

# Cultural Sensitivity And Programming



**The Case Of Government Of Ghana-UNFPA  
5th Country Programme 2006-2010**



*because every one counts*

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5<sup>th</sup> Country Programme 2006-2010

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# Preface

*“The challenge for UNFPA is to help countries as we always have with no agenda of our own; with cultural sensitivity towards unique cultural values; with an infinite willingness to work with whatever is positive; and with a determination to help countries and people turn universal principles into concrete action”.*  
*Thoroya A. Obaid, Executive Director, UNFPA*

The original version of this publication had been produced in 2005 to inform the elaboration of the 5<sup>th</sup> Ghana Government-United Nations Population Fund Country Programme 2006 – 2010 in a culturally sensitive way. In 2007, it was announced that UNFPA's flagship report, State of the World Population (SWOP) Report for 2008 would have culture as part of its main theme. UNFPA Ghana Country Office immediately decided that it would revisit the study in order to respond with Ghanaian realities on the theme with a view to launching it in a published format alongside the SWOP report.

In taking this step, the Country Office was guided by the overarching concerns of cultural sensitivity of ICPD agenda and the UNFPA mandate, especially in a country such as Ghana where traditional socio-cultural value systems and related political power structures play a decisive role in the life of its citizens, including their reproductive life.

The study has unearthed many issues related to culture and its effects on individuals, families and communities that need to be taken account of. Some of these are marriage age, especially for girls, and girl child betrothal; wife (widow) inheritance; child slavery, as well as the push factors that lead children to leave home to work as kayayei (porter girls) and truck pushers (bori boys); the issue of unwanted children – children who may be abandoned because they are perceived to be a danger to their own kin; the persistence of female circumcision – genital cutting and other mutilations; perceptions on HIV and AIDS; debilitating widowhood and widower-hood rites; domestic violence; the changing situation of the aged; the various reasons for having large numbers of children; how to approach discussion of sexual issues, especially with the youth.

This publication is considered by the Country Office as the first of future editions that will be produced on this very critical topic area, either as a whole or as elaborations of some of the issues discussed. The current one was meant for and indeed used extensively in the target regions and by our implementing partners in their work. The subsequent publications will increasingly respond to the needs of a greater number of stakeholders

including policymakers, development partners, NGOs, civil society organisations, academia and students. We are confident that this document will contribute immensely towards tackling the challenge stressed above by the UNFPA Executive Director and lead to outcomes that ensure that Ghana uses the relevant knowledge and population data for policies and programmes to reduce poverty and to ensure that every pregnancy is wanted, every birth is safe, every young person is free of HIV/AIDS, and every girl and woman is treated with dignity and respect.

Accra, 12 November 2008  
Makane Kane  
UNFPA Representative

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## Abbreviations

<b>CR</b>	Central Region
<b>DCE</b>	District Chief Executive
<b>ECOWAS</b>	Economic Community of West African States
<b>FGM/C</b>	Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting
<b>GILLBT</b>	Ghana Institute of Linguistics, Literacy and Bible Translation
<b>ICPD</b>	International Conference on Population and Development
<b>ILO</b>	International Labour Organisation
<b>JSS</b>	Junior Secondary School
<b>MA</b>	Master of Arts
<b>MOWAC</b>	Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs
<b>NR</b>	Northern Region
<b>PLHIV</b>	People Living with HIV
<b>PNDC</b>	Provisional National Defence Council
<b>SSS</b>	Senior Secondary School
<b>SWOP</b>	State of the World Population Report
<b>TGIR</b>	Teenage Girls Initiation Rights
<b>UER</b>	Upper East Region
<b>UNFPA</b>	United Nations Population Fund
<b>UWR</b>	Upper West Region
<b>VR</b>	Volta Region
<b>WFCL</b>	Worst Forms of Child Labour

# Executive Summary

The study aims to provide guidance on issues, approaches and methodologies that can be useful to the 5<sup>th</sup> Country Programme in ensuring that programming reflects cultural sensitivities. In particular it provides information and evaluation on cultural matters related to such concerns as the following:

- ♦ marriage age, especially for girls, and girl child betrothal;
- ♦ wife (widow) inheritance;
- ♦ child slavery, as well as the push factors that lead children to leave home to work as kayayei (porter girls) and truck pushers (bori boys);
- ♦ the issue of unwanted children – children who may be abandoned because they are perceived to be a danger to their own kin;
- ♦ customary practices such as the dedication of children to the service of religious shrines – trokosi and allied practices;
- ♦ the persistence of female circumcision – genital cutting and other mutilations;
- ♦ HIV/AIDS prevention strategies;
- ♦ debilitating widowhood and widower-hood rites;
- ♦ domestic violence;
- ♦ the plight of the aged;
- ♦ the various reasons for having large numbers of children;
- ♦ how to approach discussion of sexual issues, especially with the Youth.

## 1 Introduction

The document sets out the major cultural diversities in the target Regions of the programme, namely the Northern, Upper West and Upper East Regions grouped together as “the north”, the Volta Region and the Central Region. These are considered to be the poorest Regions of the country. It is particularly concerned to identify aspects of culture that can enhance programme objectives in the areas of population, reproductive health and rights and gender issues, distinguish those aspects that run counter to programme objectives, and establish ways to utilise the supportive norms for programming purposes.

## 2 Cultural Analysis Of The Target Regions

### The North

The three Northern Regions are sufficiently similar that they can be treated as a unit. Although a large number of languages are spoken, most of them belong to one branch or another of the Gur group of languages, and virtually all communities are patrilineal. On the other hand, some areas have had traditionally centralized kingdoms for centuries, but elsewhere chiefship was unknown before colonial times. The institution of the earth priest, responsible for the land, is almost universal. People generally live in widely dispersed settlements.

The three Regions differ in religious profile, since the Northern Region is strongly Moslem while much of the Upper West is Christian, especially Catholic, and the Upper East is strongly traditionalist with its emphasis on ancestor cults. However Christians and even Moslems tend to interweave traditional beliefs and practices into their social lives.

Married couples live together, often in the house of the husband's father if he is alive. Bridewealth is prevalent but the outlay required varies considerably. Education and literacy rates are rather low, the north lagging behind the rest of the country. Most people are subsistence farmers, and the area as a whole is very poor.

### The Volta Region

The Volta Region also has a large number of languages, but Ewe in the south and Akan in the north of the Region serve as languages of general communication. Unlike the northern Regions the Volta Region receives a certain number of migrants, but migration out of the Region is more common. Christianity is the predominant religion, although Islam is quite strong in the north and traditional religion in the south – as witnessed by the practice of trokosi or dedication of girls to shrines for offences committed against the deity by a relative. Literacy is about 70% for males but slightly less than 50% for females. Illiteracy in the northern area, around Krachi and Nkwanta, is high – well over 50% for both sexes.

Most parts of the Region are patrilineal but Akan portions are matrilineal. Most people are married. Economic activities include agriculture, including cocoa in some areas, but fishing is also very important, both in the sea and on the Volta. Although the Region is predominantly rural, people live in towns or villages centred on the chief's palace and including a market and other communal facilities.

## The Central Region

The Central Region is relatively homogeneous. Most people speak Akan, particularly the Fante dialect, although there are small communities speaking Guang languages which are however fairly closely related to Akan. Despite being poor it is quite rich in several natural resources, and is host to a considerable number of migrants.

Perhaps in consequence of being the first part of the country to come into contact with Europeans and missionaries, at least on the coast, the Region is strongly Christian. About 9% are Moslem. Although very few claim to be traditionalists, as elsewhere people are in fact eclectic in their beliefs and practices. More than half the population is literate, but even though several well known senior schools are sited in the coastal part of the Region, the general education level is low.

The major economic activities are agriculture and fishing, and there is a certain amount of commercial farming. Timber and especially mining are significant in the inland areas. Fishing is mainly sea fishing, and on the coast salt winning is also a significant occupation. Tourism is another important source of jobs.

## Cultural Diversities: Inter-Region Comparison

Particular attention is focussed on the broad domains of marriage and the family. Cultural factors in these matters can be both positive and negative.

**Marriage:** This is an essential institution in all the Regions, but in the Volta and the Central Regions some people live in consensual unions outside marriage. FGM occurs in the Upper Regions and the northern Volta Region, but not in the Central Region. Other kinds of nubility rites seem to be no longer practiced. Child betrothal and marriage are not unknown in the northern Regions, although they seem to be declining with the spread of education, but are not issues in the other Regions.

Increased indulgence in sex by adolescents is most prevalent in urban areas. The result is often unwanted pregnancy, which may lead to the girl and sometimes also the boy responsible dropping out of school. Bridewealth of some kind is universal, but it ranges from a mere token to substantial.

Widowhood rites are also found everywhere, but while they can be quite oppressive in the Central and parts of the Volta Regions, in the north they

are not. In many places, especially in the north, a widow may be expected to choose a husband from among the brothers of her deceased husband, but this is nowhere compulsory.

**Family:** We distinguish between the conjugal family consisting of spouses and children, and the extended family, clan or lineage, which is a corporate unit. Globalization and social change are weakening the power of the corporate family, but its ideology remains strong in both urban and rural communities.

In the north and most of the Volta Region a wife lives with her husband, which usually means with his people as well, but in the matrilineal Central Region wives often remain with their own families. In the north and the Volta Region too a man is recognized as head of the conjugal unit, but he does not become head of his own household until his father dies. Migration can cause a disruption to the arrangement, because men who migrate to urban areas rarely take their wives, and may end up abandoning them and their children. But in any case, the husband's family is recognized as having a say in the affairs of the conjugal family.

Domestic abuse exists everywhere, and can be verbal, physical, or ritual. Wives everywhere are entitled to their own property, but their title is more secure in the Central Region than in the North.

**Children's Place:** Children are very highly valued, for many reasons. However poverty (among other things) can result in a child being fostered, usually by a kinswoman. Children are jural minors, and are expected to obey adults in all things. They have always been expected to work, and this is positively regarded by the actors, but some forms of work may amount to abuse.

### **Positive Aspects of Local Cultures**

Sexual activity outside the domestic setting is strongly tabooed, placing an effective check on pre-marital sex in the traditional setting where the unmarried person has no real privacy. There is also a strong taboo against sex on the land. Incest rules limit the selection of sexual partners, and in some places it was a taboo to have sexual intercourse with an uninitiated or under-age girl.

In the north the taboo on blood in connection with the earth was an effective deterrent to murder. Abortion was not allowed, but on the other hand

defective births might be done away with, as they were suspected of incarnating evil spirits.

Even though people did not openly discuss sexual matters with children, many folktales and proverbs referred to them explicitly, and children were not excluded from hearing them. However traditional pastimes are being crowded out by modern media, plus the fact that school takes up such a large part of the child's day

The traditional family provided its members with social capital, and ensured cooperation within the communities. Reciprocity was the core value, and misbehaviour by an elder could be sanctioned by the ancestors. Now however the system is much diminished, as people only want to use it when they expect to gain individually.

The convention that a couple should cease to have children after the marriage of their first child to some extent regulated family size, at least as far as the mother was concerned. However it also encouraged polygyny on the part of older men. Another convention that tended to limit fertility was the practice of prolonged breastfeeding.

Girls' initiation rituals have been viewed as beneficial to the youth and to the effort to control HIV-AIDS. However they exist in only a few ethnic groups.

### **Community Leadership**

Chiefs are found in all the Regions, but their standing varies with the community, being least prestigious in the Upper West and Upper East. However, many are educated, and can be valuable allies. The queen mother is influential among the women, but prevalent only among the Akan. Northern communities may have leaders of women (magazia) who are non-royal.

## **3 Finding Answers To UNFPA's Concerns**

Programme intervention is likely to be acceptable when it is clearly understood and there is no suspicion about the motives for the intervention. Communities must therefore be genuinely involved in the intervention process, and given full and accurate information. There may be considerable differences within communities. Suitable partners among the stakeholders should therefore be identified. Sensitive use of the local language can be crucial in effective dialogue, and entry into the community should be

carefully timed. Cultural sensitivity can be summarized as follows:

- ♦ understanding the ways of the community and being willing to listen;
- ♦ appreciating that what has seemed to work in one context can inform approaches in another, but should not predetermine the approach;
- ♦ communities should be beneficiaries and not losers as a result of programming;
- ♦ cultural sensitivity should lead to the selection of those options that lead to a satisfactory outcome for both the programmer and the community;
- ♦ telling the truth is essential;
- ♦ the various aspects of life in a community are often intertwined. Programming should therefore exploit the synergies, while being conscious of shortcomings.

In short, cultural sensitivity implies partnerships, and alliances should be created as needed.

### **Marriage and Family Life Issues**

The institution of marriage subsumes many different dimensions of life. It is often seen as a rite of passage into adulthood, but reproductive reasons for marriage are perceived as primary. Polygyny is everywhere permitted, but it is less beneficial to both spouses in matrilineal communities such as occur in the Central Region.

Women usually marry earlier than men, and in some areas child betrothals occur, although they cannot always be enforced. They are an issue mainly in parts of the north, where fostering of girls by their father's sister is also prevalent. Such fostering often leads to early marriage to a member of the aunt's husband's family.

Widow inheritance has also been the practice, but is on the wane, continuing mainly in the north, and is nowhere compulsory for the widow. However widowhood rites are more oppressive for the survivor in the Central Region than in the north. It can include ritually compulsory sex with a stranger before remarriage is allowed, with obvious hazards and implications for the spread of disease. Some rites and practices may in fact be motivated by malice against the widow. Education is probably the best solution.

Domestic violence occurs everywhere, and although regarded as a private matter, in extreme forms it is certainly frowned upon. Programmers need to understand the community's notion of what constitutes abuse and what is permissible punishment, and the reasons for the occurrence of violence.

## Children's Issues

Children's issues take the following forms:

- ♦ child 'slavery';
- ♦ very risky jobs undertaken by child labourers;
- ♦ migrant children in urban centres: kayayei (porter girls) and truck pushers (bori boys);
- ♦ trokosi, the dedication of children to the service of religious shrines;
- ♦ paedophilia and sexual abuse of children;
- ♦ unwanted children and children abandoned because they are perceived to be a danger to kin, usually for spiritual reasons.

Child **slavery** is not customary, but very poor families sometimes hand over their children to strangers for a fee. More information on the fate of the children should be made available. Slavery needs to be clearly distinguished from **fosterage**, which can serve to compensate for uneven distribution of resources within the wider family. Children also **migrate voluntarily** in search of jobs.

The aged have lost much of the prestige and authority they once had, leading to many cases of real neglect, alienation, impoverishment and even where they may be exposed to great risks. Merely sending them home, even with financial assistance, is unlikely to solve the problem and more holistic approaches are needed.

Similarly, releasing girls from **shrine service** in the face of an unaccepting community and without psychological preparation may not be useful. It is suggested that the belief systems themselves, and their internal contradictions, need to be discussed with the communities concerned.

**Sexual abuse** of children seems to be on the rise, and is difficult to deal with because of the shame and stigma involved for the family and the community. Education on both the physical and the psychological effects is needed. Murder is more likely to be reported to the police. Involving the chiefs in dealing with such crimes is recommended.

**FGM** is traditional in much of the north, but rare in the Volta Region and non-existent in the Central Region. The factors leading to its persistence are largely social – a certain amount of peer pressure and the feeling among girls that it makes one a “real woman”. The only ritual reason for it is that when a woman dies, certain rituals can only be carried out by a daughter who has undergone it. In at least one area (Banda, in Brong-Ahafo) a substitute ritual, minus the cutting, has been instituted and could perhaps be emulated elsewhere.

There are still communities that are sceptical about the nature and origin of **HIV/AIDS**, and some consider it a disease that is treatable by traditional methods, especially in places where people fall ill frequently in any case. It is often attributed to witchcraft or some other spiritual cause, and therefore thought not susceptible to modern medicine. However admitting that it is due to 'loose living', with the associated stigma, is also problematic. Concentration on sexual transmission has led to little emphasis on and no understanding of other modes of transmission. While the male circumcision has been lauded as helpful to HIV and AIDS prevention, the instruments and procedures could be a problem here. Much more community education is recommended. If the stigma is reduced and more people are ready to discuss their condition, more people are likely to take it seriously enough to modify their behaviour or seek medical treatment, although it is unlikely that the spiritual attributions will entirely disappear.

**The aged** have lost much of the prestige and authority they once had, leading to many cases of real neglect, alienation, impoverishment and even violence. Old women in this situation are likely to be accused of witchcraft. Communities need to be educated to recognize the problem. Suitable activities can be found that will give the aged a sense of self worth, and also enrich the education of the youth. Retirement homes separate from the community are not recommended.

### **Unwanted Pregnancies**

If poor communities seem to have more children than their parents' can afford, it is because children are viewed as the most valuable possession possible. Also, children are regarded as a divine gift, which is not to be refused. Some unwanted pregnancies are the result of teen-age experimentation, a situation where contraceptives are unlikely to be used even if available. It is suggested that education, especially of women and girls, is likely to lead to increased recognition that in children, quality of health and education is more rewarding than mere numbers. This should also help bring child trafficking to an end.

### **The Youth and Reproductive Health**

Traditionally it is not seemly for parents to discuss sexual matters with the youth. Girls are sometimes instructed by their mothers, but boys learn mainly from each other. With the reduction of family control and traditional taboos and the greater opportunity for night life and unsupervised contact, youth are both culprits and victims of

sexual abuse and its accompanying dangers. More open discussion of the issues is therefore necessary.

Since the problem seems to be increasing, intervention is likely to be accepted if sensitively organized. Opinion leaders as well as the youth themselves should be involved and any educational processes already existing in the community should be studied and incorporated if possible. Facilitating dramatic performances on the issues can be very effective. Sexual and reproductive health education can be reinforced by integrating it into other useful and interesting activities, but it may be necessary to hold separate discussions for boys and girls.

#### **4 Notes on Community Stakeholders and Leaderships**

Programme implementers need to establish alliances within communities, and with their leaders. The precise nature of the position, function and likely influence of each category of leader is therefore important.

##### **Chief**

Chiefs or kings exist everywhere. They hold power by virtue of their ancestors, but they also need to maintain their popularity with their people. They can be deposed in the Central Region, but not so readily in the Volta Region and they cannot be deposed in most of the north.

The chief's support is necessary for success in any programme. Many of them are now educated people, and can be expected to support development.

##### **Queen Mothers**

Queen mothers are found throughout the Central Region, but are less significant in the Volta Region and do not exist in the north. They can be very influential especially among women, and several are wealthy or educated. Like a chief, however, a queen mother needs to maintain her popularity.

##### **The Earth Priest and Other Priestly Functionaries**

The institution of the earth priest is prevalent throughout the north, and antedates chieftaincy. He sacrifices to earth shrines and makes sure the

associated taboos are upheld. He usually has little formal education, and tends to be ignored by development practitioners. However, he is deferred to by all. The south does not have earth priests, but other kinds of priests may be very powerful, especially among the Ewe. Moslem clerics and Christian pastors are also extremely influential in their communities.

They are likely to be opposed on some issues of programme concern but can be allies on others.

### **The Asafo Companies**

Asafo companies exist mainly in the Central Region. They were formerly civil militia units, and all members of the community belonged to one. Even now, where they exist they can be central to community life and valuable partners, especially as they specialize in artistic performance.

### **Other Community Based Associations**

A number of other associations exist for recreational, thrift, literacy, ritual and other purposes. Since they cut across all sectors of the community they can bring together people of different backgrounds.

### **The Community Volunteer**

In some areas there are persons, who liaise between their community and Ministry of Health programmes and have a certain amount of training. Since they are chosen by their communities they can be usefully involved in UNFPA-supported programmes.

### **The Unit Committees**

The Unit Committees are village organizations that go back to military government days of the Provisional National Defence Council, PNDC, from 1982 to 1992 and in some places remain quite influential. They and other local politicians are likely to be inclined towards modernity and development.

### **Local Notables**

Wealthy local people often have a great deal of influence, although they may have no special title. Such men may not always be supportive of programme interventions – they may have been given teenage brides by clients, for example – but they may be supportive of some issues, and even inclined to change their attitudes.

### **The Village School**

It is usually possible to work programme concerns into slots on the school timetable, for example those for cultural studies or environmental studies.

### **Some Conclusions on Leadership**

Men monopolise power and authority within the communities, but female leaders can be found.

- ♦ Traditional authority and power are backed by ritual sanctions. Communities can however check abuses of power by their leaders.
- ♦ Northern traditional leaders are not easily removed from power, but may be boycotted, in contrast to southern Ghana where unpopular chiefs can be destooled.
- ♦ Comparatively, chiefs may be more open to modern ways than their elders, since they are often more educated.

### **The Disempowered: Jural and Actual Subordinates**

Women (as wives and daughters) and youth are generally expected to play subordinate roles and to defer to men and the elderly. There are however differences between regions and communities and sometimes even contradictions within communities.

## **5 Concluding Remarks On Ambivalences And Ambiguities**

Programming must avoid glib assumptions about the cultures among which it works. Cultures have changed over time, and new realities and developments must be taken into account, including modern institutions like District Assemblies. Nevertheless, tradition remains important.

Paradoxes exist within every aspect of life. A chief may be an ally for modernization, but he also embodies the traditions of his people, and he has to balance these things. In the north a chief may prefer monogamy and schooling for girls, but he cannot refuse when a subject takes a daughter out of school to present to him.

There are many reasons to oppose FGM, yet it checked unwanted pregnancies in the past, and it needs to be understood why many women and girls continue to support and practice it.

Child labour also has many negative aspects, but in the past this was how a child acquired the skills necessary for life. A child's work might also be essential to the functioning of the family and his own survival.

Similarly, bridewealth is blamed for many problems, but where it does not exist girls are not necessarily better off. They are more valued where it is known they will bring in some economic benefit to the family. In traditional societies, early marriage perhaps prevented unwanted pregnancies, although now of course it means the girl loses out on education and may have other social and health problems. Ritual taboos seem to have had real beneficial effects, including checking promiscuity and rape. Some chiefs and queen mothers have recently advocated reintroduction of puberty rites to check teen-age pregnancy and the spread of HIV/AIDS, but it is not at all clear that this would have the desired effect.

Cultural sensitivity, appropriately applied, can make programmes sustainable and effective. The people and the community assume ownership of the intervention, even if they did not initiate them. Development practitioners need to realize that strategies cannot be simply transposed from one area to another without consideration of the local dynamics. What is good for one community may even be bad for another; development practitioners need to be able to show the people that what they advocate is good for them.

## INTRODUCTION

### **The GoG-UNFPA 5<sup>th</sup> Country Programme, 2006-2010**

Ghana has many different population groups, characterized by diverse socio-cultural beliefs and practices. This is especially true of the five administrative Regions of the country that the Government of Ghana-UNFPA 5<sup>th</sup> Country Programme (2006-2010) seeks to target. In each of the five targeted Regions, namely the Volta Region, Central Region, Northern, Upper West and Upper East Regions, we find several ethno-linguistic groups which exhibit similarities as well as differences in their socio-cultural practices and languages. Some Regions, like the three northern regions and the Volta Region, are more diverse than others, such as the Central Region which is predominantly Akan and matrilineal. There is also variation in the extent to which particular socio-cultural issues are of concern to UNFPA. Intervention strategies may therefore have to differ between Regions and within individual Regions. Nevertheless, lessons can be learnt from the experiences of particular Regions and used to inform intervention in others. Knowledge of the cultural configurations of the societies within these Regions is essential if programming is to be fine-tuned and made sensitive to cultural and social nuances, and to reflect expectations.

In all Regions the complexities associated with socio-cultural factors may facilitate or act as barriers to programme implementation. The role of power structures can be critical for the success of interventionist programmes, as in some cases community leaders have not only leverage but also the power and authority to act on behalf of communities and negotiate or initiate change. It is they who are immediately held ritually accountable to the ancestors and the gods from whom they derive their authority and mandates.

### **The Critical Cultural And Programme Issues**

The stakeholder consultations that UNFPA has carried out within the Regions have contributed to the UNFPA's Country Programme of Action Plan (CPAP). However, UNFPA requires far-reaching strategies to address many

more issues during the implementation of its 5<sup>th</sup> Country programme. Issues such as the following require more effort and strategising if programme intervention is to be effective:

- ♦ marriage age, especially for girls, and girl child betrothal;
- ♦ wife (widow) inheritance;
- ♦ child slavery and push factors that lead to the exit of children to work as kayayei (porter girls) and truck pushers (bori boys);
- ♦ the issue of unwanted children – children who may be abandoned because they are perceived to be a danger to their own kin;
- ♦ customary practices such as the dedication of children to the service of religious shrines – such as trokosi and allied practices;
- ♦ the persistence of female circumcision – genital cutting and other mutilations;
- ♦ HIV/AIDS prevention strategies;
- ♦ debilitating widowhood and widower-hood rites;
- ♦ domestic violence;
- ♦ the plight of the aged;
- ♦ the issue of having large numbers of children, due perhaps to Unwanted pregnancies and other socio-cultural reasons;
- ♦ the best way to approach discussion of sexual issues and the education of youth; and many more that require sensitivity to achieve success.

It is important to explore approaches and ways of working within the community power structures including traditional authorities, social institutions and mechanisms, age-group associations, women's groups and others. The roles of the new power structures in intervention programmes need to be assessed.

