



**THE ‘HUNT’ FOR SHEA NUTS: EMPOWERING WOMEN THROUGH SHEA IN  
THE FACE OF RESOURCE COMPETITION IN THENAKONG COMMUNITY,  
UPPER EAST REGION OF GHANA.**

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## **List of Acronyms**

COVID	Coronavirus disease
DAO	Department of Agriculture
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
MoFA	Ministry of Food and Agriculture
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organisations
ORGIIS	Organisation for Indigenous Initiatives and Sustainability
SARI	Savannah Agriculture Research Institute
SRL	Sustainable Rural Livelihoods
UDS	University for Development Studies
VSLA	Village Savings and Loans Association
WID	Women in Development
W 1,2,3	Women Group Leaders

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## **Abstract**

The collection and sale of sheanuts have supported rural women over the years to generate extra income to supplement family income for the household nutritional requirement and other expenses. There have been efforts made by governmental and non-governmental organizations to enable women to explore the potential of the sheanuts in West Africa empowering them to have a better standard of living. However there have been concerns on the increasing competition over resources - land and shea trees - affecting women in the shea business which have even been complicated with the global climate change crises. The study uses the lens of gender power relations to analyse collection and sale of sheanuts, the socioeconomic dynamics in the access to land and control of sheanut production in order to critically assess the efforts of developmental organizations in empowering women in Nakong through sheanut production for economic gains. The findings show how gender power relations play out in sheanut production where productive and reproductive activities in the household and community directly or indirectly influence shea nut production. The study looks at the gendered socioeconomic factors such as marital status, age, childbearing, kinship and the family wealth influences the access to land and shea trees which are the fundamental resources for shea nut production.

## **Relevance of Study**

Empowering rural women by enabling them to acquire extra income through off-farm activities to supplement family incomes helps improve the economic, health and social status of women and their families as well. There is need for the government and non-governmental organizations to factor in gender power relations when designing development of policies to help address gender disparities and enable women's access to resources for economic livelihoods. The study contributes to the literature on gender and livelihoods in relation to the shea industry in Ghana.

## **Key Words**

Shea, Empowerment, Women, Gender Power Relations, Sustainable Livelihoods, Developmental Interventions.



# CHAPTER 1

## 1.0 Introduction

In Ghana, economically valuable trees such as shea and dawadawa contribute significantly to the livelihoods of women employing approximately 900,000 and increasing their household income by 50% (Banye, 2014). As an agricultural extension officer my job is to support rural people to attain food security. Rural women are one of the most vulnerable social groups in agrarian communities that rely on economic trees for a living. The literature shows (Banye 2014; Ganle, Afriyie, and Segbefia 2015) women experience a double burden of productive and reproductive work in the household. Despite the enormous contribution of women in productive and reproductive activities to support the family, women in agrarian communities are discriminated and marginalized as “women still face considerable socio-economic disadvantages relative to men” (Ganle, Afriyie, and Segbefia 2015:345) which governmental and non-governmental organizations seek to address.

This research examines to what extent sheanut collection and their sale is a successful livelihood strategy for peasant women in Nakong Traditional area. The study explores how shea nut influence gender power relations and the socioeconomic dynamics that shape women access land and control of production. The research also investigates the efforts of developmental organizations in enhancing women livelihoods through shea nut collection by looking at specific activities implemented and the outcomes considering the opinions of women leaders, community opinion leaders and the field officials of the developmental organizations.

In this study I use the concepts of sustainable livelihoods, gender power relations, and women’s economic empowerment in order to explore sheanut collection as an economic strategy for women in the Nakong Traditional Area. I use these concepts in order to explore developmental interventions in the Nakong area that aim to empower women. I explore the socioeconomic dynamics determining access to resources and control of the production process of shea nut collection in Nakong community asking how and whether these developmental interventions empower women.

## 1.1 Background to the Study

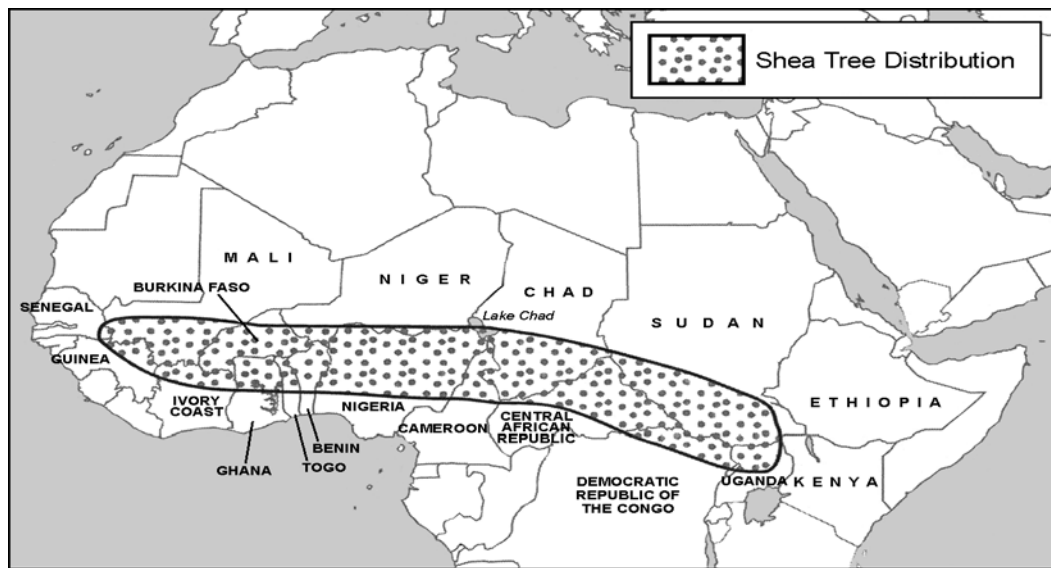


Figure 1 Africa Shea belt

Source: Elias, M., & Carney, J. 2007:38

### 1.1.1 Sheanut production in Ghana

Shea has “long been collected, processed and traded by women---women have long been the ones to collect and process shea nuts--” (Lewicki 1974 cited in Elias and Carney 2007) Women “pick up Shea fruits from the ground because the trees grow wild and the fruits are free” (Rammohan 2010:4).

Peasant women’s use of trees as a source of household nutrition and income to support family agricultural activities has Shea has “long been collected, processed and traded by women---women have long been the ones to collect and process shea nuts--” (Lewicki 1974 cited in Elias and Carney 2007) Women “pick up Shea fruits from the ground because the trees grow wild and the fruits are free” (Rammohan 2010:4). existed for generations in rural Ghana, and this knowledge has been passed on from generation to generation (Chalfin 2004, Lewicki 1974 Elias and Carney 2007). Shea nuts provide income and nutrition for the family. Women undertake shea nut collection and processing in order to provide nutritious oil for home cooking and to generate income from sale of shea nuts to support the family (Kent 2018:367).

The Northern part of Ghana is the badly affected by climate change due to its ecological condition which is semi-arid and its relative closeness to the Sahel region resulting drought and subsequent flooding which seriously affects food production leading to high levels of poverty in the area (World Bank 2011, cited in Acheampong et al. 2014).

The use and dependence of shea as an alternative income source has become more important than ever for rural women especially in the Upper East region of Ghana where the incomes and nutritional status are lower than the national average (Whitehead2006).

Trees of natural forest in rural Ghana which are mostly held in the common along with economically productive trees continue are becoming over-exploited due to accelerated land degradation (Damnyag et al. 2012) along with competition of their use. There is increasing conflict over shea tree as a livelihood resource (Atalla, 2015; Adams et al. 2016; Amoako et al. 2015). Fulani herdsmen contribute to the destruction and reduction in the number of economic trees in Ghana through activities such as the cutting down of branches and sometimes whole trees to feed cattle and burning of the dry grasses to trigger the growth new grasses which end up destroying young economic trees growing up in natural reserves (Amoako et al. 2015).

The history of the shea tree as an economic resource goes back some centuries. Europeans first recorded Shea in the early 18th century, by the 1920s “a flourishing trade was developing between West Africa and Europe. However, changing agricultural policies due to the Wars in Europe and new product formulations led to a decline in demand for Shea” (Ferris et al 2001:8). More recently the shea has become a major source of income as its products moved on the world market. The use of shea butter is now on the world market - “in 2003, European Union accepted Shea butter as one of the six vegetable fats to serve as a Cocoa Butter Equivalent” (Hatskevich et.al 2011:224).

The government of Ghana acknowledges the influence of the shea industry in the economic development of the country and hence makes efforts to enhance the growth of the sector. Governmental institutions such as University for Development Studies (UDS) and Savannah Agricultural Research Institute (SARI) are developing ways to domesticate the shea tree to enable large plantations to be established due increase its contribution economic empowerment of the country (Al-hassan 2012).

This shea plantation idea seems to be a long term solution to the shea resource competition but may not solve issues of gender bias towards men in terms of ownership of these shea plantations and the exploitation of women’s labour at the household and community level.

### **1.1.2 Nakong Traditional area**

Nakong traditional area is a rural agrarian settlement located in the northern part of Ghana in the Upper East Region. The traditional area is in the Kassena-Nankana West district, one of the fifteen districts of the Upper East Region of Ghana and has boundaries with the Upper West Region as well.

The climatic conditions of Nakong just as the whole Northern part of Ghana is semi-arid which is characterized by two farming seasons that is dry season spanning from November to April and the raining season from May to October. The study area is also characterized by dusty weather condition referred to as dry harmattan which is caused by wind blow from the Sahara -desert normally from late November to early February (GSS 2014).

The geographical location of Nakong traditional area and Northern Ghana makes it more vulnerable and most affected by the worsening climate change situation globally. The weather pattern in the area makes it difficult if not impossible for farming to be done all year round.

The traditional authority in Nakong traditional area controls all issues of land, property and inheritance. The paramount chief of Nakong together with the four sub-chiefs, elders, and opinion leaders are responsible for the laws and regulations in the community. The government of Ghana through the district assembly collaborates with the traditional authority for implementing national agendas.

The Nakong traditional area is patriarchal and women are not included in the decision-making process in the community.

