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

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in the Age of AIDS, Gender,  
Governance, and Development**

Edited by Donald I. Ray, Tim Quinlan,  
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# **3 Traditional Rulers as Partners in Health and Education Delivery**

Wilhelmina J. Donkoh

## **INTRODUCTION**

The role of traditional rulers in Ghana has been undergoing change as the democratic order advances in the country. Thus it has been necessary to attempt a redefinition of their role as heads of their polities within the framework of developmental efforts by the central government and its adjuncts as well as other non-governmental agencies. Admittedly, the institution of chieftaincy in Ghana dates back several centuries and it remains the fulcrum of Ghanaian culture. The institution is revered and held in awe and in a sense is also seen at once as the embodiment of the spirit of the ancestors and a link between them and the living community. It is expected to provide a renewed sense of belonging as well as being a powerful catalyst for social cohesion and harmony.

However, it is important to draw attention to the fact that the history of the institution differs among the different ethnic groups and even in the

various regions that constitute the country. For example, while among the matrilineal Akan-speaking people the institution seemed to have evolved right from the inception of the establishment of their polities, the same cannot be said about their Guan-speaking neighbours, who seemed to have adopted and adapted the Akan model of leadership as one may infer from the titles used for traditional rulers or chiefs. Again, while certain areas in the northern regions such as Dagbon, Wa, and Mamprussi had centralized states with clearly defined rules of succession and titles, many others such as the Tallensi and the Gurunse, until fairly recently, lacked such systems. For such areas, the institution of chieftaincy in its present form is a relatively new phenomenon resulting from a colonial imposition as part of the British indirect rule system.

Today traditional office-holders acknowledge their role as “agents for development” or “partners in development.” The question to ask is in their present capacity, aside from the vital areas of land administration and customary law practices, in what new ways have traditional office-holders been contributing to the material progress of their communities?

## PERCEPTIONS AND DEFINITIONS OF CHIEFTAINCY

In June 2001, the TAARN project team in Ghana organized a conference on traditional rulers to which each Regional House of Chiefs<sup>1</sup> was invited to send three representatives as participants. The conference theme “The Role of Traditional Rulers as Development Officers” aroused much opposition from the participant office-holders. The leaders drew attention to the fact that their position was not an appointive one but was one that was generally as a result of their pedigree or royal birth, as they are not paid for taking up that position. However, they all agreed that chieftaincy could be described as a unique traditional institution that also mirrors the society over succeeding generations. The traditional rulers perceived their office as an agency for development. They acknowledged that the role they play could be described as a partnership with other agents to bring about development within their polities. Thus they much preferred to be addressed as “partners of development” or “agents of development.”

This view of the traditional ruler acknowledges the institution's historic link with the past while at the same time it emphasizes the important role that holders of the office are expected to play. In this connection, it is pertinent to draw attention to the relatively new office of *Nkosuohene*, or Development Chief, initiated by the *Asantehene Otumfuo* Opoku Ware II in 1985. This office is usually conferred on an individual who has served the community well in terms of providing amenities that would contribute to the general well-being of the community or has the capacity to do this. Such a person need not be of royal birth or even be a native of that particular community.

It is also important to point out that, while traditionally male traditional leaders are often expected to play a generally dominant role, their female counterparts, where they exist,<sup>2</sup> are expected to play important complementary roles only in such areas as resolution of marriage and domestic conflicts as, for example, in cases of marital infidelity and in cases of accountability of family land and farms. It is important to point out that among the matrilineal Akan, the *Ohemaa* [Queenmother], who is the female counterpart of the chief, is regarded as the mother of the royal lineage and has the first option in nominating a potential chief. She plays this role because she is believed to know those who are the true members of her lineage and who therefore qualify to occupy the office. Even where all three nominees that she is entitled to choose have been rejected by the elders, she still exercises the right to approve the elders' nominee.

## CHANGING ROLE OF TRADITIONAL RULERS

It is generally acknowledged that the institution of chieftaincy in Ghana has passed through various phases and the role of traditional rulers has changed over time since the pre-colonial period through the colonial era to the post-independence period. While during the pre-colonial period traditional rulers had considerable influence and exercised greater sovereignty within their polities as their authority in both spiritual and temporal matters was absolute, during the colonial period British jurisdiction cast them in the position of sub-agents of the colonial regime in the areas of local government and for judicial settlements. Subsequently, the political

role of the traditional ruler was prescribed through various legislation and statutes enacted by the British.