### **The Study: Its Purposes And Objectives**

The study is intended to provide guidance on issues, approaches and methodologies that can be useful to the 5<sup>th</sup> Country Programme in ensuring that programming reflects cultural sensitivities, to map out strategies and to advocate for activities in the communities of the target regions that can be owned by the communities themselves. The desired objectives can be achieved if they are informed by a thorough qualitative overview.

The objectives of the study were the following:

1. to identify the major cultural diversities in the target regions, focusing on the power structures;
2. to identify the intra-regional cultural diversities;
3. to determine the cultural norms that are supportive of population, reproductive health and rights and gender issues and establish procedures for maximizing such positive attributes of culture in

advancing the goals of the International Conference on Population and Development, ICPD and UNFPA's mandate;  
to identify aspects of culture that support or are detrimental to population, reproductive health and rights and gender issues, and establish ways to utilise on the one hand the supportive norms to enhance programme objectives, while on the other changing, eliminating or minimizing the deleterious and prohibitive aspects and their effects;

4. to assess how cultural realities may affect women, men as well as the young and the aged, both as participants and beneficiaries;
5. to identify the sources of power, either from institutions or persons, which influence choices available specifically to adolescents in relation to their reproductive health and rights;
6. to recommend directions, foci or activities for the programme in relation to how cultural sensitivity can be brought about and incorporated into programming.

### **The Methodology Of The Study**

Several approaches were used. Written and oral resources, data bases, interactions with others, as well as personal knowledge and insights were all included. Where necessary, specific issues in the different target regions were investigated on the ground.

### **Organisation Of The Document**

The introduction sets out the mandate and conduct of the study on which this report is based. There is a brief comment on the GoG-UNFPA 5<sup>th</sup> Country Programme; the cultural and programme issues addressed are highlighted. The purpose and objectives of the study and the methods and approaches used are indicated.

Chapter 2 presents an overview of the target Regions, highlighting their internal similarities and cultural diversities. To this end a socio-economic and cultural profile of each of these regions is presented. Where necessary tabular summaries have been incorporated, and Table 4 compares the Regions taking into account some of the cultural issues that programme sensitivity ought to address. It is hoped that such tables will serve as a handy guide for the busy programme official.

The third chapter comments specifically on the parameters of cultural sensitivity. The specific social and cultural issues that programming targets are discussed in some detail. The question of stakeholders and their

actual as well as potential roles in the programme objectives receives attention in this part.

The study concludes with notes on the various types of community leadership, and the problem of ambivalences in the course chapter. This is followed by the last chapter which includes a summary table that indicates where specific issues are to be encountered, the nature of the problem, the roles of stakeholders and other relevant information.

## CULTURAL ANALYSIS OF THE TARGET REGIONS

The targeted Regions are the three Northern Regions, the Volta and the Central Regions. These are considered to be the poorest Regions of Ghana. A profile of each exhibits similarities and differences.

### 2.1 Cultural Diversity of the Regions

Ghana is not homogeneous in geography, culture or economic activities; differences can be found between regions and within them. From the cultural perspective, language, histories and legends, social organisations, physical environments, beliefs and customs differentiate the groups. However, the main dichotomy is between the north and the south of the country. The Central and Volta Regions are considered southern. In colonial times the Northern, Upper East and Upper West Regions constituted the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast. Nevertheless, similarities can be found between the northern part of the Volta and the northern Regions. Broadly, the three Northern Regions can be considered as one identifiable unit and are treated as such in this study. This is not to deny the real intra-regional differences within the North. The Central and Volta Regions are clearly separate entities with different profiles. The next three sections characterise each of these three groupings.

The regions are described pointing out their internal similarities and differences. We discuss their geographical and physical characteristics, broad socio-cultural characteristics, and language and ethnic profiles. These issues are significant in any approach that attempts to be sensitive to cultural nuances.

#### The Northern Regions

Northern Ghana (also referred to as the North) is that whole territory lying to the north of the lower Black Volta and south of latitude 11°N. Burkina Faso lies to the north and northern Togo to the east. Communities close to the

international borders have social and cultural ties with similar peoples across the boundaries. The Volta and the main tributaries of this river system which drain the north play an important role in the lives of the people. The vegetation is predominantly grassland with short trees scattered over the landscape; economically important trees include the shea nut tree (*butyrospermum parkii*) and the locust bean (*parkia filicodera*). Others are the tamarind, the baobab, the kapok and species of acacia (*acacia albida* in the drier parts) etc. Rainfall is seasonal with a marked dry season lasting from the end of October to mid-May. The dry dusty harmattan winds set in late in November and can last till the end of March. During this time the temperature can drop to as low as 14° C in some places. At the height of the dry season temperatures can rise to as high as 45° C. The rainfall ranges from about 30 inches to 48 inches with considerable variation annually. The rainfall pattern has always been unpredictable and this has implications for rain-fed agriculture in the area. The soils are not particularly rich, and fertility seems to decline in the northerly direction. A combination of soil infertility and low rainfall implies that agriculture is a gamble. The main staples in the southern parts where the soil conditions are favourable include cereals and tubers. In the dry northerly parts the conditions support grain cultivation in combination with limited animal husbandry and poultry rearing.

The Northern Regions namely the Upper East, the Upper West and the Northern Region are administrative units created over time. However, in the colonial era they were administered as parts of the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast with headquarters in Tamale. After Ghana's independence the Upper Region was carved out, with Bolgatanga as its capital. In the 1980s the Upper West Region was created out of the Upper Region and Wa became its capital. The remaining eastern portion of the Upper Region became the Upper East Region.

The Northern Region remains one of the largest administrative regions of Ghana in terms of geographical expanse, though not in population, while the Upper East and Upper West are among the smallest in population size. Only the Greater Accra Region is smaller in terms of geographical area. The Northern Region has eighteen administrative districts, while the Upper East and the Upper West each have eight.

### **Linguistic and Ethnic Profile**

This part of Ghana is home to a number of peoples speaking a variety of languages, which however can almost all be classified into branches of the Gur family of Niger-Congo languages. Identifiable ethnic groups include the following: Gonja, Nawuri, Nchumburung, Dagomba, Mamprusi, Nanumba, Konkomba, Bimoba, Basare, Anufo and others (Northern Region people); Frafra, Kusasi, Builsa, Kasena and others (Upper East people); Dagaba, Wala, Sisala, Vagala and others (Upper West Region people). These people speak Gur languages with the exception of the Gonja, Nawuri and the

Nchumburung whose languages are Guang, and the Anufo whose language is akin to Nzema and belongs to the Bia group. (Guang and Bia group languages are quite closely related to Akan.) The languages of the Kasena, Sisala, Tampulma, Vagala and Mo have been assigned to the Grusi sub-group of Gur languages, which is distinct from the Oti-Volta (Moore-Gurma) sub-group of Gur languages. Thus Dagbani, Mampruli and Nanuni emerge as dialects similar enough to be mutually intelligible. Frafra (Gurene), Nabt, Taln and Kusaal (spoken by the Kusasi) are also very close, and similar to Dagaare and Wali, and to Moore in Burkina Faso. Note that in many cases, the official name for the language and the ethnonym are closely related; these are often not the exact terms that the people use in reference to themselves as an ethnic unit or to their language. (Information on the northern peoples can be obtained from Barker (1987), and on Ghanaian languages from Dakubu ed. (1988), see Sources and References.)

Though from the Southern perspective the North has often been viewed as a homogeneous unit, from the view point of language the complex nature of the North becomes clear. The Ghanaian north exhibits diversities in its linguistic and ethnic profiles. However, the communities are broadly similar. The similarities in languages are reflected by fact that most are classified within the two main branches of Central Gur. Most are Oti-Volta languages; about six are Grusi languages. Though linguistic similarity does not necessarily mean the speakers of the languages can understand each other, it may be possible to some degree. Unfortunately there is no single indigenous language to that can be described as a lingua franca for the entire north, not even at the regional level. Twi, the language of the Akan in the south is, however, widely spoken. Hausa, a language introduced by Northern Nigerian traders is spoken in the big urban centres.

### Religion

The dominant religions of the north are Christianity, Islam, and the ancestor-based traditional religion which was the norm until recently. In the Upper West these three are almost at par in proportion of the population, with Christianity slightly ahead. In the Northern Region slightly more than half of the population are Moslems, with the traditionalists coming a distant second followed by Christianity. In the case of the Upper East on the other hand traditional religious beliefs hold sway, as more than 46% of the population abide by them. Christianity and Islam follow as second and third respectively.

The three Northern Regions contain the greatest concentration of Moslems in Ghana; more than 40% of the people are Moslem. Peoples such as the Dagomba and Wala and to some extent the Gonja and Mamprusi have institutionalised Islam as a way of life. The variety of Islam found there predates the colonial era and was introduced from outside the area by Moslem traders and clerics. In the case of the Gonja, their espousal of Islam dates back to the foundations of the Gonja kingdom itself, as the conquerors

were accompanied by Moslem priests – the three estates comprising royals, Moslems and commoners are still distinguishable in Gonja society. Today in these areas of the north it is customary for people to observe the five prayer times prescribed by this religion and to celebrate Islamic festivals such as Damba, which is found among the Dagomba, Mamprusi, Gonja, and Nanumba and others. It is important to bear in mind that the brand of Islam that is practiced in these communities may deviate from the prescribed standard in some respects, as traditional norms have blended with Islamic injunctions. There are also some individuals who are Moslem in name but do not abide by Islamic observances.

As everywhere else in Ghana, Christianity is found in the north, though to a lesser extent; slightly less than a quarter of the population is Christian. Christian missions were late in coming to the North. For example, the Catholic Church began work about 1906. Nevertheless, Christianity has made considerable gains in some parts such as parts of the Upper West and the Upper East. Most Dagaba can be described as Catholics, especially in communities like Jirapa, Lawra, Nandom.

Those who actively espouse the traditional religious belief systems constitute slightly less than 30% of the northern population. However, as religious practices are eclectic and the traditional beliefs are interwoven into social life it can be argued that far more people still maintain the traditional beliefs. For example, some second or third generation Christians are not averse to performing traditional religious rites.

### **Family and Kinship**

Most adults in the north are either married, have been married or expect to marry. Some people have several wives, but although polygyny (an aspect of polygamy) was the cultural norm among northern people, it was never the statistical norm. It is now on the decline. A man often has to settle bridewealth to be recognised as legally married to his wife. The medium is usually cattle, but some groups employ other media such as cowries, and now cash. There are examples also of communities that accept the husband's labour as contribution towards entitlement to the hand of the wife. Child betrothals were practised in such communities. Together with 'sister' exchange, these practices are now on the decline but not necessarily entirely obsolete.

A married couple are expected to live together, often with the wife joining her husband in a compound that may be headed by the husband's father, if the husband is still young. The household comprises the couple and their children plus other close relatives of the husband.

In many communities, the right to membership of the community and the ability to draw on its resources derived from ties traced to the corporate

group of relatives through the father. Succession and inheritance depended on this, as well as rights to landed property. In this regime women had little claim to collective property. They also were seen as jural minors. Their male kin were their guardians, with the right to give a young girl out in marriage, even against her wishes. A widow would be expected to remarry a relative of the dead husband (if only symbolically) and to live with him.

Societies differed however; women had more authority in some than in others, and elderly women or royal women especially had powers comparable to those of males. Bridewealth was not an issue in some societies, and usually in those societies marriages also tended to be unstable. While some had institutionalised widow inheritance (the practice existed in the Upper East and West Regions), some either did not have the institution, or if it existed an unwilling widow could not be compelled. In some groups also a person could assert dual, complementary or multiple rights based on ties traced through either parent. This seems possible among peoples like the Dagomba (their dang and the zulya kin groups seem to employ different criteria in their formation) and the Gonja. (In this connection see Oppong 1973.) Some of the Dagaba allow for dual but complementary inheritance of property from both paternal and maternal sides. People like the Tampulma on the other hand seem to be matrilineal rather than patrilineal.

Being head of a household often goes with authority to speak for the members and to represent them as a group in external matters. It is useful to remember that 'household', just as household 'headship', may have different meanings and vary with the context, a fact which can pose problems for Census officials collecting information on household composition and headships.

Such a unit often comprises a married couple, their children, grandchildren and other dependents. Married adult children may remain in their fathers' households or break away and found their own households. The superior jural statuses of men also account for their headship of households. Mainly males were recognised as household heads, unless the male head happened to be absent. In communities where patrilineal norms hold, a male, even a teenage boy may be the socially recognised head of a household, even where his widowed mother is the de facto head. It can also happen that a junior male is socially recognised as the temporary representative of his deceased father, and therefore head of lineage and also household in the presence of his senior brothers. In urban areas unmarried, widowed or divorced women can head their own households. There are thus differences between traditional rural areas and cosmopolitan urban centres where household headship is concerned.

The village community is often headed by a chief or elder. Chiefs are very prominent among peoples like the Dagomba, Mamprusi and Gonja but less

so in many of the Upper West and Upper East communities. The power and influence of the chief also varies. This person is normally male in northern Ghana, although there are a few female chiefs among the Dagomba and Mamprusi.

Chiefs are chosen from among a number of potentially eligible princes. Once chosen, they retain the office for life. Deposition, though never impossible, was rare in the past. However, colonial regimes did depose 'non-performing' chiefs; some successor Ghanaian governments have done the same, although the Constitution now shields chiefs from governmental interference.

The Gonja have what amount to queen mothers, or royal females in positions of authority but subordinate to the chiefs. Less institutionalised is the role of other women's leaders or *magazia*, who are elected by the women in the community and expected to mobilise women for community tasks. These are found in some communities in the Northern and Upper West Regions, though they are not very common in the Upper East.

The elder who heads a lineage often is not elected but is selected taking into account core membership of the lineage, age and genealogical seniority. Elders often have ritual jurisdictions and intercede with the ancestors on behalf of the living. They have judicial roles and help to resolve community conflicts. The elder may represent his lineage in the court of the village chief and answer to the chief on matters concerning his village. In the case of the Kasena-Nankana of the Navrongo District, all information or messages to be disseminated throughout the lineage should be passed on by the elder. Once a man is made an elder he holds office for life. He is often an older man, but occasionally a youthful person may be made an elder due to his genealogical standing.

An elder traditionally is almost as powerful as the chief is to the earthpriest. Communities however differ on their criteria for selecting an earthpriest. He may be elected based on factors such as lineage membership, age and generation, but in some communities divination is used to discover the person selected by the gods for the office.

Local associations create positions for leadership. Youth or young men's groups can be found in some places and have leaders; credit unions and religious societies like the Christian Mothers are effective in those communities with substantial Catholic congregations.

### Education and Literacy

In terms of education and literacy rates, the northern regions lag far behind other regions of the country. Formal schooling was late in coming to the north. The missions can be credited with establishing the first schools and for complementing Government in the provision of secondary education. In some districts school infrastructure is very poor, and pupils sit under trees or poorly constructed sheds. The proportions that are functionally literate are very low, especially in the case of women. The Upper East Region, for example, is reported to have 449 primary schools, 177 Junior Secondary Schools and 23 Senior Secondary Schools. Its population of functionally literate people is not more than 20%. Educational attainment declines sharply at higher steps on the educational ladder. Based on the Region's profile, less than half of the population (48.1%) have attained primary education, just over a fifth (20.8%) have Middle/JSS education and slightly over 12% have had secondary/senior secondary. Jirapa-Lambussie District in the Upper West, which boasts that its educational infrastructure ranks among the best in the region, has 68 Primary Schools, 43 Junior Secondary Schools and four Senior Secondary Schools to show for this. There is in addition a Vocational School to cater for students who unable to enter other tertiary institutions.

Schooling is not promoted by the dispersed settlement pattern of some of the northern communities, and the geographic expanse and low population density do make it difficult to situate schools close to homes. This is equally true for other modern amenities like hospitals and clinics in conditions where transport and communication links are still undeveloped.

**Table 1**  
**Distribution of Educational Facilities**

District	Region	Primary School	Junior Sec. School	SSS-Vocational
East Gonja	Northern	125	37	4
Nanumba North	do	106	15	3
Navrongo	Upper East	72	34	9
Bongo	do	40	13	2
Jirapa	Upper West	68	43	5
Lawra	do	53	34	7
Nadowli	do	64	30	4
East Sisala	do	52	40	4

Also, as the North is generally unattractive to immigrants, especially trained personnel, it comes as no surprise that rural schools there have lacked qualified teachers since time immemorial, a fact that has an impact on quality education and accounts for the high drop out rates.

### **Economic activities**

The northern area is the most rural part of Ghana, although it also boasts of a number of large towns such as Tamale, Bolgatanga, Bawku, Wa, Salaga, Navrongo. It does not appear to have benefited much from establishment of infrastructure and industries. Agriculture remains therefore the predominant source of the people's livelihood. Subsistence agriculture is still practiced, although commercial farming is becoming popular. Commercial rice cultivation is an example. In the remote rural villages almost everybody is a farmer. Cereals (millets and other grains) and legumes are cultivated everywhere, and in the southern parts of the north, where the climate and the soils are more favourable, yams and tubers are cultivated. The savannah vegetation supports animal husbandry and poultry. In the more densely populated parts of the Upper East it has been customary to farm around the compounds and to combine this with poultry and livestock rearing. There, plots of farm land are often cultivated permanently, which however results in soil degradation and impoverishment.

As half the year is dry and rainless, effective crop cultivation is confined to just the wet season that stretches from May to October. The building of earth dams across river channels has helped somewhat, in that irrigation makes it possible for communities living close to the dams to cultivate cash crops like tomatoes, rice and legumes

In addition to commercial activities including transport and trading in the towns and the provision of services, a limited amount of mining is carried out.

For the majority of people, beyond agricultural activities there is not much opportunity for gainful occupation. The consequence of this is the emigration of youth to southern Ghana – to the cocoa farms and the southern cities in search of menial jobs. According to the 2000 Census statistics about one third of the Mole-Dagbon speaking group were counted outside the North. In the case of the Dagaba slightly less than 64% are found in their home regions. Even at that, there is considerable internal migration. Relatively few people come into the northern Regions from other parts of the country, with some districts receiving negligible immigration. This is no doubt due to lack of job opportunities and such amenities as housing.

The larger urban areas attract people from both within their Region and beyond it, as they provide opportunities in the formal and informal sectors, and in recent times have acquired modern facilities like electricity and potable water.

The northern regions on the whole are very poor, and malnutrition is commonly reported in children. Poverty accounts for emigration from the Region; it also is responsible for a variety of problems within these regions such as high attrition rates in the school enrolment trends, teenage marriages and reproductive problems, child migrant labour and even some amount of child trafficking. The kayayei and trolley boys found in the streets of the major cities hail from these deprived rural areas.

### **The Volta Region**

The Volta Region, with a population in 2000 of about 1,635,421 (which represents a growth of about 35% on the 1984 figure), lies generally to the east of the Volta Lake and west of the Ghana-Togo international boundary. It enjoys a coastline that stretches from west of the Volta estuary at Ada to the Togo border at Aflao-Lome. The Region was once part of German Togoland but was ceded to Britain after World War I, and was eventually incorporated into Ghana at the time of independence. It is currently divided into fifteen administrative districts.

The peoples of the Volta Region live in towns or village settlements, the centre of which is usually the chief's palace or compound. Each would also have its own market, burial ground, churches, schools and other communal facilities. Like the northern Regions, however, much of the Volta Region is rural. Sizeable towns are not many – mainly the regional capital Ho and the various district capitals - Kadjebi, Kpando, Anyako, Kpedze, Juapong, Keta, Krachi, Peki, Hohoe, Nkwanta, Krachi and Worawora.

### **Linguistic and Ethnic Profile**

The Volta Region is home to a number of peoples, including the Ewe who are the predominant group. The Ewe language is spoken predominantly in the middle and southern parts of the Region and across the border in southern Togo. Towards the northern part of the Region and in the mountainous areas can be found peoples who maintain different traditions of origin and speak a variety of different languages, including Nkonya, Kaache (Krachi), Avatime, Tem (Kotokoli), Sekpele (Likpe), Siwu (Akpafu), Lelemi (Buem) and many others. Some of these, like Nkonya and Kaache are classified as Guang, but most are not. Akan speaking communities can also be found in

the Region, some of which have traditions that claim their ancestors migrated from the Akan heartland to where they are found today. There are as many as sixteen of these community languages, used within the family set-up and in the local community setting, most of them spoken by populations as small as a few thousand. For communication purposes outside their immediate community many of the speakers of these languages have use Ewe or Twi. In German colonial times Ewe was adopted as the language for instruction in schools in the Region. The proliferation of ethnic and linguistic labels in the Region can be confusing, a situation compounded by dual and shifting ethnic identities.

There is a tendency for other Ghanaians to lump together as Ewe everyone from the Volta Region who happens also to speak Ewe, but the area north of Hohoe is multi-lingual and multi-ethnic. Some of the peoples found those areas may identify with the Ewe in external contexts, but they nevertheless cherish their own mother tongues. Akan personal names are used in some of these areas, including by some Ewe. (For more information on the languages see Dakubu ed. 1988.)

There has been some immigration into the Region from the northern parts of the country, Togo and even northern Nigeria and beyond, with the result that in the northern parts of the region Konkomba farming communities and multi-ethnic zongos communities, such as at Kadjebi, can now be found. Migration within the Region has also been on-going and it is possible to find Ewe-speakers in all its Districts and towns. But while there has been immigration into the northern sections of the Volta Region, there has also been considerable emigration, particularly from the Ewe-speaking areas, to other parts of the country and even beyond in search of economic opportunities.

The Ewe, who constitute about 68.5% of the population, live in autonomous kingdoms in the southern part, which is also the most populous part of the Region. The legend of their ancestral migration from Notsie serves as a bonding factor in addition to the Ewe language. Although some northern Ewe dialects differ from southern ones, they are all mutually intelligible and have a standard written form. Beyond this, each community jealously guards its political and ritual autonomy and its cultural traditions. Chiefs and traditional authorities play important leadership roles. Each local community has its chief, who symbolises the autonomy of the community and its traditions. Large traditional units have paramount chiefs with sub-chiefs under them. Fifteen of these have permanent seats in the Regional House of Chiefs.

### Religion

The main religious beliefs of the peoples of the Volta Region are Christianity, Islam and the so-called traditional religion which is centred on belief in the agency of the ancestors and divinities. The 2000 Census statistics suggest that about 67% of the population is Christian. Nearly 22% espouse the traditional religions, while about 5 % are Moslems. Again there are differences between the districts. Some districts such as Ho, Kpandu, Hohoe and Jasikan seem to have higher proportions of Christians than others, while the proportions that espouse the traditional religious beliefs are higher in others, for example among the Anlo where shrines and deities still hold sway and where as a result trokosi has been an issue. In the Ketu District those who espouse the traditional religious beliefs account for over 40% of the population. Christians account for 44% of the population. On the other hand, the Moslem population can be found mostly in the northern parts, in Kadjebi and Nkwanta, as a result perhaps of immigration.

### Education and Literacy

The adult literacy rate in the Region is about 58%, but there are district and gender differences. Nearly 70% of the males are literate as opposed to only slightly over 49% of the female population. The Ewe speaking parts seemed to be doing better than the rest. The worst areas are the northern Districts of Kadjebi, Nkwanta and Krachi. Compare for example Kadjebi and Kpando, another Volta Region district as displayed in Table 2.

**Table 2**

**Distribution of Educational Institutions in Some Volta Region Districts**

<b>Educational Facility</b>	<b>Kadjebi</b>	<b>Nkwanta</b>	<b>Kpando</b>	<b>South Tongu</b>
Nursery Schools	13	25	81	24
Junior Sec. Schools	30	38	62	36
Senior Sec. Schools	2	3	8	N/A
Vocational schools	1	N/A	4	1

Total enrolment for Kadjebi was 13,731. The District has 530 trained and 79 untrained teachers. By contrast, Kpandu District, as profiled in Ghanadistricts.com is better endowed. Its Assembly renovated and refurbished Science Resource Centres at Kpando and Peki Secondary Schools and sponsors school clinics in Science, Mathematics and Technology. The Assembly also is promoting pre-school education and upgrading the libraries at Kpando and Peki.

The illiteracy rates for Krachi and Nkwanta (a very large district) in particular have been described as very high – in the range of 62% for males and 75% for females, in contrast to Hohoe, Kpando and Ho which are highly Christianized and where missionary groups established schools in colonial times.

There is a sharp drop in the pupil population from primary to JSS in all the districts. There are far fewer Junior Secondary Schools than primary and still fewer secondary schools. The other reason may be that there is little new infrastructure for JSS in the districts. The large drop from JSS to SSS enrolment in the districts may be the result of examination failure, poverty and the inability to pay for SSS education. There are too few Vocational, Technical or Commercial Schools to absorb those who cannot make it to Senior Secondary School and tertiary institutions.

### **Family and Marriage**

Family ties define membership in a community and the corporate unit comprised of kin, the lineage. In most parts of the Region relationships on one's father's side define membership; patrilineal kinship is the basis of groups that claim descent from a common ancestor. The Akan portions of the Region however abide by matrilineal norms, by which succession is based on relationships traceable through the mother. Though not as influential perhaps as in the past, nevertheless through the lineage a person may mobilise support. Statuses and property such as landed property may be handed down lineally.

