

Women Becoming Bosses: Changing Gender Roles and Decision Making in Dangme West District of Ghana

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Abstract

Using both quantitative and qualitative data from the Dangme West district of Ghana, this study shows how the changing socio-economic status of women, as a result of governmental and non-governmental interventions, has influenced women to economically contribute more in their homes, become less vulnerable and subsequently improve their decision-making roles. The study also revealed that other factors such as unemployment and out-migration of men are creating more space for women to assume 'headship' positions and act as major decision-makers in the home. This 'new' gender role and position of women is, however, creating gender antagonism at the household level. The study recommends that NGOs and government agencies must strategically tackle the complexities of decision-making and bargaining power in interpersonal relationships. Moreover, sensitive issues concerning sexual behaviour must be addressed as the first step towards any intervention.

Key words: Ghana, Dangme West, decision making, gender, gender roles

Introduction

Within the traditional Ghanaian family, there is unequal power relation between men and women with husbands wielding more power than their wives. This unequal power relation also manifests in access to and control over resources such as land, labour, credit, education, decisions on reproduction, and the allocation of tasks at the household and community levels. The man assumes a central position as the 'head' and key decision maker mainly because of his economic advantage and his control over productive resources. The wife being subordinate and submissive owing principally to her lower socio-economic status, participates very little in the decision making process (Brown, 1994; Duncan and Brants, 2004; Wrigley-Asante, 2008).

Some writers have however made links between women's status or level of 'power' and their participation in household decision-making. They argue that the relative power position of spouses is influenced by the comparative resources, such as education and income, which husbands and wives bring to the marriage. The more equal the spouses' contribution, the more likely they take part in household decision-making. Women who earn an income therefore have a greater influence in household decision-making (Songsore and McGranahan, 2003; Oppong, 2005). Some studies in Asia have also shown that when women's economic status changes, it impacts both positively and negatively on them, both at the household and community levels. In certain cases, an improvement in women's economic situation brings about changes in the attitudes of husbands and more respect for women, but in other cases it provokes violence (Goetz and Gupta, 1996; Mayoux, 2002).

It is against this backdrop that this paper seeks to contribute to existing literature by discussing factors that have contributed to changes in the decision making role of women and its effect on social relations at the household level, using the Dangme West district as the study site. The paper first discusses the structural and institutional factors that have over the years promoted women's socio-economic position in Ghana and the study site in particular. The research methodology and findings are then presented and their implications on social relations are discussed in the concluding part of the paper.

Structural and Institutional Factors Promoting Changing Status of Women in Ghana

In Ghana, it was not until the 1950s that formal women's organizations were formed to address the concerns of women. The Ghana Federation of Women, for instance, was formed in 1953, with membership drawn from the ranks of market women, to work for an improvement in the economic and legal position of women. The National Council of Ghana Women, which was a merger of various women's groups all over the country, was formed in 1960 as the sole officially recognized body responsible for educating women and providing opportunities for them to improve their lives (NCWD, 1995; Nikoi, 1998). Even though the Conventional People's Party (CPP) encouraged the participation of Ghanaian women in politics and public life, the focus of existing women's organizations at that time was mainly on welfare issues, specifically home management, improved nutrition and childcare. Moreover, in an attempt to enhance the living standards and to improve the quality of life as well as integrate women into the development process, in 1967 the National Liberation Council (NLC) government passed the labour degree, which granted a six-week paid maternity leave to working mothers and time off work for nursing mothers (Asenso-Okyere et al., 1992).

In the early 1970s, at the start of the second development decade, Boscrup's pioneering work, '*women's role in economic development*', served

as the basis of policy arguments and became a characteristic of the Women in Development (WID) effort. The first world conference on the status of women in Mexico, in 1975, was called for by the United Nations General Assembly, to focus international attention on the need to develop effective strategies and plans of action for the advancement of women. It was after this conference that the United Nations declared the United Nations Decade of Women (1975-1985). The second and third waves of feminist movements which influenced this decade were to ensure women's participation in employment opportunities, and improve their share of resources, in an attempt to effect dramatic improvements in their living conditions. The Decade's mandate was to increase women's economic participation in development as well as facilitate the allocation of special budgets within the UN system to address women's overall socio-economic status. Consequently, aid agencies and non-governmental organizations in the north made visible efforts to integrate women into sectoral planning and create programmes for improving women's livelihoods. Thus the deliberate direction of intervention towards low income women in developing countries gained momentum after 1975 with the designation of a United Nations Decade for Women. By the end of the decade, 127 member states, including Ghana, had responded by establishing a national machinery to deal with the promotion of policy, research and programmes aimed at women's advancement and participation in development (Visvanathan, 2002; Chant, 2007).