However, in the early Nkrumahist phase of the post-independence period, the role of the traditional ruler in local government and judicial settlement ended in the interest of democracy. Between 1960 and 1966, they were subjected to central government control. A hallmark of this development was the enactment of the Chieftaincy Act of 1961 (Act 81). After the 1966 military coup against President Nkrumah and the re-establishment of elected government, central government control as embodied in the Chieftaincy Act of 1971 (Act 370) marked a new liberal phase for the institution. The liberal phase continued until the situation was further enhanced with the promulgation of the 1992 Constitution of the Fourth Republic, which assigned them both statutory and non-statutory functions.

### *Statutory Functions*

The statutory functions among other things included:

- The collection, refinement, codification of and the unification of customary laws.
- Adjudication in chieftaincy disputes.
- Compilation of lines of succession to offices in the various traditional areas.
- Appointments of representations to various government statutory bodies, including the Council of State, Prisons Council, National and Regional Lands Commissions, and Regional Coordinating Councils.

Constitutionally, too, traditional rulers are barred from active partisan politics. The role of traditional rulers has evolved over time with the changing political morphology, thus turning these office-holders into adjuncts of central government and joint custodians of state interests rather than partisan individuals. Significantly, the 1992 Constitution has freed the Chieftaincy Institution from governmental control. Freedom of traditional rulers from active politics enables them to function more effectively

as parents of the nation. In this capacity they tend to devote much time and attention to providing amenities that enhance the quality of life of members of their respective communities. Often, too, their success is assessed in terms of the provision of amenities that promote the well-being of their areas of jurisdiction. The authority to initiate and promote such development projects emanates from their non-statutory functions.

### *Non-Statutory Functions*

The non-statutory functions of traditional rulers are derived from their positions as moral/natural leaders of their respective communities. As influential members of their communities, they undertake the following functions:

- Settlement of disputes through arbitration.
- Mobilization of their peoples for development purposes. In this capacity, they acted as linkages between their communities and the development agencies as central government departments, local government institutions, NGOs, diplomatic missions, churches, and welfare associations.
- Use of the agency of annual festivals: chiefs mobilized their peoples for the purpose of planning and finding avenues and opportunities for executing development projects. In addition, festivals provided a forum for bringing together members of the community for the purposes of soliciting their help in advancing the execution of their development projects.

## THE ROLE OF TRADITIONAL RULERS TODAY

Traditional rulers perceive their role today as being primarily initiators of development or catalysts of developmental processes. They accept that the function of traditional office-holders has been transformed from serving merely in political, military, and ritual capacity that derives from their traditional role as moral and social leaders and is now translated into

mobilizing their communities for developmental purposes, which includes the provision of infrastructure for an enhanced standard of living (material welfare delivery) on behalf of the community. Traditional rulers initiate development projects and secure the support of both internal and external agents of development for the execution of these projects.

Traditional rulers also see themselves as a unifying factor, which is characterized as the belt used in tying a broom to bring out the image of strength through unity.<sup>3</sup> In this role, they are involved in conflict prevention and management as well as having control over conflict resolution mechanisms. They are expected to ensure that peace and stability, which are prerequisites for development, prevail by maintaining fairness in the adjudication of cases and the distribution and sale of land. Increasingly, traditional rulers perceive their role as rendering a service to their people by managing communal resources such as land, water bodies, and forest resources.

## TRADITIONAL RULERS AS DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS

The history of Ghana is replete with examples of partnerships between traditional rulers and other development agents in undertaking projects that would improve the material well-being of members of their communities. The underlying principle in these collaboration efforts is that the traditional rulers deploy their influence in mobilizing resources for the well-being of their communities. A good example was the *Okyenhene* (ruler of the Akyem Abuakwa State) *Nana* Sir Ofori Atta I. An educated son of a Basel Mission catechist, *Nana* Sir Ofori Atta I acknowledged the importance of education in nation-building. Consequently, he established the Abuakwa State College, a post-elementary institution and also set up the *Okyeman* (Akyem State) Scholarship Scheme in the 1920s that sponsored the higher education in England of Dr. J.B. Dankwa, the Ghanaian statesman, legal luminary and acclaimed scholar. Another example was the *Asantehene Otumfuo* Sir Osei Agyeman Prempe II. Under his auspices, the *Asanteman* Council set up the *Asanteman* Scholarship Scheme in the 1930s. The scheme financed the higher education of many brilliant Asante youth, including Mr. Victor Owusu, who became the