The population of Nakong is estimated at about 2,500 people inhabiting four sub-communities (GSS 2014)

**Figure 1:** Map of Kasena-Nankana East and West Districts showing study communities

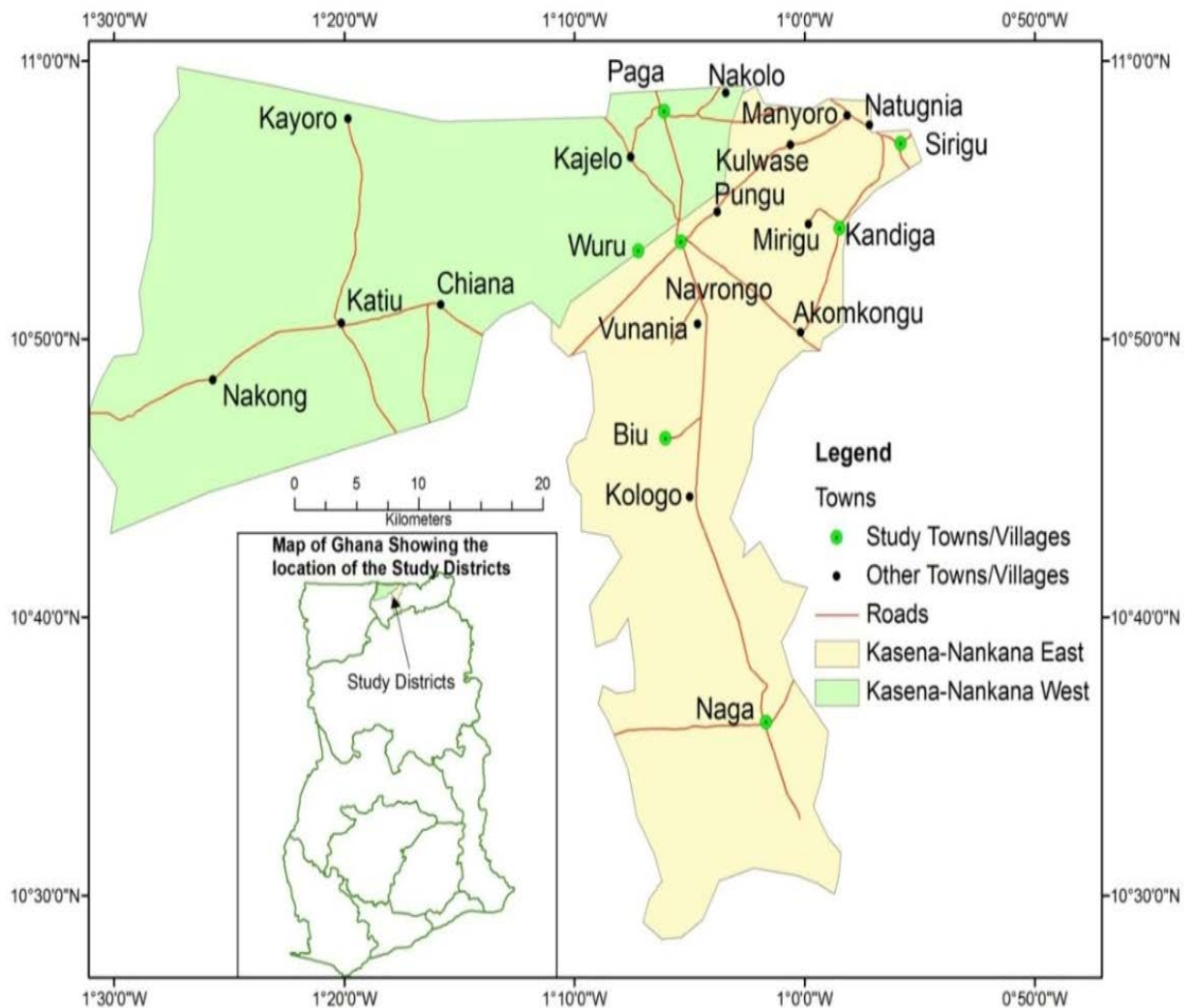


Figure 2 Map of Kasena-Nankana West showing Nakong

Source: Google photos

Nakong is a farming community with a flat landscape and produces crops such as maize, groundnuts millet, sorghum, beans, and vegetables through rainfed agriculture mostly for domestic consumption.

Subsistence farming is the major livelihood practice for the people of Nakong traditional area, but this seems to be unsustainable since poverty remains a big challenge in the community. The worsening impact of global climate change on agricultural cannot be under stated as evidenced in the food crises in 1981 famine (Yaro 2013). The area's proximity to the Sahara-desert which is encroaching due to climate change has resulted in the annual drop of crop yields and the rearing of animals becoming a more difficult task as vegetations and water bodies dry up.

Communities in the traditional area practice the patrilineal system of inheritance. The community is comprised of four sections or sub-communities namely Atiinia, Awenia, Kawenia and Nakong-dongo with one chief and several landlords who together manage the natural resource of the community. The community is an agrarian community with farming as the major source of livelihood. The climate is semi-arid with only four months of rain in a year making rain-fed agriculture a challenge to the inhabitants of the community. The dry season stretches for eight months and lives becomes difficult due to a paucity of alternative livelihoods. As a result, poverty in farming households is high in the Nakong community increased by frequent low crop yields and below average record of the income level of the region (Whitehead 2006). Land and other natural resources are under the supervision of elderly male landlords who head the indigenous clans of the community. The family land is allocated by them to households under the control of the male member of the household who is the household head. The women and non-indigenous people in Nakong do not own land and can only have access to land through arrangements with landlords and the chief of the community.

The uncertainty of agriculture yield has been increased due to the climate change crises in the upper east region of Ghana. The shea tree has become an alternative source of livelihood for most rural inhabitants through the exploitation of tree parts or even the whole shea tree along gender lines. Women are engaged in the collection and use of the shea nuts which are either sold or processed into shea butter for domestic use and for sale. Men are engaged in charcoal production which involves the cutting down of branches and even sometimes the whole shea tree for the process. Fulani herdsmen also depend largely on the shea tree for feeding of cattle especially in the dry season when grasses are completely burnt, they cut branches and sometimes the whole shea tree down for cattle to feed on the shea leaves. The shea tree, therefore, is a crucial source of livelihoods for many people in Nakong resulting in a competitive use of the shea as a resource. The increasing exploitation of the shea tree by chainsaw operators, real estate developers and Fulani herdsmen impact the use of shea tree and the livelihoods of women (Garba and Muhammad-Lawal (2020). This can lead to social conflict as well as posing danger to the sustainability of the shea resource.

In addition to these local dynamics within the community, there are other external actors. The organization for indigenous initiatives and sustainability (ORGISS) is a non-governmental organization in the Kassena-Nankana west district of Ghana that focuses on the empowerment of women in rural communities. The organization aims to improve

women's livelihoods at the beginning of the shea value chain by buying the collected shea nuts and channelling them to the national and international market. The department of agriculture (DOA) is also mandated to ensure food security and sustainable natural resource management in the district. The department through the women in agriculture development (WIAD) unit carry out trainings on the utilization of shea butter in local dishes in order to improve family nutrition and for sale to derive income. The government, NGO (ORGIIS) and other civil society also engage with the chief, elders, family heads and other opinion leaders in the community on the need to support women in order to achieve their full socio-economic potential through the shea industry.

### **1.1.3 Postionality of the Researcher**

As an agricultural extension officer working in rural areas of Ghana, I see rural women as one of the most vulnerable social groups when it comes to livelihoods. I have had regular contact with communities from 2011 to 2019 where I interacted with women and assisted them to implement livelihoods activities to enable them to generate income to supplement their family farming. I have worked in The Nakong Traditional area for eight years and have gained some level of trust from the people after these years of engagement. A major project was with a developmental organization known as the Organization of Indigenous Initiatives and Sustainability (ORGIIS) to train farmers on developmental issues. This engagement with the people and opinion leaders of the traditional area enables me to run farmer trainings in the area. It was from this direct experience that I saw the potential of the collection and sale of shea nuts is improving women livelihoods and family nutrition but also how it improves their social status within the household and more widely in the rural community.

### **1.1.4 Statement of the problem**

Women's economic activities in Nakong are regarded by the community as menial and are not seen as contributing significantly to the family upkeep, therefore women's concerns to preserve shea trees for family and income are not given a priority by male decision makers in the community as indicated by Heenan (2012 cited in Boateng et al 2014). Women are obliged to keep moving further and further into the forest reserve in search for shea nuts as shea trees nearby their homes become depleted. This situation reflects the unequal gender power relations in agrarian communities where women are discriminated and marginalized (Ganle, Afriyie, and Segbefia 2015). Due to class and gender disparity in rural society, peasant women are exposed to both economic hardship and gender disparity, lack of access to resources combined with sexual and physical abuse (Ganle, Afriyie, and Segbefia 2015:335).

This situation of gender disparity and the problem of community women to maintain their livelihoods through shea nut collection has to be put in the context of the land tenure system and competition over shea nut as economic resources. In a stakeholder forum in the Kassena-Nankana west district in the upper east region of Ghana, Mr. Julius Awareyga, the CEO of the Organization for Indigenous Initiatives and Sustainability

(ORGIIS) an environmental friendly NGO operating in the Kassena-Nankana West district indicated that the Nakong community alone lost about 55 hectares of shea parklands to activities of charcoal production which poses a danger to the sustainability of the shea tree and the livelihoods of women in the community<sup>1</sup>.

The continuous expansion of agricultural farms, the use of Shea trees for charcoal production and feeding of livestock has serious consequence on the fragile savannah environment and poses a threat to the sustainability of women's livelihoods in Nakong. This shea resource competition comes with the risks, conflicts, and injustices. This problem persists in Nakong communities and has led to several developmental interventions being implemented by department of agriculture, NGO(ORGIIS) and other civil societies in the last five years.<sup>2</sup>

To understand why women are still struggling at individual and community level to maintain their livelihood around the shea I look at the gender power relation shaping access and control of land and trees, and the different developmental interventions put in place to address this problem and the extent to which these developmental interventions empower women by looking at the social, political and culture dimensions of the gender power relations in Nakong community.

## **1.2 Objectives of the Study**

The overall objective of the study is to analyze the gender power relations in relation to shea production and how developmental interventions aim to maintain shea nut collection as a livelihood strategy in Nakong a farming community in the Upper East Region of Ghana. The study looks at how gender relations operate in the Nakong community as women struggle to maintain access to shea nut collection as a core livelihood strategy.

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<sup>1</sup> GhanaWeb(2020) Economic trees in the Upper East Region under threat due to deforestation, 12 June available at <https://mobile.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/Economic-trees-in-Upper-East-Region-under-threat-due-to-deforestation-978685>. (Accessed: 23 July,2021).

<sup>2</sup> The annual reports of the ORGIIS and DOA indicated the various interventions in Nakong traditional area as part of efforts to empower women through the collection and sale of shea nuts

## **1.3 Research Questions of the Study**

### **1.3.1 Research Main Question**

How is the collection and sale of shea nuts shaped by gender power relations and to what extent do developmental organization empower women through shea nut production?

### **1.3.2 Sub-research Questions:**

- How do gender power relations operate in communities involved in shea nut collection in Nakong?
- What are the socio-economic dynamics determining access to resources and control of the production process of shea nut collection?
- How and to what extent have developmental interventions in the Shea nuts sector contributing to empowering women?

## **1.4 Organisation of the Study**

The research paper is presented in five chapters.

Chapter one gives an overview of the background of the study in Nakong Ghana and the research problem. The chapter also explains the positionality of the researcher as an agricultural extension officer working in the study area and how this impacts the research. The research questions and objectives are indicated.