In Ghana, with the establishment of the national machinery for women, the National Council on Women and Development (NCWD) became one of the most important instruments for the integration of women in the development of the country. Under NCWD, some development approaches adopted for the advancement of women included welfare, equity, poverty, efficiency and empowerment. The welfare approach focused on women's maternal and domestic roles and the equity approach concentrated on women's right to employment. The poverty approach emphasized on

income generation for women whilst the efficiency approach analyzed women as a development resource. Finally, the empowerment approach focused on women's capacity to increase their self-reliance and strength and this approach recognized women's rights to influence the direction of the change, through the ability to gain control over both material and non-material resources. The income generation approach was vital in NCWD's programmes aimed at promoting women's emancipation and these were supported with the welfare and anti-poverty approaches to women and development. Activities of the Council thus focused on skills training in various economic ventures, provision of appropriate technologies and labour-saving devices to reduce women's work burden and assist them in expanding their productive activities (Dolphyne, 1995; Nikoi, 1998). The income generation approach thus became NCWD's key effort at promoting women's emancipation and improving their status in society. The Council also made efforts to address the legal rights of women, education and cultural practices inhibiting women's development. Counselling was also another important area of the Council's work.

By the 1990s, significant efforts had been made by many international and national NGOs in poverty reduction particularly in rural communities in Ghana. Many provided human-centred integrated rural development programmes such as provision of educational facilities, business management training, counselling and legal aid services, particularly to women. Specific poverty reduction interventions targeting women were being implemented in order to reduce women's vulnerability to poverty as well as to empower them. This was being done by increasing women's participation in income generating programmes, ensuring that poor women's increased productivity will eventually result in self reliance. Thus gender advocates within some governments and aid agencies attempted to increase women's access to credit and savings with a wider context of poverty-targeted micro-finance (Mayoux, 2002; Chant, 2007). Specific programmes with a credit component directly targeted at women were

introduced. The Enhanced Opportunities for Women in Development (ENOWID) intervention project was set up as part of the Programme of Action to Mitigate against the Social Cost of Adjustment (PAMSCAD), for women. Most NGOs and other government interventions for women thus sought to develop the economic and social opportunities for the vulnerable particularly poor rural women by mobilizing, training and developing their entrepreneurial skills. Loan schemes were also extended to these women who have always remained at the periphery of the formal banking sector (MOWAC, 2004b).

In 2000, there was a transition in government with the ruling National Democratic Congress party (NDC) losing power to the opposition National Patriotic Party (NPP). With changes in Ghana's political system, the Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs (MOWAC) was established in 2000 to promote the welfare of women and children in Ghana. It has under it, the NCWD as the department responsible for women's issues and the Ghana National Commission on Children (GNCC) as the department responsible for children. MOWAC collaborates with development partners, civil society organizations and other stakeholders to facilitate the integration of women and children's issues into national development. With its establishment, MOWAC has formulated a comprehensive national gender and children's policy to guide other sectors in incorporating gender concerns into sectoral policies, plans and programmes in the areas of education, health, agriculture and generally poverty reduction programmes among women (MOWAC, 2004a). MOWAC has vigorously pursued the expansion of credit facilities for women as part of the overall effort to address poverty. The ministry has also created gender focal points in ministries, departments and agencies to promote gender mainstreaming and the rights of women and children. MOWAC thus seeks to enhance the socio-economic status of women and children through support systems which will facilitate and increase women's entrepreneurial capacities in small-scale enterprises. Emphasis is therefore put on facilitating and increasing women entrepreneurs' access to requisite