attorney general during the Busia regime (1969–72) and Mr. A.S.Y. An-doh, former registrar of the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumase, and currently secretary to the *Asantehene*. It was under this scheme also that the *Asanteman* Secondary School was established in the early 1940s. In addition, he encouraged the development of more secondary schools and a university in Kumase. Among them were Prempeh College, Opoku Ware Secondary School, St. Louis Secondary School, and the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST). In more recent times too, the *Asantehene Otumfuo* Opoku Ware II instituted a new scholarship scheme in the 1980s to which every Asante national was expected to contribute one cedi per annum.

In the early colonial period, the spread of education in many parts of Ghana was mainly the result of collaboration between traditional rulers, on the one hand, and the Christian missions and the central government, on the other. The contribution of the rulers was usually in the form of land grants and organization of communal labour. Sometimes, too, they undertook to pay the teachers' remuneration and/or to provide them with accommodation. Traditional rulers employed a similar principle to draw other social amenities like potable water, health centres, and electricity into their respective communities.

Individuals too have undertaken projects that have promoted the material welfare of people in their communities. Recent examples include Mr. Kwame Ofori Bamfo, Managing Director of Bamson Company Limited, who initiated the Sikkens Education Trust with a 20-million cedis capital for the Obomen Kwawu area in the Eastern Region in 2003.<sup>4</sup> Another is the 4.6-billion cedis Sam Jonah Endowment Fund (SAMJE-Fund) set up by Sam Jonah, chief executive of Anglo-Gold Ashanti in June 2004 to help finance infrastructural development of the University of Cape Coast.<sup>5</sup>

The discussion below will examine more closely how specific traditional office-holders have pursued the objectives of improving the material well-being of the people within their communities in the specific spheres of education and health care delivery. Closer attention will be paid to the *Asantehene* [King of all Asante people] *Otumfuo* Osei Tutu Aba-bio and his role in these spheres of development. The traditional Asante state, or *Asanteman*, includes the entire modern political administrative area known as the Ashanti Region, as well as parts of the Brong Ahafo

Region, which, before 1959, was known as Western Ashanti and political islands like Worawora in the Volta Region who profess to owe allegiance to the *Asantehene*.

## OTUMFUO OSEI TUTU ABABIO'S VISION FOR DEVELOPMENT

Upon ascension on the Golden Stool on 26 April 1999 as *Asantehene*, *Otumfuo* Osei Tutu Ababio set out to promote peace, social order, and economic development in addition to improving the living standards for all the people of Asante. He pledged, among other things, to make the socio-economic development of the *Asanteman* [Asante nation], in particular, and Ghana, as a whole, his priority. His fundamental objective was to improve social services for the people. In this scheme, he identified education and health as two important pillars for improving the material well-being of his subjects. He observed that, while education is fundamental to the human resource base for the development of the society, at the same time, able-bodied citizens are required to ensure its realization and sustainability.<sup>6</sup>

Indeed, the *Otumfuo's* declared vision for development in Asante won him much acclaim and respect both locally and internationally. Between May and June 2001, he was received as an honoured guest in Britain and several states in the United States, where he was awarded honorary doctorate degrees.<sup>7</sup> These included doctorate degrees from the University of Maryland and Savana State University as well as the University of Glasgow during its 550th anniversary. Locally, too, KNUST, Kumase, followed by the University of Ghana in Accra and the University of Cape Coast, have all conferred honorary degrees upon him, particularly because of his interest in and support for education.

