participate in decision-making processes because each community land development committee (CLDC) has a 30 per cent female representation.

The CLDCs are in direct consultation with chiefs, surveyors and with local government through their elected assembly members. They are consulted on land matters and act as watchdogs to reduce large scale land sales, ensuring decisions are engendered to enhance good governance. The allocation of land to women has been in direct consultation with all community stakeholders, including the youth.

The CLDC and the Coalition have built understanding on the rights of women and brought communities and their leadership closer to each (the WAP, CP and the CLDC) through peer exchange. Community members mobilize and meet with their paramount chief and share gender equity, grassroots participation and good governance models with him.

The media campaigns have expanded engagement on the land campaign, bringing it before the public, allowing for contributions during discussions, and urging other chiefs to emulate chiefs who are practicing good land governance and giving women land.

Another positive outcome is that the youth, in particular, have shifted position from resistance to women's land rights to advocating for women's participation and security of land tenure.

Significant lessons learnt during this project are that communities make decisions based on the information they have and how that information is communicated to make a difference. Without relevant and adequate knowledge on issues, women and their communities lack the courage to demand accountability from their leaders. Consensus building through information sharing and improved communication supports and sustains community decisions, actions and initiatives, improves gender equity, grassroots participation and good governance. For women, it helps in making the right choices.

Another valuable lesson is the need to create linkages and dialogue platforms among stakeholders so that discussions can be had and transparent decisions can be made in a participatory manner.

The effectiveness of using drama to convey sensitive messages and in voicing out issues considered sacred in the traditional setting was also illustrated by the Project. Without seeming to hurt anyone the culture of silence is broken and messages are sent directly to the intended target while providing entertainment, information and education. Using docudrama and jingles that depict the benefits of gender equity, grassroots participation

and good land governance is recommended to keep the synergies and momentum of the dialogue platforms that have been created during this Project.

The biggest challenge which confronted the Project was legal literacy. The women targeted by the project are non-literate and most legal provisions are written in English. This drawback is compounded because they are also non-literate in the local language. The use of drawings during presentations helped to explain some of the aspects of women's rights.

Another challenge was the exorbitant cost of land registration which posed difficulties for many of the women because they were poor and could not afford it. This challenge is being addressed by women groups that have started supporting each other through a savings scheme to enable them register their lands.

In spite of these challenges the gains of the Project are likely to be sustained because of the advocacy platforms that have been created, especially since they were established through consultations and consensus building with all stakeholders.

Some chiefs, community women and female opinion leaders within the operational area are requesting replication of the Mwananchi Project in their communities and districts. They are attracted to the success stories of women obtaining information, accessing and gaining security of tenure to land.



Community durbar on womens access to land at Doyin



PROMOTING THE RIGHTS OF THE VULNERABLE TO INFORMATION (PRIVI)

Socioserve-Ghana (SSG)

SOCIOSERVE-Ghana was established in 2002 with its head office located in Akosombo in the Eastern Region of Ghana. The organization works to ensure that vulnerable and excluded people have access to quality education, good health, equal rights and a protected environment by creating empowering partnerships for sustainable development.

In the course of its work with local communities Socioserve-Ghana identified that access to information on government programmes and policies in Ghana is lacking especially at the local level. It also discovered that locally elected assembly men and women, who serve as the link between government and the people, have inadequate capacity to be able to effectively include their constituents in planning and decision making. Assembly members are also not able to influence their district assemblies to be transparent and accountable to the people. Due to this information and knowledge gap, communities are ignorant of their entitlements and rights. The voices of the people in the communities' are not being heard and therefore the demand for accountability from duty bearers is weak.

The objective of the PRIVI project was to build the capacity of locally elected assembly men and women in information and communication processes so that they are better able to engage and, communicate with their constituents in decision-making. The Project also facilitated awareness creation on government programmes and policies such as the allocation of two per cent of the District Assembly Common Fund (DA CF) to the disabled; subsidised agricultural inputs to help impoverished farmers; micro finance and small loans initiatives and business advisory services targeted at vulnerable groups.

Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) approaches were adopted in implementing the project activities. These methods empower people and provide the opportunity for them to take part in solving their own problems. Specifically, social dramas, participatory review meetings, community capacity enhancement and training workshops were employed by the project. Social dramas were used to educate vulnerable groups on government programmes that are in the communities. This method was also used to demonstrate to vulnerable groups and elected assembly representatives the strategies of community engagement, advocacy and lobbying. Plenary sessions after the dramas helped participants to critique and learn from one another. Community capacity enhancement sessions allowed vulnerable groups and their elected representatives to reflect on their own problems and challenges and devise ways of solving them. Such sessions served as a learning process for both elected assembly men and women

“...access to information on government programmes and policies in Ghana is lacking especially at the local level.”

and vulnerable groups because they appreciated and learned about their own problems and therefore became committed to solving them.

Quarterly project review meetings brought together vulnerable groups, elected assembly members, district assembly officials and traditional leaders to reflect and deliberate on the project outcomes. Assemblymen and women shared among themselves some strategies of engaging their constituents that they are adopting, and which worked well for them. Since all stakeholders were present at these meetings, it provided them with the opportunity to respond to issues raised by other stakeholders and, collectively, concrete remedial actions got initiated.

Another important strategy was training sessions targeted at assembly members, vulnerable groups and the media on information and communications processes for good governance. Eight selected media personnel were trained in ‘development communication’ and this has enhanced the capacity of the media to report on issues affecting the poor and vulnerable. Another important initiative was the development of a manual for assembly men/women to help them communicate more effectively with their constituents.

The various strategies that Socioserve-Ghana has employed have resulted in vulnerable groups becoming more aware of government programmes and policies as well as their entitlements within these policies and programmes. Importantly, they have become more

assertive in demanding accountability from their representatives. For example, a youth group known as ‘Concerned Youth of Asuogyaman’ presented a petition to the District Assembly citing “lack of transparency in the award of contracts in the district.” The group also demanded transparency in the disbursement of the MPs share of the District Assembly Common Fund from the Member of Parliament because they argue that it was not being properly used. Worthy of note is the fact that the association of persons with disability (PWDs) in the District has for some years now not received their share of the DACF as mandated by government policy. This came up during review meetings and consequently in October 2011, the Assembly disbursed GH¢ 20,000 to 100 PWDs.

The manual developed for assembly members has helped them to maintain close contact with their constituents especially with the vulnerable groups. They are now more responsive to the needs of their constituents. One Assemblyman at Anum, for example, helped to mobilize GH¢3,000, which was used to assist a group of 30 unskilled young women between the ages of 20-30 to go into hairdressing apprenticeships.

The manual has also helped enhance knowledge of assembly members on local governance and its

processes. They now question some of the Assembly’s operations such as their non-involvement in ensuring that contractors who are working in various communities liaise with the respective assembly men and women. They recognise that the lack of proper assembly oversight and community monitoring is affecting the effective implementation of projects. The Assembly is now responsive to the demands of its members and the vulnerable groups it serves. Long term the manual will help to sustain the goals of the Project because it has become a useful training tool that is being replicated in other assemblies, and would continue to serve as a knowledge base for future assembly members to improve upon their work.

Another successful outcome is that assembly members have also begun mounting pressure on the Assembly to re-activate Towns and Area Councils which are sub-district structures that facilitate information gathering, storing and sharing within the community. Towns and Area Councils also ensure continuous contact between assembly members and their communities and are therefore important structures that encourage local level accountability and give more meaning to local governance.



An assembly member presenting an exercise during training on a communications manual

Strategic engagement with the media, especially the capacity building programmes the Project targeted at them, has resulted in them tracking developments in the communities and providing airtime to discuss them. This has led to a more sustained collaboration between the local radio station in the community (Rite 90.1 FM) and Socioserve-Ghana. The partnership has resulted in the implementation of other joint projects between the radio station and the CSO, including one aimed at promoting issue-based campaigning and voting as well as political tolerance among the electorate and political parties. Socioserve-Ghana leveraged its experience in enhancing the voice of the vulnerable and together with Rite FM organised parliamentary debates as well as election platforms during the 2012 elections to assist voters assess candidates who wanted to represent them. The major lesson learnt about the approaches to implementing the Mwanananchi Project is the importance of bringing all stakeholders together on one platform to reflect and deliberate on issues, promote learning, resolution of conflicts and the initiation of remedial actions that are accepted and owned by all. Using communication strategies such as social dramas also help people to appreciate issues better.