resources, such as information, skills, material, technology and most importantly credit. Consequently, a Women's Development Fund (WDF) has been established by MOWAC, to provide micro credit for women and their productive activities. This is also done in response to the United Nations Millennium Development Goal one "Eradicating Poverty" especially among women. The fund provides loans for poor women in both rural and urban communities throughout the country. Access to the WDF is guaranteed only by group formation and through the banks. The integration of reproductive health activities into the micro credit programmes is intended to ensure that both the reproductive and productive roles of women are effectively addressed. To improve women's access to rights and entitlements, there has been the passing of the Domestic Violence Act, 2007, which indicates significant gains in legal reforms. Moreover, the MOWAC held consultative meetings with relevant government institutions to get inputs on a draft Spousal Property Rights Law as well as the development of the Intestate Succession Bill. Considering the important role rural women play in agriculture, there has also been the development of the Gender and Agricultural Development Strategy (GADS) which provides a detailed framework for mainstreaming gender concerns into all policies, programmes and projects in the agricultural sector.

The programmes run by non-governmental organizations such as World Vision International and ActionAid Ghana, to support particularly rural women and to complement government efforts cannot be overlooked. The paper will look at the significant effects some of these activities by both governmental and non-governmental organizations have had on women and their interpersonal relations at the household level.

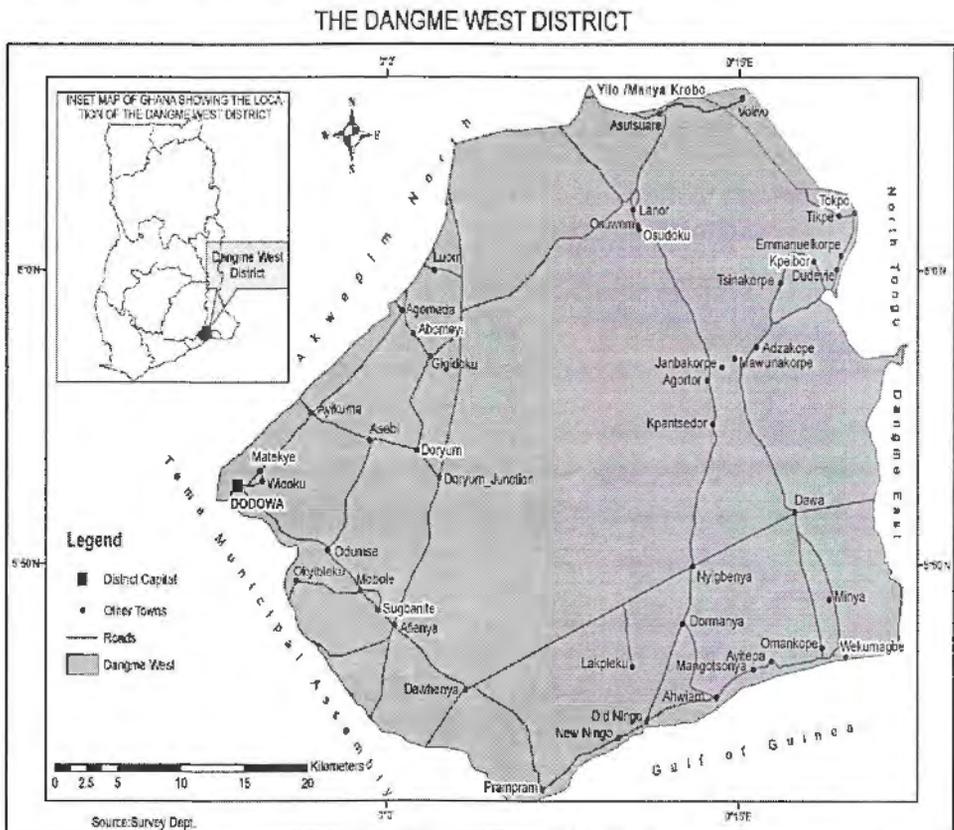
The Study Site and Context

The Dangme West district, as shown in figure 1, is situated in the south-eastern part of Ghana. It has a total population of 96,809, with females representing 51.8 per cent. The district falls within the coastal savannah agro-

ecological zone of Ghana and is characterized by the sub-sahelian type of vegetation, short grass savannah interspersed with shrubs and short trees. Apart from a few large settlements, the majority of the population live in small, scattered villages of less than 2000 people with poor infrastructure (Ghana Statistical Service, 2003).