Chapter two presents the relevant literature review and concepts of the study. The chapter reviews critical literature on gender power relations, land and resource use and control, patriarchal cultural traditions, women empowerment, and developmental interventions in empowering women which all helps in understanding gender and rural livelihood with respect to sheanut collection and sale in Nakong context. It also specifically examines SRLA exploring on Scoones perspective of SRLA linking to sheanut production as supplementary sources of livelihoods to women in Nakong community.

Chapter three describes the research methodology of the study indicating who was interviewed, how respondents were selected, the process of data collection, techniques



used, and how the data analysed. The chapter indicates actors in sheanut production in Nakong and how empirical data was collected to unpack the dynamics in the communities. The chapter presents the strengths and weakness of the research mostly due to COVID-19 restrictions

Chapter four analyses and discussed the findings of the research. The empirical data was analysed under themes relevant to research namely gender power relations, socioeconomic dynamics of access to land and control of sheanut production and developmental interventions in empowering women through sheanut production. It brings to the fore the dynamics in sheanut production in the Nakong.

Chapter five presents the conclusions from the study. The chapter summaries the findings of the research based on the research questions linking to the theories and concepts used in the study. The chapter indicates how relevant the collection and sale of sheanuts is to women in Nakong communities and argues that socioeconomic factors such as marital status, kinship, age and polygamy influences women access and control of land and sheanut production in the area. The researcher's commitment in working with these communities to create more awareness on the limitations of women potentials by patriarchal traditions and to improve the impact of sheanuts in the area is also indicated in this chapter.

## CHAPTER 2

### 2.0 Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

In this section I explain the main concepts that inform my analysis building on literature from gender, power relations, land and resource use and conflict, patriarchy and sustainable livelihoods. The discussion of these concepts gives a clearer picture and provides a proper understanding of the dynamics of sheanut production in the study area and generally on gender and livelihoods in the Shea industry.

My conceptual framework brings together the concepts of sustainable livelihoods, patriarchal gender power relations and women's economic empowerment in the context of Nakong traditional area. The concepts inform the analysis of how shea nut production by women forms a livelihood strategy to overcome gender inequalities and enables them have access to resources and change their socio-economic conditions encouraged by development interventions. I use this as the framework for understanding the impact of developmental organizations interventions in sheanut collection and sale as an important livelihood of women in the midst of competing uses of the shea resource in Nakong traditional area.

### 2.1 Gender Power Relations

Gender power relations (the roles, behaviours and attitudes that societies define as appropriate for women and men) have been an important issue in understanding inequalities and differential access to resources which play out in different contexts (Kabeer 1995).

According to Harcourt (2017) "gender is not an essential category determined by biology but rather a constructed phenomenon that is reproduced in and through practices, policies and actions that shift and change over time".

Gender power relation is key to the access and control of natural resources and how men and women experience and interact with the environment differently.

According to Bookchin (1980), the exploitation and destruction of the environment is determined by power relations where one party takes advantage over the other: the "very concept of dominating nature stems from the domination of human by human, indeed, of women by men, of the young by their elders, of one ethnic group by another, of society by the state, of the individual by bureaucracy, as well as of one economic class by another or a colonised people by a colonial power" (Bookchin 1980:62).

Kabeer further reveals the complexity gender relations in society: "Gender relations, like all social relations, are multi-stranded: they embody ideas, values, and identities; they allocate labour between different tasks, activities, and domains; they determine the distribution of resources; and they assign authority, agency, and decision-making power" (Kabeer 2005:23).

The use of the shea trees in communities of Nakong for livelihoods has gender dimensions as well which have implications on the economic wellbeing of women in the area. In Ghana unequal gender power relations play out in access to land and natural resources. Women in agrarian communities are discriminated and marginalized (Ganle, Afriyie, and Segbefia 2015). Tradition and customs are contributing factors to the unequal power relations. The traditional culture in Ghana prescribes certain roles according to gender by placing men in authority over women so that men control all productive resources at the household and community level (Kent 2018).

“women’s traditional roles in the home also mean that they are often constrained by their household and caregiver duties, which may limit their mobility and time to participate in more rewarding activities in the value chain or to engage in a trade on a full-time basis” ( Shackleton et al 2011:138).

Specifically, there is unequal access to the use of land and trees in the Nakong traditional area among competing users in the quest to derive livelihoods. According to Owen, in most communities with patriarchal structures, women are regarded as subordinates and mostly experience physical, social, cultural, religious discrimination and even abuse (Owen 2001).

The traditional and cultural practices in the rural communities in Ghana restrict women’s economic potential as they lack land rights. Women have no rights to family property such as land and livestock. Women and children are regarded as assets of the men and have to seek approval from men before engaging in economic activities that involve the use of land (Apushigah 2009) since “within the Northern sector of the country [Ghana], women do not have land ownership rights as defined by custom” (Doghle et al. 2018:79).

Even though women are crucial to agricultural activities such as ploughing, planting, weeding, and harvesting, they are sidelined in decision making about how to use farm produce at the end of the farming season (Ganle, Afriyie, and Segbefia 2015). “Women play a crucial role in all farm-related activities from land preparation to marketing. They contribute a higher proportion of labor in agricultural sector than men. However, they are not active in decision making” (Fleschenberg et al. 2010: 441).

Recognizing this, according to Kevane development projects try to ‘empower’ women by raising the income levels of women within the society and to enable their voices and decisions to be taken seriously at the household and community level. He made a submission that “Many development projects for women are based on the assumption that access to credit or outside income will raise the bargaining power of women within the household” (Kevane 2000:3).

The exploration of the shea resource is crucial for women in Nakong however these communities can only derive livelihoods “so far as local resources will allow” (Scott 1976:176).

There is an open access to shea trees in the natural forest reserves to all multiple users of the resource but shea trees on individual farmlands are restricted to the exploration of household members (Kevane and Gray 1999). But in certain areas the exploration of the shea trees is open to all members of the community whether in the natural forest or on individual farmlands (Naughton 2016).

Gender power relations comes to play in the control of incomes as well. In West Africa there are conflicts over the control of income in the household, this differs according to

region. Poudyal (2011) study of the Northern region of Ghana indicates that the income acquired by women through the collection and sale of shea nuts is owned by them and they decide what to spend on with or without permission from the husband. However, the situation is quite different in other parts of Africa where men who are landowners turn to claim ownership of the proceeds of sheanuts collection and sale. In the southwest part of Burkina Faso, Guasset, Yago-Quattara and Belem (2005) found that the proceeds of sheanuts collection and sale is completely controlled by the male household heads. But in other studies, men only control the proceeds of sheanuts that are picked in the family farmland and not those picked in the natural forest( Kent 2018).

Even if economic issues are key, women's decision making, and resource control cannot be improved only by raising their income levels in the community but also requires changes to traditional and cultural norms system the subordinate women (Naylor 1999). For example, the cultural practice of bride price needs to change in tackling the issue of gender inequality in society. Asimwe (2013) argues that the practice of a bride price reinforces women as inferior to men position creating discrimination, neglect, and abuse of women rights and their access to resources. When a woman is physically abuse by the husband in Nakong, the situation is usually settled either at the family level or at the chief place where the couple are advice against such behaviors and no serious punishment given to the husband<sup>3</sup>.

As well as discrimination in productive roles, women's importance in social reproduction has been ignored. Women's reproductive roles in the home and in the fields are not regarded as work. Laven et al. argue that "often the work women do in agriculture is not visible, or it is simply not valued. They are often excluded from the more profitable aspects of agricultural enterprises" (Laven et al 2012:2).

Lahiri- Duut (2006) argues that women's social reproductive work is often not seen in relation to the amount of care work women do for the family. Women go to extra mile to spend the little money acquired from farming and other alternative income sources on family nutrition whilst men irresponsibly ignore the family and indulged in behaviors for self-satisfaction (Lahiri-Duut 2006:15). The gender power relations in rural communities are perpetuated and directly influneces the access and control of land and resources which have impacts on women livelihoods. It is indicated by many authors that the perpetuation of gender power relations and labour power through processes and institutions goes beyond the household to the community at large (Ferguson et al. 2016).

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<sup>3</sup>Focused group discussion with women group leaders in Nakong-23/07/2021

## 2.2 Gendered Land and Resource Use and Control

Land is an important asset for the rural community in Nakong where people rely on the natural resources for their livelihoods. However, “the availability of resources in the society determines the power relations in that society. Fulcher and Scott” (2011:746).

In Nakong traditional area, the landlords known as ‘Tigatu’ and male household heads own and control the land and all other resources in Nakong traditional area agrees with the submission that “under customary land tenure systems, chiefs and other custodians of customary lands are designated as trustees, and the state recognises this arrangement” (Yeboah and Shaw 2013:28).

When it comes to how the environment is used and managed for livelihoods and human wellbeing, the different gender roles men and women play have a great influence which reflect in policies as well (Rocheleau, Thomas-Slayter and Wangari, 1996).

Meynen and Salih (1995) point to how land ownership gives individuals the decision-making power over the use and management of land: the “access and control of vital productive resources does not only operate at household level. At community level a deferential access and control of resources is evident especially between poor and rich households, between female and male headed households and between people from different ethnic groups” (Meynen and Salih 1995:22).

Patriarchal structures in land ownership means that men rather than women have access and control of productive resources such as land and trees (Tsikata and Yaro 2014).

The social and political dynamics also play out in the quest to access land for livelihoods. According to Mbilinyi: “access to capital, land, livestock and labour depended on the class relations of a household, gender relations within it and clan and lineage relations” (Mbilinyi 1997 cited in Tsikata 2003:155).

Bogweh describes how women access to land depends on their linkages to men. He indicated that traditions and culture have influences on women access to land for agricultural purposes, and that the relation of women to men through marriage is key in sustaining this access to land (Bogweh, 2017). According to Aduamoah-Addo (2016) the way and manner in which land is accessed in Ghanaian communities is discriminatory and limits women involvement in agricultural activities.

Similarly, Ampadu indicated the role of the traditional authority in land issues saying that the traditional council comprising of the chief, elders and landlords represent the people and therefore decide on the acquisition, use and control of natural resource such as land and trees in the community (Ampadu 2013).

Cooke et al. research in Ghana reveals that rural households are worse off than urban households in terms of the former having a higher average poverty than the later (Cooke et al 2016:1).

Lahiri-Dutt also highlighted the importance of land in rural livelihood indicting that “a crucial aspect of livelihoods is women’s access to and control of resources such as land” (Lahiri-Dutt 2006:15).

Lahiri-Dutt in his study elaborated on the disadvantaged position women find themselves due to the lack of land rights. He indicated that women are not able to enjoy opportunities such incomes from land sales, credit and loans that comes with land ownership will have to depend on men for support economically and socially (Lahiri-Dutt 2006:15).