## OTUMFUO EDUCATION FUND

Shortly after assuming office as *Asantehene*, the *Otumfuo* Osei Tutu Ababio announced his intention to support brilliant but needy students

and deprived educational institutions, particularly within his polity and generally in Ghana, through the establishment of an education fund. At the time, the Ashanti Region reportedly had the highest number of educational districts, teachers, schools, and pupils in the country.<sup>8</sup> It had 18 District Education Directorates, 11 Educational Units, and 128 Circuits. In addition, the region had four tertiary institutions, comprising the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, the Kumase and Mampon campuses of the University College of Education, Winneba, and the Kumase Polytechnic, besides other post-secondary institutions, including several teacher training and nursing training colleges. However, despite the region's high endowment in terms of educational provision, according to some official reports, schools within the Ashanti Region were under-achieving at the time.<sup>9</sup> The *Otumfuo* identified pervasive poverty as the root cause of deprivation of access to education in general and the secondary and tertiary levels in particular for a large number of young people. In addition, he observed that poverty also adversely affected the quality of education provided.

Thus *Otumfuo* Osei Tutu Ababio, with the support of the *Asanteman*, decided to establish the *Otumfuo* Education Fund (OEF). The OEF was formally inaugurated at the Manhyia Palace, Kumase, on 3 November 1999, by Dr. Mohammed Ibn Chambas, then Deputy Minister of Education.<sup>10</sup>

The main objective of the OEF is the advancement of education for the benefit of the people of *Asanteman* in particular and Ghanaians in general. This objective was to be achieved through raising funds, which it then allocates to support the education costs of selected "bright but needy" pupils and students. It was also intended to provide incentive packages for teachers and other educational workers who excel at their work. In addition, it was to provide, renovate, or rehabilitate school buildings, structures and facilities, supply school equipment, educational materials, and teaching aids. It was to invest in projects that promote education in *Asanteman* in particular and Ghana in general as well as assist any project consistent with the objective of the OEF. In establishing the OEF, it was anticipated that it would support Central Government efforts by freeing funds intended for certain facilities within the education sector. Funds thus freed would be spent on improving the general quality educational services provided.

## MANAGEMENT OF CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE *OTUMFUO* EDUCATION FUND

The OEF is managed by a board of trustees and has an executive secretary who may be a member of the Board. In 2003, there were fourteen board members. To ensure gender sensitivity, it is the fund's stated policy that at least two of the board's trustees should be women. The board, chaired by the Most Reverend Dr. Joseph Osei Bonsu with Professor Florence Abena Dolphyne as Vice-Chair, has three female members.

A secretariat of six members of staff headed by an executive secretary has been established at *Manhyia*, the administrative headquarters of traditional Asante and residence of its monarch. The deed of trust governing the management of the OEF requires each Asante to contribute a minimum amount of two hundred cedis a month or a specified amount determined by the board of trustees periodically.<sup>11</sup> In addition, any person, company, or association, regardless of ethnic, religious, or political affiliation who so wished could contribute to the fund either in cash or in kind. To establish firm links with Asante citizens in the diaspora, branches of the OEF have been established in Canada, the United States, and the UK.

The practical administration of the OEF is carried by the secretariat, which receives applications from individuals and institutions. The applications are then investigated. Heads of institutions who put in requests on behalf of deserving students usually send along reports and other relevant documents. Such requests are usually granted. Institutional requests are usually for materials.<sup>12</sup>

The administrators of the OEF employ several methods to solicit for funds. They arrange meetings with and give talks to such organizations and business groups as hoteliers and market women. In addition, they make direct appeals to identified institutions and individuals and the response has been encouraging. Originally chiefs were mandated to collect 200 cedis each from every Asante citizen. Paramountcies have been divided into four categories, depending on how well endowed they are, with the Kumase Traditional Council in a separate category. Future fund-raising strategies include organizing special functions as raffles, football matches, and fund-raising weeks.

## DECLINING EDUCATIONAL QUALITY AND JUSTIFICATION OF THE *OTUMFUO* EDUCATION FUND

Between 1990 and 2000, the standard of pre-tertiary education in Ghana as a whole seemed to be declining. The decline was more dramatic in Asante. Between 1997 and 2000, the Ashanti Region recorded some of the poorest Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) results. Five factors have been identified as being the major causes of the decline. First, were the poor and inadequate facilities and conditions in the classrooms and schools that were not conducive to studies. School structures were often in a state of disrepair, many classrooms were without furniture, and often there were not enough textbooks. Therefore several pupils had to share the few copies of textbooks available.