### **Marital status of the population and age**

Census statistics for 2000 show that about seven out of every ten adult persons are in a marriage relationship, or once were but have now been widowed, divorced or separated. About 54% of men were married while nearly 60% of women were in a marriage relationship or consensual union. The once married but now separated, divorced, or widowed constituted about 13% of the adult population. About 38% of men had never been married as against about 22% of the women.

Though marriage is usually for adults, nevertheless a very small number of children aged 12-14 years are in a marriage relationship or have been at some time. At the time of the 2000 census, 93 girls or about 0.08% were in this category. No male aged 12-14 years was recorded to have ever been in a marital union. Such married minors most definitely have never been to school or have dropped out. Premature teenage pregnancies cannot be ruled

out as the cause for these marriages.

A married couple is expected to set up a home and household, and arrangements comprising husband/father, wife/mother and children living under the same roof are the norm in the region. 85.5% of all household arrangements identified in the region are of this type. The father/husband is traditionally acknowledged as the head of the immediate family unit. In the Volta Region 61% of heads of households were males and 31% females. In addition, there were temporary household heads who were more often females than males. Where a female headed a household she was often living alone, or an unmarried or widowed or divorced woman living with her children or grandchildren.

### **Economic Activities**

The vegetation of the region ranges from coastal savannah, savannah woodland on the Atlantic littoral to forest in the middle belt and grassland in the northern fringes of the region. Rainfall is variable but seems adequate for agricultural purposes. The Region takes its name from the Volta River, which not only marks the western frontier of the Region but also serves as an important physical and socio-economic feature in the Region.

Agriculturally based activities including fishing predominate in the region, and from these the bulk of the economically active population derive their livelihood. Along the Atlantic coast salt winning is an important economic and commercial activity, although erosion caused by the action of the sea has been a major worry for the coastal communities, endangering livelihoods and compelling the relocation of peoples and communities.

Staples include maize and cassava, and in the northern parts yam is produced. In the southern coastal areas around Keta shallots are cultivated. There are efforts to cultivate rice on a commercial scale in the southern parts of the Region. Cocoa is cultivated in the forested parts.

Some Ewe communities specialise in fishing. The Battor are an example; small communities of Battor and related Ewe groups can be found along the Volta all the way up to Bamboi on the lower Black Volta. Keta people practise sea fishing, and migrant Ewe fisher-folks can be found all along much of the coast of West Africa.

Most of the people are in the private informal sector and are self-employed. This applies to both sexes. Those in formal employment are a small minority.

Most economically active people are in some employment, but census figures indicate a small minority of people who described themselves as unemployed; this probably includes school drop-outs, the aged, the infirm, and people awaiting formal sector jobs.

While significant numbers of children are in school, by no means all children attend. As in other parts of the country enrolment rates leave much to be desired, while the attrition rates are high at the higher levels. Those children not in school are under pressure to join the work force. Consequently children younger than 15 years can be found in agriculture and in the fishing industry.

Figures obtained from the website [ghanadistricts.com](http://ghanadistricts.com) show that as many as 16% of children of Volta Region below 14 are workers or actively looking for work. The trend is as high as 39% in Nkwanta but as low as 6% in Keta.

But agriculture and local industry do not suffice to meet the needs of the populations. The Region has not received much industrial development and it remains the 5<sup>th</sup> poorest in the country. Consequently there has been considerable out-migration. In this respect, the Volta resembles the northern communities which have since colonial times been noted for out-migration to the south. Statistics from the 2000 Census suggest that more than half the Ewe population was registered outside the Volta Region, which in turn suggests that the outflow of population is proportionately even greater than is the case for the northern parts of Ghana. Migrant Ewes are found in a variety of professions including the armed forces, civil service, the construction industry and farming.

## The Central Region

The Central Region with an area of 9,826 square kilometres is the third smallest administrative Region in Ghana. It is bounded by Western and Greater Accra Regions to the west and east respectively and the Ashanti and Eastern Regions to the north. To the south is a 168-kilometre long coastline, on the Gulf of Guinea.

This administrative region which accommodates twelve administrative districts is home to the Fante, the Efutu and Awutu (Guang people), the Agona, Denkyira and others. This makes it predominantly Akan and matrilineal, and therefore relatively more homogeneous culturally than the other targeted regions. This is the part of the country that boasts of the earliest contacts with Europeans and colonial and missionary activity.

Along the coasts can be found patches of mangrove swamps and coastal savannah vegetation with palm trees, but further inland is continuous rain forest, much of which has now been degraded. Annual rainfall ranges from about 900mm (about 35 inches) along the coast to about 2030 mm (about 80 inches) in the interior.

The region is endowed with a variety of natural resources such as gold; bauxite in the Upper Denkyira District; petroleum and natural gas at Saltpond; kaolin in the Mfantseman district; diamond in the Asikuma-Odoben-Brakwa District; clay deposits; columbite at Nyanyano in the Awutu-Efutu-Senya District; quartz, muscovite; and other minerals like mica, granite, feldspar as well as forest products; fishing grounds along the coast; and farm land. Paradoxically, it is nevertheless usually listed as one of the poor regions of the country.

### **Linguistic and Ethnic Profile**

The region is predominantly Akan, as pointed out above, with over 80% of the population belonging to this ethnic group. The main sub-group is the Fante, who occupy the coastal areas and account for just over half of the region's population and over two thirds of the Akan group in the Region. Other Akan groups are the Gomoa, Denkyira, Breman, Ajumako and Agona. The Guang component (Awutu and Efutu) accounts for about 6%. But in addition to the ethnic groups that can claim to be indigenous to the Region, there are migrant groups among whom the Ewe are probably the largest – nearly 5% of the population. Many of the Ewe migrants are fisher-folk whose communities are along the coast. Northern migrants can also be found, although these are a minority, constituting not much more than 3% of the population.

The Central Region is thus subject to both inflows and outflows of population. It is not very clear which of these trends dominates, and it ultimately depends on the district or area or even the time. Cape Coast as a well known centre for quality second cycle educational institutions sees an increase of youth during school term times. Coastal communities on the other hand lose able bodied youth as a result of a dearth of employment opportunities. In communities like Ajumako, which are some distance from the coast and where cocoa cultivation opportunities have dwindled, most youth who remain at home end up as bread sellers (the girls) or lorry drivers (the boys). Proximity to Accra is certainly a strong pull factor for unemployed Central Region youth. On the other hand, further inland in the forested parts where agricultural opportunities are better it can be expected that there would a net inflow of migrants. Thus Twifo-Hemang-Lower Denkyira has high proportions of migrants. The same applies to the environs of Breman Asikuma, but less so to the Ajumako-Enyan-Essiam area.

## Religion

Since it is the part of the country to first come into contact with missionary groups it is not surprising that most people in this Region claim to be Christians, though the non-orthodox or Pentecostalists and Charismatics outnumber the orthodox Christians. About 9% of the population is Moslem. Those who did not profess any faith were not more than 7% of the population. People who claim to follow the tenets of traditional religious beliefs remain an insignificant proportion of no more than 3%. However, in reality most people tend to be eclectic in religious belief and practice. Even when they say they are Christians it does not mean that they do not hold on to the traditional religious beliefs in ancestors and deities or perform the rites prescribed to restore health and fortune to avert calamity. Ancestral festivals that honour and celebrate the ancestors are still seriously conducted.

## Education and Literacy

This is one of the Regions that have been in the news in recent times for the poor performance of schools in the Basic Education Examinations, despite the fact that two university institutions and some of the best senior schools in the country are found in the Region. Outside Cape Coast the standards do not seem to be better than in other Ghanaian regions. More than half of the population in the region is literate; males account for nearly 70% of literates and women just over 46%. Even these figures may be deceptive when it comes to actual functional literacy and the ability to speak and write English or a Ghanaian language.

## Economic Activities

Most peoples of the Region are employed, but a small percentage described themselves as unemployed. Again these must be mainly people expecting jobs in the formal sector. Most people are however self employed, operating in the non-formal private sector.

The predominant occupation of the people of this region is agriculture and related activities (including fishing), which employ more than two-thirds of the population. Only in the Cape Coast municipality does agriculture command a lower figure. Interest centres on cocoa, maize, cassava, oil palm, plantains and various fruits.

Cocoa production is concentrated in the Assin, Twifo-Hemang-Lower Denkyira and Upper Denkyira areas, and oil palm production in Assin and Twifo-Hemang-Lower Denkyira. Pineapple and grain production are encountered everywhere. Pineapple cultivation is a commercial industry

that satisfies the internal Ghanaian market while at the same time feeding the export trade.

Fishing is done mainly in the coastal districts. Coastal Fantes practice canoe fishing, an industry that has lost its potential to sustain the coastal populations due to the high costs of outboard motor fuel and other necessary inputs, not to mention the depletion of fish stocks. It would seem that there is considerable poverty in some run-down coastal villages, leading perhaps to low school enrolment and high attrition rates and culminating in reports of trafficking in children, a strategy adopted by poor parents.

In addition to fishing, salt winning is an important commercial occupation among some Central Region coastal dwellers, as a name like Saltpond (which has quite a different name in the local expression, *Akyemfo*) suggests. Table 3 indicates the percentage of the population of selected districts that participates in agriculture on the one hand and fishing on the other.

**Table 3**  
**Significance of Agriculture and Fishing**  
**in Some Central Region Communities**

<b>Agriculture</b>	<b>% pop.</b>	<b>Fishing Industry</b>	<b>%Pop.</b>
Asikuma-Odoben-Brakwa	70.4	Mfantsiman	15.3
Ajumako-Enyan-Essiam	67.3	Komenda-Edina-Eguafo-Abirem	12.7
Assin	71.4	Abura-Asebu-Kwamankese	10.9
Twifo-Hemang-Lower Denkyira	70.2	Awutu- Efutu -Senya	10.5
Upper Denkyira	65.3	Gomoa	8.5

Logging is still practised, although on a reduced scale as commercial trees have been felled to make way for farming and to obtain timber, and most of the forests have been degraded. Some Fantes have had to migrate to parts of the Western Region and Brong Ahafo to engage in cocoa or palm oil and food crop cultivation.

The rich mineral resources of the Region provide employment opportunities for mining and related activities. Retail trade is also important in the major

towns like Swedru, Cape Coast, Mankessim and others.

White collar jobs provide employment for the educated elites, particularly in the urban centres like Cape Coast, Swedru, Winneba. The Central Region also benefits from the tourist business as a result of the ancient forts and castles dotting the coast line.

## 2.2 Cultural Diversities: Inter-Region Comparison

The cultural issues that present themselves for programme action are diverse, but essentially they concern social and reproductive health relationships within the family. In the discussion that follows, the position of children, women and the aged is highlighted so as to bring out the differences between and within regions, ethnic groups and other distinctions. Authority and power relations are crucial. This has to do with the modes of livelihood and the religious beliefs of the people as well as exposure to agents of westernisation. Within this broad domain particular attention focuses on the following sub-themes:

### Marriage

Unaffordable bridewealth demands and their potential repercussions on conjugal and gender relations, domestic violence, practices such as girl child betrothal, wife (widow) inheritance, female genital cutting (also known as FGM), debilitating widowhood and widowerhood rites and the issue of unwanted pregnancies and unwanted babies.

### Family

Its fulfilment or non-fulfilment of its role as social security and safety net, the position of children and how they are treated. Related to this, the question of child work and labour, push factors that lead to the exit of kayayei (porter girls) and truck pushers (bori boys), the issue of unwanted children – children who may be abandoned because they are perceived to be a danger to their own kin; the dedication of children to the service of religious shrines as in the case of trokosi and allied practices, and the plight of the aged.

Some of these are ambiguous, in the sense that they can have beneficial effects on individuals and communities. On the other hand some have more negative than positive effects while with others it is the reverse. The objective of UNFPA programming is to encourage communities to minimise the negative effects and derive value from the positive. Table 4 attempts to

summarise the differences and similarities between the three study regions on these issues.

### **FGM and Marriage**

Marriage remains an essential requirement in all the study regions, but it seems statistically more important to women than men and in the north more than in the Volta and the Central Regions, where there are more unmarried persons with some living in consensual unions.

Usually marriage involves adults, with the husband older than the wife. In the past in the Upper East a girl was ready for marriage when she had had the clitoridectomy (FGM) rites performed for her. Nubility rites that used to be performed in the Central and parts of the Volta Region seem not to be so prevalent anymore, although there have been calls for their revival. The FGM rites were found in parts of the Upper West and northern Volta, but not in the Central Region.

Female Genital Cutting (or FGM) rites are no longer encouraged. Though no longer being performed openly, since it is a legal offence to perform them, they have not disappeared entirely but have merely gone underground in some communities. The reason for their performance in the first place is no more concrete than a desire to be recognized as a woman who has met the social and ritual requirements of womanhood and is brave enough to endure the pains of the knife.

**Table 4**  
**Comparing Regions on Cultural Issues of Importance to the Programme**

		<b>Incidence: North (the three regions)</b>	<b>Incidence: Central Region</b>	<b>Incidence: Volta Region</b>
<b>Ethnicity</b>	Linguistic fragmentation	high	low	medium
	Regionalism (distinctiveness)	high	low	high
	Regional divisions	medium	low	high
	ECOWAS*	medium	low	high
<b>Occupation</b>	Agriculture	very high	medium	high
	Commerce	low	medium	medium
	Other occupations	crafts	tourism	fishing
<b>Religion</b>	Traditional	high	very low	high
	Islam	high	very low	low
	Christianity	medium	high	high
<b>Education</b>	Basic: Primary-JSS	very low	medium	high
	Secondary	very low	medium	high
	Professional	very low	high	high
<b>Family</b>	Patrilineal descent	high	very low	high
	Matrilineal descent	low	high	low
	Family cohesion	high	medium	high
	Impact of change	medium	high	medium
<b>Marriage / Conjugal Relations</b>	Monogamy	high	high	high
	Bridewealth	high to low	low	medium
	Wedding expenses	low	medium-high	medium-high
	Husband's authority	very high	medium	high
	Polygyny	medium	low	medium to low
<b>Women's Issues</b>	Child marriage	low	low	low
	Debilitating widowhood rites	mild	mild to severe	mild to severe
	Property rights	low	high	medium to low
	witchcraft accusations against old women	high	medium	medium
	Genital cutting (FGM)	medium	none	low

<b>Leadership-significance of various types of leaders</b>	Chiefs	very high to low	very high	medium
	Elderships	high	high	high
	Women’s leaderships	low	high	medium
	Others	earthpriests	asafo associations	shrine elders and traditional priests
<b>Children’s Issues</b>	Child labour/work	high	medium	high
	Migration	high ( <i>kayayei</i> )	medium	high
	Pawning	none	medium	medium ( <i>trokosi</i> )
	School enrolment	low	medium	medium
	Child malnutrition	high	medium	medium
	Deformed infants euthanasia	low or none	none	none
	Underage betrothal/marriage	low to medium	low	low to medium

\* Communities and individuals claiming to have roots in other ECOWAS countries and seen

In a few cases in the north and the Volta Region girls under the age of twelve years have been married off. Child betrothal was institutionalised among peoples like the Konkomba and Bimoba. The census statistics do not appear to capture this, although it is common knowledge in those communities. Only recently the DCE of Gushegu was reported to bemoan the withdrawal of school going girls in his District to be sent off to husbands, usually older men who may already be married.

Reacting to the imposition of an unwanted husband or wife, people emigrate. Some may elope with the person they love. These tendencies were common in the northern parts until recently and they may be observed wherever child betrothal is still practised. However, as educated young people resist their parents' and guardians' choices, parents have learnt that it does not work to impose a spouse on a daughter. Elopements are thus less common or necessary now. The freedom of association that youth now enjoy in rural and urban communities and the whittling away of sexual taboos have resulted in teenage sexual relationships.

These are common in most communities but they are more prevalent in urban settings where there is a semblance of night life. The outcome of these relationships is often unwanted pregnancy. These are either aborted (sometimes using crude means), or the girl is compelled to identify the man responsible. He and his parents may be compelled to pay penalties and to marry the girl. Boys in this situation may drop out of school or seek refuge in urban areas.

### Unusual Marriages

Cases exist of an older woman living with a younger woman whom she controls and whose children, by whatever sexual arrangement, are the older woman's responsibility. She becomes in effect the female husband and father. Empirical evidence is, however, yet to be adduced on this practice.

### Bridewealth

In Ghanaian communities marriage usually involves the settlement of some form of bridewealth. In some it is considerable value but in others it's a token. In Akan communities it is no more than a token, but this applies to the core presentation of drinks. In addition grooms may incur other expenses in the celebration of the marriage. In the Volta Region there are differences between the northern parts and the south. Usually several sets of gifts and payments are required. A groom or his family may have to provide to the wife through her guardian a trousseau containing an assortment of items. In parts of the Northern Region a girl is expected to send a trousseau to her bridal home; it may not be compulsory, but it is prestigious to do so, particularly in a polygynous setting.

Widowhood rites can be found in all Regions. Their effects are potentially debilitating in parts of the Volta and the Central Regions, but less so in the northern parts of the country. Associated with this however, is widow inheritance. This is found in the north where it is expected that the widow will select a spouse from the brothers and cousins of the deceased, and in the Central Region. Where the practice exists the widow has a choice as to whether to marry someone else or to accept a particular individual from her husband's family. A younger widow may be under pressure to accept a relative of the husband as her second husband, but she is entitled to leave and remarry elsewhere, if she so chooses. Akan norms also encourage widow inheritance. The successor to the deceased – a brother, cousin or nephew – may step into the shoes of the deceased man. The arrangement traditionally enabled the widow and her children to continue to enjoy the estate of the deceased. These marriages are however rare these days.

### **Extra-Marital Relationships**

In encouraging formal marriage, the traditional norms frown on extra-marital relationships, as sexual intercourse itself was regarded as serving the purpose of procreation rather than recreation. Even today extra-marital relations are kept secret and are the subject of embarrassing gossip. Nevertheless, such relations are becoming more common among unmarried adults, leading in some cases to consensual relations and cohabitation. This is found in all Programme Regions, but more in the southern regions than in the north. It is more prevalent in the towns than in the rural areas where such relations are difficult to conceal.

### **The Family**

The family remains one of the important social institutions in Ghanaian communities. It is within the family that future generations are brought up and equipped with a way of life and tools to survive in the world. Social norms for family life differ between communities. On the whole, we can distinguish between a conjugal family comprising spouses and their children on the one hand and the corporate family, also called 'extended family', 'lineage or 'clan', which establishes and maintains bonds of solidarity and reciprocity between people living or dead who are believed to be connected by kinship ties. The principles governing the constitution of the corporate family differ between communities, but its influence on individuals and its ability to provide support is dwindling under the impact of globalisation and social change. Nevertheless, the ideology of family still remains strong in communities both rural and urban.

### **The Household and its Headship**

In northern communities a wife is expected to join her husband wherever he may be located, and that often means residence with the husband's people. There, a wife is often a stranger, and her access to community resources such as land derive from her husband, or her sons by the deceased husband, if she has any. This is the case in the north and to a large extent in the Volta Region. However, among the matrilineal Akan a wife may or may not join her husband residentially. The Efutu permit dual residence, whereby wives remain with their mothers and sisters while men remain with their male kin in separate residential settings. In the Efutu case, it can be argued that women head their own households and men do the same. Husbands however must give money to their wives and wives must provide their husband's evening meals.

Traditionally a married man does not assume headship of the household to which he and his wife and children belong so long as his father is alive. This

is true for the north and to a large extent for the Volta Region. There is an Ewe proverb that says that a man is never master in his house so long as his father lives. This is changing in tandem with changes in the economy. For example, a wage earner may seek independence and emerge as head of his own household.

Though the husband is usually acknowledged as the head of the conjugal unit and the household, a man may have more than one wife, and important people are polygynists. This can complicate the picture. Potentially each mother in a polygynous setting is head of her own sub-household, while the polygynist husband retains overall headship of the compound household. In the rural areas polygamy (polygyny) remains a cultural ideal still upheld even by some wives and many husbands' mothers, sisters and fathers, though not necessarily by wives' parents and other relatives.

### **Migration and Family Issues**

The issue of migration introduces additional complications into family life. While curiosity can account for travel, unequal opportunities between zones and local strictures account for the movement of people between districts and regions and between urban and rural areas in Ghana. In colonial times migration from the north was officially encouraged, as the policy of the British was to keep the north as a labour reservoir for the south. They therefore did not make efforts to develop the north or to set up industries there. Thus the north, which is savannah and lacks adequate rainfall for year-round agriculture, has since colonial times exported labour to the mining and cocoa areas of the south. That trend continues for the uneducated and the unemployed educated. What is true for the north is true also to some extent for the Volta Region, part of which was mandated territory that joined Ghana at the time of independence. The British made no extra effort to invest in a mandated territory. The Volta Region however differs from the north in a number of respects. Not only is it largely southern, part of it is forested and supports cocoa cultivation. Even today, the northern Volta Region is attractive to the Konkomba yam farmers.

Urban migration has always been presented by those who migrate as a temporary absence, lasting a season; in any case regular reunion is expected. Because of the uncertainties of urban life and accommodation difficulties rural migrants rarely take their wives along with them to the cities. The migrant is expected however to send remittances back home to his wife and parents. This does not happen regularly, and sometimes the migrant takes a girlfriend or wife in the city. When this happens remittances dry up and the migrant soon ceases to visit his rural family. The wife left

behind is initially under the care of the migrant husband's parents, in the case of the north. She might eventually return home to her own parents or leave the area herself, after entrusting her children to the care of her parents. Some such wives might remarry. These are likely scenarios in any of the communities in the programme regions, and how life is lived in a Kadjebi zongo, a Dagaba village in the Upper West or a Frafra community in the Upper East. A married woman may begin life in her father-in-law's household, move into a new household with her husband, become proxy-head of that household when her husband migrates to the city, then eventually return to her natal household and end up herself as head of a household.

The conjugal family consisting of a husband, a wife and their children is becoming recognised as an autonomous unit of production and reproduction in all the programme regions, though in the rural areas it may not necessarily be autonomous when it comes to decision taking. The husband's brothers and parents will have a say in matters affecting the members of the conjugal family.

### **Division of Labour within the Family and Its Implications**

Within the family there is traditionally a division of labour according to age and sex, but this is breaking down. In many northern communities there are still chores that a man or woman may or may not do. Northern men traditionally should not be seen cooking the evening meal, fetching domestic firewood (although in the towns men cart wood in trolleys for sale in the market to pito brewers) or water for the drinking pot (although men are involved in water vending in the towns). Women usually cannot cultivate certain crops (yam, potatoes, guinea corn) that demand heavy labour inputs, hunt (there is saying that a woman does not kill a python and boast about the feat) or slaughter, fish, or pour libation to the gods. Traditionally life could not be lived fully without wife, husband and children. Volta Region communities are similar to the northern ones in this respect, even if the female is more attached to her own natal family there than in the North. The matrilineal communities of Central Region seem to guarantee more independence to women, socially and economically. The number of priestesses in Central Region shrines, women's domination of church activities and their assumption of pastorships of Charismatic churches all reflect their religious independence. Their economic independence even in traditional times was necessitated by the matrilineal pattern of inheritance, which denied the widow and her children direct access to the property of the deceased. The division of labour is also less strict in the Central Region. Nevertheless couples there crave for children as sources of prestige and support in old age. Women do not feel fulfilled sexually if they have been

unable to have children and men are under pressure also to prove themselves. These pressures account for unstable marriage and extra-marital relations where a couple has had no children.

### **Domestic Abuse**

The term 'domestic abuse' is often another word for wife abuse. However, potentially any member of the domestic unit may abuse another physically or psychologically. Husbands and their kin with whom a couple live may do things that are not physically or psychologically acceptable. This happens in all Regions under study. Abuse can be verbal, ritual, such as requirement that a person should perform rites that are not pleasant to that person, emotional, psychological and physical. Sexual abuses are included.

Certain types of abuse are an issue of perception. What may be seen as abuse from the perspective of the outsider may not be abuse to the person perceived as being abused. In some northern communities a husband can demand and insist on sex with his wife. After all, the point of marriage is to have children and they cannot be born without sexual intercourse. A husband may therefore exhibit physical aggression towards a wife who repeatedly rejects his sexual approaches. In all the study regions a spouse may exhibit aggressive behaviour towards a partner who is unfaithful. A wife may attack husband on the basis of a rumour that he has a girlfriend.

Domestic abuse can also be economic; for example, entitlement to property. There are differences in attitudes to a wife's property in the Regions. In all programme regions wives may earn incomes independently of their husbands, and in all regions opportunities for this exist. However, while the income of a wife in a matrilineal community cannot be appropriated without her consent it is possible in some of the patrilineal communities for husbands to behave as if they own the wife's income. Generally society does not support highhandedness on the husband's part. In the case of immovable property, abuses occur and are premised on the wife's status as a jural minor and dependent. In the event of divorce, northern wives may be prevented from taking any self-acquired physical property away. They lose any title to farms and farm produce or buildings put up in the husband's village.