The access and control of land is fundamental in deriving and sustaining livelihood of women in rural areas and this has become evident due to the limited non-agricultural livelihoods in the rural areas. It is therefore important to understand how rural women access land and politics of land access is shaping and is shaped by social and political economical processes and ecological dynamics. According to Tsikata (2015) “social relations are embedded in economic, social, and political systems that privilege and also discriminate against particular social groups”.

The livelihoods of agrarian communities are directly linked to the land even though non-farm activities are done to supplement household incomes. Moreda argues that “any study that wishes to examine livelihoods in rural areas must place particular concern, today, on the evolving complexity and dynamics of land issues” (Moreda 2016:126).

Moreover “Land is viewed more than just an economic resource that extends to define relationships between and among individuals, households and communities and the state” (Rahmato 2009 cited in Moreda 2016:126).

Women in the study areas indicated the importance of land in their daily lives saying that the access and control of the land and its resources is key as the entire wellbeing of the family is connected to the farm and the natural resource it provides ranging food to medicine.

The linkage of rural livelihoods to land has been disputed by Rigg who argues that the emergence of non-farm livelihoods could mean that land is no longer central to livelihoods of rural people (Rigg 2006: 10). However, in Nakong traditional area, land is still the fundamental asset especially for women who largely depend on it for livelihoods and nutritional requirement of the family.

The communal lands are held under the authority of the paramount chief of Nakong traditional area and these communal lands play a key role in the livelihoods of the people creating competition and conflicts among competing users of the land resources.

In Nakong, women undertaking sheanut collection and sale has been proposed through government extension work and development NGOs as a promising avenue to empower women through livelihood activities. But it is not straightforward. One reason why women in Nakong do not benefit much from sheanut production is due to the competition over shea resource in the area.

The collection of sheanuts by women is faced with several challenges when competition for sheanuts leads to over-exploitation of economic trees (Damnyag et al. 2012). Shea resource competition leads to women taking risks walking unprotected and are subject to attack as they compete to use shea tree as a livelihood resource (Atalla, 2015; Adams et al. 2016; Amoako et al. 2015).

As stated earlier, the continuous expansion of agricultural farms, the use of Shea trees for charcoal production and feeding of livestock has a serious consequence on the fragile savannah environment which poses a threat to the sustainability of women livelihoods in Nakong. As a result women depend largely on shea trees in the natural reserves as there are fewer number of shea trees in farmlands. Women have to walk long distances in order to have access to sheanuts in the natural forest (Elias, 2010). The competition and conflicts on land and shea trees are even more complicated by patriarchal traditions in Nakong which will be looked at below.

## **2.3 Patriarchal Traditions**

For the purposes of this study, patriarchy is defined as social construct that determines the power relations between men and women within a society. Men determine decisions in the household. “Patriarchy is a system of social structures and practices, in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women” (Walby 1989:214). “Patriarchal structures create gender-asymmetries in endowments, risks and constraints which penalize autonomous behaviour for women but also offer them provision and protection if they remain within its parameters” (Kabeer :1997:300).

Polygamy and payment of bride price are an example of patriarchal practices in the Nankong community.

Polygamy is a form of marriage arrangement in which a man can marry more than one woman at the same time. This form of marriage is the most common in Ghana especially in rural areas where over 70% of Ghana’s population lives in polygamous families and determine the relationship between genders (Gyimah 2005:20).

Polygamy has been argued by many scholars as unhealthy coexistence for women and children as their rights are mostly violated. Polygamy is a challenge to women's rights and in most polygamous husbands cannot provide adequately for their multiple wives and children(Acheampong 2010). “Polygamy does not support women's rights and it would take abolition of the practice to completely eliminate its gender discriminatory effect” (Acheampong 2010:331).

Bride price payment is one of the most important aspect of traditional marriages in many African countries. The bride price involves the payment of valuable items to the woman’s family by men in order to claim the woman as the wife. These payments could range from less valuable items such as livestock and food items to much more valuable items “This traditional practice, and its gendered dimensions, has caused concern among activists and academics in countries in Africa, and to some extent elsewhere, in terms of its possibly damaging impacts on women and others in the communities concerned” ( Hague et al. 2011:550).

The practice of bride price payment reinforces women’s inferior position to men creating discrimination, neglect, and abuse of women rights and their access to resources including land which is crucial for women livelihoods in rural communities( Asiiwwe 2013).

Nakong is a patriarchal society with cultural traditions that determine the access and control of productive resources which have serious implications on women livelihoods. Moving beyond these patriarchal traditions to economically empower women will be a way of achieving sustainable development in rural communities.

## **2.4 Women’s Economic Empowerment**

It is important to clarify what is implied by ‘empowerment’ in this study.

One way of thinking about power is in economic terms in other words the ability of people to generate the income necessary to provide the livelihoods for themselves and

the family. To be empowered means to be able to have access to livelihood opportunities.

Women's economic empowerment is strategies of the gender and development process to support women livelihoods activities. Projects to empower women have been undertaken by developmental organizations through income generation. "Women empowerment has been identified as a panacea to promote gender equality and poverty alleviation among poor women" (Anjali et al. 2005 cited in Mensah and Yanson 2013:115).

Some authors have raised questions on the role of developmental interventions as being gender biased towards men in the quest of supporting women make extra income from alternative sources as empowering strategies. Elias (2010) indicated that there is a possibility of men benefiting the most from the developmental interventions aiming to empower women as women begin to shoulder most of the household responsibilities. Also studies in West Africa indicates that women supported by developmental intervention to make extra income end up assuming more responsibilities in the household which were traditionally assigned to men (Becker 2001).

This lead to the ascertainment that, the aim of improving the living conditions of women through the implementation interventions to empower women economically may not be realized if women are to take up more household responsibilities now than before (Naylor 1999).

According to Buvinic (2006), women empowerment is a holistic and multi-dimensional approach which encompass the social, political, economic and social development of women in society. However, she indicates that for communities to fully develop, the economic empowerment of women should be given more attention for a sustainable societal development. It is within this reasoning that there is the urgent need now more than ever in formulating strategies aimed at empowering women by promoting economic empowerment through alternative livelihoods in Ghana.

Ghana like other countries in state institutions and non-governmental agencies aim to empower women and to prevent social and economic discrimination (Kaburi 2018).

"The Ministry of Women's and Children's Affairs was established in 2000 as the national machinery for women in Ghana. The goal of the ministry is to strengthen the institutional foundations for promoting greater responsiveness to gender policy measures" (Anyidoho and Manuh 2010:268).

For rural areas to develop holistically, economic empowerment of women should be a key element in all developmental interventions at local, regional, and national levels.

However, these developmental interventions seeking to economically empower women in the Northern Ghana and other parts of Africa through livelihoods ventures and microcredit do not always work due to patriarchal traditions and unequal gender power relations in the household and community impeding on the goals of such programmes. A study by Schindler (2010) on developmental intervention in the microfinance sector titled informal credit as a coping strategy of market women in Northern Ghana indicates that "informal credit involves high transaction costs and prevents market women from growing out of poverty in the long term" (Schindler 2010:234).



## 2.5 Sustainable Rural Livelihoods

The livelihoods approach explains a wide range of issues in rural development. It is a popular approach in the past three decades and has been used in the analysis of rural development and practices. This study understands rural livelihoods as “complex, multi-dimensional, socially, and spatially varied” (Scoones 2015:34). Every household needs a livelihood venture in order to survive and for agrarian communities, natural resources such as land and trees play an important role. Different communities have different natural resources and hence the livelihoods strategies may vary. These strategies change over time, according to changes in the community including household relations, development interventions and external factors such as climate (Ellis, 2000).

Rural peasants rely on the land and its resources to derive livelihoods. These lands are either owned or rented which constantly put peasants in negotiation with landlords, labour and the market (Akram-Lodhi and Kay 2010). Studies show how livelihood diversification is essential to generate additional income to supplement farm work earnings (Scoones 1998: 9)

Scoones also added that “livelihood perspectives offer a unique starting point for an integrated analysis of complex, highly dynamic rural contexts. Drawing on diverse disciplinary perspectives and cutting across sectoral boundaries, livelihoods perspectives provide an essential counter to the monovalent approaches that have dominated development enquiry and practice. With more complexity, more diversity, and more uncertainty about possible rural futures such an embedded approach is, as is argued here, essential” (Scoones 2009: 183).

According to Bartra and Otero (2008) the fundamental human right to live has a direct link to the access of productive resources such as land and trees and the ability to exercise one’s freedom in their use as in ownership and agency. The term ‘sustainable livelihoods’ relates to a wide set of issues which point to the relationship between poverty and environment” (Scoones 1998:5).

Scoones categories livelihoods strategies in the agrarian settings as agricultural intensification/extensification where rural people can increase the quantity of farm inputs such as labour, land, seed, fertilizer to increase crop productivity. The second is livelihood diversification where rural people engage in off farm activities to generate additional income to support agriculture or other business and lastly migration where rural people have to leave to other geographical locations to seek for other jobs in order to support the family back home (Scoones 1998: 9).

Rakodi and Llyod-Jones (2002) argue that the location and time determines the accessibility of productive resources and how these resources are exploited for livelihoods. The livelihoods approach focuses on the mediating factors and processes that enable people to access basic assets or resources for livelihood, the mediating process are contexts, conditions and trends – which include history, politics, economy, climate, demography, agroecology, and social differentiation which influence or hinder poor people development (Scoones 1998). “When the necessary assets and resources are available, social relations, institutions and organizations determine the extent to which livelihoods will be promoted or hindered”(Ellis 2000: 39).

In order to understand the possibilities of women to sustain their livelihoods in rural society, it is important to understand how their livelihoods are determined by the gender dynamics of labour and the access and control of land in communities. Razavi (2007) points out how livelihoods are determined by access to technology, capital, credit, and natural resources which are areas where women are largely marginalized. Her work and others indicate there is the need for developmental intervention to support women who are most vulnerable in society to derive livelihoods sustainably.

## **2.6 Development interventions and livelihoods**

The collection and sale of sheanuts as a main livelihood venture for women in Nakong have over the years supported the family as women work hard to explore the shea resource in the area. However, women in Nakong traditional area are disadvantaged in the market because they are positioned at the bottom of the value chain and gender hierarchies prevent their involvement and access to the market with men dominating in decisions as revealed in similar studies (Neumann and Hirsch 2000). Rural women with no educational background are more vulnerable and do not benefit much from livelihood ventures which they work so hard to sustain (Dubey 2016).

In order to reduce the level of poverty in rural areas, governmental and non-governmental organizations seek to implement developmental interventions in the shea area to help rural population meet the nutritional requirements of the household. These organizations serve as mediating institutions that facilitate the livelihoods of the rural communities as indicated by Ellis. That for viable livelihoods interventions to be constituted and shaped, there are factors and processes that mediate the access to productive resources and that social relations, institutions and organizations represent these mediating factors and processes. He further inducted that these mediating factors and processes are able to influence individuals and households to make certain choices Ellis (2000:39).