Second was the lack of teachers. Often schools in the rural areas, in particular, lacked teachers because those posted there refused to accept the posting due to such factors as lack of or inadequate accommodation and basic amenities like good drinking water and medical care.

The third factor was the poor conditions of service and inadequate pay for teachers. Thus, often teachers did not put in their best in the classroom. Fourth were financial difficulties. Some parents found it very difficult to provide the necessary financial and material support that could help develop their children's interest in education. Fifth were government budgetary constraints. As a result of low revenue vis-à-vis commitments of the central government to other social sectors within the economy, it was impossible to provide adequate financial and material support for the education sector.

Thus the *Asantehene's* objective in establishing the OEF was to complement the efforts of the central government and the local authorities in stemming the tide of decline in the standard of education and providing universal quality education within Asante in particular and Ghana as a whole. To achieve this objective, four discrete areas were identified for the application of the funds.

First was the rehabilitation and renovation of existing schools as well as the construction of new classroom blocks. Second was to assist in the supply of furniture, textbooks, and learning and teaching aids to help both the teacher and the pupil. Third was to boost the morale of teachers by providing them with incentive packages to enable them give of their best.

Fourth were the provision of financial and/or material assistance to bright but needy students to enable them to develop their natural talents to the climax of their academic abilities.

## ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE *OTUMFUO* EDUCATION FUND

It is rather difficult to assess fully the impact of the OEF. Despite the existence of precedence as noted above, the novelty in the *Otumfuo* Education Fund established by the *Otumfuo* Osei Tutu Ababio attracted much excitement and positive support. In the first place, the operation of the OEF, unlike all the earlier schemes, operated beyond the confines of the patron traditional state, which in this case is Asante. Significantly, any person of Asante parentage who lives in any part of Ghana could benefit from the fund. At the same time, any resident in any part of Asante who is not of Asante parentage also qualified to apply to the fund.

In 1999, for the first time, funds collected through a traditional ruler were used to sponsor the university education within the country of needy but brilliant students.<sup>13</sup> Hitherto, university education within the country had been financed almost single-handedly by the central government. Increasingly, the burden had become too heavy for the government and therefore new approaches have been examined. One of the approaches that seemed more acceptable to all parties with interest in university education was a cost-sharing mechanism referred to as the “user-fee,” which was adopted as official policy and implemented in 1999. This scheme required students to contribute towards the cost of using residential and academic facilities. A major flaw in the scheme was that it was not means tested. The implication of this scheme therefore was that brilliant students who did not have the means to pay the user fees were to be excluded from university education. Thus the introduction of the OEF in 1999, which immediately offered to sponsor 200 students each from the three premier universities – the University of Ghana, the KNUST, and the University of Cape Coast – was a timely intervention that guaranteed the university education of some 600 Ghanaians. A total of 180 million cedis from the OEF was granted them to pay their user fees.

However, the current policy of the OEF has discontinued the sponsorship of university students. The rationale for this decision is that a person who has already completed second cycle education would be in a position to seek employment and fend for themselves. This policy change is intended to conserve resources to provide sponsorship and facilities for young people in the earlier phase of their education so that they do not miss the opportunity of accessing education altogether.

Another unique quality of the OEF lies in the fact that it provides facilities for schools both within and outside Asante. Among such beneficiaries outside Asante are Ada Secondary School, Sewhi Wioso Secondary School, and Wesley Girls' High School.<sup>14</sup> Other schools in this category whose requests were pending in 2003 included Our Lady of Apostles, Ho, and Kpando Secondary Schools.

It is important to observe that the education fund idea has become so popular that people from diverse backgrounds both locally and abroad are eager to contribute to it. For example, *The Pioneer* of 28 February 2003, reported that the Anloga Carpenters Association (ACA) in Kumase had donated benches estimated to cost 200,000 cedis, as its "contribution towards the celebration of the *Awukudae* [Wednesday Sabbath] festival."<sup>15</sup> The gesture stemmed from the ACA's desire to identify closely with the OEF's objective of developing quality education within the *Asanteman* and Ghana. It is even more important to observe that the OEF has been able to provide some measure of support in terms of both material and cash. By May 2003, the OEF had provided science laboratories, libraries, and computer units for about six rural secondary schools in addition to funding the construction and renovation of dormitories and other facilities in about eleven institutions. The UK branch of the OEF sent 100 million cedis for the rehabilitation of the Ashanti Regional Library. In addition, through the agency of the OEF, equipment including computers, photocopiers, and 2,300 dual desks were distributed to basic schools in the Ashanti and Brong Ahafo Regions.