### **Children's Place In The Family**

Children are valued for prestige reasons as well as for economic and religious reasons. The significance of the quest for 'name' or social immortality is reflected in a proverb that states that if you do not have children to propagate your name, then dig a well to serve the needs of the community and your name will be immortalised. The more children the

better, which means that in some communities a man feels it is alright to accept paternity of children begotten in extra-marital relationships by his estranged wife. This is the traditional norm in many of the patrilineal societies of the north. Gonja men however do not claim children that they did not beget biologically; rather it is the biological father who claims paternity, if we are to go by Goody's findings on these people. Both Jack Goody and Esther Goody have done considerable research among the Gonja dating back to the period before Ghana's independence. However, we cannot expect the Gonja people to have maintained their traditional ideas concerning parentage in this day and age, when even fathers in matrilineal societies are bequeathing self-acquired property to their own children at the expense of siblings and nephews. In the Central and Volta Regions biological paternity is significant. Due to social change individuals in the north too may now discriminate between biological and non-biological children.

The importance of children in domestic life means that individuals who do not have their own children can foster the children of relatives. This happens in all the targeted Regions. Foster children, unlike adopted children, are not distanced from their natural parents. The fosterage be short or long term. Among the Kasena-Nankana of the Upper East, fostering a nephew or niece in the past was total and ritualised, leading to the transfer of social paternity to the fostering relative. By contrast, fosterage among peoples like the Dagomba and Gonja was partial. At least in the past, when fostering by kin was not possible some parents redeemed debts by sending their children to work for others. A needy person might also sell the services of his or her child to a stranger. This has been reported for parts of the Volta Region. Urban working families in the cities who require house helps now engage young girls for the purpose.

Children have always been regarded as jural minors whose rights are defined through their parents (the father in patrilineal communities) or guardians. Valuable as children may be, the social statuses of babies are not clearly defined and there is sometimes uncertainty about their humanness. Among Upper East people an infant becomes a person when a younger sibling arrives. Children born with congenital deformities or those exhibiting abnormal or unusual behaviour at birth may be suspected to be masquerading wild spirits, and risk being put away before they can endanger their parents' lives.

As jural minors who are 'owned' they are expected to respect and revere the parent or guardian and by extension every related adult of the parents' generation. An adult is believed to be better informed and more

knowledgeable. A child should not therefore refuse to carry out a parent's or a guardian's instructions.

### **Child Work or Child Labour?**

In all the programme regions certain chores have traditionally been designated as 'children's work'. Such chores cannot easily be done by adults, or if they can it is considered below their dignity. Fishermen using nets in the Volta Lake engage children as divers to retrieve entangled nets, a risky undertaking. The herding of livestock in some parts of the Upper East is considered a boy's chore. At the same time it is recognised that certain tasks are not appropriate to children. Children are exempted from physically demanding work.

A hardworking child has always been praised, but everywhere there was a concept of child labour, and if an adult subjects a child to tasks that are too onerous and likely to tax the child's strength society can be critical of the abusive parent. The Kasena for example believe that a child's growth would be stunted (o wo fuuli) if he or she were subjected prematurely to heavy work. However, in spite of the work categorisation, children should accompany their parent of the same sex to learn how to perform tasks appropriate to their sex through participant observation. Such association also had emotional undertones. Parents have always had a traditional obligation to see to it that their children are brought up properly and groomed for life. The work of children has been considered necessary to the viability of the domestic establishment, and where a person lacked a child it was possible to foster a relative's child and bring up that child as if it were one's own. A child should be around to run errands for the adult. In all the programme regions children are required to peddle goods in the towns. Young girls sell a variety of items ranging from water in sachets to cooked foods that they hawk in the communities.

The requirement that children should work sometimes results in children not attending school or having to drop out of school. It is an issue that also relates to levels of poverty and deprivation. A hard pressed mother who is stressed out by her domestic work load may be tempted to encourage her daughter to drop out of school, especially where the benefits of formal education are not fully appreciated. Women's work loads are heavy, as they have to do many things at once to ensure that they generate an income adequate for the needs of the domestic establishment. Where their communities cannot acquire gadgets to mechanise work many chores have to be carried out manually and laboriously. Labour becomes short and the children are pressed into service. All this applies to each of the programme regions and it accounts for the demand for child labour locally and for its

export.

## 2.3 Positive Aspects of Local Cultures

Given the tendency to make glib generalisations about outmoded customs in Ghana, it is necessary to consider those aspects of the lives of communities that could be positive rather than negative and could therefore be applied in the search for strategies for the promotion of programming. Table 5 displays some of these aspects. It is important to bear in mind that the issues in question can also have less desirable implications

**Table 5**  
**Issues Potentially Positive for Programme Concerns**

		North	Central Region	Volta Region
<b>Religion</b>	presence of various taboos on sex	very high to low	medium	high
	Incest and Exogamy	very high or high	high	medium
	Value of life	high or declining	high or declining	high or declining
<b>Education</b>	Moral education	low-dying	low-dying	low-dying
	Folklore (proverbs, riddles, tales)	high but declining	medium	medium
	Traditional Games	low and declining	low	low
<b>Family</b>	Reciprocity	high - declining	medium - declining	medium-declining
	Family cohesion	high	medium	high

<b>Marriage / Conjugal Relations</b>	Marriage rites	high	medium	high
	Breastfeeding ≥1.5 years	high	medium	medium to high
	Postpartum abstinence	high	medium	medium
<b>Women's Issues</b>	Puberty rites	none	low	low
<b>Leadership</b>	Chiefs and queen- mothers exist	very high to low	very high	medium
	Elderships	high	high	high
	Women's leaderships	low	high	medium
	Youth Associations, Asafo	low or none	high	low

### Sexual Taboos As An Aspect Of Traditional Religion

Sexual taboos have regulated sexual contact in traditional societies. They regulate who may sleep with whom, when and where. For example in some communities a person cannot engage in sexual intercourse in the period preceding the performance of certain tasks. The belief is that sexual intercourse at that time would ruin the objectives of the enterprise. The benefits of this for reproductive health may be null or at best minor. However the taboo that forbids premature indulgence in sexual activity for a child or unmarried youth does potentially have considerable benefits for reproductive health, as it led to sexual abstinence and thereby prevented premature pregnancies.

Taboo also forbids the performance of sexual acts in certain places. To begin with, the place designated for sexual activity is the home or domestic setting. This setting affords privacy while at the same time making sexual activity noticed, if not observed, ensuring its legitimacy and checking potential abuses. A person should have a place of his or her own to be entitled to engage in sex. Thus adolescent sexual activity was ruled out for the youth who lived with his or her parents. For these reasons a married person is entitled to a hut of his or her own and therefore a measure of privacy.

In the domestic setting a person was surrounded by people of the opposite sex who were either kin or spouses of kin. A person was not at liberty to bring in an unrelated person of the opposite sex for sexual intercourse, as such a visitor immediately became the visitor of the entire group and was treated as

such, with little leeway for unapproved activity.

However the traditional religious norms are on the decline due to claims in certain quarters that they are irrational, unscientific and fetish. Yet it has to be remarked that it is not by any means every science-educated or Christian Ghanaian who rejects these norms. You do not have to believe in the norms and conventions as science to accept them for what they are. It has to be remarked too that everywhere, not everything that people do is rational. In fact there have been attempts to assign rational and scientific explanations to religions and secular taboos.

### **Traditional Education**

It was the duty of the family, and this includes the parents, the grandparents, siblings and others including the peer group, to be involved in the education of the individual. That education was aimed at passing on what was culturally acceptable and discouraging the anti-social. It was basically a moral education. From early childhood the child was expected to observe and listen to what was done or not done as well as try things out. Actual instruction was not excluded. This form of education was reinforced by sanctions of various kinds – moral, religious and social, which were both positive (remunerative) and negative (punitive).

The traditional education was total and encompassed all aspects of life. It ensured the good of the community and enabled the individual, whatever his or her inclinations, to accept life as it was and to play his or her part. In the target Regions this type of education addressed the issues relevant to UNFPA programmes including adolescent reproductive health, domestic harmony, the treatment of children including orphans and the elderly. Children need to share and not be selfish, etc.

We find this form of education manifesting itself in wise sayings and proverbs. Folk songs and popular tunes praise good behaviour while criticising immoral attitudes and actions. They recount actual events and occurrences. Even though it is usually felt that sexual and reproductive matters are sacrosanct and not open to discussion in traditional communities, or in the presence of children, proverbs and folk tales did not shy away from commenting on sexual issues.

Sex is forbidden in the open and in the bush. The argument was that the earth, the source of the community's living and its viability, forbids this. Those who violated this taboo were seen not only to be injuring themselves but the rest of the community as well. Such intercourse was therefore an unpatriotic act, and it was therefore incumbent on all to see to it that the infraction was dealt with ritually. Such a taboo, it can be seen, pre-empts

the possibility of adultery, fornication and rape as a person could not take advantage of the absence of community members to perform unlawful sexual acts. Thus in the past, despite the fact that both sexes were scantily clothed, sexual aberrations were rare.

Intercourse was forbidden between kin and with the spouse of kin. A young girl's family did not take kindly to any man having an affair with their ward without having first approached the girl's family. Such a person would be sanctioned and disgraced if he was found conducting an unapproved intimate affair with a girl that he had not married.

Some cultures forbade sexual intercourse with under-aged or uninitiated girls or those who had not undergone the puberty rites. In addition women in the menses were themselves avoided and sexual intercourse with such a person was viewed as polluting to the culprit. The same applied to pregnant women. In some cultures only the person responsible for the pregnancy may continue to sleep with the pregnant woman.

### **Incest and Exogamy**

Sexual intercourse with a related person was forbidden in all the programme regions. This applied not only to the immediate family and their spouses but also to distant kin. In some northern communities a person could not have sex with anyone who is known to be related through either the mother's or the father's side. The clan or a sub-segment of it defined the limits of incest. Such a rule checks sexual abuses. It also meant that people had to marry outside their own clan.

### **The Pro-Life Nature of Traditional Religions**

The traditional religions of the three regions emphasised the sanctity of the human being and his life. A person is viewed as containing in himself or herself a divine quality and a destiny. Even a stranger could be a divine being, masquerading in human guise to tempt the living and punish them if they were found wanting. Life was seen as a value that must be protected and not toyed with. In northern communities the earth forbids human bloodshed, regardless of whether the victim was a stranger or not. The ritual penalties were irksome for the homicide and his family. The religious beliefs thus entitled a person to dignity and self respect. Even children were respected, as they could be the reincarnations of significant ancestors. Given this pro-human stance there was no place for abortion. This pro-life perspective sometimes led to rejection of unusual beings such as infants with congenital deformities who were diagnosed to be masquerading evil bush spirits. It also accounts for the rejection of witches.

In the past, everyone in the community played games. They took place in the daytime if people were not too busy working, and at night. They were rarely two-person games. When people were not playing games they came together to converse and share the village gossip. All this helps to debunk the view that fertility levels in the traditional communities were high due to a lack of entertainment, which drove adults and adolescents to sex because there was nothing else to do.

The traditional forms of entertainment and games are declining in all regions due to the changes in life styles and their replacement with new games and entertainments promoted by globalisation and its agents. The record dance and the video show are overly enjoyed, to the point that these have become the new fetishes. People sometimes cannot appreciate that the movie is not reality but an act, make-believe. The crime and violence, the sex and drugs, the glorification of disobedience and disrespect for authority are consumed by gullible youth to be in turn re-enacted.

School these days lasts the better part of the day, with extra-classes that run on till the late hours. Not only do parents lose the opportunity to educate their children, there is no time for the youth to benefit from the traditional forms of education, especially as parents and adults are themselves wage earners who must stay out to work.

### **The Traditional Family**

Family is essentially a construct. Every society makes what it wishes of it. Essentially, it is about how people are grouped and recruit others into their groups. The ultimate purpose is to provide everyone with the benefits of belonging to a group – the allocation of social capital – to make sure that the individual is protected from the difficulties of life and its crises by distributing goods and services as they are needed, and likewise to reduce misfortune and hardship by ensuring that they are shared. The so called 'extended family' (the lineage in many of the communities of the programme regions) comprises a fairly large number of related individuals and establishes alliances with many more in its environment. It ensures cooperation within communities and also holds individuals accountable to themselves and the rest of the community. In this sense it enhances the moral fibre of the society and increases wellbeing.

Reciprocity is thus the core value of the traditional family. It knits together the different generations and addresses vulnerabilities of all sorts. The strength of that reciprocity may never have been non-discriminating. Research has shown that distinctions were made between close and distant

relatives, but the principle was entrenched and could be called upon if it was not seen to be applied. Even for those who would rather go counter to the established norms of family life there were always religious beliefs to check selfishness. The ancestors played the role of umpires, sanctioning those who abused the rules of reciprocity and fair play. Among the Kasena-Nankana an elder or senior person in charge of looking after collective resources was killed by the ancestors for any highhandedness. Thus the orphan had a champion after all, if his or her rights were being trampled under foot. It was not acceptable for the husband to abuse his wife in ways not allowed by custom. The family saw to it that such abuses did not continue, as it would earn for all a reputation as 'wife beaters', a label that did not do the other members of the group any good in future marriage negotiations.

Now the family is everywhere in decay, including in the programme regions, but this is not to say that the family is necessarily dead and defunct. Lineages continue to defend traditional prerogatives, especially in the case of chieftaincy and other traditional offices. A lineage may still constitute a residential unit in some of the rural areas. Religious rites particularly funerals may be held jointly with lineage members being allocated their customary roles. Even where the ideology persists, the idea of a corporate group has been whittled away and overtaken by the forces of the market, globalisation and individualism working together. The characteristic of the traditional family as a leveller is being resented more and more as Ghanaians wish to exploit the norms of the institution only when they stand to benefit individually. The matrilineal and patrilineal corporations have been overtaken by laws of intestate succession and other legislations, making it pointless to be your brother's or sister's keeper. As the domain of the family decays or shrinks, intervention by the family in a person's life is being rejected.

### **Marriage Issues**

While customs like bridewealth have seemed to be more a liability than an asset, the family and indeed societal involvement in the marriage process and its monitoring of conjugal events has beneficial consequences for individuals and society. Conventions leading to what can be described as 'social menopause' applied in some societies. By this is meant that a married couple should not have more children after their first child takes a wife or husband. This was to contribute to family size regulation in local communities. Unfortunately the norm also put pressure on older men to seek younger wives. A middle-aged woman in her social, though not biological, menopause has to put up with celibacy because she cannot seek

another husband. The reason for this lies in the fact that knowledge of contraception was very limited traditionally, and sexual intercourse was perceived to be necessitated by the need to procreate, rather than pleasure. Given this perception, and as polygamy was unavailable to many, ultimately many couples had to settle for a celibate life.

Traditional conventions that supported prolonged breastfeeding can be counted among beneficial norms and practices. Rural mothers, especially in the north, breastfeed their children for longer periods; this is understandable given that these are women who lack the resources to buy infant feeding products. Moreover they carry their children with them on their work errands, unlike urban mothers. However, even this practice is on the decline.

### **Women's Issues**

Girls' initiation rituals have been viewed as positive and beneficial to youths themselves and to the effort to control sexually transmissible diseases, including HIV-AIDS. Ritual performances that centre on puberty and nubility have pragmatic results too, as they are also the opportunity for the education of unmarried girls in their teens about reproductive issues. As the rites should ideally be undergone by virgins or girls who have not known sexual intercourse, they serve as an encouragement for young girls to delay the initiation of sexual activity. Unfortunately, these rites were never universal, but rather confined to certain ethnic groups such as the coastal Ga-Dangme peoples. In some other areas they once existed but are now in oblivion. However, some Central Region chiefs are now calling for the reintroduction of such rites as a strategy for containing the spreading of AIDS. The call seems to coincide with the setting up of virginity clubs.

### **Community Leaderships**

Community leaderships and opinion leaders wield considerable authority in local communities, although that influence has declined. Local leaders know the environment and are recognised. They have good contact with the rest of the community and can speak for the community as well as speak to the community.

Chiefs are found in all Regions, although their standing varies between communities. There are communities where chiefs did not exist in the past. Chiefs are powerful and influential in most parts of the Northern and the Central Regions, with every community having several chiefs constituting a hierarchy of authority. Even today the institution remains highly attractive; candidates are drawn from the highest echelons of society. Communities

themselves opt for those resourceful candidates with the highest profiles. The office is however less prestigious in the Upper East and Upper West, where the institution is fairly recent. The potential significance of the chief as an agent and ally for governance and development led the British to support the institution and attempt to rule through chiefs. That historical fact has not however diminished the prestige of the institution. As a social and political icon and the embodiment of the identity and integrity of his community and its aspirations, a chief aims to promote community welfare. As well educated people who are regularly in touch with the outside world through national fora, chiefs often have a modern outlook and an appreciation of programme issues.

The queen mother, who is often described as the female analogue of the male chief, is highly respected in her community, especially among the womenfolk. These days the occupant of this position is an outward looking person, knowledgeable on the issues of community wellbeing and development. Traditionally among Akan peoples adolescent reproductive issues fell to the queen mother to handle. She is best positioned to influence programme actions on sexual and reproductive matters within the community. Queen motherships are not however common in the northern parts of the country, and although they can now be found in the Volta Region their history there is a recent one and it may be that they have not been as deeply entrenched as their Central Region (Akan) counterparts on whom they are modelled.

Rather than queen mothers, what we find in the northern parts are a few female chiefs among the Dagomba and Mamprusi; the Gonja ewuriche comes closest to a queen mother. A number of northern communities have a women's leader (magazia) selected by the village women to lead them. These are women with leadership qualities, but not usually with outstanding backgrounds. Educated women do not usually desire such offices. Nevertheless the magazia wields influence among her fellow women.

In the Central Region communities we find civil militia (asafo) groups, through which the able-bodied youth (usually the males, but also sometimes females too) are mobilised for community duties; they police the community and ensure its integrity. The existence of several such groups in the community leads to competition among them, so that they serve as a check on each other and against abuse of power by the established authority. They galvanise public opinion on communal issues.

## **FINDING ANSWERS TO UNFPA'S CONCERNS**

This chapter is devoted to answering the specific questions posed for programming, namely, how can UNFPA-supported programmes on the issues of adolescent reproductive health, marriage and conjugality, family issues, child issues and the situation of the elderly be addressed in a culturally sensitive way? We attempt to identify the various stakeholders and their local leadership potentials, as well as the structures that could serve the needs of programme implementation. Issues already broadly discussed in earlier chapters are now treated in depth, pointing out their implications for community advancement, together with contradictions that arise as norms, behaviours and attitudes are examined with a view to achieving effective programming. The chapter begins with an attempt at a definition of cultural sensitivity in the Ghanaian context.

### **3.1 The Question of Cultural Sensitivities in Ghanaian Communities**

As a general rule, intervention is likely to be acceptable where it is understood and there are no suspicions of ulterior motives. If programme intervention is conceptualised as an offer or gift being presented to local communities, then any external intervention will be judged by the recipients in terms of the givers' perceived motives and the acceptability of the gift. Like any present, a gift is genuine only when it is understood to be well-intentioned. The status and perceived intentions of the deliverers of intervention are critical in determining whether an intervention is received or rejected. Given the ambiguity of things, particularly gifts, an otherwise beneficial act is automatically of negative value if administered by the enemy; thus an offer will not be accepted if its motives are unclear or are suspect. Vaccines have been rejected in some West African communities because people have suspected the donors to be their 'enemies'. Therefore, how implementation partners of UNFPA-supported programmes enter the communities, who their collaborators are, their methods and approaches,

and their attitudes to local communities and local concerns and related issues are critical to the process of intervention.

Intervention must seek to enable communities to take decisions that will be beneficial to them, and should create the feeling within the community that it owns the product of the intervention. A product that is not owned cannot be sustained beyond the departure of the implementation agents.

Communities must be genuinely involved in the intervention process. However they must also be provided with the necessary information and the means to allow them to make informed choices. The assumption here is that ultimately communities are capable of appreciating what is good for them, although they may not seem to be so at first. In any case, not everybody within the same community seeks the same objectives or subscribes to a common ideal of the 'good life'. Thus it has to be borne in mind that communities are not homogeneous and that variations within communities are a fact of life.

Intra-community differences may be due to a number of factors, including gender and age differences, differences in experiences, in levels of formal education, in religious beliefs, or even differences in status and wealth, in degree of external exposure etc. For that reason, different individuals or categories of people may hold different ideas of what is good for themselves and for the rest of their communities, or of what is good for the community but not for themselves as individuals. Programming must take cognisance of these differences, which need not be hindrances to intervention; in some cases they can provide a window to successful intervention. For example, while the local person may have difficulty with certain innovations that the programme seeks to introduce, the 'been-to' who has lived elsewhere may be very ready to espouse the novelty and could serve as the programmer's ally.

Within any community then there is both a measure of consensus about how things are, should be or should not be, and how to proceed or not to proceed. On the other hand, there are also differences in attitudes and expectations. What is more, norms do not remain static and unchanging, although certain norms endure more than others. Certain segments of a community are more open to change than others. Often within the communities there are negotiations and accommodations. It is therefore important to seek and identify different types of stakeholders and the power relations within a community. Given the power and authority of the formal village leadership it may be tempting to exaggerate its influence out of

context. For example, women may have a bigger say than men on certain issues; the voices of youth may be more strident on certain other issues. The chief of village may seem very powerful from the outside, and yet he may not be able to take and implement certain decisions without consultation with his council and other stakeholders, such as the youth. To act unilaterally could jeopardise his position.

On the question of how to conduct discussions, it has to be remembered that certain subjects may be better discussed within a uniform group than in an open forum involving a cross section of persons from diverse backgrounds. Community sensitivities may differ on this. For example, there may be nothing wrong with holding mixed group discussion sessions in some communities, as both men and women can be expected to speak freely, but in some communities and for certain subjects and topics it might be better to have separate group discussions for adult males and females; it might even be necessary to have separate discussions with children. It may also be that the gender and age of the external agent are factors that should not be ignored.

### **Language And Communication**

Effective intervention depends on dialogue and education – the sharing of information and perspectives on critical issues. This cannot be done effectively in the absence of appropriate language and communication. Efforts must therefore be made to seek the appropriate media of communication and the channels of communication. The local language may be important in this respect. It may have ready expressions for certain ideas, or not. However, even where the language does not have a conventional way of expressing particular topics there is always room to improvise acceptably. A language may consider certain things 'unsayable' or taboo, and may use euphemisms and circumlocutions to effectively get a message across. Perhaps certain things may not be said directly in the presence of or in the hearing of certain people without sounding vulgar and uncouth. Local resources – folklore, verbal art – proverbs, riddles and adages, folktales, jokes etc. can be very effective. Innovation is not impossible in this area and programming can indeed exploit innovation tailored to the needs of the programme. A new proverb can be coined to say that wife battery is bad, even if there is a proverb that seems to suggest that a husband can treat his wife as a minor two proverbs will not be seen as contradictory.

It may be that sometimes things that cannot be said acceptably in ordinary speech can be better said through other media such as drama shows and

displays, song, poetry etc. Likewise, certain types of subjects can be better understood when presented in a specific medium

### Timing

Entry into a new community may also have to be timed to take advantage of the prevailing mood of the community and its rhythm of activities and events. There is something like an opportune time. It has been suggested that festival occasions suit certain types of programme events, as they are the occasions that witness convergence of people expecting to enjoy leisure and spectacle and to tune in to new ideas. The celebration of an important festival might also be an opportune time to remind people about risky behaviours and build consensus. It has not been usual for traditional festivals to be held around a particular theme, but this is changing. The Tengebigre festival of the Nabdam of the Upper East had as its theme for 2005 *Nabdams, protect your environment for sustainable development*.

#### Box 1: Contextual Nature of Cultural Sensitivity

All told, cultural sensitivity is contextual and boils down to the following:

- understanding the ways of the community and being willing to listen to community voices;
- appreciating that a particular community has its own preferred norms, that may be similar to or different from those of other communities. Therefore what has seemed to work in one context can inform approaches in another, but should not predetermine the approach;
- using knowledge about a community to identify approaches that can be used to achieve programme objectives, while at the same time ensuring that care is taken not to offend the feelings and sensibilities of the community;
- at the end of the day, communities should be beneficiaries and not losers as a result of programming;
- given that there are several choices and modes of operating open to the programmer, cultural sensitivity should lead to the selection of those options that lead to a satisfactory outcome for both the programmer and the community.
- where programme objectives seem to go against those of the community, information should be presented in the clearest ways possible, without

misleading or misguiding the community. For example, known side effects should not be hidden from the community, nor should the negative side of an issue be exaggerated, frightening a community out of its wits, so that the programme's line would be adopted outright. Telling the truth is essential.

□ It also implies that the programmer would appreciate that the various aspects of life in a community are often intertwined, such that changes in one area can have an effect on others. This means programming should take the whole into account and exploit the synergies, the ways in which the parts work together, while being conscious of shortcomings.

□ In short, cultural sensitivity implies partnerships, and these should be exploited by creating alliances, as needed.

It must be remarked that the social and cultural issues to which UNFPA-supported programmes should pay attention to are multifaceted and interwoven. In the required concerted intervention the relations between issues must be taken into account. Marriage issues are not to be looked at in isolation from family issues, or leadership norms and expectations, or even of religious questions. For any of the issues it is possible to detect social, religious, economic and even political implications.