The district is an indigenous Ga-Dangme community and the people are predominantly Ga-Dangme with a few other ethnic groups. It has an extended family system, and a patrilineal inheritance system, and lineage property is used more to the advantage of men than women. Men traditionally take decisions regarding major resources such as land, both in the home and the wider community (DWDA, 2003).

Figure 1: Map of Study Site



The main economic activity in the district is farming, with about 65 per cent of the labour force in crop farming, fishing and livestock rearing. Farming is predominantly subsistence-oriented and farm lands are acquired mainly through inheritance. Land could also be acquired through purchase or lease. Livestock rearing and poultry farming are also done as supplementary sources of income. Commerce is the second major economic activity attracting about 22.1 per cent of the labour force. Trading is dominated by retail activities and wholesale is insignificant. The marketing patterns and commodity flows in the district have been greatly influenced by the relatively short commuting distances to the regional and national capitals. The 2000 housing and population census of Ghana shows that 40.8 per cent of households in the district are headed by women. This is higher than the national average of 35.0 per cent. Also, 49.5 per cent of the women have never been to school as compared to 34.2 per cent of the men. Thus women are mostly subsistence farmers, petty traders, farm labourers and fish processors. Although the public and formal economy absorbs only about 20.0 per cent of the population, more men (26.4 per cent) than women (15.9 per cent) are found in that sector (Ghana Statistical Service, 2003). Traditionally, a man's primary obligation is to provide for the family and the most desirable husband is the one who can provide all of his wife's needs. On the other hand, the women's primary obligations are mostly their reproductive roles as well as faithfulness to their husbands (Robertson, 1984; DWDA, 2003). Following the international women's conferences and specific programmes targeting women in the 1990s, the district has benefitted from women specific interventions. One of the interventions with a special component for women was the National Poverty Reduction Programme (NPRP) which was launched in 1995. The NPRP was a collaborative programme of the Government of Ghana and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to complement national poverty reduction efforts. A core

component of the NPRP was the Women's Empowerment Project (WEP), with the objective of improving women's access to credit and information, promoting women's civic and legal awareness and enhancing women's access to health. Thus the NPRP was one of the first initiatives to address specific women's issues in the district. Following the NPRP, the Social Investment Fund (SIF) was set up in 1998 through the concerted efforts of the Ghana government, the African Development Fund (ADF) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The major areas of operation of the SIF included health, education, agriculture, micro enterprise and skills development.

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs), notably World Vision International, have also played significant roles and have complemented government efforts in addressing women's issues simultaneously in the district. They support income generating activities through access to credit facilities and also lay emphasis on awareness-creation on issues such as the importance of organizing, creating alliances and coalitions, and public education. Thus most of the NGOs use an integrated development approach focusing on the provision of micro credit, skills development and business advisory services. The assumption is that by increasing women's economic participation through micro enterprises development programmes, poor women will increase their productivity, which will eventually result in self reliance and self confidence among them and subsequently improve their decision-making roles. How these programmes have influenced women's economic contributions and decision-making position at the household level and the implications of this position on social relations will be the focus of discussion in subsequent sections.

Research Methodology

The paper is based on both qualitative and quantitative data collected in 2005-2007 from the Dangme West District of Ghana, as part of the author's PhD fieldwork. A multi-stage sampling procedure was adopted to select communities, households and respondents within the Dangme West district. Ten communities which had benefitted from women-targeted programs were selected to reflect the different geographical areas and economic activities in the district. In effect, communities were selected from the district's coastal areas where the major economic activity is fishing and women are mostly fish processors. Communities were also selected in the district's inland areas where the major economic activities are farming and commerce, with women being mostly farmers and petty traders. Using the group list, 206 women who have benefitted from viable micro enterprises development programmes were randomly selected. The household questionnaire targeted these women as the household reference point. The questionnaire solicited information on basic characteristics of the respondents' household members, sources of credit, work schedules, contributions to household budget, savings and investments, and decision making patterns in relation to various household activities. Focus group discussions were also held for the women as well as the men in the various communities. Women's group activities such as how groups organised themselves, decision to join groups, how meetings are organised as well as production and marketing challenges were examined. Questions on perception of poverty and changes in gender roles and relations were also asked.