Various educational institutions have donated scholarships to the OEF. In the 2001/2 academic year, the Ohio State University offered the OEF a tuition scholarship that is tenable every other year. The first recipient of this award, Miss Cindy Kumah had her pocket money and fare totalling ₵16,000,000.00 paid for by the OEF. The Volta River Authority offered the OEF six scholarships at the Akosombo International School,

effective from the 2002/3 academic year. Each beneficiary receives seven million cedis. The Kumase Polytechnic also offered scholarships worth 5 million cedis each to ten students tenable from the 2003/4 academic year to cover all aspects of their education except for boarding.

The OEF has also sponsored young people to acquire employable skills in the non-academic sector. In the year 2000, six boys were sponsored to train as mechanics. The sponsorship covered procurement of tools, overalls, and other needs for the training, as well as pocket money. At the same time, some girls were sponsored to train as seamstresses.

The OEF management is trying to keep track of all beneficiaries and to encourage them to contribute to the fund. There are plans to form an association.

## LIMITATIONS AND PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED IN OPERATING THE *OTUMFUO* EDUCATION FUND

The operation of the OEF has come up against many problems and criticisms. The fund could operate and meet its set targets if all contributions collected were paid in. To ensure that funds flowed into their coffers, the management of the OEF periodically appealed to the general public, in particular those who had not already done so, to donate to the fund. To earn the support and commitment of the general public, it is important to publicize how much has been contributed into the OEF's coffers and how these have been disbursed.

A major problem that the OEF has encountered is the failure of bodies and individuals who have undertaken to collect contributions but have failed to submit any accounts of their receipts. Thus, for example, *The Pioneer* of 2 April 2003, carried this headline, "Expected Cash from Education Fund Locked Up: Defaulting Chiefs, Groups to be Summoned to Appear before Asantehene and Board."<sup>16</sup> The accompanying story, which was credited to Kapital Radio, one of the F.M. Stations in Kumase, reported that the administrative assistant of the OEF, Mr. Osei Akoto Amoateng, has disclosed that outstanding contributions expected from certain groups, organizations, chiefs, individuals, and the churches could run into several millions of cedis. The situation came about because the



organizations and individuals who collected the receipt books, issued about a year earlier with the aim of raking in funds for the OEF, had not submitted their returns. As a result of this turn of events, which Mr. Osei Akoto Amoateng reportedly described as “the unpatriotic act of these people,” the OEF was unable to finance about 80 per cent of its projects in the year 2002. Several measures were adopted to coerce the defaulters to submit their accounts or return the receipt books. These measures ranged from appeals, exhortations, and extension of time to those concerned to enable them fulfill their obligations to threats of being summoned before the *Asantehene* and the OEF board.

Some observers and critics have also expressed concern about lack of accountability and transparency regarding the contributions and disbursements so far made. In June 2004, this kind of concern was expressed in the Accra-based *Ghanaian Chronicle* and posted on its internet web site. The authors of the publication, Aaron Kumah and John Tetteli, observed,

... this [establishment of the OEF] is a laudable idea and Oturnfuo [*sic*] deserves commendation for his vision and foresight....

Now, the main issue is not so much about the setting up of the fund but what has been derived from individuals and organizations in respect of contributions and donations as well as what has been expended on students and educational institutions.

For the past three years, Ghanaians have been kept in the dark about the state of affairs of the OTEFund. One would hope that, beyond setting up the OTEFund, there would be greater candor in its activities but that was not the case. This situation is casting a very serious doubt on the veracity of the OTEFund and the managers of the fund. It may soon face public vilification and displeasure.<sup>17</sup>

These critics of the OEF contrasted it to the newlyestablished Sam Jonah Endowment Fund (SAMJEFund) set up to help finance infrastructural development of the University of Cape Coast. They further added that the latter fund had by 4 June 2004, raised 4.6 billion cedis.<sup>18</sup>

It seems such criticisms are unfair or unfounded or highly exaggerated. The OEF usually gives out receipts to cover donations. Also, periodically it publishes the names of benefactors and beneficiaries. For instance in an official report entitled "Short Report on the Projects undertaken by Funds so far and the Needs of the Fund," it was stated that "A number of books and 20 used computers worth \$50,000.00 (¢425,000,000.00) and \$10,000.00 (¢85,000,000.00) respectively donated by individuals and organizations have also been distributed to schools in the districts."