### 3.2 Marriage And Family Life Issues

It would appear that a number of the issues of interest are related to marriage, such as wife (widow) inheritance; female circumcision – genital cutting/mutilation; domestic violence; debilitating widowhood and widower-hood rites etc. Marriage illustrates clearly how a single institution brings under its scope sundry dimensions of life. In all the UNFPA-supported regions marriage is considered essential (although co-habitation is coming into focus in rural towns where men on transfer and away from their conjugal families take local women as temporary partners). While co-habitations are coming into their own, there is equally the phenomenon of truncated conjugal families where a married woman lives with her children and acts as head of household while her 'diaspora' husband is away in the urban areas in paid employment or seeking a job. He may or may not maintain regular contacts with his conjugal family in the rural areas. (See for example Faisal's MA thesis on the challenges facing female-headed households in Kadjebi-Zongo).

## The Cultural Importance Of Marriage

To understand the issues that marriage presents we need to consider both the underlying and the manifest reasons that communities advance for the institution. Firstly, marriage can be a rite of passage that initiates a person into responsible adulthood in community. Failure on the part of an individual to marry before death would be a sign of abysmal failure. It is seen as anomalous for an adult not be married and living a family life.

*If marriage is seen as a rite of passage to social adulthood, it explains the tendency for certain youths to take wives and then abandon them for the city.*

Culturally, people marry for reproductive reasons, because a 'full' person is one who has had offspring. Marriage makes this possible, and in most societies is the primary reason for marriage. In some northern communities, though not all, a husband is automatically the father of all the children that his wife produces; the husband's social and legal claims override those of the biological father. This of course is not true in the matrilineal communities of the Central Region.

*If marriage aims at giving a man children, then men who need children for social, political, economic or prestige reasons will surely take as many wives as possible to maximise the number of children. At the same time, a wife who is incapable of giving children or has passed menopause is less desirable.*

The existence of a traditional division of labour by gender implies that individuals cannot live complete and fulfilling lives if they are not married. Certain chores are sex-linked. The economic dependence of unmarried young women implies that they need a husband to provide for their essential needs – clothing, food, shelter, their health needs etc.

Marriage facilitates sexual companionship in a context where sexual activity outside the home is not only frowned upon but difficult to conduct, given taboos such as those of incest, adultery and others listed in the previous chapter. Where incest taboos coincide with exogamy rules, or the necessity to find a marriage partner outside one's clan, and are applicable to a wide range of clan or lineage relatives, sexual gratification outside marriage becomes very difficult. These taboos are being relaxed in the modern context, but in the closely-knit rural context they hold. It is observed that in some Upper East communities distant members of the clan do not commit incest if they sleep together even though they are forbidden to marry each

other. Thus, the clan is exogamous but between certain categories of lineage members incest does not obtain. *The possibility of this 'brother-sister' love, when stretched by modern youth that is oblivious of taboos and out of control, can result in the birth of children who go through life without fathers.*

### Box 2 Sexual Access Rights

As marriage is seen as a transfer of sexual access rights to the groom, it is considered the husband's right to demand sexual access whenever he wants it. By the same token society frowns on a wife denying her husband sexual access without good cause. The settlement of bride-wealth may secure these rights for the husband, but not in every case. In matrilineal communities both partners enjoy these rights, though not equally. Matrilineal society therefore accepts a wife's complaints of not getting satisfaction from the husband. Furthermore, as sex is associated with reproduction and is its *raison d'être* in some cases, sexual access becomes non-negotiable between a couple.

Marriage transfers rights and obligations to the spouses, and as women have traditionally been seen as jural minors, marriage gives a husband control over a woman. That control can be exercised in ways that add to the prestige and comfort of the husband and his family. Many are the social services that wives provide in rural communities. This means that a man can multiply his economic and social advantages by taking more than one wife.

Marriage, as it establishes the rights of the spouses, is in demand, and wives are in great demand because of their social subordination. This accounts for the polygynous practice of having two or more wives simultaneously. Polygyny is everywhere sanctioned but not its opposite, polyandry. Traditionally, polygyny enabled a husband to multiply his benefits without necessarily multiplying his obligations. Consequently, it is found in the three northern Regions and the Volta Region. Islam too supports polygyny. Rural men seeking spouses and their families and kin (parents and siblings including their mothers and sisters) are not averse to it; but first wives, their parents and siblings might be opposed to it as it implies competition for resources and the attentions of the polygynous husband. Paradoxically perhaps, some wives take the initiative to bring in a co-wife, a kinswoman whom they know they can control and manage, rather than wait for the husband to bring in a stranger as a second wife.

In the Akan societies matrilineal norms mediate and reduce the imbalance between the spouses. There, polygyny is less beneficial and is practised less. We can therefore expect polygamy to be less common in the Central Region. The downside of the trade off is that traditionally in matrilineal communities the spouses remained closely attached to their lineages. This can undermine the conjugal bond and pose problems for the economic interests of the children and wives, especially for orphans and widows.

Polygyny then has its perceived benefits as well as drawbacks, which account for its persistence in communities. It may be the alternative to sexual promiscuity for both men and women, and to serial polygamy in which men and women frequently divorce and remarry. Some women would rather marry a well-to-do married man who is capable of meeting their needs and those of their children than a man who is unmarried but has nothing to offer a woman economically. Does polygyny have the potential to increase the incidence of STDs and HIV-AIDS, or to check them? There is no clear answer and it will depend on the individual and the society.

### **Age At First Marriage**

In the targeted Regions, it is normal for there to be a difference between the marriage ages for men and girls. While traditionally men marry relatively late, women tend to marry early; and not only is this a fact, girl child betrothals can be found in some communities, especially in parts of the northern area. Factors responsible for this include polygyny, inequalities in wealth and incidence of poverty, bridewealth demands and customary child betrothal practices.

The issue has to do with the ideas and expectations about marriage and conjugal roles. Wives are valued as bearers of children and for the various social and economic services that they provide. The practice of polygamy raises the demand for girls who have reached puberty, who therefore become relatively scarce. High bridewealth, in the medium of valuable or scarce resources – livestock, cowries etc., postpones male marriage while bringing forward that for girls. Young men beginning life cannot easily secure such bridewealth resources and families lacking resources may have to marry off their young daughters in order to obtain from their husbands the bride wealth goods that would enable a brother, cousin, uncle or other male relative to find a wife.

Where child betrothals are customary, babies and infants are betrothed and premature marriage becomes inevitable, given the anxiety of a betrothed

man who is much older than the girl to secure his wife before a more desirable and younger man, who may not have invested in her, takes the betrothed girl away. These days it is not unusual to hear of betrothed girls eloping with other men. This generates conflict within villages and murders have been known to result. Some of the consequences of premature marriage are too obvious to warrant mentioning here, but some of the implications, especially the health implications for premature mothers and their children, may not however be obvious to the practicing communities, and some education could go a long way to cause such communities to rethink the practice.

Child betrothals continue to be an issue among peoples like the Konkomba and Bimoba. However, they may not be the only groups to continue with such practices. In parts of the Upper East where the practice has not been institutionalised, infant or young girls may occasionally be given out to husbands. One scenario is that of an infertile couple that is able to give birth to a girl child through the intervention of a healer. In token of gratitude such a child, designated as the wife of the healer, would almost certainly be expected in future to marry the healer or a member of his family.

Paternal aunts' fosterage of nieces, which is common in the Upper East among the Kasena-Nankana and the Builsa, leads to early marriages for girls. Such a child is sent off in early childhood to be brought up by her father's sister and serves as a domestic maid. The claim of the aunt is mechanical but is backed by ritual. By virtue of her role in the rites of first pregnancy conducted for her brother's wife, the married sister earns the right to be the one who determines whom her niece (her brother's daughter) marries in future. Almost always this means that the young niece will be given in marriage to the husband of the aunt, to one of his brothers or any of his kin that she may decide on. The logic of the practice is to ensure that the aunt has a protégée and ally living with her; such a young girl is also a potential negotiating tool in the hands of the older woman in her relations with her husband and any of his kin desirous to earn the favours of the old woman and the privilege of the having the niece bestowed on them. Pressure from the aunt in this way can lead to premature marriage.

The practice of a girl being fostered by her father's sister continues, though on a reduced scale. Some paternal aunts may send the girl to school and may permit her to go back to her parents when she has passed the age of being a maid. In spite of the role of ritual in keeping the practice alive, aunts can be persuaded not to insist on it. However, some parents themselves seem to insist, especially where the child's aunt is well to do.

## Wife (widow) Inheritance

It is customary for widows to accept marriage to a relative of their deceased husband after the performance of the final funeral rites. This practice is found in the Upper West and Upper East and has been commented on above. In parts of the Upper East where the practice exists, the widow is requested immediately after the deceased husband's funeral rites to indicate which of his relations she would live with as a spouse. Widows are not however compelled to select anyone and refusal should not normally pose problems for the widow. She can continue to live in her husband's village if she chooses, although it would be resented if she entertained lovers. If she opts for a relative of the husband she would be expected to take a man who stands in the category of a younger brother or cousin to the deceased. A young widow might decide to leave altogether and find a new husband. Widow inheritance does not necessarily place the widow at a disadvantage. However, if the widow selects a younger man he may need persuading to accept the arrangement.

The practice is on the wane; among people like the Kasena-Nankana all that an unwilling widow has to say is that she wishes to 'stay by her late husband's grave'. The practice certainly cannot have the serious disadvantages and health implications that international news reports suggest are associated with it in parts of Kenya. In the Kenyan case, reports show that widows whose HIV statuses were questionable were themselves refusing to have sex with the kin of their deceased husbands, as custom demanded, but were nevertheless compelled to engage in sexual intercourse all the same. This does not hold in the Ghanaian case, and is one illustration of unjustified criticism of cultural institutions mounted by officials acting on hearsay. Critical comments on the practice issuing from the Upper West might suggest that widows were being compelled to accept men they did not like.

Generally, if a young widow decides to return to her parents and remarry, a portion of the bridewealth taken from the deceased husband's family might be reclaimed. This fact may compel a widow to remain unmarried or to enter into cohabitation. Bridewealth given for a wife is often perceived to be collective family property, hence the family of the deceased feels it can demand that the widow continues the marriage relationship through a proxy in the form of one of their kinsmen.

Widow inheritance can be a rights issue where it compels a man to accept the widow of his brother as an expression of loyalty to the deceased. The practice might restrict the choices of widows. Where the bridewealth is

negligible it would seem that widow inheritance is a non-issue, as the widow can opt to remarry.

### Widow- And Widowerhood Rites

Death and funeral performances signify transition for family and spouse of the deceased. The change of status is symbolised by rites performed for the living kin, especially the surviving spouse and children. Some of these rites have been regarded as demeaning and as imposing unnecessary hardship on the survivors, particularly the widow. The rites differ from society to society and so does their effect. They may include the following categories:

- Dietary prohibitions;
- the widow being kept incommunicado or in seclusion for the duration of the mourning period; the duration however differs from society to society.
- abstention from sexual intercourse for the duration of the transition period and until the conclusion of the final funeral rites; in parts of the Upper East where the funeral rites can be postponed indefinitely and where it is not unusual for the funeral to remain unperformed for a decade or more, it can mean that the widow will not be able to marry and cannot have sexual relations with anyone. The same does not however seem to apply to widowers.
- compulsory sexual intercourse with a stranger and others; in some Central Region communities she must wear a chastity belt or a chain with a symbolic padlock for a year and can only take it off after one year of mourning and after engaging in a sexual act with a stranger;
- going through ordeals that are supposed to prove the fidelity of the widow;
- special clothing or a special hair style may be required, and there may be a prohibition on bathing with hot water.

Taken together, the demands on the widow in particular are considerable and restrictive to say the least. In northern communities widow or widower abuse seems absent and the rites are not resented by widows or widowers, perhaps out of a feeling that they should participate in the condition of the deceased by symbolically 'dying' with him or her. The ritual performances prescribed for the widow and widower may be said to be in their interests as they are believed to have the prophylactic function of disguising the widow(er) from attempts by the dead to take along the surviving spouse.

From the perspective of the outsider these may nevertheless seem to be imposing considerable hardships. This may not be the insider's perspective. However, the way the rites are administered in some societies suggests vindictiveness and punishment for the widow, who is under suspicion of complicity in the death of the deceased. This is unlikely to be the case in those communities where the wife has little to gain by the death of her husband. In northern patrilineal society, where the wife is domiciled where her husband's lineage is based, a wife loses a protector and a direct channel to lineage resources with the death of the husband. Widowhood rites are not therefore rites of atonement for a wife's complicity in the husband's death. However, they can be a test of her fidelity, as their performance by a wife who has been sexually unfaithful is expected to have harmful effects.

The main criticisms of widowhood rites are that they contain health hazards for the widow and compel her to perform undignified tasks. Principal among these is the requirement that she shed her pollution condition by performing a sexual act with a stranger. This has been reported for southern Ghanaian communities but it remains alien to northern people, who insist on the widow remaining chaste until the conclusion of the final funeral rites.

### ***What to Do about Widowhood Rites?***

The question of what to do arises only where the rites are debilitating and pose difficulties for the parties involved. Sensitivity to a people's socio-cultural norms demands that harmless customs are not subjected to undue negative criticism. Indeed, sympathy for the harmless practices of a community prepares the ground for the community's acceptance of suggestions for change to undesirable ones. Specific categories of harmful rites would include:

1. Rites that represent hostility by the relatives of the dead to a widow or widower.

Where this is the case there is double agony for the surviving spouse. It is different if hostility is purely symbolic, and not personal, and therefore can be taken in the spirit of ritual and customary requirement. These kinds of rituals can be reduced to a symbolic token that causes no real harassment. Community leaders and other stakeholders such as the chief can lead in the change.

2. Rites that symbolise the significance of losing a dear one such as a spouse.

Some of the benefits that result from having a spouse and which make life more pleasant and fulfilling may be withdrawn or prohibited, in the effort to bring home to all the loss that death has wrought. Not only are symbolic behaviours used to convey these cultural arguments, mourners in some cultures vocalise them in

funeral dirges.

No malice is implied in the performance of these rites. The performers may consider the rites necessary but they do not bear the widow or widower any grudge. This being the case, ways can be found to introduce changes such as the substitution of symbolic token rites that harm no one.

### 3. Rites that seriously endanger health and wellbeing.

These are rites that, though considered to be a customary requirement, are not without malice on the part of the kin of the deceased, who blame the widow or widower for the death of the spouse. It is essential to note here that the death of a wife or husband can be put to the 'bad luck' of the widow or widower, who then stands culpable for what he or she has not done consciously. There have been reports in certain parts of Ghana of widows having had pepper rubbed into their eyes and being subjected to humiliating and degrading treatment in the name of ritual. At the other end of the spectrum however are those dangerous rites that are not performed out of malice on anyone's part. An example of these would be the requirement that the widow should have intercourse with a stranger. Such intercourse is not supervised and often takes place away from the village, where the widow or widower's reasons would be unknown to the selected sex partner. It usually is a one-off event that is deemed to be prophylactic. There is no way a widow or widower can be physically compelled to undertake the act. Not only is it an unpleasant ordeal, the danger of sexually transmitted disease is great, although this may not be appreciated by the actors.

In the case of hostility this is an attitudinal issue. If it is only symbolic this might not convey much ill will; but in some contexts underlying suspicion lurks and it prepares the ground for the dispossession of the widow by the kin of the deceased.

#### ♦ *What can programming do about this?*

It may be difficult to persuade people in a community to abandon the suspicion that a spouse's 'bad luck' is instrumental in the death of a dear one, since widows and widowers themselves tend to harbour such guilt feelings in many cultures. However, counselling that employs traditional (not necessarily western psychotherapy) modes can help. Communities can be persuaded to attach more importance to pathology reports on causes of death. Though acceptance of a pathologist's report does not eliminate spiritual causes of death, it can reduce the suspicion, and with that the inclination to take revenge on the widow or widower by insisting on

dehumanising treatment of her or him. Currently many rural communities do not want to autopsies.

In the case of potentially dangerous prophylactic rites it is important to educate communities that are ignorant of the greater danger of sexually transmitted diseases, or other types of danger stemming from the ritual performance. Knowledge of the dangers of certain rites increases the options and choices, and can be a step towards discontinuing debilitating rites. In the case of sex with a stranger the issue as traditionally presented is a simple choice:

*If you don't perform the prescribed sexual rites you cannot remarry, or if you do you will not live long. Your new husband would also be affected by the breach of taboo.*

However, when the necessary information is provided, people soon realise that it boils down to the following:

*If you don't perform the sexual rites you cannot enjoy remarriage or an active sexual life; if you remarry or engage in sexual intercourse you endanger your partner, and you yourself may not live long.*

But also

*If you engage in ritual sex you might contract HIV or STDs, and also might not live long or enjoy remarriage.*

Saddled with this Hobson's choice people might be prepared either to replace actual sex with symbolic sex, or if they must go through with the actual sex, to make it protected sex.

It should be remembered that in all cases the widower or widow not only has antagonists, he or she is not without sympathisers who wish the widow the best. Any mitigation to harsh widowhood rites should find support, particularly among the youth and the non-traditionalists.

## **Domestic Violence**

Domestic violence can take different forms. It occurs in all Regions of Ghana in both subtle and obvious forms, and is perhaps associated with gender attitudes and conjugal expectations. It is not exclusive to the domestic setting, as it also occurs outside it. It reflects power differentials in the domestic setting and in the communities. As a wider category, domestic violence includes violence to minors and children as well as violence to the aged, a phenomenon that is gradually rearing its head in some communities. Gender violence may also characterise boyfriend-girlfriend relations. Girlfriend abuse is not uncommon, leading in some cases to

murder or irreparable physical damage. The latter case cannot be cultural; girlfriend abuse cannot take place customarily, because marriage ties have not transferred rights over a girl to a husband.

Though the targets of domestic violence are usually females, men and boys are not excluded. The rights and obligations implied in domestic arrangements and power inequalities lead to violence and abuse. Violence can be physical as well as psychological, and in the targeted Regions it manifests commonly in wife and child battery and insulting behaviours. Parental abuse (involving old persons), formerly uncommon, is now beginning to be a worry. In some northern communities abuse of a parent is prevented by the existence of taboos forbidding it. There are also spiritual and physical sanctions for such abuses.

### Box 3: Notions of Abuse and Violence

It is important however to distinguish between a community's notion of *abuse* and *non-abuse*, with its perceptions of legitimate and acceptable expression of violence and its forms on the one hand, and what some activists present as generic cases of unacceptable abuse and violence on the other. When this distinction is defined, the way can be clear to persuading communities to accept the activists' conception of violence, if there is justification for it. From a community's ways of handling what it considers as abuse lessons can be learnt for programme intervention.

Ghanaian communities too have their concepts of domestic violence. It is to be expected also that there are differences between matrilineal communities such as those in the Central Region and strict patrilineal communities such as those to be found in much of the north. In-between are communities such as those of the Ewe, where women enjoy considerable autonomy and remain attached to their families of orientation (parents, siblings etc.) even after marriage. The shield of the natal family, i.e., the woman's own family and other kin, can minimise domestic violence.

Many societies accept that domestic violence may be spontaneous and unpremeditated and regretted by the culprit. It cannot be and is not justified where it leads to serious injury. 'The teeth and the tongue are members of the same body, but they disagree occasionally leading to one of them being hurt by the other', says one proverb. Another says however that 'A dog does not bite its puppy to the bone'.

## The Case of Marital Rape

There is currently a debate in the country about marital rape. It would appear that many Ghanaian communities do not readily accept that spouses can rape each other, especially against a background of the cultural expectation that women should 'play hard to get'. Sexual access seems to have been written into the traditional marriage code, as marriage transfers sexual access rights. That said, it cannot be denied that women are expected to refuse and resist a husband's advances at certain moments. The mother of an unweaned child is not expected to engage in sexual intercourse. Women do wear chastity belts to bed if they do not wish to have sexual intercourse with their husbands. Forcible sexual intercourse under these conditions would amount to violence.

Refusal of sexual intercourse can be a source of violence within the domestic setting when a wife is beaten by her husband for her refusal to give in. Occasionally wives are beaten by a husband who cannot cope with the persistent demands of a wife who insists on sexual satisfaction; there is also the case of the sexual partner who vents his or her sexual frustrations on the other. In many Ghanaian communities, matters of the night belong in the couple's private domain. When matters however get out of hand, complaints may be made to family elders, but not to the government authorities. Husbands may be rebuked if their demands are thought unreasonable, or if they are unwilling to sleep with their wives and give them satisfaction. In matrilineal societies divorce may be the ultimate sanction for spousal abuse.

In the context of Ghanaian culture, then, conjugal issues are expected to remain private matters rather than legal. Comments in the Ghanaian press suggest that most public opinion is against the criminalisation of minor conjugal conflicts. However the same cannot be said for serious injuries. Bloodshed in any form was always a public issue, not a private one, for which the culprits had to account to the earth-priest in northern Ghanaian communities where the earth tabooed bloodshed. The brothers of a woman have been known to be justifiably aggressive in the eyes of the community because their sister had been badly beaten by her husband. This suggests that not all forms of domestic violence were seen as private to the couple.

Effective intervention on the issue of domestic violence should first and foremost study and understand the reasons for the exercise of violence. An important determinant of society's level of sympathy for the victim of the violence may depend on the reason for it. It is generally accepted that a parent has an obligation to discipline his or her children and that to spare the rod is to spoil the child. Wives who are seen as minors in the early days of

the marriage are so treated. Older women may not be so treated with impunity; adult sons have been known to intervene where a father is being abusive to their mother.

Unfortunately there seems to be no formal penalty for the perpetrators of domestic violence, beyond societal disapproval and perhaps self help in the forms discussed above. An abusive husband's parents may also upbraid him, in northern Ghanaian communities a wife may run back to her parents, and persistent wife abuse may be sufficient grounds for divorce in the Central Region and among Ewe people. In northern communities unjustified abuse may result in conjugal separation, though rarely in divorce. The head of family or lineage may be invited to mediate in cases of violence, but in patrilineal communities where the wife lives with her husband's people no serious punishment is meted out to the husband or the parent who abuses a dependent. However, since colonial times lineage heads have learnt that excessive violence that leads to serious injury and death can lead to the police arresting not only the culprit but senior lineage members as well.

*In the case of violence meted out to children, it may be that communities do not appreciate fully the damaging effects of such violence physically and psychologically on the child's future development. As every parent's resort to the cane is seen as being in the child's ultimate interest and as part of the education process, it may be that educating the community on the issue would stem the violence. Such education should adduce clear evidence to prove the physical and psychological effects.*

In the case of gender-linked violence, education alone may not be sufficient to resolve the issue. The cause of the violence must be understood.

Empowerment of women would certainly contribute to the reduction of the problem.

### 3.3 Children's Issues

What have been described as the 'Worst Forms of Child Labour' (WFCL) include among others child trafficking, work as a kayayoo (female market porter), child domestic servitude, commercial sex exploitation, and trokosi (ritual servitude). A taxonomy of the children's issues that come up for UNFPA programming includes the following:

- child 'slavery';
- child labour and the risky jobs undertaken by child labourers;
- migrant children in urban centres: kayayei (porter girls) and truck pushers (bori boys);

- the issue of *trokosi*, the dedication of children to the service of religious shrines;
- paedophilia and sexual abuse of children;
- unwanted children and children abandoned because they are perceived to be a danger to kin.

Child slavery is not customary in the programme Regions, although there have been anecdotal reports of parents and relations selling their children and wards to strangers. In the distant past some Ghanaian communities practised child pawning where a distressed family needed money or food to bail it out of an emergency. Even then, the expectation was that with the emergency over the family would redeem its pawned member.

The phenomenon of giving children out to strangers for a fee is a recent development which lacks any cultural basis. It has been reported for parts of the Lower Volta where poor families give their children to fishermen needing child labour in exchange for a sum of money. Reports suggest that some of these children have been exported to other parts of West Africa.

#### **Box 4: Factors Influencing Child Trafficking**

Misrepresentation on the part of the outsider intent on acquiring children for export cannot be ruled out. Ignorance and gullibility on the part of a needy parent about the real intentions of the outsider requesting the services of the child cannot be dismissed. Poverty is the underlying explanation for the alienation of children in this way; some rural parents are incapable of providing for their children's needs; they cannot feed and clothe them and keep them in school. It is easy therefore for such parents and the children themselves to accept the proposition that this apparently altruistic stranger will provide paid employment and training, and that the child will be able to send money home. Unfortunately, parents who 'sell' their children do not realise the plight of such children. In the context of a craving to be a 'been-to', it is possible that rural children themselves have misguided perceptions about life away from home and what awaits them.

#### ♦ ***Modes of Intervention:***

1. Provide of information and education to vulnerable communities about the plight of children 'sold' to strangers. There is a real place for dramatic enactments of actual experiences of life away from home that can be enjoyed by both young and old. The experiences of children in this condition should be portrayed as objectively as possible. The involvement of migrant children in such a documentary or drama would be essential.
2. Provide people in rural areas with credit and know-how to establish cottage industries and to undertake income-generating ventures. This can be supportive of vulnerable families, the ones likely to sell children that they cannot maintain.

3. This fact, of families not being able to care for their biological children, might be used as argument in support of not begetting more offspring than couples can look after.