The organization for indigenous initiatives and sustainability (ORGIIS) is a non-governmental organisation based in the Kassena-Nankana West district which supports women by providing training on safety measures in shea nut collection, resource and time management as part of efforts to enable women become more appreciated and contribute significantly to the well-being of the household. The district department of agriculture also provides agriculture extension services to women in rural communities to help empower them with crop production technologies for increased productivity. In order to tackle poverty and hunger in rural households in Ghana, the government targets women through the planting for food and jobs programme to support them with farming input due to their high vulnerability and discrimination in the society to boost farm production (Tanko, Ismaila and Sadiq 2019:25).

# CHAPTER 3

## 3.0 Methodology

The study explores the gender power relations in shea communities and how the interventions of development organizations seek to empower women through the collection and sale of sheanut which is characterized by natural resource competition in Nakong traditional area

The study is based on qualitative data collection principally via primary data collection working with the women in the Nakong area. In addition to field work in Nakong, I will review the quarterly and annual reports from developmental organizations (ORGIIS, MOFA, District Assembly) to augment academic literature that looks at livelihoods, gender and development issues in Ghana and Africa as a whole.

## 3.1 Selection of Research Respondents

In the first phase of the study, I identified three categories of members of the community who participated in the research: women group leaders, development organisations and community leaders

### 3.1.1 Women Group leaders

I identified seven (7) women group leaders who have been leading groups for more than five years. These women groups have been existing for more than a decade now and the rich experiences of the leaders helped to understand the dynamics in relation to shea production in the area. The seven women leaders are those with the longest involvement in the affairs of the groups. Most women in communities of Nakong traditional area are organized in groups as way of pulling together their collective efforts in addressing critical issues that affect the livelihoods of women in the area. The formations of these groups are facilitated by the NGO- ORGIIS and the District Department of Agriculture in the various communities of Nakong. These women groups operate under a drafted constitution and leaders are elected democratically by the members per the constitution. These leaders are first nominated by the members based on the several factors such as: the knowledge acquired due to exposure to other parts of the region; their educational background; their family's economic status in the community; the level of activity in the community; and the ability to speak out freely without fear.

The women group leaders are active participants of all group activities and play a key role in ensuring the cohesion of the group by encouraging and listening to the predicaments of fellow group members. The group leaders are occasionally invited by ORGIIS and DOA to attend training workshops out the community to build their knowledge and capacity on current issues around gender, livelihood sustainability and environmental integrity.

### **3.1.2 Developmental organizations working with women in the Shea Business**

As well as the women themselves I engaged with developmental organizations (ORGIIS and MOFA) working with women in the shea business. The Organization for Indigenous Initiatives and Sustainability (ORGIIS) serves as a support base for women in Nakong engaged in sheanut collection. ORGIIS train women groups on quality control measures in the sheanut collection and provide ready market for collected sheanuts. The women are taken through how to manage natural forest regeneration and supported with different tree species to help in the reforestation of depleted areas within the community. Women groups have also been supported with a motorcycle to help in the transportation of shea nuts from far distances to the warehouse in the community. The women are occasionally given wellington boots and raincoats to help cope during the unfavourable weather conditions. The department of agriculture also plays a role in training women on sustainable livelihoods and natural resource management to help maintain the shea business in Nakong.

Two field officers, one each from ORGIIS and MOFA have been interviewed to solicit information for the research. The two field officers gave detailed accounts of the kind of support they offer to women in Nakong and their perspectives on the power relations and socio-economic dynamics that exist in the communities.

### **3.1.3 Community leaders**

In addition to the women and the developmental organizations, three community opinion leaders have been interviewed to solicit further information about the women's roles in the community. The community or opinion leaders are respected individuals in the community with a wide range of knowledge about rural dynamics and developmental issues. The community leaders will help to establish what are the norms and values regarding gender power relations the socioeconomic dynamics in the community. These opinion leaders who are chiefs, religious leaders and Assembly members are held in high esteem by community members and are perceived representing truth and fairness. The chief presides over community issues such as land conflicts, marital conflicts, domestic abuse, ethnic and religious conflicts to maintain peace and order in the community. The religious leaders such as pastors and traditional priests advise in domestic and family problems when requested by members of the community. The assembly member of the traditional areas serves as a mouthpiece to people in and outside the community in difficult times. The assembly member respect all people the community irrespective of ethnicity and religion, and therefore intervenes in domestic conflicts, ethnic and religious conflicts to ensure peace prevails in his electoral area. Because of these key roles the opinion leaders play in the traditional area, they are abreast with the critical issues that affect the lives of community members on daily basis.

## **3.2 Research assistants to undertake primary data Collection**

The primary data is based on qualitative research working with the selected participants. During field work narrations and perspectives of women engaged in sheanut collection

were collected to understand how they perceived gender power relations, the developmental interventions of NGOs and government workers in the area and their perspective on the socioeconomic dynamics.

Because of travel limitations due to the COVID pandemic I was not able to go to the field myself, therefore I employed two researchers in the field who undertook in-depth interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) using a semi-structures interview guide.

The two research assistants are from the region where the research area is located and are both fluent in English language as well as the local language (Kassem). I organized an online training for the research assistants who have been carefully selected virtue of personal relationship to me as well as their experience on rural development issues. One of the research assistants Mr. Sylvan Danaa is a community development expert with a master's degree in Rural Development from the university of Van Hall Larenstein and a Post graduate diploma in Research methods and skills from Maastricht School of Management. He is a senior agricultural officer and currently works with the Department of Agriculture in the BalsaSouth district which is adjacent to the Kassena-nankana West district where the research area is located. The other research assistant, Mr. James Asasiba is a graduate from the Bolgatanga Technical University and has been working with the Department of Agriculture for seven years now. Both research assistants have more than five years' experience working in rural communities and have carries out several agricultural activities in relation to women, children, and livelihoods in rural communities. The research assistants were taken through the interview guide online and all clarifications made before data collection started. I worked with the research assistants on a daily basis planning the field data collection via Internet connection.

There was also a community assistant who was responsible for organizing participants and liaising with the research assistants on daily basis for updates on planned activities. The community assistant is selected based on the rich social relations he exhibits in the community. The community assistant was born and lived in the community for more than thirty years and has acquired respect from the community members due to his willingness and participation in community volunteering work. The community assistant is seen organizing people for social, political and developmental activities for years now. Due to his active participation in religious, political, and developmental activities, he has become popular in the community and has the ability to work peacefully with most members of the community.

### 3.3 Methods to collect primary data



Research assistant with women group leader W5



Research assistant with a women group leader W1



Research assistant with the paramount chief



Focused group discussion with women group leaders

Figure 3 Respondents in the field during data collection

### 3.3.1 Semi structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews using an interview guide was conducted by the two researcher assistants to understand the power relations, the socioeconomic dynamics and perceptions of development interventions in Nakong community with regards to sheanut collection as a livelihood venture. These qualitative interviews were held one on one to enable the research assistants to carefully record the experiences of these women in a conducive environment. The interviews were conducted and recorded in Kasem which is the local language of Nakong and then transcribed.

A semi-structured interview guide was used in order to solicit views and perceptions of women engaged in sheanut collection, opinion leaders and officials from ORGIIS and DOA on the power relations, socioeconomic dynamics, and developmental interventions around the sheanut collection as a livelihood venture in Nakong traditional area. These interviews explored issues on both a personal land community level in relation to social reproduction, production, and the environment.

### 3.3.2 Focus group discussions

A focus group discussion with the seven (7) women leaders was organized in order to consolidate and streamline views to obtain a true reflection of real situation for women in the community.

The community assistant organized participants and meeting points where the interviews were carried out within the community.

Due to the increasing numbers of COVID cases on daily basis in Ghana, the public have been advised not to encourage the gathering of people. The chief was assured of complete adherence to the COVID 19 protocols before, during and after interviews and the focused group discussion. The chief assured the research team that a word will be sent to all the elders and landlords about the presence of the team in the area since a gathering of the elders was not possible.

According to Dr. Kuma-Aboagye the Director -general of the Ghana Health Service, as at the fourth of August 2021, Ghana records an additional 664 new cases of COVID 19 infections making the total active cases standing at 6,766<sup>4</sup>. Students from the secondary and tertiary institutions across the country accounted for 2,864 of the active cases recorded. The most common is the delta variant and educational institutions are cautioned to take strict measures to ensure the adherence of the protocols to help reduce the spread of the virus in schools.

This situation calls for the research team to take the COVID protocols more seriously during the data collection.

The rains this year started late in July in Nakong area delaying the land preparation and planting activities. As at the period the research team visited the paramount chief, most of the community members were busy on their farms as the opportunity of adequate moisture for ploughing and planting presents itself.

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<sup>4</sup>Ghanaweb(2020)Ghana Corona virus update. Available at <https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/LIVESTREAMING-Information-Ministry-s-press-briefing-on-Coronavirus-case-count-1003078?gallery=1> (Accessed on 09/07/2020).

There has been a drastic change in the rainfall patterns in Nakong over the past 30 years which directly affects ploughing and planting activities which usually start in early May now starts in late July.

The current situation has compelled the research team to readjust plans from having the interviews in the school premises to other available alternative venues. Some of the possible places were within the compounds of the respondents or at the farm. These new plans came up unexpectedly but also pose an advantage to the research assistants to relate questions to the physical environment during interviewing for more clarity and understanding.

The interviews were conducted successfully with limited interferences and all interview sessions were recorded in the local language (Kasem) and then transcribed into English. The researcher was in contact with the research assistants through phone calls for further clarifications and support when the need arises.

### **3.4 Ethical Consideration**

Ethical approval from ISS on COVID 19 safety protocols for the research was sought before the commencement of data collection. As traditional ethics demand before starting any activity in a community in Nakong Traditional Area, the chief and elders must be first informed. On the 29<sup>th</sup> of July, 2021, the research assistants together with the community assistant to pay a visit to the paramount chief of Nakong traditional area to brief the traditional council the objective of the study and the possible outcomes of the research. The chief was pleased with the efforts been made to understudy the traditional area to unpack critical issues affecting the development of women and the community at large. He indicated that the sovereign power is in the hands of the people and the royal position is just a representation of the will of the people. The research team thanked the chief and assured him the data collection exercise will be done consciously not to jeopardize the public health and peace.

Before the commencement of the interviews, community assistant made sure the selected research participants are informed a day earlier about the interview and their permission to participate granted.

Before starting interviews, the research assistants explained to the participants in details the purpose of the research and assure them of confidentiality of their identity and information they provided.

Consent forms and letters were given to participants as evidence of seeking their permission before the commencement of interviews. These consent forms were either signed, or thumb printed by participants to indicate their approval. Consent letters from the researcher were also sent to ORGIIS, DOA and the District Assembly to enable the researcher access quarterly and annual reports for the research.

The research participants consent was also be sought to record interview sessions for review and possible follow ups for more clarifications after the interviews and focus group discussion.



