



**Reinventing African Chieftaincy
in the Age of AIDS, Gender,
Governance, and Development**

Edited by Donald I. Ray, Tim Quinlan,
Keshav Sharma, and Tacita A.O. Clarke

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7 From Calgary to Krobo and Back: How the IDRC Encouraged Grassroots Links between Canada and Ghana

Kimberley Schoon

In May 2003, I had the great opportunity to do research and work with the Many Krobo Queen Mothers Association (MKQMA). I first learned of this particular group of queenmothers and the significance of traditional leadership in development from two classes taught by Dr. Don Ray, “Political Science 279 – Politics of the Global South” and “Political Science 371: Politics of Africa” at the University of Calgary. I was also involved with a group called the Global AIDS Awareness Group (GAAG), at the University of Calgary, whose focus is on raising awareness locally, nationally, and internationally about HIV/AIDS. This group invited Dr. Ray, also a member of the group, to speak at a panel discussion in March of 2003 regarding the topic. He spoke in depth about his research sponsored by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) of Canada in regard to traditional authority as a potentially effective tool in combating HIV/AIDS in Africa, in particular with respect to the MKQMA.

As a result of this lecture, I was motivated to do research and work with MKQMA while in Ghana.

My initial intentions for visiting the MKQMA was to do research for an undergraduate academic project and to develop a partnership between the queenmothers in Ghana and GAAG in Calgary, Canada. The research component of my visit was aimed at understanding the various aspects of HIV/AIDS resistance in Ghana. In the case of the queenmothers I wanted to understand in greater detail their understanding of HIV/AIDS as a social issue, particularly in the context of gender, and to determine which aspects of their activities most contributed/inhibited their success. The second dimension to my visit was the partnering of the MKQMA in Ghana and GAAG in Calgary, Canada. This was instigated so that GAAG could support the queenmothers by generating resources and awareness in Canada on their behalf.

I visited the MKQMA at their headquarters in Krobo-Odumase on two separate occasions. The first visit took place on 23 May 2004. Manya Krobo Deputy Paramount QueenMother Manye Nartekie (also spelled Manye Natekie or Manya Naterkie) was exceptionally welcoming, as were the rest of the queenmothers. Because Dr. Ray had written ahead introducing me and informing the MKQMA that I would be coming, she knew who I was without an introduction and took my husband and me upstairs where the queenmothers were already gathered for another guest. After listening to a presentation of songs sung by the queenmothers, I was given the opportunity to present my "mission" to the group. Both were accepted (research and partnership). After this I was introduced to the 'AIDS orphans,' who were already gathered for the previous guests. Manye Nartekie and I agreed that I would return the following Thursday to conduct my interviews and to purchase a quantity of crafts to be sold by GAAG in Calgary. Overall, I was overwhelmed by Manye Nartekie's kindness and support.

The second visit took place on 29 May 2004. The queenmothers were just as hospitable as the first time. As Manye Nartekie was initially away for related business, I sat with the Manya Krobo paramount queenmother until I could conduct my interviews. The queenmothers were very willing to answer my questions. As a result of the interviews, I was able to understand further details of the various activities and projects of the queenmothers, as well as their understandings of their capacity as traditional

leaders. Furthermore, the reasons for their success became increasingly obvious, as did the barriers that prevented them from acting further. Following my interviews, we discussed further the potential relationship between their association and GAAG. We determined that GAAG would purchase a quantity of their crafts and attempt to develop a market in Calgary and elsewhere where these crafts could be sold. eW agreed that GAAG would begin thinking of potentially working with MKQMA in order to assist in the sponsorship of the orphans in their care. We also made a list of long-term goals, which included working towards the donation of a sewing machine and the development of a permanent resource centre for their collective use. We all walked away from this meeting feeling incredibly optimistic about the partnership.

During this particular visit, I was installed as an honorary queen-mother. I was presented with the appropriate beads and cloth, identical to the ones they wear while on “official AIDS duty.” Furthermore, I was granted the title “Pi Yo Gu,” which translates as “special woman” or “ideal woman.” This installation took place in the presence of the many queen-mothers involved in the association and was led by Paramount Queen Mother Manye Mamle Okleyo and Deputy Paramount Queen Mother Manye Nartekie I. Their final words as I returned to Accra were to remind me that now I was “one of them,” permanently installed as the Paramount Honorary Development Queen Mother of Manya Krobo.