### **Distinguishing Between Child Enslavement And Fosterage**

Child slavery or purchase is to be distinguished from child fosterage – sending children to kin or foster parents for upbringing. Child fosterage has been customary and it has been a mechanism for addressing differences in wealth between related families and in the demand for and supply of child services, as well as ensuring that some children are given the necessary training for professions by attaching them to skilled persons or master workmen or women. It is fact that a number of people have gained education through being fostered. In matrilineal societies the mother's brother and mother's sister seem ideal foster parents.

Some parents have more children than they can cater for, while some of their relatives may lack children. Needy children like orphans may be fostered by close or distant kin who become responsible for them. Fosterage is essentially positive, although cases of abuse of fostered children have been reported. Fostered children for example may be made to work excessively or denied food or even subjected to physical punishment. In addition there is the traditional perception in some northern communities that bonds of affection prevent a biological parent from bringing the child up well. Kin are considered more effective in this, quite apart from the fact that the fostered child is seen to keep links between kin active.

### **Spontaneous Migration Of Children To Urban Areas**

A related issue is the attraction of children in their early teens, or younger, to the urban areas or to mining and fishing areas where they expect to find jobs. This category of child tends to be the school drop-out who is poor, the orphan or one not adequately cared for by parents and relatives. They are usually children from deprived regions like the three northern Regions, the Volta and the poorer parts of the Central Region, who are attracted to the cities and the more prosperous regions. Since the 1980s girls from the Upper East have been visiting Burkina Faso where some work in beer parlours and others engage in semi-prostitution. In southern Ghana the migrant children may end up as labourers on the cocoa farms or as truck pushers and porters, male and female, in the market places or as maid servants taking care of homes and children to enable urban people go to work.

The work available to the migrant child is often unpleasant, demanding and

risky, and pays low wages. Young girls may be forced into prostitution. As helpless and kinless porters in the city they become easy targets for sexual abuse, and so become victims of premature pregnancies and HIV infection. The case of children being used by fishermen on the Volta Lake as divers who disentangle fishing nets has received media attention in recent times. Children are also used in shallow pit mining in parts of the Central and Ashanti Regions. These are jobs that have markedly high fatalities and expose children to dangerous sexual habits, alcoholism and drug abuse. Poverty and the wealth inequalities between rural and urban areas, real or imagined, as well as the inequalities between savannah regions and the better off forested regions, and the perception that opportunities and a better quality of life abound in the cities seem to account for the set of issues that are being discussed here. The phenomenon of *kayayei* (female porters) may have more fundamental causes, but the quest for money to contribute to marriage expenses and to the trousseau, especially in Moslem communities, cannot be discounted.

### **Box 5: Risks, Children and Female Migration**

In some cases the risks in child trafficking and young female migration to serve as porters are well known to the actors, while in others the victim is naïve, uninformed or misinformed and does not have any idea of the risks that could be involved. But even where the risks are known, FATALISM allows people to hope that they will not fall victim to them. There is often the notion of 'leaving everything to divine will' or alternatively there is a resort to ritual protection.

### **The Search for Solutions**

The way out for some NGOs has been to search out some of the affected child migrants, particularly the female migrants and to rehabilitate them, even equip them with skills and then repatriate them. Another approach, one favoured by the Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs (MOWAC) has been to identify the children involved and trace their roots so that mothers can be given financial assistance to set up a business and be self sustaining. The former solution seems to be of the short run and the latter of the long run. In either case sustainability is necessary. It is a happy event, seeing a repatriated migrant girl returning home with skills and the things that rural children love to have, but the effect of this might be to encourage others to follow in her footsteps and leave home. It would seem that there is a need for alliances among local people at the vulnerable sites from which the migrants hail, NGOs and the MOWAC to tackle the causes of the problem in a more concerted and holistic way.

## The Dedication Of Infants And Virgins To Shrines

It is not unknown in many cultures to express profound appreciation or gratitude to divinities by dedication of self or dependents to the service of a benevolent god or deity. The giving of young girls to medicine-men in reward for their intervention in securing a successful pregnancy, or as a means of ensuring the survival of a child believed to have been born through the intervention of a deity or medicine-man, has already been discussed above. Priestly vocations (those of priestesses too) are often based more on fear than on a voluntary decision by the devotee. This could derive from dread of punishment from an offended deity, and the vocation becomes an act of atonement for some offence against the deity or its protégée.

In northern Ghanaian communities it is recognised that certain types of ailment are the result of the affected person trespassing on the domain of a deity. The healing involves mediumship, and many diviners have come into their profession through this channel. In the Ewe communities of the southern Volta Region, in addition to divine penal sanctions visited directly on the offender, the presentation of virgin girls (sometimes referred to in reporters' accounts as 'vestal virgins') may be prescribed. The victim could be a boy, but this is less common. The 'secretaries' of the shrines may communicate the wishes of the deity to the offender or his kin. The victims are not therefore themselves the offenders. Their position as jural minors however enables kin to use them in this way. The deleterious effects of trokosi have received considerable attention and various NGOs and missionary groups have attempted to exploit the issue, to the annoyance of local people. This has not always been helpful.

### *What the Programme Should Know?*

In attempting to make an effective intervention in the case of trokosi, it is important to realise that the characteristics of this phenomenon vary. Whereas in some parts of the southern Volta Region the dedicated girl remains at the shrine for life, in others she can be redeemed, and procedures exist for this. The most appropriate strategies for intervention cannot be suggested without understanding the differences in practices. It is also important to appreciate community attitudes to the 'vestal' virgins and the bases for such attitudes and prejudices. It has been said that 'once a trokosi always a trokosi', implying that a trokosi girl remains forever a devotee and sexual object to the priests at the shrine. To what extent is this saying an accurate reflection of actual behaviour?

Who are involved in the situation is very important. The following could be important role players:

- ▣ Those kin of the girls deemed to have broken some taboo or offended a deity or its protégé;
- ▣ the traditional priests who superintend over the shrines, and their associates the 'secretaries';
- ▣ diviners whose predictions and interpretations about the causes of misfortune and who have persuaded kin that they must have indeed offended a god;
- ▣ the young girls who suffer as a result of the bondage;
- ▣ and the wider local community.

Thus it may not be enough to reach an understanding with the priests alone, as some NGOs have tried to do by paying the priests to let the girls go, and hope that by so doing the trokosi victims will be released and everything will be fine. There is perhaps a need to distinguish between total release, both physical and psychological, and mere physical release. If released victims are spurned by their own kin who refuse to accept them back for fear that retribution would follow; if the rest of the community will not have anything to do with such released girls; if eligible men will not come forward to marry them, then their physical liberation from the shrines may not be meaningful to them, especially if they harbour guilt feelings and fear of divine retribution for leaving the shrine and feel rejected by the world. It has been reported that some released trokosi girls have themselves returned to the shrines because they have felt out of place in the wider society.

Intervention must target all the stakeholders of the trokosi institution and find ways and means of weaning each category from its fear of retribution and addressing its concerns. The question that needs to be addressed is whether some other form of atonement would not be acceptable to the gods. Many communities that once practiced human sacrifice have now substituted some other victim and the gods and ancestors apparently have accepted this. Some Ghanaian chiefs who are ritually prohibited from crossing certain rivers now do so, as they cannot afford not to cross them. What some of them say is that they sacrifice a sheep to the ancestors before or after crossing such rivers and this seems to be acceptable to the gods. In one form or the other local people need to be asked the question, what would happen to the person who is deemed to have offended the gods but has no daughters to offer in atonement? Would the penalty still be in the medium of a virgin girl, or would some other medium be acceptable? Local practices often allow for accommodations in the face of reality. Ewe culture like any

other must have examples of such accommodations. These can be brought to the attention of communities and their leaders.

In negotiating with communities it might make sense to draw people's attention to the contradictions in the belief systems themselves. Often there are many such contradictions. The resolution of contradiction often leads to social change and transformation.

### **Paedophilia And Sexual Defilement And Abuse Of Children**

If the frequency of press reports on the issue is anything to go by, the defilement of infants and younger children is on the rise. The culprit is often a close acquaintance or a person who has ties with the victim or her parents. The perpetrators range from the old to persons of middle age down to younger people. They include married persons, teachers, even chiefs, strangers, and others. The phenomenon is not restricted to the Regions that current UNFPA-supported programme seeks to target, but is nationwide. It violates traditional sexual norms and taboos. Incest is involved in some cases, and the crime may be committed at the instigation of a medicine-man, who may have authorised the crime as a solution to some problem presented by the paedophile. Recently, anecdotal reports have suggested that some HIV-AIDS affected people had been advised to defile a virgin as the cure for their condition.

The status of the culprit often prevents closely-knit communities from taking action. Whatever action is taken is often low-key, and lets the culprit off with nothing more than a rebuke or a token fine. Where pregnancy has resulted the accused might be compelled to take the victim as his wife, but even that can only happen where the paedophile is unrelated and exogamy would not be breached. Such communities certainly have difficulties taking firm action against the offender. In former times communities adopted traditional modes of action against certain sexual aberrations which also helped deter others. These might be ritual-based and non-physical sanctions such as public ridicule, gossip and social boycott. Today such sanctions have lost their effect.

### Box 6: Tackling Paedophilia in Communities

#### What Can Programming Do?

The problem then is how to persuade communities in which paedophilia takes place to report the issue to the legal authorities for culprits to be prosecuted and stiff sentences imposed to set a precedent. While it will be difficult to obtain full community support for this, it is possible to secure some sympathy for criminalising the act, if communities are educated on the full implications of defilement (both medical and psychological) for the minor who is so abused. Communities are often oblivious or ignorant of the psychological effects of defilement on the victim. It is time to emphasise not only the physical effects but the non-physical psychological aspects. It should be made clear and accepted as such that defilement of a minor amounts to murder in the sense that the victim may die of possible HIV infection, or if she lives her life would be dead psychologically. Given an understanding of the gravity of the results, there could be sympathy for externalising action. The treatment of murder is illustrative. Communities may not always report murders readily but the kin of the deceased who crave vengeance would not be averse to reporting the murder to the police. Communities may dread future retaliation and revenge, but traditional systems have usually allowed self help, ie. retaliation and vengeance, especially in cases of homicide. Chiefs have a role to play in this. A restoration of some of their judicial powers might be the way forward here.

### Female Genital Cutting and Other Mutilations

The practice of cutting or mutilating the genital organs of young females has been traditional among some groups in the northern parts of the country. It appears to be rare in the Volta Region and non-existent in the Central Region. In some practicing communities, the operation was carried out on neonates while among others it is the teenage girl who is targeted for the operation, ideally before marriage. Among some groups girls are pressurised directly or indirectly to present themselves for it. Among the Kasena-Nankana the pressure is moral, based more on parental expectation rather than physical coercion. Girls have been known to present themselves spontaneously for the operation when word got round that a surgeon was about. Such girls did not consult their parents first. Peer group pressure was important here, as those who refused or resisted became a laughing stock. However, as the surgeon is often hired by a particular family to

perform the operation for its daughters who have attained puberty, the question of compulsion cannot be ruled out even in the case of the Kasena-Nankana, even if it is not always in evidence.

It needs to be observed that in some northern communities non-performance of FGM does not prevent marriage, and there is no evidence that men love circumcised women more than uncircumcised ones. Among traditionalists, non-performance of FGM could deny a daughter the right to conduct certain funeral rites in honour of a deceased mother. The purpose of the rites then is to symbolise ritually that a woman has become a 'full' woman in the sociological sense.

The practice was reinforced by beliefs such as that an uncircumcised clitoris is unsightly. This of course must be less of an issue today, with women clothing themselves more amply than in the past. As late as the 1950s women in some parts of the country wore only leaves, but with the importation of cheap clothing nobody goes about scantily dressed anymore except for the mentally deranged. It is also maintained that an uncircumcised clitoris blocks the vaginal passage making parturition difficult. However practicing communities rarely argue that circumcision reduces the libido and sexual desires of married women. If that were the case it might make clitoridectomy less appealing to men.

Clearly, FGM is an issue of culture and one that even local communities cannot defend, beyond the argument that it has been customary for teenage girls to go through it to affirm their participation in womanhood as defined in their traditions. Girls who participated were often lauded for exhibitions of bravery. A participant was expected to show courage and even perform a dance after the operation. For this she received ululations acclaiming her pedigree.

The performance also provides the opportunity to determine a girl's virginity, though among peoples like the Kasena-Nankana this was never a specific objective. The surgeon would demand extra fees for operating on a girl who had lost her virginity. It was perhaps one factor that traditionally supported abstinence from pre-marital sex. Traditionally, the girl who has not undergone the rites might be teased and even insulted. Kasena-Nankana would tell such a person she has an 'ugly clitoris', or that her clitoris 'gathers dust'. A child who does not respond to instruction could be asked whether he or she was the product of an 'uncircumcised clitoris'.

As in other cases, intervention needs to identify the stakeholders. They include the young girls and their peers, the parents – father and mother, but

more especially the mother, the surgeon who derives a livelihood from the performance and the men who demand the girls as wives.

In communities where female genital cutting is ritualised the surgeon is a specialist trained for the job and supported by spiritual powers. He or she does not derive a living exclusively from the practice. However, there is a fee for the service and the surgeon is usually hired by the community. If he is not about, life goes on. Such people need to be identified and involved in the process of intervention.

♦ **Girls must be willing and eager, and benefit from the practice, for it to continue.**

Programmes need to target young girls in remote rural communities of the Upper East, particularly those who are illiterate or have dropped out of school early. Their model is their mother. Traditionally, prestige attached to a girl's participation. Performance of FGM signalled that a woman was ready for marriage and suitors then began to woo her formally. For the parents it signalled that a daughter was of age. All this might explain why in the past some teenage girls among Kasena-Nankana volunteered for the operation without waiting for parental consent and permission. Non-participation detracted from a person's womanhood.

Contrary to the perception that patriarchal men compel women to undergo these rites, men as fathers and as suitors or husbands are only secondary stakeholders. FGM seems to be treated locally as more of a women's issue. It continues because women demand it. The surgeon may be male or female – males predominate. The mother, who is the role model for the rural girl, looks forward to a befitting funeral send off by a daughter qualified to do this by having participated in the FGM rites. Men as husbands do not really seem to mind if a wife is uncircumcised. The male youth of today in particular do not care about it.

Traditionally-minded fathers acquiesce and look favourably on the performance; this is because the traditional father likes to boast that he gave to a favourite son-in-law a daughter who befitted the status of a wife. More and more, such a boast is becoming meaningless in communities where girls do not await parental decisions on whom to marry. It falls to the father to provide the fees that the surgeon demands.

### Box 7: Education and FGM

It can therefore be expected that with a proper explanation of the hazards that women who undergo the rites face, it should be possible to get some women to stay away from it. It is an issue which though not exclusive to the illiterate girls, tends to be more prevalent among them than among educated girls. It is even possible that its performance would be a source of embarrassment to school going girls. Schools have a role is persuading girls to distance themselves from the practice. However, because of stigma, a JSS girl who has had the operation would almost surely not return to complete her schooling.

It is essential to point out that the existence of laws against FGM is helpful and can have a deterrence value, but it is not enough; the rural, closely-knit communities are where FGM persists. The performance is private. A member of such a community could not inform on neighbours or kin without risking community sanctions. On the other hand, by getting the various stakeholders involved in frank discussions based on information made available to the communities FGM could be eliminated from most northern communities. Programmes must however take care not to over-exaggerate the dangerous effects of FGM, as is sometimes done.

- ▣ An intervention programme could make common cause with teenage girls, for some of whom the performance could be an embarrassment as it can confirm a girl's loss of virginity.
- ▣ Christian churches are opposed to such practices, as they are believed to involve traditional rituals which have ancestor-worship components.
- ▣ Young men no longer seek virgins. On the other hand FGM is now perceived, rightly or wrongly, as making girls sexually unresponsive.
- ▣ Women's leaders (the institution of magazia is common in the Upper West and parts of the Upper East) wield considerable influence on women's issues in some communities and can be persuaded to work for change. Where they exist, Christian Mothers associations should be involved in the campaigns. The chiefs and elders also have roles. Another important ally for this would be the school child.
- ▣ As an alternative to conducting FGM traditionally and under questionable sanitary conditions, hospitals might offer to perform the service for those who must have it at all costs, provided the law can be made to allow it. True, facility-based FGM may not have quite the same meaning and significance as the traditional operation, but it might be an acceptable alternative for some.

### Some Good Practices Worthy of Note: The Banda Example

The following report (based on a newspaper report in the Daily Graphic of July 17, 2007) on decisions taken by the Banda Traditional Council and other stakeholders on the issue of Female Genital Mutilation (Genital Cutting) and widowhood rites in the area is perhaps instructive. Banda is an ethnic community found in the Tain District of the Brong Ahafo region, northwest of Wenchi town. In some respects the community resembles the communities found in the southern parts of northern Ghana, such as the Gonja and the Mo or Degha.

The Banda Traditional Council, it was reported, had become concerned about the increase in FGM in the Tain District of the Brong Ahafo Region and had taken steps to ensure compliance with the newly introduced law against this practice and widowhood rites. The council let it be known that people caught violating the law and practising FGM would be made to pay fines of seven white rams and 28 bottles of schnapps to the council, a penalty that is informed by traditional penal norms of the area; for most people in Banda, this is a considerable fine. However, that does not end the matter; culprits thereafter would be handed over to the law enforcement agencies for prosecution. This is the punitive or 'stick' aspect of the Traditional Council's intervention.

There is also a carrot aspect. The Traditional Council adopted a set of positive measures to persuade people to discontinue the practice. It decided that in place of the FGM rites young girls would have a substitute – what the Council called 'Teenage Girls Initiation Rites' (TGIR). These new rites were presented in the report as similar to the FGM rites except for the absence of genital cutting. At the same time, the traditional widowhood rites of Banda people were to be modified 'in tune with modern cultural values'.

The paramount chief of the Banda, the report states, had announced the resolution in question at Banda Ahenkro and had disclosed that a cow had been slaughtered in sacrifice to the gods to institute the TGIR in place of FGM, as well as the modified widowhood rites. The Paramount Chief is identified in the report as Osabarima Okokyeredom Kojo Sito.

The author of the report comments that 'The new arrangement was a collaborative effort by a community-based organisation (CBO) called Nafaanra Literacy Project, the Resource Link Foundation, a non-governmental organisation (NGO), and the Banda Traditional Council, with financial support by IBIS Ghana, an international NGO'. Thus traditional rulers and opinion leaders have teamed up with external agencies to work

out the modalities that would make the new interventions not only acceptable but also sustainable.

The co-ordinator of the Nafaanra Literacy Project is reported as having remarked as follows: '..... since culture was dynamic, the stakeholders unanimously agreed to replace FGM with new rites, under which no young girls would be circumcised'. He is said to have explained that '... with the new rites, young girls would undergo various stages of education by studying the history of the people, knowing more about HIV/AIDS, traditional dancing and dressing, self maintenance, socialisation, training in home management skills for the purpose of supporting their parents at home and preparation for marriage in the future'. Thus, the new interventions go beyond addressing some of the rationale for the rites that used to be associated with FGM, i.e. to fortify and socialise teenage girls for marriage and to prepare them for adult roles by actually equipping them with skills that FGM rites do not provide.

In the case of widows, it was pointed out that '... widows would be allowed to put on decent mourning cloths, they would not be forced to shave their hair as they did in the past, and that they would end the rites in six months, instead of the previous 18-months period'. It was also indicated that widows would have the '... freedom to go about their normal duties 40 days after the death of their husbands, and [will not be] ... subjected to any inhuman treatment'. Although some of the northern Brong Ahafo peoples have been reported to have even more hazardous widowhood rites, some of which involve sexual intercourse with strangers as a prophylactic, the dress code imposed by widowhood rites and the 'twilight' existence of those women in the widowhood state can be too restricting not only socially but also economically. A case in point is the plight of the three widows of the late Nana Adjei Dimpo II, Paramount Chief of the Mo Traditional Area in the Brong Ahafo Region, who had remained in confinement for nine years following the death of their husband. (This case was reported in the *Daily Graphic* issue of June 27<sup>th</sup>, 2008.)

In a nutshell, the Banda approach shows how to introduce change in a fashion that makes it acceptable for all parties. The initiative taken by the chiefs and elders, the intermediaries of the community in the court of the gods and ancestors, in making sacrificial offerings of appeasement to the gods and ancestors must be adequate reassurance for those who dread ancestral retribution. It is an exhibition of cultural sensitivity. The parents of teenage girls should appreciate the immediate impact of the education associated with TGIR, as it seeks to make them more helpful to their own

parents. It introduces the girls to their culture and history and this, all things being equal, is likely to go down well with the communities. Men looking for good wives will be favourably disposed to the intervention.

The fear of penal sanction alone may not be enough, where people dread the spiritual retribution of their ancestors more than the penal arm of the state. In any case, if everybody were to adopt a stance of non-compliance, who would inform on whom for the law to take its course? Communities have ingenious ways of circumventing unpopular laws. Take the case of the community that decided to have its young girls sent to a neighbouring country for the FGM operation to be carried out. The Head of the Women Department at the Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs, in remarking on the challenges of implementing the laws against FGM, explained that those who continued to carry out the rites were aware of the laws forbidding the practice. She remarked that to avoid arrest and prosecution some Ghanaians took their children to neighbouring countries where the rites could be performed.

(<http://www.myjoyonline.com/health/200802/13281.asp>).

### 3.4 HIV/AIDS Prevention Strategies

As a condition that is a couple of decades old in Ghana, HIV/AIDS is no longer news to Ghanaians. However, there are still pockets of sceptics. This could be due to a number of factors. Those infected present signs and symptoms common to other diseases known and labelled in the communities before the advent of HIV/AIDS. The result is that HIV/AIDS may be classified in some communities as a disease that has traditional treatment or is not life-threatening. It is of course common knowledge that HIV/AIDS creates the environment for the entry of opportunistic infections and diseases. Secondly, in the communities some people are known to have chronic poor health and to fall ill frequently; this can create doubts as to what types of chronic ill-health are or are not to be classified as HIV/AIDS related. Given the unwillingness to submit to HIV/AIDS tests and to disclose any positive diagnosis, in many rural communities rumour is likely to be widespread about who has HIV/AIDS and who does not have it, and like witchcraft, it can become a means for maligning others unjustifiably. Once communities have been persuaded that 'loose' living or immorality accounts for the disease and that it can be transmitted from the affected to the non-affected, disclosure of HIV/AIDS status is bound to be a problem, as it can lead to a reassessment of social relations.

Diagnosis of the condition as a traditional illness, one that was known long before the pandemic set in, is associated with claims by some traditional healers to have cures for the disease. Not only does this reduce understanding of the seriousness of the disease, it also might result in care not being taken to avoid unsafe behaviours that can promote the disease.

At the same time, certain traditional norms do not create conditions that would check HIV/AIDS. FGM and male circumcision and ethnic (tribal) facial and body marks and scarification continue. Relations and acquaintances continue to shave kin's hair, often reusing the same razor. Many rites of transition involve shaving the hair. Traditional birth attendants continue to perform their duties using the same old techniques, although this exposes them to blood and other body substances. The AIDS control programmes focus on sexual avenues with less emphasis on other modes of transmission. Generally, it would be culturally unacceptable for relations and kin to look on when a person is injured and blood is in evidence without trying to help care for the injured person. Blood is a serious symbolic issue associated not only with the life of an individual but also that of the kin-group. Its oozing from a person triggers concern and compels immediate action. Although individually these can be described as minor sources of potential HIV-AIDS transmission, nevertheless cumulatively they can be an important channel.

Currently programmes target FGM, but it may be asked whether male circumcision, as traditionally practiced should not now receive attention. It would be acceptable to most people to substitute hospital surgery for the services of the traditional surgeon when it comes to male circumcision. The hospital charges will however have to be low and affordable, if most clients of the traditional specialists are to be converted. Already in some of the urban areas parents do send their babies to hospitals for such operations. The service could even be made free in some poor communities, or brought under the scope of the National Health Insurance Scheme.

- Education programmes need to be intensified about the causes and the channels of transmission of HIV/AIDS. Teachers have a role in conducting or facilitating such education.
- Community education programmes should explore drama and visual methods that communicate the messages in clear and unambiguous ways. The effects of catchy phrases and songs cannot be underestimated in the fight to prevent and contain HIV/AIDS.

### Box 8: Reducing Stigma on HIV and AIDS

Efforts need to be made to reduce the stigma on HIV-AIDS in the communities. Fortunately, Ghanaian communities already appreciate that illness needs to be disclosed if the affected person hopes to obtain help from others. Culturally, one form that the demonstration of sympathy takes is to offer to the sick medicinal recipes and suggestions for seeking treatment and cure. Ghanaians also accept that illness is not to be attributed entirely to the individual, and that sickness can be the result of accident or even the work of witchcraft. Whatever the causes, the Ghanaian perspective is that the affected deserve sympathy more than condemnation. From childhood people are taught that *'you do not laugh at a condition of illness because by so doing you are tempting fate'*.

It would appear then that with the right approaches stigma can be reduced. People living with HIV-AIDS can be persuaded not to remain secretive but to be willing to disclose their condition. Already there are a few individuals ready to discuss their condition openly; they give a human face to the HIV-AIDS sufferer and generate sympathy. If their example were properly managed and projected it can be expected that many more affected people would follow their example. This should enhance awareness and enable communities to appreciate the concreteness of HIV-AIDS and to take it seriously. When all is said and done, the potential spiritual implications of the condition still remain, as some studies show. People will still demand to know how some people, despite their risky behaviour, remain unaffected while the one-timer ends up with the disease. The availability of treatment and the knowledge that therapy can be sought helps to reduce the spiritual load of the disease, since spiritually induced diseases are thought to be unresponsive to medical treatment. That means that the standard medication now in use should be brought within the means and reach of the affected persons.