### **3.5 Strengths and Limitation of the research**

Both research assistants have more than five years' experience working in rural communities and easily adjusted to diverse situation that emerged in the various communities during data collection.

The selected participants are knowledgeable and interested in the subject matter of the research since these are the very issues (power relations and livelihoods) women are struggling to improve upon in their daily lives.

The research assistants are not from the study area but can speak the local language fluently. This combination will give the participants a belief of thinking of sharing issues with someone who already known much or someone who might use the information against them in the community. The participants will therefore feel free to express views and will also be confident that 'their own kind' will seek help for them and the community at large.

The community assistant is popular in the community and has been regarded a serious person due to his involvement with several developmental programmes in the traditional area. The community assistant role of leasing and scheduling interview dates will be much easier due to his rapport with the people.

The community assistant openness with his political party, ethnicity and religion has led to perceptions of biases in the minds of some individuals with regards to the dealings of community activities. To clear all misunderstandings before the interviews, the research assistants took time to explain the rationale of the research to participants.

The emergence of the new delta COVID 19 strain in Ghana has brought about a fear of a third wave of the virus. This situation limited interactions during the FGD and much more efforts were put in place to ensure strict adherence to the COVID protocols.

The translation of local terms into the English poses some difficulty since some local words do not have direct translations and would need thorough description in context by the researchers to express the intended meaning.

The data collection was done in the rainy season which is a critical period for rural communities for crop production. Women play an important role in agricultural activities during this period making scheduling of interviews difficult.

The rains this year started late in July in Nakong area delaying the land preparation and planting activities. As at the period the research team visited the paramount chief, most of the community members were busy on their farms as the opportunity of adequate moisture for ploughing and planting presents itself.

There has been a drastic change in the rainfall patterns in Nakong over the past 30 years which directly affects ploughing and planting activities which usually start in early May now starts in late July.

### **3.6 Data Analysis**

The data gathered through interviews and FGD was recorded in the local language (Kasem) and transcribed in English for analyses. The narrations and descriptions were analyzed using themes or concepts to draw meanings, similarities, differences, and conclusions. The data is analyzed in themes or concepts using content analysis.

# CHAPTER 4

## 4.0 Findings and Discussions

### 4.1 Gender power relations and shea production in Nakong

The research reveals unequal gender power relations within Nakong both in the productive and reproductive activities of men and women. Women are the home caretakers and are responsible for cooking, washing, sweeping, and taking care of the young ones with no or little help from men. Women combine these domestic activities with sheanut collection on daily basis to sustain the household nutritional and income requirement. In interviews and discussions, it was emphasized that, women contribute a lot when it comes to production and reproductive activities in the household ranging from household chores and care for the family to alternative livelihood activities putting more burden on women compared to men. These gender roles are prescribed by society as indicated by Harcourt (2017) “gender is not an essential category determined by biology but rather a constructed phenomenon that is reproduced in and through practices, policies and actions that shift and change over time”.

The collection and processing of sheanuts is done solely by women as mentioned by a woman leader in Atinia community.

“My husband cannot cook, wash bowls or wash clothes when I am there, it will be seen as disrespectful for a woman to allow the husband to do such activities at home. We collect sheanuts early in the morning and return home to do the home chores” (Respondent W2, interview 04/08/2021).

This implies that women have limited time for the collection sheanuts from farms and the natural forest since they must combine sheanuts collection with domestic activities. This finding resonates with other studies which indicates that “women’s traditional roles in the home also mean that they are often constrained by their household and caregiver duties, which may limit their mobility and time to participate in more rewarding activities in the value chain or to engage in a trade on a full-time basis” ( Shackleton et al 2011:138). These gender base activities in Nakong traditional area are learned and passed on the younger ones for years that is these activities are socially reproduced as discussed by many authors who indicated that the perpetuation of gender power relations and labour power through processes and institutions goes beyond the household to the community at large (Ferguson et al. 2016).

Childbirth is one of the most important attributes in a woman’s life and women with children are treated better for the sake of the children in Nakong since having children is an avenue of inheritance of family productive resources. Women with no children or husbands are mostly discriminated and sometimes blamed for their inability to give birth or the demise of the husband and children. This discrimination of women has been reported by other authors who argued that due to unequal gender power relations, most women especially in agrarian communities are discriminated and marginalized (Ganle,

Afriyie, and Segbefia, 2015). The training and up bringing of children is mostly shifted to women. Children become closer to their mothers at the early stages of their lives and this continuous even in their adulthood. The woman is often blame when the up bringing of the child goes bad and children become deviants. The care and training of the children at the early developmental stages is the sole responsibility of the wife as prescribe by the culture of Nakong Traditional area and this is more visible in polygamous families where the husband does not spend all the time with one wife. Women have to sacrifice their time for the of children at home making it difficult to engage fully in the sheanut collection. This was indicated by assembly member of the Nakong traditional area in his narration of the level of discrimination the area.

“Women are mostly at home taking care of the children and yet these innocent poor women are called witches and blamed for the death of their children and husbands. When the child is sick, the women economic activities come to a halt until the child recover. Women do not get much time for themselves” (Assemblyman, interview 04/08/2021).

The assigned care work of women goes beyond members the household and extends to the visitors and other relatives of the external family. The woman provides water and food to visitors of the family and prepare a sleeping place if the need arises. The men do not make home preparations to receive visitors but only monitor to ensures that the visitors are comfortable. This care and hospitality roles of women is important and promotes family and community cohesion, but it is also time consuming and affects women output in the collection of sheanuts.

“The women are the peace builders in the community. It is the duty of the woman to receive visitors and entertain them until they leave. The aged aunt known as ‘Kadikwo’ is regarded as a father in the family and settles disputes within the family” (Assemblyman, interview 04/08/2021).

It was revealed that, gender inequalities go beyond the family to the community where women are assigned certain roles during social activities such as funerals, traditional marriages, and festivals. Women are assigned the duties of preparations of local dishes, brewing local drinks, and performing the local dance to entertain community members and visitors. This family and community care of women is not considered as work. These burdens overwhelm women limiting their efforts in sheanut collection since less time is devoted for the collection of sheanuts during these cultural occasions.

The care of the environment and most importantly shea tress comes with gender inequalities as well. The women care roles goes beyond humans to the environment as they are those protecting trees. It was revealed that women depend heavily on nature for resources to take care of the family. Trees are planted by both men and women but the responsible for watering and taking care of the trees on daily basis to survive is assigned to women and children. The women therefore see protection and care of the environment as a way of life as the health and livelihoods are all linked to nature. As the women put efforts in the care of tree on farmlands to sustain their livelihoods, men on the

other hand do less and sometimes cut down trees to produce charcoal since they own the land. This is how women regard nature in Awenia community.

“The trees in the natural forest are very important in our daily lives. The spirits live in the forest and are offered sacrifice regularly for the protection of our lives and livelihoods. There are certain periods of the year we are not allowed to enter the forest or make noise all to apace the gods and the environment” (Respondent W2, interview 04/08/2021).

This assertion is in line with Bookchin (1980) who indicated that the exploitation and destruction of the environment by humans escalated from the power relations among people where one party takes advantage over the other. He argues that “the very concept of dominating nature stems from the domination of human by human, indeed, of women by men, of the young by their elders, of one ethnic group by another, of society by the state, of the individual by bureaucracy, as well as of one economic class by another or a colonised people by a colonial power” (Bookchin 1980:62).

Polygamous marriages which most women find themselves in the study area worsens the situation of unequal power relations and puts women in subordinate position. Men can marry as many women as they can, but a woman can only belong to one man at a time. Women are at the receiving end in marriages which greatly affects their human rights especially in polygamous families where some men turn to be irresponsible towards their families leaving women no choice than to struggle alone to provide for themselves and the children. The gender inequalities in marriages places women in an inferior position limits their freedom to express oneself and act accordingly since the husband have total control of the decisions of the family productive resources. Due to the number of co-wives, some women in polygamous families do not get adequate attention and support from husbands regarding the welfare and livelihoods including sheanut collection. Polygamy has several implications in the family coexistence and reinforces inequalities in the household. These inequalities present in polygamous family mostly results in quarrels among wives and most often involving children within the household is a common phenomenon. It was indicated that most men are unable to co-exist with the wives fairly and wisely in the household. The man turns to act in a manner that unveils his preference and affection to one wife and her children than the other wives. This situation creates jealousy and conflicts among wives which extends to the children. These conflicts among some women in the area has affected the unity of women in general and makes it difficult to brings the efforts of all women together to work towards the economic liberation of women through shea nut collection and sale in the traditional area. This resonates with Acheampong (2010) observation on polygamy as not protecting women rights.

“Some men are not wise enough to keep several wives but yet marry more than one because other men are doing same. It is normal for men to marry more than one woman in this community and this causes envy among women”(Respondent W5, interview 07/08/2021).

The study reveals that there is an unequal gender power relation in the home when it comes to decision making. The men turn to have greater influence over the decision-making processes in the family. The decisions making regarding the education of children, shelter and labour resources of the family is taken by the men. This more evident in polygamous households where the man does not want to be attributed as loving one wife more than the others and therefore take decisions without consulting any of the wives. The labour of women has constantly been negotiated as the collection of sheanuts usually coincide with the peak of farming activities where women labour is critical.

“I have to talk to my husband to hire more labour to work on the family farm. This reduces the workload and enables me to engage in sheanuts collection after working in the family farm. On days we don’t get hired laborers, I have to forgo sheanut collection which eventually reduces the quantity collected for that season” (Respondent W5, interview 07/08/2021).

However, the contribution of women to the finances of the family influences their involvement in family decisions on expenditure and not on the allocation of resources. The decisions of the women are only limited to their own finances and does not include the family finances and resources. It was revealed that women who can support the household financially are involved in taking decision of expenditure in the household and not the allocation of land. The men now see the importance of the woman when it comes to financially supporting the family since the women can also contribute significantly relieving them from the entire burden of providing financially for the family. This involvement of women in family expenditure decisions gives respect and confidence women deserve to continue supporting the family as much as they can but much needs to be done for women to have ownership and control of the family productive resources as well.

The income acquired by women through the collection and sale of shea nuts is own by them and they decide what to spent on with or without permission from the husband. The men only negotiate and encourage women to support major expenses of the family such school fees and shelter.

“The sheanuts I collect from farmlands and the bush belongs to me and my husband does not interfere in my sheanuts business or what I use the money for” (Respondent W5, interview 07/08/2021).

This finding resonates with other findings by Poudyal (2011) in the Northern region of Ghana. However, the situation is quite different in other parts of Africa where men who are landowners turn to claim ownership of the proceeds of sheanuts collection and sale. In the southwest part of Burkina Faso, Guasset, Yago-Quattara and Belem (2015) found out that, the proceeds of sheanuts collection and sale is completely controlled by the household heads who are usually men. But in other studies, men only control the proceeds of sheanuts that are picked in the family farmland and not those picked in the natural forest( Kent 2018).