Women's contributions to household budgets and decisions over household issues such as children's education were used as a proxy for changing gender roles of women in households. Quantitative data thus provided patterns and trends of women's contribution to the household budget as well as their decision-making roles over the years. Qualitative data also captured the

realities and experiences of women and men's socio-economic lives in relation to economic contributions and decision-making in the home. Initially, a period of ten years was used to assess the changes in women's contribution to household budget and women's decision-making roles. However, this was changed to five years because most women found it hard to recollect and some did not want to talk about experiences they had a decade earlier. Women's contributions to household budget were categorised into four as follows: contribute nothing at all or none, contribute less than half, contribute about half and contribute more than half to household budget. Five variables were used in measuring women's decision-making roles in the home. These are education (ability of a woman to take part in decisions concerning children's education such as choice of children's school or when to purchase school needs); health (ability of a woman to take part in decisions on whether to send a sick child to a health facility); food (ability of a woman to decide on what to cook or eat); household chores (ability of a woman to share household chores among children of both sexes); and sexual relations (ability of a woman to control sexual activity with partner or resist sexual activity when not interested).

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

The majority of respondents (96 per cent) were indigenes of the district. The ages of both women and men respondents ranged from 15-65 years and above. Sixty seven (67) per cent of all women respondents were currently married or in a form of relationship, 25.4 per cent were separated, divorced or widowed and 8 per cent of them were single and never married. More men (66 per cent) than women (46 per cent) have had some form of formal education. The major occupation among respondents is farming in the inland areas but women are also involved in petty trading. Along the coastal areas,

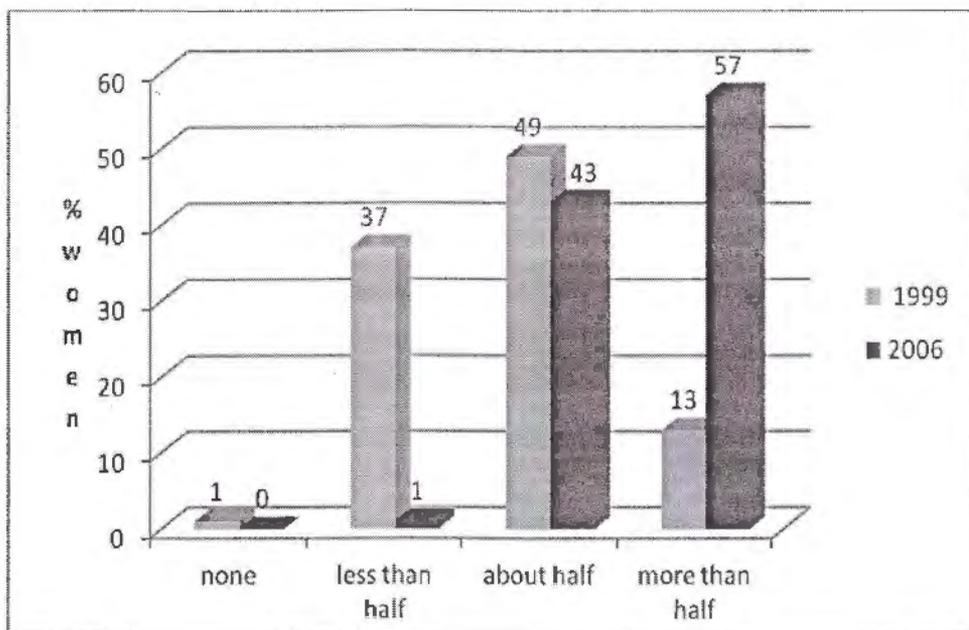
men are mostly fishermen and women are fish processors and petty traders. Men in both inland and coastal areas also take up minor occupations as artisans, drivers or bar-keepers. The household size of women respondents ranged from 1-20 persons and over, with the majority of respondents having between 1-10 persons in their households. All the respondents had children and in some cases grandchildren, and an average of 1-6 children in each household.