### 3.5 The Plight Of The Aged

In the traditional setting, management of joint family affairs and the estate fell to the aged. The order of precedence in the local setting depended very much on genealogical and chronological age, particularly in the patrilineal northern regions. Age and generation seniority were much revered and the elderly controlled the human, spiritual and material resources of their communities. Land was in their grip and so were ritual, spiritual and productive resources and other forms of wealth. Even more important was their control of dependents, the latter's labour and the product of that labour. Old age entitled a person not so much to retirement, which was not an issue, but to a right to superintend the younger members of the family and the community. The traditional division of labour allocated to the aged such roles as enhanced their power and authority with the traditional family

and the community. In that kind of regime the aged were not impoverished. Relative to the society in which they found themselves, the elderly could not be said to have been in want or to suffer neglect, as far as their material welfare was concerned. The choicest victuals were often placed before them. As the life span of the individual was shorter than it is today, demographically the aged were not so many as to pose a serious economic burden. Needless to say, the idea of an old people's home would be anathema.

In present times the rosy days of the aged seem to be over, even in the rural areas. The agents of globalisation in the form of modernity, education, paid employment sought in locations far away from the traditional home base, espousal of Christianity and other belief systems have cumulatively introduced cracks in the hegemony of the traditional family and undermined the position of the elderly in the society. The elderly have as a result become distanced, neglected and impoverished. Their dependents are no longer willing or on hand to be of direct service to them. Urban incomes are however often too meagre to allow remittances to the aged in the rural areas. Ill-health often means that the rural elderly cannot fend for themselves, especially when they attain advanced ages and have no savings to rely on. Their health suffers as a consequence and their food and shelter are no longer guaranteed. Though there is still the fear of ritual retribution resulting from an elderly person's curse, this no longer is as compelling as it once was. (Arguably, in any case, one has to be there to hear the curse for it to have its desired effect.)

It would appear that the most vulnerable categories of the aged are the following:

- people in chronic poor health;
- old persons in crisis situations who become psychotic and prone to accusethemselves of bewitching others. A number of old women are currently in this predicament, having accused themselves of being responsible for the deaths of some prominent people in their communities.
- people who have not had offspring of their own and old women, especially childless widows, who may in some communities risk being accused of witchcraft and denied care, precisely because such women would have most reason to be jealous of others and to bear the type of grudges that account for witchcraft behaviours.

In parts of northern Ghana some of these old persons have been banished from their communities and compelled to live in witches' camps, with hardly any means to maintain themselves.

Violence meted out to the aged, particularly dependent old women takes a variety of forms; usually they are first accused of witchcraft and of being responsible for the socio-economic plight of the kin on whom they are dependent. Asare reported in the Daily Graphic on a 45 year old woman at Kwadaso, Kumasi, who had set fire to her room killing her mother and her sons of fourteen and four years old as they slept, because she wanted to get even with her mother whom she accused of inflicting illnesses on her. (See '4 Perish in bizarre fire outbreak' Daily Graphic January 4<sup>th</sup> 2007.)

### What Can Be Done?

Communities where the elderly are most at risk are often also the poorer communities, particularly those where subsistence agriculture is still practiced.

- ▣ Communities need to be encouraged to recognise the issue and be willing to tackle it in ways that are not at variance with their norms.
- ▣ Generic needs of the aged at a particular community should be established and where necessary resources pooled, both material and non-material, to assist them.
- ▣ In cultures where retirement was unknown or did not imply inactivity, the able-bodied aged can be found work that suits them and is rewarding to them and the community as a whole. If it is true that until recently communities used to value the knowledge and expertise that our grandparents used to share around the fireside in the cold Harmattan season, perhaps communities can re-create sessions at which the aged would be encouraged to share their experiences with the village or community youth. They could educate the community on its tangible and intangible heritage which stands the risk of being lost forever, or even their traditional languages and wisdoms. Through being so engaged old persons could derive a sense of worth to their communities, while being positively valued by the youth.
- ▣ Appropriate entertainments and pastimes should also be found for the aged. The search should involve the community. Some of the traditional games and forms of entertainment could be reconsidered and new more interesting avenues for entertainment introduced.
- ▣ Old people whose culture did not institutionalise retirement may not thrive in the quiet seclusion of an institution such as a Western-style old people's hospice. This is true for most of the aged in the rural communities of the targeted Regions.

### 3.6 The Issue of Highly Pro-natalist Cultures: Unwanted Pregnancies

In the deprived communities people continue to have many children, perhaps too many relative to their means, and this is to be seen in the light of economic cultures that place top value on rights to human dependents in the spheres of value and exchange. There is also the fatalistic perception that children are divine gifts and it is not up to a couple to reject such a gift. This means that no effort will be made to check the rate and periodicity of births. For some too, the aim is to have an ideal size and composition, which translates into so many sons (Y sons) as against so many daughters (Z daughters). Until that ideal size is attained there can be no question of limiting births. What is more, many unwanted pregnancies occur as a result of teenage sexual relations and teenage marriages initiated when the partners are not quite ready for parental responsibilities. When this happens, one of the parents, usually the male, finds reason to leave home, often never to return, thereby burdening the female head of household, often not the biological mother of the child.

In the present context, given the impact of socio-economic change and globalisation, the outcomes of schemes that give a free run to the individual's fertility potential have been proved to account for many of the social problems in contemporary rural societies in many parts of Ghana, including low enrolment rates and high dropout rates in schools, truancy, children leaving home prematurely, child labour, prostitution, violent crimes, and so on.

Disempowerment accounts for some unwanted pregnancies. A false start leading to a first-time pregnancy and childbirth in a poor rural community can trap an impoverished young woman in a vicious cycle of more unwanted pregnancies as she loses the ability to negotiate sex. Such women may be at the mercy of short term migrant strangers to the community needing wifely services, as in the case of parts of the Central Region. Matrilineal norms have been used as an excuse for a migrant man to renege on his obligation to children fathered on a short sojourn at a new place away from home. The absence of acceptable contraceptive facilities in some rural areas, their affordability, the stigma stemming from their use or suspicions resulting from being seen with items like condoms, uncertainty about how to use or apply them, or even outright opposition by male or female partners means that the opportunity to control fertility and curtail unwanted pregnancies is lost to some couples who desire sexual intercourse but not pregnancy and

childbirth. Among teenagers, sexual relations are often experimental and unplanned, which does not allow for the use of contraceptive devices. As communities become more open, youth get the opportunities (for instance, night life away from the supervision of parents) they need to engage in teenage sexual intercourse.

With the right education and the empowerment of women and girls, there would be a systematic erosion of the notion of acme value in dependents. In communities where it is still considered that investment in offspring pays off later in life, there is also a latent recognition that more and more, it is not just the number of children that a couple are able to have that matters, but rather the quality of offspring, such as whether the children are well fed to grow up as strong and healthy people, whether they get good education, are well-brought up to appreciate their responsibilities to themselves, their parents and family and to the wider society, find good jobs, etc. There may still be the lingering perception that it is providence that cares for the poor person's children, but it is also becoming abundantly clear that uncared for children do not make it in the modern world. Beyond the individual's optimum number of offspring, child quality suffers as available resources have to be spread too thinly to make beneficial impacts on children. People can therefore be encouraged to trade off numbers of children for quality, if educational programmes make the case as clearly as possible to persuade people that it is indeed right and proper to switch values from numbers to quality.

Child labour and child trafficking can be related; both are a function of poverty. It is not surprising therefore that the Regions of Ghana that are of concern in this document and which are also among the poorest are the Regions where child labour in its severest manifestations has been reported. According to some studies carried out by the International Labour Organisation, ILO, Volta Region tops with 33.2%; the northern Regions account for 24.5%. Currently, some of the poor parents of young school drop-outs are known to encourage the trafficking of their children, when they take monies from strangers and in exchange permit the strangers to take their children away on the pretext that they will train the children and find them well paying jobs. Thus children can be used to generate money for their parents. Beyond parental education on the harm of having more children than they can adequately care for, child trafficking should be successfully brought under control and stopped.

### 3.7 Youth and Reproductive Health: Best Approaches to Discussing Issues

In many families, parents and other adults find it difficult to accept persons in the early teens as anything but minors. Many Ghanaian communities have sayings to the effect that children should be seen not heard. However, children are also involved, albeit as audience, in discussions and in events of importance in the community, because there is an appreciation that the community heritage cannot be transmitted effectively if children, the future, are not involved as participant observers. Their opinions are usually not sought and they have no roles in decision making. This does not mean that their concerns are not regarded.

Most communities believe that children should not be active participants in sexual intercourse and in issues of reproduction. However parents are also aware that children, even from pre-adolescence, play act sexual roles when adults are not about. Traditionally, adults were likely to treat pre-teenage sexual relations as non-events. Direct sexual education was never given to children and the same remains true today; there is often the fear that licence to discuss sex would result in youth wanting to experiment with their bodies. Thus, many children often have had to learn from each other and have tried to discover for themselves by experimenting.

It can be argued that the escalation of teenage pregnancies outside marriage is a novelty made possible by several factors, such as the non-adherence to traditional taboos that regulated sex, the abundant evidence of sex on television, video and the cinema and the temptation to imitate what is seen on television and on videos and read in pornographic literature. The electrification of many rural communities enables nightlife and widens choices in evening entertainment available to youth. It also means opportunities to act out sexual fantasies in the dark corners when adults are not about. Sexual licence among the youth is increased without creating the necessary sense of responsibility that appropriate education in reproductive health should provide.

The openness of many rural societies, where it is now possible for youth to remain outside deep into the night, and the reduction in the power of traditional taboos like those that prohibited sexual intercourse in the open seem to account for the escalation of teenage sex and its attendant problem of teenage pregnancies, unsafe abortions, obstetric complications and sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV-AIDS. However, teenagers and

children are not always the culprits; they are in some cases also the victims of sexual abuse by other teenagers and adults. Today, Ghanaian newspapers are awash with reports of rape and sexual molestations of teenagers perpetrated by both adults and children. It is not just any adult that emerges as the culprit, but sometimes close members of the family, such as the father, have been accused of having had intercourse with his own daughter when the wife – the girl's mother – was away; even grandfathers have been accused. Persistent abuse can remain unreported because of intimidation.

Perhaps it is time that sexual education should also equip the child to defend herself against adult sexual advances and molestation from close kin. Perhaps because culturally it had been unheard of for close members of the family to proposition or rape infant girls, there has been no strategy in place culturally for pre-empting and dealing with the issue. When the report is made by a minor against an adult, the report is usually not believed because society is not predisposed to accepting that it can happen that way. Precisely for this reason, the signs of abuse are often ignored and victims fear to report attempts at victimisation. When the crime has been discovered, immediate family and even the local community are confused and uncertain about what to do: to publicise shameful behaviour that has the potential to bring the family name into disrepute, or suppress a criminal act that is antithetical to the norms of kinship. Now it begins to look as though parents, especially mothers, will have to be more vigilant than has been the case and more circumspect. When mothers allow their teenage and pre-teenage daughters to hawk petty foodstuffs like oranges, bananas, peanuts etc. and to respond to the invitations of men to come over to a secluded place to sell their wares, they also unwittingly expose such girls to unwanted male advances and aggression.

The unwillingness to accept youth sexuality means that youth discussions of sexual topics are also disapproved. Such discussions are labelled in some northern languages as 'talk that spoils the child'. By the same token, parents and other adults are unlikely to engage in the sexual education of these minors. There is however a disconnection here: it would seem that what little sex education is given in the communities is transmitted from mothers to daughters at the time of menstruation. Elsewhere puberty rites and nubility rites achieve the same objective. Boys usually would not receive similar education from parents. To fill the gap boys depend on their peers for knowledge on sexual issues; unfortunately these discussions are likely to be more pornographic than factual. In the end they titillate and encourage youth to experiment, not to abstain.

While it cannot be denied that local communities are generally reluctant to provide sexual education, there is evidence that teenaged children of both sexes in some rural settings indulge in exchanging bawdy riddles, even in the hearing of adults. References to the sexual act are also contained in folktales, riddles and proverbs, folksongs and other traditional genres.

It would appear then that there is urgent need to acquaint the youth with the implications of teenage sex for themselves and their families, and to equip them to avoid mistakes and better protect themselves. Awareness may not stop every youth from engaging in teenage sex, but it just might check its incidence and prevalence.

Given the problems of teenage pregnancies and their repercussions, it is sensible to expect that communities would welcome interventions aimed at containing the problem. On this question, programming can make common cause with local communities. Abuses of infant girls and teenagers by kin may not be new, but it seems that it was not common until recently. It is not clear whether the rarity of abuse was genuine, or merely due to such crimes being kept a closely guarded secret. Whatever the case, the willingness of the Ghanaian press to bring these happenings to the attention of the public is commendable; the new awareness paves the way for behaviour and attitudinal changes on the subject.

Even in highly pro-natalist communities, human reproduction is not unregulated, as the role of sexual taboos in Ghanaian societies suggests. Well-meaning interventions are therefore likely to gain acceptance, if they take into consideration community norms and are made sensitive to communities' needs and concerns.

- ▣ Sexual and reproductive health education will have to be organised and supervised by trusted persons, not left to teenagers alone. The expectations and that it pre-empting lingering suspicion and doubt. Youth should themselves be given a hearing and a voice.
- ▣ Where the community has its own educational processes these should be studied and their beneficial aspects taken into account and incorporated into the processes to be used.
- ▣ Novel educational approaches can be adopted, such as facilitating youth production of dramas and even where possible video productions on themes relevant to the educational objectives and behaviour change.
- ▣ Programmes aimed at providing such education should be integrated into other youth programmes. Unemployed youth in the rural

- settings need skills to be able to set themselves up in future. It is also true that the devil finds work for idle hands. Sexual and reproductive health education would be reinforced by being integrated into other beneficial activities.
- In some contexts separate sessions for boys and girls may be necessary.

The best approaches to discussions of sexual issues and the education of youth require sensitivity to achieve success.

## NOTES ON COMMUNITY STAKEHOLDERS AND LEADERSHIPS

As programming needs to establish alliances within communities their leadership structures assume importance. It is critical to know what types of leaders are found in targeted communities, their domains of influence and their limitations. It is critical to know their concerns and how programme activities are likely to be taken by them. The significance of the different leadership roles depends on the community; programme activities should not deliberately undermine local leadership positions, but should be supportive, where possible. It can be risky to over-generalise here without paying attention to what happens on the ground in each case.

Age, sex and position are critical in the distribution of influence at the local community levels. Within local communities it is usually possible to distinguish between people holding formal leadership positions and others who, although they may not necessarily hold official positions, have nevertheless power to lead and give direction in decision making processes within the communities. The taxonomy of occupants of leadership status might include the following:

- kings, chiefs (male and female), elders, councillors or community 'fathers' and queen mothers;
- women's leaders - magazia (also ewuriche among Gonjas), leaders of Asafo companies among the Fante and other Central Region peoples, and youth groups;
- lineage elders, clan heads;
- earth-priests and priests of powerful community gods, keepers of shrines, diviners and others.

In recent times the village catechist, the Mallam or Moslem cleric, market queens, the school teacher or head teacher, the assembly man or woman, the community 'volunteer', that is to say the individual selected by the

community as their representative when government agents such as personnel of the health service are carrying out activities that benefit the community, or the leaders of community based organisations (CBOs) and other association leaders may be included. It is not in every community that each of these can be found. Below we describe in more detail than before some of the established leadership personnel and roles.

## The Chief

Chieftaincy is ubiquitous in Ghanaian communities. Though there are some northern communities, like the Konkomba, Dagaba, Sisala and others who did not have chiefs in the pre-colonial past (or if such statuses existed at all, their occupants' authority to make decisions binding on the community was negligible), now all communities acknowledge some chief's jurisdiction. The strength of that jurisdiction is variable, ranging from the ineffectual village chief who is more often than not ignored, to the great potentates whose influence even today remains considerable and transcends their ethnic communities. In the old northern kingdoms like Dagomba, Mamprusi, Gonja etc., the institution of chieftaincy is deeply entrenched and chiefs wield considerable power and authority among their people. It would not be wrong to say that there the chief's word is more or less law, even today. Chiefs and their councillors do in fact have the authority to enact bye-laws and deal with local social and cultural issues.

The chief is almost always male, as far as the targeted communities and Regions are concerned. The possibility of a female chief cannot be ruled out for the Central Region. A few royal women hold chieftaincy titles among the Dagbamba (Mamprusi and Dagomba together) peoples. The Chief may be young or old, educated or illiterate, although these days communities prefer to have literate chiefs who can guide their development. In fact, chiefs who can work with external agencies and bring in modern amenities to the community are popular and have considerable clout, and chiefs know it.

Chiefs in the Regions in question derive their office and status from their ancestral connections to former holders of the office. They have usually been elected and ritually installed and their office is sacred, which entitles them to reverence but also saddles them with taboos and prohibitions which regulate their movement and conduct. Persistent violation of these prohibitions can bring a chief into disrepute and lead to loss of his office.

The word of the chief is usually taken seriously, and a powerful chief can get away with many decisions which may not initially have enjoyed

overwhelming support. Where so-called 'outmoded customs' are concerned a powerful chief could introduce change even if some of his courtiers are opposed to it; if things go well his innovation might stand. However the sectors opposed to the change could get back at him if things go wrong soon after. A chief must however be careful not to give his people cause for displeasure. A rejected chief will not be obeyed by his people; he might be ostracised and his presence boycotted. He could also be removed from office. Where the norms of the people do not permit the chief's removal from office, his death may be contrived. Regicide may not now be an available option, but the unpopular chief who has outlived his welcome may become the object of ritual and spiritual attack. These are not matters that any informant will openly admit to – all one is told is that there are ways. Deposition is within the traditional constitution for Central Region chiefs, though less so in the case of the Volta Region and least of all in the northern Regions.

A cautious chief listens to his elders and courtiers. A younger and inexperienced chief may even be tied to the apron-strings of the elders as he requires their direction, but as he matures in the office he will probably become more independent and assertive and develop the capacity to outmanoeuvre his elders.

In northern Ghanaian communities chiefs are not normally deposed, no matter how unpopular; it is expected that the ancestors and the gods would 'kill' the chief who violates his mandate and loses the trust of the community. This notwithstanding, the British did remove chiefs they considered non-performing and replaced them with people they preferred. There are cases where they actually transferred chiefs from one community to the next within the same ethnic group. This seems to have happened in the case of the Gonja, where the practice of promotion and rotation was known in the pre-colonial past. Some successor Governments in the past removed those chiefs they did not like; which meant chiefs had to be partisan to the government of the day, its agents and agendas and programmes. The current Constitution (1992) protects and insulates chiefs by making their position above partisan politics.

In the Volta and Central Regions, chiefs can be deposed if they are unpopular and the processes have been laid down by custom. The 'youth' can depose a chief and so can the elders. For a grossly unpopular chief the flimsiest of excuses can be used to remove him from office. Chiefs in these places therefore have to ensure that they consult their elders and avoid autocratic behaviour. They must listen to their people, as their oath of office enshrines.

From the perspective of culturally sensitive programming, chiefs are therefore important stakeholders in communities. They are the representatives of the community and their spokespersons. A chief's duties might include adjudication of disputes that are sent to his court, particularly those concerning traditional issues and marriage disputes. Even today such disputes continue to be sent to the chief's court. The chief might offer occasional sacrifices to the ancestors and gods of the locality, especially at times of crisis.

Given his overarching significance, programme objectives can therefore be compromised or undermined when the support of the chief has not been obtained. However, as educated people who know that their success can depend on what development they deliver to their communities, chiefs are often anxious to be seen to work closely with programmers. There is however a limit to what the chief can do, as the remarks made here would suggest. The limitations of the chief should be recognised and taken into account by programmers.

### **The Queen Mother**

This person, like the chief, is ritually installed in her office; she is the chief's ally and counterpart, although there have also been cases where the two were at loggerheads. She is entitled to advise the chief and can even rebuke him in some cases. She represents especially the interests of women, and consequently it falls to her to supervise certain of the specifically female rites. She therefore wields considerable power and influence among the women folk, and in the community as a whole. Wealthy queen mothers are as influential as the chief.

The office of queen mother is found in the Central Region and in many parts of the Volta Region. In the latter her power and influence are less than those of her Central Region counterpart. The Mamawos of the Ewes seem to be a comparatively recent introduction. Northern communities do not have queen mothers, though some, like the Dagomba and Mamprusis, actually have female chiefs, as pointed out above. The Gonja ewuruche comes closest in status to a queen mother.

Though the northern parts generally lack queen mothers women's leaders are found, such as the magazia, whose position is not hereditary and whose job description includes mobilising the women of a community to undertaken activities that benefit women and the rest of the community as a whole, as well as socialising newly married women within the community.

She need not be a royal woman. Depending on her personality, a *magazia* (or *ewuruche* in Gonja) can exert considerable influence in the local community, especially where she doubles as a political party agent. As these women leaders play roles that are complementary to those of the chief, they cannot be ignored when programming concerns children's and women's issues especially. They may be as influential as the chief in some of these matters, if not more powerful. They have the power to mobilise the women folk and can initiate discussion of issues that are likely to affect women or be of interest to them, such as FGM, where it exists, widowhood rites, where they are debilitating, marriage and divorce issues, reproductive rights and rites, the education of the youth, etc.

Like the chief, the women's leader's power and authority are not limitless and she can be challenged or lose her position if she becomes unpopular. Back at home her husband can control her; the stability of her marriage can become a problem. In some communities a widow may be insulated, but where wives live with their husbands in the husband's home a leader who is a married woman may lose her authority within the community if her marriage breaks up and she is divorced. This means that a women's leader who does not have the support of her husband may not be very effective.

### **The Earth-priest and Other Priestly Functionaries**

The earth-priest is essentially a ritual figure, who makes sacrifices at the earthshrines and sees to it that the taboos of the earth are upheld. As the earth throughout northern Ghana forbids bloodshed the earth-priest becomes the maintainer of peace in the community. Cases that could threaten the community's survival, especially those to do with the environment, are submitted to him for ritual adjudication. One example is witchcraft, which represents internal aggression. Sexual acts that took place in the open could also be brought to his notice for the necessary rites to be carried out. Except in the case of the old kingdoms of Dagbon and Mamprugu, it is the earth-priest who allots land for farming and settlement purposes, and his permission may be required for burials to take place in the land under his jurisdiction. In the past he could prevent burials on that land. He could also banish an undesirable person through the performance of rituals of ostracism. He was not however a ruler and lacked the physical means to coerce anyone or to compel obedience.

These people (the earth-priests) tend to be conservative; they are usually older than the chief and many may have little or no formal education at all, even today. As the office is ritual based and does not seem to enjoy the wider prestige associated with chieftaincy, educated people are usually reluctant to assume the office. The priests are often relegated to the background by

governments and developers. Yet, they remain important in the communities precisely because of their ritual power and their priestly roles. Even the chief defers to them when it comes to the performance of critical community rites.

The office of earth-priest is not found in southern parts of the country but ritual analogues exist. The Akan chiefs and shrine keepers (*okomfo*) play roles similar to those of the earth-priests of northern Ghana. The southern priests and priestesses are very powerful and influential persons, especially as they are seen as agents of the deities. In their possessed state the deities control their movements and pronouncements; such pronouncements, believed to come directly from the gods and the ancestors, are not taken lightly. Even the chief may be powerless to resist them. Those who disobey their commands are believed to incur the anger of the gods and punishment is inevitable. The power of the Ewe priest cannot be doubted by anyone.

The priests work hand in hand with the soothsayers and diviners. Together they disclose the origins of calamities and prescribe ritual actions that would avert misfortunes. Some programme issues fall squarely within the domain of these ritual figures. Witchcraft and *trokosi* are clear examples. The fear of the priest and his god explains the willingness of Ewe families to transfer girls to their service in expiation for sins attributed to family members.

In Moslem communities of the north, the role of Moslem clerics, teachers and al hajj cannot be ignored. The same can be said for the village catechist or pastor. These are very influential persons as far as their congregants are concerned. Where they are found, each is in a position to give spiritual direction to the community. Priestly and religious figures should therefore not be ignored by the programmer. They inevitably serve as advisers to the chiefs and other leaders who need them. Their utterances can influence behaviours and attitudes. They may be as a matter of policy opposed to some issues of programme concern but they could also be allies on certain other issues.

### **The Asafo Companies**

The Asafo institution is central to the life of the Central Region peoples, especially the coastal Fante. Its analogues exist in other Regions, although there they may not be as colourful as the Fante Asafo. These organisations are not to be found in the Upper East and Upper West Regions, although the Dagbamba (Dagomba and Mamprusi) peoples have their Kambonse units

which seem to have served some of the functions of Asafo in the past. In former times, the Asafo was a civil militia unit whose role was the protection of the community. All bona fide members of the community were expected to belong to an Asafo company and to exhibit loyalty to their Asafo. The Asafo may not fight battles today, but its competitive character has been maintained. The battle ground today may be social issues that undermine the community. In Winneba, the two Asafo companies still keep ancient antagonisms and rivalries alive and this has influenced chieftaincy politics there. The Asafo through its leadership has considerable influence over chiefs, elders and ordinary people. Asafo members meet from time to time; they pride themselves on their artistic works, which include paintings, wood carvings, shrine buildings, songs, dances and dramatic enactments.