Another key lesson is that communities are able to demand accountability and participate adequately in decision-

making only if they have information and a platform on which to communicate their needs to duty bearers. Therefore creating and instituting sustainable platforms for constant information sharing and communication is needed. Lessons from the Project suggest also that there ought to be frequent capacity building activities targeted towards assembly members as many are ill-educated and lack knowledge on governance issues.

Despite the positive outcomes of the project and the valuable lessons emerging from its implementation, there were challenges that affected the project implementation. The challenges included the low literacy levels of most assembly members and the difficulties some face in doing their work because they are not paid for their services. In dealing with the problem of literacy the Project adopted a more participatory approach to all its review meetings and training workshops so that people could learn by doing. Based on such experiences Socioserve-Ghana is calling for more attention to be paid to district assembly elections to ensure that the right people with the adequate capacity, skills and knowledge are elected to the assemblies in order to have a more functional local governance system.



Assembly members in a group discussion during a training on communications manual

Reflections from PDA, the National Coordinating Organisation (NCO)



The wonderful and annoying thing about development work is that you never quite know how it will unfold, no matter how much you try to plan or control it. Mwananchi Project activities began in Ghana in October 2008 when ODI asked us to organise a consultation meeting for them. Little did we know that PDA would become the national coordinating organisation and that this would end up being one of our most interesting and worthwhile projects. After a somewhat slow year of baseline research and design meetings with a small group of people elected through the consultation meetings, the basic design, and thus the foundation of Mwananchi Ghana, was finally laid by early 2010. This mirrored all the key features of the Mwananchi Project as a whole, but the consultative process in Ghana identified the area of information and communication in governance processes as the special area of focus. This theme was to engage both our organisation and the eleven grant partner organisations in a three-year process of collaboration, experimentation and enquiry.

What happened next on the ground is already documented in the earlier pages of this publication, so I would like to share just a few thoughts about what I feel are the major highlights of Mwananchi Ghana and what came to be its distinctive and remarkable features.

Firstly, as always, it is the people and the relationships between them that made it happen. Mwananchi Ghana would not have been what it was without the hard work and enthusiasm of Glowen Kyei Mensah, the Project Coordinator for the majority of the project's life. She drove the project towards success at all times, always determined to make it work and always making sure everyone involved was fully on their toes!

The rigorous selection process, identifying 11 exciting projects from over 200 applicants, following a national call for proposals in the press in early 2010, brought together a very special group of organisations and individuals. From the very first capacity building meeting at Lake Bosomtwe in September 2010 this remarkable group quickly became the "Mwananchi family" and never wavered from their collective mission. Always open to finding ways of supporting and collaborating with each other. Despite the humble budgets that the Mwananchi Project offered to our respective organisations, all of us saw the greater value in the learning, access and connectedness we would gain. And although we perhaps all began a little sceptical about how this might turn out, we all gradually relished our Mwananchi-related work.

When we look back at those early photographs it is striking that so many of the original people are still involved and that they and their organisations have thus benefited from the total learning process that PDA sought to piece together as part of the project. The 3-day residential capacity building and learn and share events that have been held roughly quarterly throughout the three years, have bound us together in a continuous learning process, and helped us to reflect and plan together, teasing out emerging issues for the project as a whole. At each of these events we were able to both take stock of progress in a supportive and challenging atmosphere, but also to learn new ways of seeing and doing – learning about the Outcome Mapping methodology and how it could be adapted to our work, findings new ways of presenting our work and ideas to others through written and visual means, how we can enable people to gather and use evidence, and making new connections with people we hitherto scarcely knew how to reach, yet alone communicate with. Gradually these connections have opened up a host of new pathways that we all hope will continue to wind into the future and take our work into new spheres, persuading more and more people to reach the 'mwananchi' in a variety of governance related processes.

This binding together also helped us to see more clearly how our 'Project 11' work could unfold. The term 'Project 11' was coined early on to mean the work that needed to be done to connect the work of the grantees together and to look for ways of joining it up with regional or national processes and institutions that would further its aims more widely. This work unfolded in the form of joint events linking CSOs, the media and traditional authorities, lobbying parliamentary select committees to address policy and legal instruments, funding further events to reach a wider constituency, as well as organising the interactive process that gave rise to the Media for Good Governance network (MeGG). We are hopeful that these activities have been able to permanently change expectations about who it is and isn't possible to work with as we strive to affect change, demonstrating that there is a way of working together across our respective 'life-worlds' in which we only meet people 'like us'. Too often we only relate with those we already know, and fail to look beyond our world of existing connections. I hope that all the interlocutors involved in Mwananchi: civil society organisations, traditional authorities, people working with all types of media, and all types of elected representatives too, will continue to step out of their life worlds and into those of another.