Results and Discussion

Changing gender roles of women

Even though it is difficult to generalize on the extent of women's contribution to family welfare in Sub-Saharan Africa because of the great cultural diversity associated with the region, in the traditional Ghanaian society, a husband is considered as the head of the home and has the responsibility of taking care of all household members. Indeed traditionally, there is no such notion as the pooling of resources or a common conjugal budget. However, the structural transformation of the Ghanaian society has changed the status quo, creating freedom for women to assume more responsibilities in the affairs of the household (Brown, 1994; Oppong, 1974; 2005). This study revealed that improvements in women's economic position over the years as a result of access to credit, improved technology and training in entrepreneurship and business management have subsequently provided positive increases in production and market returns of women. Consequently, there has been improvement in the economic contribution of women to household needs in the area of food, clothing, children's education, utilities and health needs of the family. Figure 2 shows the pattern of women's contribution to household budget over a period of five years. The results show that only 13 percent of women reported that they contributed more than

half to household budget in 1999, but by 2006 the situation had changed, with 57 per cent reporting that they contributed more than half to household budgets and 43 per cent contributing about half to household budgets. Only 1 per cent mentioned that they contributed less than half to household budget by 2006.



N- 206

Source: Field data, 2007

This means that a high proportion of women are contributing to support and maintain the home, a gender role traditionally assigned to men. For most women, they feed, clothe and provide for their family needs including the needs of their husbands. Indeed, many women reported that most often husbands tend to be *'irresponsible'* and therefore the onus lies on the women to cater and provide for their families. One woman presented her situation as follows: she smokes fish even during the lean season due to access to credit, which she sells at an urban market and uses some of the income to purchase

canned food items, detergents and other cooking wares to sell in her community. She uses the proceeds to cater for her children and even the personal needs of her husband. Another divorced woman explained that access to credit has enabled her to sell cooking wares in the market during the day and cooked food in the evening. For both women, trading has enabled them to feed, clothe and provide their families' needs, particularly the school needs of their children regularly, something they were not able to do previously. This suggests that the status quo is changing and in most cases women are increasingly becoming and in some cases have become important economic actors and bear major economic responsibilities in the home (Mayoux, 2002; Opong, 2005; Wrigley-Asante, 2008). Women thus appear to be less economically dependent on men as expressed by these women:

'These days we do not rely on our husbands. We work hard to look after ourselves and our children. If we depend on our husbands we will die out of hunger and so will our children' (Woman 1).

'Our husbands are no more husbands. We don't wait for them to give us money. We cater for the home ourselves' (Woman 2).

As a result, women have high ambitions for themselves and their children. They want to expand their businesses and diversify and once they have started earning some income and contributing to the household budget, they want to keep it up.

Are women becoming bosses?

The experiences of these women respondents perhaps affirm the assertions that women in unions are increasingly becoming *de facto* household heads since they are important economic actors and provide income and other resources for themselves, their husbands, children and other members of the extended family (Ardayfio-Schandorf, 1994; Wrigley-Asante, 2008). Again, when women gain access to financial services, for instance, they are more likely to have control over businesses and income. This in most cases positively affects women's position in the household where both their well-being and the overall welfare of the entire family are improved. This influences decision-making at the household level, sometimes including taking decisions on women's fertility goals (Schuler and Hashemi, 1994 in Steele et al., 1998; Mayoux, 2002). Thus, the increasing economic contributions of women in the home certainly have implications for their decision-making roles.

The study revealed that more women are participating in decisions concerning children's education, health issues as well as sexual relations. From the results, 71 per cent of women in the coastal areas were participating in decisions on health issues of the family some five years ago. The situation has changed with more women (93 per cent) participating in decisions concerning family health. More women in coastal areas are also participating in decisions concerning children's education as well as sexual relations. The percentage of women in inland areas taking decisions concerning children's education has increased from 38 per cent to 77 per cent within the five-year period. Women in inland areas are also increasingly participating in decisions concerning health needs, rent and utilities. Decision-making concerning food for women in both coastal and inland areas has however not changed and almost all the women respondents participate in this process. This situation however implies that decisions

about food constitute an area over which women have control and this has further enhanced their position in the home, as explained by these women:

'...When a woman asks her husband for money he will bluntly tell her that he doesn't have money. In that case, what will you do? The woman has to work hard to feed the family' (Woman 3).

'Some of our husbands even depend on us; we cook for them without asking them for housekeeping money and so we have to decide on what to cook' (Woman 4).