The long and short of it is that where they exist, Asafo companies can be central to community life and could be brought into alliances for community development. Their membership cuts across the community and includes women, as well as youths being groomed for membership in their father's companies. An alliance with civil groups like the Asafo can have benefits, just as antagonising such civil associations and their opposition to issues can set back programme objectives. Since Asafo groups specialise in artistic performances they could be encouraged to project through their performances issues and messages that are germane to programme objectives. They can also serve as the means to reach their wider memberships on programme issues such as adolescent reproductive health.

### Other Community Based Associations

Similar to the Asafo are other community based associations set up for recreational, thrift, occupational, literacy, ritual and other purposes. Where they exist they could serve as channels for reaching out to their memberships on programme issues and for building alliances. In kinship-based communities these associations cut across the sectors of the community and bring together people of different backgrounds, enabling them to adopt perspectives that have no obvious factional bias. They can be encouraged to explore ways in which their core activities and competences can be brought to bear on programme issues, and how their networks can be put to use in promoting programmes that could benefit their association and the community as a whole. For example, by supporting and showing interest in the activities of the following, various programme objectives could be promoted:

- By supporting the local football team materially (it might need a new football or jerseys), it might be possible to reach out to youth and

provide them with reproductive health education.

- The local Christian Mothers associations can be encouraged to debate FGM issues.
- 'Susu' thrift clubs can be encouraged to explore how to set up ventures that would provide employment to women and thereby initiate their empowerment.
- Non-formal literacy classes and shepherd schools could be encouraged to access functional literacy through exposure to Development issues such as those of interest to UNFPA.

The Ghana Institute of Linguistics, Literacy and Bible Translation (GILLBT) is already exploring these techniques in rural literacy communities in Northern Ghana and the northern Volta Region. GILLBT's literacy work over the past couple of decades has equipped and empowered thousands; these schemes have also been the avenue through which small scale rural enterprises and thrift societies have been established. GILLBT (2007) shows that in 2006 alone, large numbers of adult learners in a number of rural communities were beneficiaries, including men and women in comparable proportions. Books were published that year on sexuality, marriage and on the HIV pandemic in the various languages.

### **The Community Volunteer**

The Ministry of Health has put in place various structures to support their programmes in rural communities. Many rural areas in the five programme Regions fall within the onchocerciasis control zone. In onchocerciasis endemic communities the practice has been to get local communities to nominate persons as 'volunteers' who would serve as links between health programmes and the community, and have the responsibility of collecting, distributing and monitoring side effects of ivermectin, the drug used to treat onchocerciasis in communities where it is endemic. These people have also been given some training on what is expected of them. Since they are usually identified by the communities themselves they enjoy the trust of the people. They can be involved in some of UNFPA-supported programmes, especially those to do with HIV/AIDS and reproductive health. They may require some incentive, but they remain essentially volunteer agents accountable to their communities. (For more information see Hagan, Awedoba et al. 2000.)

### **The Unit Committees**

Rural villages have other civil organisations, some of which date back to the PNDC days in the 1980s. They go by several names such as 'Unit

Committee', 'Town Development Committee' etc. They are elected by their communities and are accountable to them; they often have the means to mobilise and 'conscientise' the community on issues beneficial to it. These groups once commanded considerable power and some of them still do. The youth may look up to them. In addition to these, there are the District Assemblymen and women. Depending on the size of the community it may have an assembly man or woman to itself or share one with neighbouring communities. These individuals, if they happen to reside in the community, are important stakeholders who, as politicians, do not wish to be seen to be left out of local events. In some cases their authority can rival that of the chief.

Unit Committees and local politicians, like the assembly members and members of parliament, are usually modernity-inclined and can readily be persuaded to support interventions targeting their communities. They might need to be further educated on the programme issues and persuaded about the benefits to communities. Establishing alliances with these groups is beneficial; they know the local terrain and can mobilise the support of the youth in particular.

### **Local Notables – The Person Of Wealth**

In addition to the traditional and modern office holders, local communities provide opportunities for outstanding persons like the well-to-do to participate in leadership roles and wield influence in matters that affect the community. The position of 'wealthy person' was ascribed (though no label was attached) based on criteria such as the size of one's domestic establishment i.e. number of wives and children, ownership of tangible property like a vehicle, as well as size of farms, productive activities, size of livestock in savannah zones and social networks. In some parts of the Upper West wealthy men, people who had accumulated cattle, wives and many children were a force to reckon with, and were of chiefly status among the Sisala and Dagaba in pre-colonial times. They were in a position to deploy their wealth to create reciprocities that tied community members to them. There is evidence that some chiefs appealed to such people for the wherewithal for the performance of community rituals requiring sacrifices. It appears that in the organised states like Ashanti, kings in the past enticed and tapped the wealth of such people by bestowing titles on them. (This is abundantly illustrated in Wilks' 1979 essay.) Although it probably does not happen exactly in the same fashion now, in the various programme regions some chiefs have found novel ways of attracting the wealth and expertise of wealthy notable subjects and others by bestowing on them titles such as that of *nkosuohene* ("development chief"). Such title holders have leverage on the

traditional authorities which can serve advocacy purposes.

The village 'big' man may or may not espouse the concerns of the programmer. Where such people are polygamists, they might not support programmes that seem to question polygyny, or the empowerment of women. They may themselves have acquired teenage brides handed over by parents who are indebted to them on account of their generosity. At the same time such people, who have exploited the traditional system, may be obliged to reciprocate; they may for example be inclined to marry off their teenage daughters to older polygynous men in furtherance of alliances. These are issues that programming should take cognisance of. However, it should not mean that these kinds of people are necessarily opposed to issues that programmers advocate. Not only are some of these people likely to have changed their views on the things they once held dear, they could in fact be on the lookout for allies who could help them change over.

### **The Village School**

It is a fact that behaviour change should begin from the cradle. The classroom is therefore a potential ally in the inclusion of children in programme issues. Even where the official school timetable and syllabus do not expressly prescribe the teaching of certain subjects, nevertheless space can be created on the timetable for the exposure of children to issues that concern them in the locality. The slots for cultural studies, environmental studies and social studies periods can be legitimately so used to involve school children in issues that affect them. The class teacher has a critical role in this, together with the circuit supervisors from the District Education office. It is true that many school teachers understand by 'culture' the practice of drumming and dancing. Perhaps it is time to get teachers to appreciate that there is more to culture than artistic performances and that such performances can be used to teach about other aspects of life in a community. There cannot be anything wrong with a teacher setting his or her class the task of debating or writing essays on the issue of teenage pregnancies in English or in a Ghanaian language. Some Ghanaian language teachers do this and the practice must be encouraged.

### **Some Conclusions On Leadership**

- Men monopolise power and authority within the communities, but female leaders can be found. Certain categories of women may be more influential in the community than at first thought; the wise grandmother is an example.
- Traditional authority and power are backed by ritual sanctions. It is expected that leaders will be accountable ultimately to the gods and ancestors for gross abuse of their mandates. Communities can

however check abuses of power by their leaders. Traditional leaders are not therefore above the local law; however they are a force to reckon with.

- Northern traditional leaders are not easily removed from power, but may be boycotted if there is popular disaffection. This is to be contrasted with the southern Ghana case where unpopular chiefs can be destooled.
- Comparatively, chiefs may be more open to modern ways than their elders, since they are often more educated and are persons who have assimilated Christianity and modern or westernised ways of life. Today chiefs count professionals among their number.

### **The Disempowered: Jural and Actual Subordinates**

Women (as wives and daughters) and youth are generally expected to play subordinate roles and to defer to men and the elderly. There are however differences between regions and communities and sometimes even contradictions within communities. For example, before glib generalisations are made about female disempowerment, there is the need to distinguish between pre-menopausal and post-menopausal women. Even in patriarchal societies, older women, as senior sisters, aunts, and mothers, are sources of advice in the communities and are consulted and listened to in private, and occasionally in public. When Akans defer discussion of difficult or controversial issues to allow time for consultations, they say they postpone discussion 'to enable them to consult the old lady on the issue'. This is evidence of the social recognition of the value of women's insights on difficult issues. Women may indeed be consulted by individual office holders within the respite, even if it is not always an elderly female who is consulted.

Women have their associations in which they hold positions of authority. Through their associations they can exert considerable collective influence on the life of the community. Central Region women in particular seem to enjoy enhanced statuses and independence of action in their matrilineal societies. Each matrilineal family has its male head (*abusuapanyin*) and a female head (*obaapanyin*), and in matters that concern the larger family these heads have roles and stakes. The economic independence of the Efutu woman (the Efutu of Winneba and surrounding communities in the Central Region are not a typical matrilineal group) cannot be discounted.

Youth, as a social rather than a chronological category, can make its views heard through youth associations. Youth, particularly non-adult youth, are expected to defer to their seniors, and have been described as voiceless. There are however cases where youthful persons have been classified as 'elderly', on the grounds of their genealogical standing or experience. Kasena people say 'a well-travelled child is older than its father'. Polygamy (polygyny) makes it possible to have a wide gap in age between siblings. It allows a man of say sixty years of age to have a brother aged twenty; the two are genealogically equal, though many years apart. This young man will take precedence over his brother's son even though the latter may be much older.

In patrilineal societies therefore some youth may enjoy and exercise traditional power and have a voice. Among some Upper East people, a young man may be a proxy elder and head of his clan, a fact that entitles him to take precedence over older persons such as his own senior brothers because he alone can act for his deceased father, the former clan head, until the final funeral rites are held for the deceased. This is temporary 'ultimogeniture', to be contrasted with 'primogeniture'. There have been cases where youth have actually monopolised power in this way when the performance of the final funeral rites of a deceased father have been withheld, with the connivance of kin. Matrilineal communities in fact apply criteria involving competence and achievement in the allocation of traditional statuses like those of elderships. This means that a competent younger person may be elected as elder (abusuapayin) over more elderly persons. This contrasts with the Ewe view that a man cannot be master over his household so long as his father lives.

The long and short of this is to say that though women and youth are the voiceless and jural minors, there are exceptions. Programmers need to be aware of this in their search for strategies.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS ON AMBIVALENCES AND AMBIGUITIES

All this goes to stress the paradoxes and contradictions that programming is confronted with in different communities, and the need for cultural sensitivity and avoidance of glib assumptions. It is fair to conclude that traditional ways today are not what they were in the past. For this reason a culturally sensitive approach must reflect new realities and developments in communities. This is why suggestions and comments offered in this document make a point of referring to modern institutions like churches, schools, biomedical health institutions, district assemblies and so on. The roles of traditions nevertheless still remain important and they have a bearing on behaviour, thought and attitudes.

The paradoxes that have been referred to are enshrined in almost every aspect of life, and that is particularly the reason why sensitivity is essential. A chief of a village may be the right person to deal with and to have as an ally, but it should not be forgotten that he is the custodian and the epitome of the local culture and the traditions of his people. He is expected to belong to the conservative faction of community, yet in some respects he is the agent for development and modernisation. A balancing act is required on his part. He may have several wives because the expectations of his office impose polygyny on him (for example in northern communities subjects signal their loyalty by giving their daughters to the chief to become his wives; he is not entitled to refuse these offers) and on his elders; his councillors may themselves consider polygyny the ideal form of marriage. He has been the recipient of young brides, some of whom may have been taken out of school. It may therefore seem that he is not the right person to approach as an ally on some women's issues. However, it is important not to lose sight of the contradictions in life, and it is not impossible for a chief who espouses the traditional norms to end up as a modernising chief.

There is a gamut of arguments against the practice of FGM, yet it can be said that in the past it checked sexual promiscuity, pre-marital sex and unwanted pregnancies. The local reasons for persistence of the practice should be studied. A Banda type stick and carrot approach can only be adopted when we fully understand local cultural issues. It is not even wise to assume that because a particular intervention has worked in one part of the country it will naturally work in another.

Child labour as it is sometimes defined undeniably has its negative side, yet involving the child in productive activity equips the child with skills to function as a self reliant and useful member of society. For this reason the parent who refused to allow his or her children to work hard was criticised as an 'enemy' of his or her own offspring. If a child returning from school seemed tired and would not take care of its infant siblings so that the mother could do household chores, then there might not be food on the table or it could eventually get to the table when this child was asleep. The contributions of some children are what enable school fees to be paid and uniforms to be bought. Some poor families depend on what the child can bring in. As a former truck pusher who has just obtained his M.A in African Studies testifies in his thesis (Osei 2005), it was such work that enabled him to get to where he is today, although he also admits that many have not achieved their life's ambitions this way.

Like these other practices, bridewealth is blamed for many social and gender problems. There may be some truth in all that. Yet it can also be argued that societies that do not have this practice or where the bridewealth is considerably lower in value are not necessarily better off. If daughters must marry and go to live with a husband elsewhere and produce children for that man and his lineage, and serve that man and his parents and siblings, which is what is implied in many traditional African conjugal arrangements, then some parents will take a lukewarm attitude to daughters, if daughters cannot be seen to bring them anything substantial. They would not want them; they would also discriminate against them in the allocation of resources, since daughters would then be seen as 'worthless'. The classic example is India where pregnancies are scanned to detect and abort female foetuses, because girls and daughters are perceived to alienate family wealth while boys and sons bring in wealth. In high bridewealth paying societies daughters are wanted, because without a daughter, sons might not find wives. The institution might also ensure that irresponsible men do not easily get wives, since they would not have the resources for bridewealth on their own and without kin support. The other problem with societies without bridewealth is that in some such societies they just swap sisters or

kinswomen. A couple of northern Ghanaian communities (Bimoba among them) are known to do this, especially in the past; they probably still do, although perhaps to a lesser extent.

It is thus possible to see the reason for the reluctance in some Ghanaian societies to do away with bridewealth altogether. Some, like the Kusasi of the Bawku Districts, would prefer a reduction in the number of cattle that are usually demanded. Youth arguably would favour the abolition of bridewealth transactions, but elderly people would oppose this move as it might imply some loss of control and influence over the youth, who depend on them to secure the goods necessary for formalising a marriage.

One of the justifications for early marriage is the concern that if marriage were delayed girls would be put in the family way. This would not only create the problem of fatherless children that grandparents must look after, the family name would be dragged in the mud. Early marriage thus seems to serve potentially as the solution to teenage pregnancies in traditional societies. Of course in the contemporary society it does not solve the problem; it merely results in girls losing out on formal education and other opportunities, not to mention the host of social and health problems attributable to marriages of teenage girls.

Taboos have been given bad publicity by some policymakers in Ghana, sometimes without just cause or even a proper appreciation of those taboos. Yet some taboos had very beneficial effects on society, to such an extent that some of today's social and reproductive health problems can be blamed on the fact that due to modernisation and weakening of belief in the ancestors taboos have lost their effect. Taboos such as the incest prohibition, the taboo against sexual intercourse in the bush or outside the home, taboos against sexual relations with any girl who had not been initiated through puberty rites and a host of other sexual taboos, checked promiscuity in the past. The teenager in particular did not have the opportunity to engage in sexual experiments because it was simply taboo to do so; rapes were unthinkable because of the ritual repercussions.

It will be recalled that a number of Ghanaian chiefs and queen mothers, including some in the Central Region, have recently advocated the introduction of puberty rites as a check on teenage pregnancies and as a strategy for containing the spread of HIV/AIDS transmission. Before anyone rushes out to establish such rites care should be taken to consult the youth. The return of puberty rites would be short-lived and ineffective if teenaged girls are not in agreement. If at the end of the day only very young girls of

eight to ten years are presented, the scheme will surely have the opposite effect. The pre-teens will undergo the rites and thereafter feel they have the license to engage in sex. Perhaps this accounts for the high prevalence rates of HIV/AIDS in the areas where Dipo rites are still performed. Though the rites may have something to contribute to sexual discipline, since girls must be virgin at the time they go for the rites, lowering the initiation age has the effect of making the pre-teens who undergo them prematurely women, feeling they have a right to engage in sexual relations with men.

To conclude, cultural sensitivity is desirable and when appropriately undertaken can make programmes sustainable and effective. The people and the community get to own the interventions, even if they did not initiate them. However, programmers need to study the local context carefully. They cannot simply transpose strategies that have succeeded in one area to another without due consideration of local dynamics; they can however learn their lesson. We also cannot assume that if a particular practice is outmoded in one part of the country, it must be outmoded in every other part. There are cases where a practice has indeed been detrimental in one community but remains harmless in another. A programme can get a bad name when we try to persuade communities that what they consider as harmless is bad for them, without being able to show convincingly what is wrong about the practice in question or why it is not a salutary one.

## **SUMMARY OF ISSUES, CAUSES, POSSIBLE INTERVENTIONS & PARTNERS**

ISSUE	SITES	CAUSES	SUGGESTIONS FOR INTERVENTION	PARTNERS / ALLIES
1. Marriage age: - Low for girls, high for men - Child betrothal	UER, UWR, NR; North. VR	Poverty; high demand for wives; high bridewealth demands; attempts at avoiding premarital teenage pregnancies	1. Address factors decreasing school enrolment and retention 2. Enhance girl child access to formal education	Communities leaders (chiefs, clan heads); churches; village associations; teachers; Assembly men and women
2. Widow inheritance	UER, UWR, NR	Bridewealth; Kinship obligations	1. Generate discussion pointing out the problems for some individuals i.e. polygamy, Christian insistence on monogamy etc 2. Empower women to be self supporting	Community chiefs; assemblies
3. Child slavery; push factors leading to the exit of <i>Kayayei</i> (porter girls) and truck pushers ( <i>bori boys</i> )	UER, UWR, NR; parts of VR; Coastal CR	Poverty; Demand for cheap child labour on farms, work places and in urban homes; Unappealing home environments; children seeking employment; attractions of life away from home and glamour of cities	1. Educate communities on hazards that migrant children are exposed to. (Graphic illustrations by dram) 2. Address factors leading to early school drop out 3. Provide unmarried girls with local employment opportunities	Performance media; community leaders; churches; former child migrants
4. Unwanted or abandoned children; children perceived to be a danger to their own kin	UER, UWR, NR, VR, CR	Belief systems; ignorance about the causes of infant ill health and congenital birth deformations	1. Encourage orphanages and institutions of care 2. Educate community on the biology of congenital deformity, involving local healers	Health institutions; local healers and diviners, community leaders

ISSUE	SITES	CAUSES	SUGGESTIONS FOR INTERVENTION	PARTNERS / ALLIES
5. Children dedicated to shrine service i.e. <i>trokosi</i> and allied practices	Southern VR. Related practices in UER, UWR and NR	Belief system; atonement for sins and taboo breaches; appreciation for positive divine interventions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Educate community fully on plight of dedicated children in the shrines and modern system</li> <li>2. Dialogue on the acceptability of non-human victims; possibility of token/symbolic rather than actual dedications</li> </ol>	Communities; local leaders, traditional priests and diviners, District Assemblies
6. Female genital cutting/mutilation (FGM) and other mutilations	UER, UWR, NR (possibly North VR)	Cultural practices; traditional concepts of womanhood; religious beliefs	<p>Education on health hazards of FGM: Use of media to show the negative effects of the FGM. Include young men in activities</p>	Communities; schools peers, community leaders; traditional surgeons; health personnel
7. Behaviour not conducive to HIV/AIDS prevention	UER, UWR, NR, CR, VR Border areas.	<p><b>Doubts</b> about the disease since its signals and symptoms are not peculiar to it. communities are <b>fatalistic</b>; tendency to assume that HIV affects unknown others. <b>Stigma</b> and non-disclosure are issues as HIV is associated with sexual promiscuity. certain <b>cultural norms</b> compel certain behaviours.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Reduced stigma makes possible disclosure of HIV status. Education about the causes still necessary in some areas</li> <li>2. More sympathy for the affected rather than their perception as profligates.</li> <li>3. Encouraging PLWHAs to disclose their condition and to talk more openly.</li> <li>4. Find substitutes for norms that promote HIV. Some communities in southern Ghana now forbid night wakes</li> </ol>	Community leaders; youth; affected; hospitals and health centres; traditional healers

ISSUE	SITES	CAUSES	SUGGESTIONS FOR INTERVENTION	PARTNERS / ALLIES
8. Debilitating widowhood rites	UER, UWR, NR, VR	Beliefs about the power of the dead spouse to harm the living spouse. Symbolisation of the dependence of spouses and their conjugal rights to each other	Educate communities on the hazards and dangers of the rites which at best are a nuisance, such as the widow being kept incommunicado, and at worse injurious to health and well-being, such as the requirement that the widow or widower should have sexual intercourse with a stranger	Community leaders, Women's associations and others
9. Domestic violence	UER, UWR, NR, CR, VR	Gender expectations: Perception that for a good reason, such as neglect of duties, misconduct, minors (children and women) can and should be disciplined by those positions of power over them.	Empower women, educate communities to appreciate that violence in any form is not only degrading and a denial of individual rights; it is also physically and psychologically injurious which negates the objectives of correction. Wife abuse has generic implications and effects since a wife is somebody's sister, daughter, mother etc. Don't do to a wife what you would not do to your mother, sister or daughter. Therefore community should be concerned with such violence	Community leaders, religious leaders, general education

ISSUE	SITES	CAUSES	SUGGESTIONS FOR INTERVENTION	PARTNERS / ALLIES
10. The plight of the aged	UER, UWR, NR, CR, VR	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Socio-economic change has eroded the managerial roles of the aged.</li> <li>2. Exodus from rural areas-wages not adequate for worker and his family of procreation;</li> <li>3. Misfortunes such as deaths sometimes blamed on the aged</li> <li>4. Younger dependents cannot cope with the care demands of the aged</li> </ol>	<p>Since the aged are not necessarily useless appendages, find suitable occupations that would engage them.</p> <p>Provide employment avenues that retain in the village's able-bodied youth.</p> <p>Encouragement communities to create community roles for the aged such as would give them a sense of worth.</p> <p>Enhance knowledge on the causes of deaths and misfortunes to stem witchcraft accusations.</p> <p>Expand the scope of care institutions at the local levels to deal with the health needs of the aged</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The aged as partners</li> <li>2. Youth as partners</li> <li>3. Health authorities and religious groups</li> <li>4. Local health institutions</li> </ol>
11. The issue of having too many children	UER, UWR, NR, CR, VR	<p>Community and individual concepts of ideal composition and size of family of orientation; Unwanted and unplanned pregnancies;</p> <p>Non-availability of culturally acceptable fertility regulating methods</p>	<p>Family planning education that is made relevant by its reflection of local concerns and provisions of answers to local questions.</p> <p>Cautious use of local examples to show that quality is better than quantity, when it comes to how many children to have</p>	<p>Married couples, grandparents, community, churches, adult literacy establishments.</p>

ISSUE	SITES	CAUSES	SUGGESTIONS FOR INTERVENTION	PARTNERS / ALLIES
<p>a. Unwanted Pregnancies</p>	<p>UJER, UWR, NR, CR, VR</p>	<p>Perception of offspring as assets and investments. Children as divine gifts that cannot be rejected</p>	<p>Provide appropriate education on reproductive health. Rural women may not realise the health implications for themselves and their offspring of frequent childbirths. Make fertility checking devices more easily available and acceptable.</p>	<p>Married couples, grand-parents, community, churches, adult literacy establishments</p>
<p>b. Teenage sexuality and teenage pregnancies</p>	<p>UJER, UWR, NR, CR, VR</p>	<p>Lack of Knowledge and information on reproductive health. Desire to experiment; role of sexually titillating materials and literature Traditional sex taboos have no effect now</p>	<p>Open discussions of sex with teenagers; address the fears that such discussion would lead to experimentation; explain the dangers of unorthodox abortions. Use the classrooms to discuss the issues involved</p>	<p>Youth associations; schools and teachers; churches; parents</p>
<p>12. The best approaches to discussions of sexual and reproductive health issues</p>	<p>All Regions</p>	<p>Discussions have tended to be top-down and have ignored the inputs of communities and local stakeholders like the youth and women</p>	<p>Involve major and minor stakeholders. Create opportunities for dialogue. Consider social networks where they exist. Use variety of approaches and media- community dramas, dances, pictorial presentation that concretise issues</p>	<p>Youth, parents, teachers, education officials community and youth association leaders; Schools and classroom activities such as essays and debates</p>

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13. High bridewealth and marriage transaction costs	UER, UWR, NR, CR, VR	Customary requirements, loss if daughter's childbearing and her labour; quest for prestige in the case of expensive trousseaux and the role of invidious comparisons among grooms and brides	Empowerment of girls through education to determine whom they marry; a well-to-do daughter can make remittances to her parents and her marriage will not imply a loss to her people. Community stakeholders should dialogue on the issue and agree to lower bridewealth and the size and content of wedding trousseaux	Youth, parents, women's associations, acknowledged leaderships, District Assembly
14. High school dropouts	UER, UWR, NR, CR, VR	school factors, social factors and poverty.	Make schools environment friendlier to both sexes. Inform local people about the benefits of education. Help school respond to needs of individuals	Parents, children, school authorities and community leaders

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