Since my return to Canada in July 2003, GAAG and I have engaged in several activities in order to fulfill our obligations within the partnership. On a personal level, I have spoken numerous times at schools, churches, and at the University of Calgary with regard to the MKQMA. Many of these events paid me an honorarium; all of the funds were then directed in full to the queenmothers. I completed an independent studies project and several research papers with respect to female traditional authority and development. Much of this work has been published in such media as CBC Radio, the *Calgary Herald*, the University of Calgary newspapers *On Campus* and the *Gauntlet* (the student newspaper), with acknowledgment of the role of the International Development Research Centre of Canada in funding Dr. Ray’s research, which got me involved and active in this project. One further result of this locally generated public education was that I was contacted by a Dutch researcher doing post-graduate studies in

development chiefs/queenmothers. She had read about my experiences on the internet and included me in her research.

GAAG had the opportunity to engage in many events that both supported the MKQMA and worked to raise awareness about HIV/AIDS in our local community. This occurred through such public awareness days as International Women's Day, where we honoured women like the MKQMA who are championing the fight against HIV/AIDS. We also sent volunteers to Sexual Health Awareness Week events. We attended many festivals for the purposes of craft sales, including the Ploughshares Peace Fair in December 2003, and the African cultural festival "Afrikadeys" in 2003 and 2004. We have also had many opportunities to showcase the video, "In Sickness and in Health," a docudrama produced by MKQMA. University of Calgary students in particular have been very interested and excited about the work of GAAG and the MKQMA. In April, 2005 we were able to send to the queenmothers our first disbursement of \$800, money that was generated from craft sales, donations, and speaking/fundraising events. Our policy is to send 100 per cent of revenues to the queenmothers, regardless of expenses incurred along the way.

In 2004–2005, our goal was to raise enough money to send sewing machines to the MKQMA. In June 2004, the people of St. Paul's Anglican Church in Calgary donated twenty sewing machines to the MKQMA and \$1,000 toward the cost of shipping them. Our intention was to develop a sponsorship program to offer financial assistance in the care of the more than six hundred AIDS orphans in the Manya Krobo cultural area. Finally, we will be applying for the status of "registered charity" with the Government of Canada. This will be called the "Manya Krobo Queen Mothers Association, Canadian Chapter." This chapter will be accountable to the MKQMA of Ghana and will act under their leadership and guidance.

My experiences with the MKQMA, all of which arose out of Dr. Don Ray's IDRC-funded research and the Traditional Applied Authority Network (TAARN), have been overwhelming. I feel that what we have done thus far has made a significant and sustainable contribution to the already phenomenal work of the MKQMA. Our local university campus and the Calgary community at large have been inspired by the success of the queenmothers, which is reflected in the growing number of people who are involved in the various activities in which we engage. This part-

nership has become the pride of the students of International Development Studies program at the University of Calgary, who recognize it as an instance in which a student has been able to make a genuine contribution to positive and sustainable development. Numerous people within the academic community are excited by the fact that the project arose out of research being done on campus, specifically Dr. Don Ray's IDRC-funded TAARN project. We've "thought globally," yet "acted locally," and we look forward to a long partnership with both TAARN and the Manya Krobo Queen Mothers Association.



MAKING BEAD NECKLACES AND BRACELETS FOR ONE OF THE INCOME-GENERATING PROJECTS OF THE MANYA KROBO QUEENMOTHERS ASSOCIATION. (PHOTO: KIM SCHOON.)



CAYLA GILBERT AND
EUNICE MAHOMAH
– PRESENTATION BY
THE UNIVERSITY OF
CALGARY’S GLOBAL
AIDS AWARENESS
GROUP TO THE
CALGARY OLYMPIC
PARK ROTARY CLUB,
MAY 2005, ON THE
WORK OF THE MANYA
KROBO QUEEN-
MOTHERS ASSOCIA-
TION. (PHOTO: DR.
DON I. RAY.)



HONORARY QUEENMOTHER CEREMONY FOR KIMBERLEY SCHOON – BECOMING MANYE
PI YO GU. (PHOTO: KIM SCHOON.)



MANYA KROBO QUEENMOTHERS ASSOCIATION. (PHOTO: DR. DON I. RAY.)



MANYE PI YO GU SITTING WITH MANYE NARTEKIE, PARAMOUNT QUEENMOTHER AND OTHER QUEENMOTHERS AFTER INSTALLATION AS HONORARY QUEENMOTHER. (PHOTO: KIM SCHOON.)