This is a demonstration of what Laven et al. (2012) stressed when they indicated that “often the work women do in agriculture is not visible, or it is simply not valued. They are often excluded from the more profitable aspects of agricultural enterprises” (Laven et al 2012:2). This shows that the gender power relations in the ownership of sheanuts production income vary across locations and regions.

## **4.2 Socio-economic dynamics in access to land and control of shea production in Nakong**

The findings shows that factors such as marital status, age, childbearing, polygamy, kinship which interconnects with gender power relations influence the access, use and control of land and the sheanut production in the traditional area. The ownership of land is important when it comes to the decisions to be taken with regards to the management and use of the land and tress on the land. Even though the access to land and trees in Nakong traditional area is open to all gender categories, the kind of land, the distance and quantity of land access by the various social groups vary. Land-based livelihood strategies such as shea nut collection and sale are closely associated with the access and control land as this either enables the access of shea trees and nuts or restrict access especially on farmlands. Related studies have shown gender inequalities in livelihood outcomes as a result of inequalities that exist between men and women in the ownership, control of and access to land (Whitehead and Tsikata, 2003).

Women born into households in the traditional area are regarded as belonging to another family and has no say when it comes to land ownership and management which affects their livelihoods that accrue from land such as shea nut collection. Women do have access to shea nuts for livelihood through the husband, brother, father, uncle, or the landlord of the community. During the FGD, women indicted that the collection of sheanuts is open access in the natural forest but restricted on individual farmlands. The women indicated that shea trees are protected and cared for on farmland due to economic benefits it provides and hence seen as an investment for the family. This finding is similar to other studies in West Africa which indictes that there is an open access to shea trees in the natural forest reserves to all multiple users of the resource but shea trees on individual farmlands are restricted to the exploration of household members (Kevane and Gray 1999).

This means that women with no access to land will have to complFetely depend on the natural forest foe sheanuts.

In contrast, these views of the shea resource are different in some part of Mali among the Bamana tribe where the exploration of the shea trees is open to all members of the community whether in the natural forest or on individual farmlands (Naughton 2016).

Women in the study area are either married, unmarried, widowed, elderly women. According to the 2010 Ghana population census, from a total of 25,462 females in the Kasena-nankana west district representing 51.9 percent of the total population, 18,343 unmarried, 12,333 married, 3,786 widowed and 4,020 are elderly women (GSS 2014). The access of productive resources like land and shea trees depends on the family and the women’s status. The research reveals that elderly widows and unmarried young women

experience difficulties in accessing land compared to aged unmarried and married women. This difficult in accessing land have dying consequences on the ability of women to diversify their livelihoods to take care themselves and their children. Women with little or no access to land will have to depend completing on the natural forest to harvest non timber tree products such as sheanuts for their livelihoods. Women must compete among themselves and other trees users on daily basis for sheanuts.

A women group leader narrates the challenges of unmarried women in gaining access to land for sheanut collection in Awenia community.

“It is very difficult to gain access to sheanuts as an unmarried woman here as you are expected to collect sheanuts from your husband farmland. The unmarried woman can only collect sheanuts from a male relations farmland. This situation makes life difficult for unmarried women in the community as they have to rely mostly on the natural forest for sheanuts” (Respondent W5, interview 07/08/2021).

Marriage becomes a guarantee for women to gain access to shea on farmland of the husband. The men as family heads who owns the household productive resources grants access to the wife. Even after the women gain access land for their economic activities, there is still a level of control by the landowner since the woman does not own the land. Certain activities such as tree planting trees and fencing the area will have to be approved by the landowner before execution. This shows how women are still tied to men in their economic growth and development since they do not have the freedom to invest in the land without the approval of the husband or family head. This discriminatory situation is more visible in polygamous marriages as indicated by Acheampong (2010).

The situation was similarly explained by a woman group leader in Awenia

“This situation predisposes young women to early married in the Nakong traditional area in order to gain access to land which is an important source of livelihood to women in the area since off-farm alternative livelihood activities are limited”(Respondent W5, interview 07/08/2021).

The customs and traditions prevent women from owning land and can only be given temporary access for economic activities such as farming and sheanut collection. The landlords and family heads do not negotiate land ownership with women who wish to acquire farmlands outside the family land for economic activities. The ownership of land in the Nakong traditional area comes with customary traditions of sacrifice performance on a regular basis to thank the gods for their protection. These sacrifices can only be done by men giving them the sole right of land ownership and control resources such as trees on the land. This finding is in line with Aduamoah-Addo (2016) who also revealed that the way and manner in which land is accessed in Ghanaian communities is discriminatory and limits women involvement in agricultural activities.



Women have different views of the customs of the area. This was the feeling of a women group leader in Atiinaia community

“the sacrifices are done by men but that should not deny women ownership to land since the gods themselves know women needs land to farm and derive livelihoods to support their children. The traditional norms were put in place by the older generations to promote and protect the wellbeing of the people at that time. If these traditional norms are not promoting development and the wellbeing of the people now, then I think these traditional norms should be amended to enhance women development in the community” (Respondent W5, interview 07/08/2021).

The women indicated that, they have always wanted to have their own lands to cultivate crops and nurture shea trees that will bring them income and not to be regarded as helpers in the farms of the men. They added that even though access to land is open, the competition and the processes involved in the acquisition of land limits women access, and this impedes their efforts in the sustainable management of shea trees in the area. The findings reveal women’s difficulty in accessing shea nuts as the years go by due to the activities of other land and tree users in the area. In the acquisition of land and access to natural resources for economic activities, one need to consult with the landlords and these consultations depend on who you are and the position you hold in society. Just as indicted by Tsikata (2015) “social relations are embedded in economic, social, and political systems that privilege and also discriminate against particular social groups”.

It was mentioned during the FGD that, wealthier ones are able to have access to land and tree resources easier and faster in Nakong. And most of the time, people who get access to most of these land resources are not the local natives of the community but rather richer capitalist businessmen and Fulani herdsmen. These competing land users are able to give a portion of their profits to the landlords and the chief which is a fundamental requirement for having access to land and natural resources in the community.

This situation poses a threat to shea trees and the livelihoods of women as many shea tree trees are cut down for commercial crop farms, charcoal production and feeding of livestock. The effect of increased competition over land and shea trees has been recorded in other studies that describes how women have to walk long distances now in order to have access to sheanuts in the natural forest (Elias, 2010) which expose them and children to danger.

Women access to land for sheanut collection through the family system is as well threaten as landowners persevere for more economic gains as indicated by Gray and Kevane “Women, whose rights to farm a plot of land were guaranteed by marital or kinship status, lose these rights and face a diminished access to land which underlies and re-enforces a greater economic and social insecurity. (Gray and Kevane, 1999:16).

Children play an important role in sheanut production in Nakong traditional as they assist women in the collection and processing of sheanuts for sale. Having children espe-

cially male children in the family give women the privilege of accessing more land for sheanut collection. Male children are perceived as those holding the family lineage and lands are reserved for them until they come of age. Women with children are therefore able to collect more sheanuts in the family farm and from the natural forest with the help of the children. This also exposes children involved in the collection of sheanuts to snake bite and bad weather conditions resulting in a lot of illness. Women leaders affirmed the importance of children in the collection and carting of sheanuts from the natural forest to the house. The limited access of women with no children to farmland affects the quantity of sheanuts they collect and will have to depend on the natural forest for more sheanuts. The situation is even worse for the aged as they will have to do the collection and processing of the sheanuts by themselves.

The allocation of productive resource is limited to women in polygamous families and caution is taken to ensure fair treatment of all wives. In polygamous families, the husband will have to allocate the land area for sheanut collection according to his discretion. It is difficult if not impossible for men to be fair and transparent to wives in a polygamous family in the allocation of productive resources which mostly result in violence and abuse of the rights of the wives.

A women group leader explains what happens in polygamous families;

“I am the first wife of my husband out of three wives, and I have four children. We the wives with our children work together in our husband's big family farm which is mainly cash crops where most of the shea trees are cut down. As women, we need portions of land to nurture shea trees and also cultivate crops like groundnuts and legumes mainly for cooking at home and sometimes for sale to help buy ingredients for cooking. The farm produce from the family farm is for the entire family and I do not expect much from there since we are many. When I asked my husband for land, he was willing to give me but because we are three wives, he could not give me a big portion of land indicating he needs to give some to my co-wives. I have just one acre of land and I could have grown more crops and picked more shea nuts on a bigger land to get more income to support my children”. (Respondent W5, interview 07/08/2021).

The study reveals that older wives are mostly given the opportunity to collect shea nuts first from the family farm before the other wives. The quantity of land allocated to the first wife is mostly bigger compared to the other wives which compels most women to compete in the natural forest for sheanuts. According to Naughton, Lovett, and Mihelcic (2015) due to the limited access of sheanuts on farmlands, women have to compete in the natural forest early each morning for sheanuts to sustain their livelihood in the shea business.

The situation is quite different for married women in monogamous families who have access to the entire family lands for the collection of sheanuts as they carry out agricultural activities. It was indicated the women in monogamous marriages enjoy the privileges of care, access to productive resources and involvement in family decisions than polygamous wives.

### **4.3 Developmental interventions aiming to empower women through shea production in Nakong**

The study affirms the limited off-farm economic activities in Nakong traditional area partly due to the absence of a market in the area. The women rely on the collection and sale of sheanuts since the resource is available in the area which resonates with findings indicating the gender association to sheanut collection and sale (Lewicki 1974 cited in Elias and Carney2007).

Though it should be noted that shea nut collection and sale is a woman job may soon change due to the increasing market demand for the product as men who are the land-owners from where sheanuts are collected may want to also benefit (Kent 2018).

An NGO- ORGIIS sees the availability of shea trees in the area as an opportunity to support women to be economically sound. This was affirmed by a woman group leader in Kawenia community

“sinceI got married in this community twelve years ago, I have been working with my husband on the family farm. The shea trees are really helpful, I depend on these trees to generate additional income to supplement what we get from the farm. There are no other jobs opportunities in this village and so we see the shea trees as blessings from the gods” (Respondent W2, interview 04/08/2021).

From the SLA perspective, the poor and the marginalized still have something they can depend on for survival. The human capital is key for the women in Nakong traditional area as the work hard on daily basis to contribute to the nutritional requirement of the family. The women rely on their human capital to collect sheanut from farmlands and the natural forest in order to derive livelihoods. The women in Nakong may not have financial capital which is important when it comes to livelihood diversification, with their labour, network and the natural resources which in this case the shea trees can derived their livelihoods. The SLA approach unpack how women can utilize the resources available to them and depend on that to diversify their livelihoods.