For PDA, the Mwananchi Project has opened up some new strands in our work – among these a greater focus on working creatively with information and communication as a way of realising greater participation of 'ordinary people'. This has led to: our revamped website, new training courses at PDA's Institute for Development Practice and Management (IDPM) in using the social media to advocate, a new found fascination for Outcome Mapping as a way of engaging with the planning and analysis of change in our work, and supporting others in a similar journey by offering training in OM. It has also confirmed our view that we can perform ambitious nationwide feats through collaboration with sister organisations across the country, and a renewed belief that we must work at and across sub-regional levels to do our work if we really want to reach and serve the 'mwananchi'. Beyond our country we now have connections with sister Mwananchi-NCO organisations in five other African countries as a result of the meetings and electronic connectivity we have had through the Mwananchi Project. We cherish these new organisational friends, who in some cases are our only link into another part of the continent and thus bring a real and human face, as well as new possibilities, to erstwhile unknown places.

One can be sceptical about development projects – how they begin and end way before they have done their work, how they initiate work that may not be sustained, how they provide a temporary and artificial level of funding. But another way of seeing this is to take up each opportunity we are offered and do with it as we see fit for the duration of the journey, and I believe all those involved in Mwananchi, both here in Ghana and in the other countries it has touched, have done this. We are different now – stronger, wiser, more open to possibilities. And as we go forward post-project there is much for us in Ghana to continue – both together and separately, and both in terms of the things we want to change, and the way that we go about changing them.

One of the key reasons that this has been possible is the way Fletcher Tembo and Sarah Hunt at ODI have gone about managing the overall six-country project – creating a 'container' for us all to work within, but at the same time giving us the space to shape our work as we see fit. Always (seemingly at least!) trusting that we will know the best way of doing it and never failing to accord us the basic respect. If only all partners could be this way.

Celia Marshall, May 2013
*Senior Consultant and member of
PDA Board of Directors*

Acknowledgements

Hundreds of people worked hard to make the Mwananchi Ghana Project so successful. You know who you are and you should congratulate yourself and feel satisfied that your efforts made a difference! As the Mwananchi Project comes to a close however, it is important to acknowledge a few people in particular because their contributions were exceptional:

- First and foremost the eleven Mwananchi Grant Partner organisations, their staff and their partners for their hard work and enormous effort, for their vision, their passion, patience, ideas, flexibility and courage, not to forget their enormous team-spirit.
- The members of the National Steering Committee (NSC) who helped to guide and critique while supporting the progress of the Project. Chairperson of the NSC and Mwananchi Governance Expert Professor Audrey Gadzekpo was essential for the success of Mwananchi Ghana. She played multiple roles and was always there to lend a helping hand to not only the NCO but all 11 partners as well as MeGG. She was never too busy to spare some time for Mwananchi. Togbega Gabusu V helped tremendously in the communication and work with traditional authorities. The contributions of Hajia Fatima Sulemana, Dr Anthony Tsekpo and Nana Rex Owusu-Ansah throughout the project period were also very important.
- Dr. Fletcher Tembo (Mwananchi Project Director) and Sarah Hunt (Mwananchi Project Manager) of ODI for their support, advice and expertise. A memorable double act.

Also:

- o Alpha Primus Ltd. for their professional and reliable report writing services, no matter which corner of Ghana we took them to;
- o The mid-term evaluators Jenny Chapman and Antonella Mancini for making us think midway;
- o The members of MeGG for stepping out of their life-world and into another too!
- o Dr Dominique Chadwick for working miracles with the videos;
- o DFID Ghana staff and the staff of other GTF-funded projects in Ghana for their interest and collegiality.

Lastly, every member of PDA staff got involved in Mwananchi work at some stage, but the following should be particularly acknowledged:

- Glowen Kyei-Mensah the Mwananchi Country Coordinator without whose tireless determination and humour Mwananchi Ghana may have faltered somewhere along the way;
- Celia Marshall for getting the project going at the beginning and guiding it all the way
- Helen Nti and Zita Kesse-Appiah and their teams for unfailing support.

Thanks for your contribution and hard work...

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