Thus women perceive their increasing power principally as the result of changing economic realities at the household level. In effect, women who have access to employment opportunities and their contributions to household expenditures have increased their status and conjugal decision-making power as explained by these women:

'Formerly when I say something, he wouldn't listen but now that he's seen that I'm working and have money, he listens' (Woman 5).

'Now he listens and respects whatever advice I give at home because he's seen that I have money and provide food even if he doesn't provide money. If he can't pay the children's school fees, I pay, so he listens to me...' (Woman 6).

This shows that women are participating in decisions concerning important domestic needs of their families, which traditionally are roles ascribed to men, as a result of women's better economic position in the home. Thus earning an independent income has led to an increase in women's ability to

exercise a 'voice' in the household decision-making process. It also confirms the fact that women's position in the household may be enhanced when they become a source of credit and income for the family, leading to a revaluing of their contributions to the survival of the household. This is important as it is a reflection of the enhanced power at the household level resulting in greater choice in household resource allocation, especially for those who were previously disenfranchised (Kaboor, 1998; Hashemi et al., 1996; Mayoux, 2002).

The results further revealed that more women in both coastal and inland areas have a say in decisions concerning sexual relations with partners. In the coastal areas, 97 per cent of women mentioned that they have a say in decisions on sexual relations as compared to 42 per cent some five years ago. Similarly in the inland areas, 80 per cent of the women mentioned that they have a say in decisions on sexual relations as compared to 35 per cent some five years ago. The increasing number of women controlling sexual relations is a result of women's increasing economic roles, awareness creation and sensitization programs on family planning and other reproductive and health issues. Most importantly, it is a result of men's failure to fulfill their expected economic obligations. Indeed, many women explained that the burden of providing for their children and family, coupled with the minimum support they receive from their husbands, has influenced their decisions about sexual relations. They therefore protect themselves in order not to have many children as reported by one middle-aged woman. To corroborate what the women said, the men respondents confessed that the increasing economic position of women has given women some form of 'power' in the home. Moreover, men's inability to support their homes financially is a factor increasingly affecting their traditional decision making role in the home, even in the area of sexual relations, as expressed by these men:

'Now some of our wives are controlling us because it becomes difficult for us to provide money for the home. When the NGOs come, it is only the women that they support so they get the money to work all the time but we men don't get anything. So you see, the women have now become the "bosses" in the home and this is bad. Indeed, this is what we the men are very unhappy about' (Man 1).

'You know in this our community, most of the men do fishing which is a seasonal job so we earn seasonal incomes. When the season is over, that is it. There is nothing to do, because there are no jobs for us. If you don't travel then you totally have to depend on your wife and that is when the problem arises. They show us their "power" because they are catering for the home and they want to take decisions on everything including when to have sex' (Man, 2).

Most men interviewed unanimously agreed to these statements. Indeed, most men explained that they become jobless for the most part of the year and have to depend entirely on their wives and in some cases even their mothers; a situation which sometimes makes them feel completely 'hopeless' because they cannot fulfil their expected roles. This tends to increase domestic violence in the homes as revealed by both men and women. In-depth discussions with an opinion leader confirmed the current changing traditional roles of men and women in the communities as follows:

'We are happy that the NGOs are supporting women but we feel that now the women are rather the 'head'. The man's position as the 'head' is diminishing. If a woman has money and the man doesn't, the man becomes belittled. Before a man can do something, he has to contact the woman before most often for money so it appears that all the "power" is with the woman. This is creating a lot of conflicts

between men and women. Because of this, men appear to be no more "men". So we are pleading with the NGOs to also support the men' (N.A, Stool Elder).

These statements clearly attest to the fact that women's economic role in the home is increasing whilst the traditional economic role of men which gives them 'power' appears to be diminishing and has resulted in men's lack of social value and self-esteem (Silberschmidt, 2005; Khan, 2009). This implies that men's failure to fulfil their expected economic obligations in their homes as a result of economic pressures vis-a-vis women's changing economic roles, appears to give women some form of 'power' and make them 'bosses' in the homes. Thus as noted by Songsoore and McGranahan (2003:71) the power of men within the household has come under threat from two processes: economic crisis and the growing unemployment of men on the one hand; and the reverberations of the global movement for the empowerment of women on the other.