The availability of resources for women livelihoods was further explained by Scott who argues that context is essential when discussing sustainable livelihoods and requires a more nuanced exploration of how communities live “so far as local resources will allow” (Scott 1976:176). This resonates with Rakodi and Llyod-Jones (2002) who argued that the environment in which people find themselves great influences the accessibility and utilization of resources available for livelihood activities.

One key intervention by ORGIIS (NGO) is the creation of a ready market for sheanuts as part of efforts to economically empower women in the traditional area. Even though women are engaged in petty trading, shea nut collection business is the most dominant and profitable livelihood venture in the Nakong traditional area as indicted by a women group leader in Awenia.

It was revealed that since the inception of the new value chains these women are now able to save money generated from the shea nut business and diversify into other livelihood activities enabling them to contribute significantly to the survival of the household better than before. The field officers of ORGIIS indicated that, the creation of a ready market for sheanuts in the traditional area is not only to make organizational profits but also for the economic wellbeing of rural women. He explained that the contribution of

the women to the shea nut industry is enormous, and this has greatly enhanced the welfare of women in general.

“women are able support their children and provide food for the entire household through their involvement in the sheanut business in Nakong. It is usually the harvested farm produce that is available at home but what makes it a nutritious dish is handled by the woman. The women have also been able to support husbands to pay children school fees, build new houses and buy agricultural inputs during the rainy season”( ORGIIS field officer, interview 17/08/2021).

But the assemblyman (an opinion leader) of the area is skeptical, he lamented about the monopoly of the ORGIIS as a sole buyer of the sheanuts in the area. He indicated that the situation at present does not present competition in the shea business, there is only one offering to pay for the sheanuts in the area and women have no choice than to accept the prices offered by the organization. He stressed that

“the closer one is to the finished product in the shea value chain, the more profitable the business become. Chunk of the profits goes to the third parties like ORGIIS who save a middle actor between them and finish product manufacturers locally and internationally”(Assemblyman, interview 04/08/2021).

A women group leader also lamented of the prices of sheanuts in the area:

“even though the prices of sheanuts are better than before, I think more still needs to be done about the prices of sheanuts to reflect the magnitude of efforts and sufferings women have to go through to collect and process these sheanuts”(Respondent W2, interview 04/08/2021).

But the field officer of ORGIIS have a contrary view, he indicated that the company is offering a fair trade and premium prices to women in Nakong to help sustain the availability of the commodity.

“the prices we offer to women in Nakong is fair and competitive as the company does not only focus on making profit but also on empowering women economically in society”( ORGIIS field officer interview 17/08/2021).

These concerns of monopoly of the ORGIIS and unsatisfactory prices of sheanuts in Nakong raises questions of the quest of the NGO to empower women in the area. It seems ORGIIS is perpetuating appropriation rather than empowering women.

The formation of women groups is instrumental in mobilizing women and channeling their efforts towards economic empowerment at the family and community level. Through these women groups, ORGIIS and the department of agriculture are reaching to the various communities in the Nakong traditional area creating awareness on the importance of the Shea tree in the economic empowerment of women and environmental sustainability.

“The women groups in the various communities are trained on sustainability of livelihoods, natural resource management and good agricultural practices on the farm. This is to enable women take the right decisions and engage in alternative livelihood venture to empower them financially” (DOA field officer Interview 10/08/2021).

The study reveals that the formation of the village loans and saving scheme by the ORGIIS was helpful in supporting women in shea nut production with income to support their families and diversify livelihoods.

The income generated through the VSL are used to buy agricultural inputs such as improved seed, fertilizers, and other chemicals to boost their agricultural productivity. Some of the women are engaged in trading of agricultural food products in markets of neighboring towns. This was indicated by a women leader group leader in Atiinia:

“The collection and sale of the sheanuts have helps me do a lot of things for myself and the family. Getting fertilizer for our crops during the raining season was so difficult due to lack of funds. And now we are able to buy improved seed and fertilizer to do our farming which has yields a lot of food for our family. I am also able to buy kerosine from the big market which I retail to get more profit.” (Respondent W2, interview 04/08/2021).

The study reveals trainings are organized for women groups and community members on natural resource management in order to show case the importance and benefits of good environmental practices. These training were focused on the need to protect shea trees in the area since it forms a vital livelihood asset for women.

The department of agriculture seeks to economically empower women by designing and implementing projects and activities that will equip women with requisite knowledge and skills to be able to work on their own farms.

“We agricultural field officers conduct home and farm visits to give hands on support and practical skills to women to enable income from farming and sheanut collection” (DOA field officer Interview 10/08/2021).

ORGIIS-Ghana has over the years organized trainings for women and promote the shea business in Nakong traditional area. This was indicated by ORGIIS field officer:

“We train women in quality control measures in the shea industry which includes the selective collection of the sheanuts, the parboiling processes and the dry as well the shortage of the sheanuts. We also women are also supported with the appropriate working gear and clothes to protect them from the dangers encountered during the collection of the sheanuts from the natural forest” (ORGIIS field officer interview 17/08/2021).

The study also reveals that, ORGIIS(NGO) also support women groups with credit to enable them buy sheanuts from other women from neighboring communities to increase the quantity of sheanuts aggregated for the company.

“We support the women groups we are working financially to buy more sheanuts to meet a target of hundred bags where the group will benefit an interest on

each bag. The groups that meet the hundred bags of sheanuts target gets an extra bonus for their efforts”(ORGIIS field officer interview 17/08/2021).

The sheanut production also creates an opportunity for women in the area to access agricultural inputs during the farming season. The women indicated the support in term of farm inputs from ORGIIS(NGO)

“We are so happy for the support we get from ORGIIS every year. We are supplied with improved seed, fertilizers, herbicides and pesticides at the beginning of the cropping season and then pay back with the sheanuts we collect at the end of the season. This helps us grow crops to feed the household all year round” (Respondent W2, interview 04/08/2021).

These interventions by ORGIIS and the department of agriculture (DOA) seeks to empower women by aiding women access to knowledge and skills and more importantly finances to support their wellbeing in society. As mentioned by Kevane (2000) developmental projects and programmes aims to increase the earnings of women in order to increase their negotiation power in the household and community level for improved wellbeing of women in society.

The study reveals that, women particularly those in polygamous families and widows can support the household nutrition and take up of more responsibilities of the family as their income level increases.

“We are able to buy ingredients to cook without the support of husbands,thanks to the money we earn from the collection and sale of sheanuts”( FGD women leadres)

This observation is similar to other studies in West Africa where women are support by developmental intervention to make extra income end up assuming more responsibilities in the household which were traditionally assigned to men (Becker 2001).

But unfortunately, the aim of improving the living conditions of women through the implementation interventions to empower women economically may not be realized if women are to take up more household responsibilities now than before (Naylor 1999).

# CHAPTER 5

## 5.0 Conclusion

The study shows that even though sheanut collection and sale improves women income and is a key source of livelihoods, unequal power relations in the productive and reproductive activities and discrimination against women in the access of land and control of shea nut production still persist despite the efforts of government and non-governmental organisations to empower women in Nakong. In this RP I show how while sheanut collection and sale is being promoted as a major livelihood venture in Nakong to economically empower women in the various communities, patriarchal traditions interfere with these developmental interventions impeding the sustainability of sheanut production in the area. The study shows how women's unpaid domestic work limits their participation in sheanut production. Socioeconomic factors such as marital status, age, childbearing, kinship, and the family wealth influence the access to land and shea trees which are the fundamental resources for shea nut production. The findings also reveal that marital status of women is important as this determines the land and control of sheanut production. Married women in monogamous marriages have greater access to land and control of sheanut production than women in polygamous marriages and widows.

As well as looking at the barriers to access to resources and the different livelihood strategies adopted by the women, the study also reviewed development interventions examining the department of agriculture (DOA) and the organization of Indigenous initiatives and sustainability (ORGIIS). These interventions are instrumental in empowering women in the shea business by implementing interventions such as creation of market, establishment of village loans and saving schemes, skills development and the provision of credit and agricultural inputs all aiming to increase the income levels of women.

Such interventions aim to address gender power relations at the household and community level. Access to and control of productive resources such as land and shea trees are key to livelihoods of women in Nakong. It is therefore important to ensure and secure women access and control to land and shea trees through developmental interventions to raise the standards of living of women in Nakong. This means overcoming the significant cultural and associated financial barriers particularly for women so that they can own land and trees and negotiate access and control over financial resources.

This study added to my experience as an agricultural extension officer by providing analysis of the situation using gender power relations, sustainable livelihoods, patriarchy and economic empowerment. Taking these findings into account I will work together with these communities in designing development strategies to improve how shea nut production can be a successful livelihood strategy that ensures the economic welfare of women. An emphasis on integrating men especially family heads (land owners) into mixed gender groups that support women could enable men appreciate better the issues of gender and development and support women to access productive resources for a holistic sustainable community development. Key to this will be the involvement of women in community decisions on land issues and access to shea nut trees.

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## **APPENDICES**

### **Interview guide**

#### **Women leaders**

Are you originally from this community? (Probe: born here, got married here, migrated here)

What is your educational background?

Have you lived outside Nakong before? If yes where and for how long?

Are you married? If widowed for how long? Do you have children?

Who do you support in your family?

What role does your husband/son/father play in decision making?

Do you farm? Who owns the farm? How many acres?

How do you get access to the land you farm on?

How does the farming meet the needs of the family?

What are your main livelihood activities?

What are the main challenges you face as a woman farmer?

How are decisions taken in relation to who does what on the farm?

How long have you been in the collection and sale of sheanuts?

How does sheanuts collection meet the needs of the family?

How has the collection of sheanuts changed over years?

How are earnings from sheanuts collection utilized at the home?

What are the challenges you face in the collection of sheanuts?

What kind of support to you receive for the sheanuts collection business?

From whom?

What do you think can be done differently to support you and other women in the sheanuts collection business?

#### **Community Opinion leaders**

What role do women play in the Nakong traditional area?

What challenges to you see women facing in Nakong society?

(Probe involvement in decision making in the family, social status, and land ownership)

How do women address the challenges?

How do you see sheanuts collection as a livelihood venture for women in Nakong? (Probe on resource availability and conflicts).

What do you think can be done to improve the general wellbeing of women in Nakong? (Probe: Livelihoods, empowerment (involvement in decision making, access to resources).

**Developmental officials**

What role do you see women playing in Nakong?

What are the main livelihoods activities of women in Nakong?

What are the challenges women face in Nakong?

What are the interventions put in place to support women livelihoods in Nakong?

How sustainable are these interventions in the sheanuts collection business?

To what extent do these interventions help women in Nakong? (Probe: household level, community level).

What can be done differently to better support women in Nakong?

**Focused group discussion (FGD) for women leaders**

What are the main challenges in the household faced by women in Nakong?

What are the economic challenges women face in Nakong in farming?

What are the challenges women face in the collection of sheanuts as a source of livelihood?

What are the efforts been made to address these issues affecting women in Nakong?

Who is addressing the challenges impacting women in Nakong?

How could the situation be improved?