With unemployment and men's inability to fulfil their expected breadwinning roles, men's role and identity appears to have been challenged and their self esteem has been linked to sexuality and sexual behaviour as men explained that they prefer to be with 'girlfriends' who respect them rather than with their wives. Silberschmidt (2005:234) thus argues that multi-partnered sexual relationships and sexually aggressive behaviour seems to have become essential to strengthen masculinity and self-esteem. Moreover, for most men, particularly in the coastal areas, the lack of alternative economic opportunities in their communities forces them to move out of their communities to seek 'greener pastures' as explained by these men:

'In these our fishing communities, men travel a lot; if you don't do that there will be nothing for you to do when the fishing season is over....look

at me, I am a married man, I have a wife and children and I need to give my wife money but I can't because I'm doing nothing. So what can I do, I have to look elsewhere so that I can do what a man is expected to do. If I don't, my wife won't respect me and there will always be quarrels' (Man, 3).

'We have to leave our families behind and go and struggle, because if you don't, you would have to depend on your wife and this is not good for the image of a man. Sometimes we return home especially when life becomes difficult or when the fishing season resumes but when things work well, we stay' (Man, 4).

In most cases, women are left behind to assume the responsibility of sole managers of the household, a situation which has also contributed to the improved decision-making roles of women. In such cases, women become important economic actors and decision-makers and provide income and other resources for themselves, children and other members of the extended family. Thus women have become both *de facto* and *de jure* household heads, responsible for the upkeep of their families and taking decisions of all forms. However, this situation may have negative consequences on women in situations where little or no remittances are received or where husbands desert women. Women could be left in a disadvantaged and vulnerable position with increasing burdens and responsibilities since they are often left alone to support the households. Where men withdraw their contributions and assume less responsibility towards the household's welfare than before, with only the women's incomes acting as substitutes, women's vulnerability may increase and the sustainable impact of women's contributions and the welfare of the household becomes questionable (Ardayfio-Schandorf, 1994; Mayoux, 1997; 2002).

Concluding Remarks

The study has revealed that the increasing economic position of women in the home is changing the traditional status of women. This in effect is creating room for women to become more independent as well as important economic actors in the home and has subsequently improved their decision-making roles not only on household needs but also on decisions regarding sexual relations with partners. Although the findings of this study may not necessarily be applicable in all instances since Ghanaian women traditionally have never been entirely without a say (Robertson, 1984; Brown, 1994), it supports the argument that the economic emancipation of women has given them an opportunity to rephrase their position and play an active role in the major decision-making processes within the household, and that women who earn an income are likely to have a greater influence in household decisions. Moreover, women's position in household decision-making is positively related to their occupational and financial resources and how these are used in providing the needs of the household (Songsore and McGranahan, 2003; Oppong, 2005). It is also a fact that unemployment and out-migration among men are also creating more space for women to improve their socio-economic positions in their homes. In effect, traditional gender roles are changing and giving rise to different social roles and positions for men and women. Whilst women are taking over men's traditional roles as *breadwinners* and positively influencing women's decision-making roles, men's authority appear to be under threat since they are most often reduced to mere '*figureheads*' in their households, a situation that affects men's sense of self-esteem, dignity and identity. These '*new roles*' are therefore forcing both sexes into more confrontation with each other and this often leads to conflicts and in extreme cases this situation can lead to divorce, separation and abandonment (Hashemi et al., 1996; Silberschmidt, 2005).

In order to address this acrimony, government policies and programmes should foster sensitivity to the needs and concerns of both men and women at the community level. It is important to mainstream gender perspectives in programmes and projects in order to address the employment needs of both men and women at the community level. Thus, both men and women's concerns and experiences must be an integral part of all programmes. This will hopefully increase women's economic position and at the same time address male concerns and make men more '*responsible*'. In doing this, it is also important for men and women to go through the process of deconstructing and reconstructing gender identities through vigorous gender education and sensitization programmes. It is important that NGOs and government agencies strategically tackle internalized oppression and the complexities of decision-making and bargaining power in interpersonal relationships as well as sensitive issues around sexual behaviour, as the first step towards any intervention. Educational programmes must include the greater need for sharing of responsibilities among both sexes. More studies also need to be conducted in the area of masculinities and the life situations of men in the process of socio-economic changes in order to explore and understand men's changing roles as well as sexual behaviour and its health implications for both sexes.

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