The fund had collected cash donations of ¢2.2 billion. Expenditure in cash and in kind amounted to about ¢2,204,500,000. The fund also has accounts being operated by its branches in the UK, the United States, and Canada.<sup>19</sup> It seems the desire to rush to press without seeking out full information about the OEF and its operation does more damage than good. Probably if such criticisms as high administrative costs and bogus beneficiaries could be made and substantiated, then it would be worth looking into and finding ways and means of resolving them.

In discussions with the administrators of the OEF, it appears among the major problems that inhibit the effectiveness of the fund are excessive patronage, failure of the secretariat to acknowledge all donations promptly and to follow up pledges and offers, donor fatigue, and failure to honor pledges. The wrong use of patronage come in two forms. People in authority sponsor applicants who do not satisfy the fund's criteria for beneficiaries. Others also use the *Otumfuo's* name to swell the numbers of beneficiaries by adding to applicants that have already been selected. Some institutions and individuals contribute for some time and then give up. The secretariat sometimes fails to follow up institutions that promise to contribute over a period of time. An institution promised to pay 300 million cedis over a five-year period; however, after payment of the first installment of 60 million cedis, it did not make any further payment. The administrators of the OEF made no effort to follow up. Others also make pledges in public then refuse to honour them.

In-built mechanisms in the traditional governance system are among the major drawbacks of the OEF. In particular is the patronage system, known in traditional practice as *dwantoa*. Literally, the term means "run to seek refuge." *Dwantoa* is a system whereby people in trouble or seeking favours appeal to a person who has authority or influence to step in and mediate on their behalf. The beneficiary may show appreciation by

offering gifts, which could be in kind or cash. Sometimes cash presentations are intended to pay for transportation and other related costs of the patron. Since traditional rulers are among the most influential personalities in their communities, often such appeals are passed through them. People who solicit assistance from the OEF often use this traditional means of seeking favour. The problem is that such requests often ignore the means-testing system. Thus it is not always the most brilliant but needy that benefit from the fund. It is rather the applicants who has the most influential social and political networks who benefit, thus undermining the cardinal objective for which the fund was established, essentially providing for needy but brilliant students and to raise the standard of education within the *Otumfuo*'s area of jurisdiction. Also such beneficiaries do not adhere to the principle of contributing to the fund themselves but often direct their gratitude towards their patrons who made it possible for them to access the fund.

## THE *OTUMFUO* HEALTH FUND

The *Otumfuo* acknowledged the health problems endemic in the country in general such as the HIV/AIDS menace, the falling standards of health care in Asante, the falling standards of quality health care, the deteriorating infrastructure and facilities in the health sector, and the increasing cost of health care services that make it difficult for many people in Asante to access basic health care. Ministry of Health statistics indicate that there is a high incidence of infant mortality, maternal mortality, and prevalence of preventable diseases in Asante.<sup>20</sup> At the same time, it has been impossible to expand health infrastructure to cope with population growth in Asante. This situation has severely strained the available health facilities. The problem had been compounded by high poverty levels that affect many people, in particular those in the informal sector, thus making it difficult either to pay for or to access health care even when it is within their geographical reach. Indeed, it seems the problem of lack of access to health care in Ghana is a nationwide phenomenon. In February 2003, for example, Professor Agyeman Badu Akosa, the director general of Ghana

Health Service (GHS), revealed that only 46 per cent of Ghanaians have access to orthodox medicine.<sup>21</sup>

The *Otumfuo* is also concerned about the increasing trend of HIV/AIDS and the need to improve the standards of health care in Asante. This includes the poor infrastructure and health care facilities, the low quality of health care, and the increasing cost of health care services that make it difficult for many people in Asante to access basic health care. The *Otumfuo* demonstrated his concern for health-related issues by mobilizing traditional authorities within Asante to spearhead the campaign against HIV/AIDS.

It is as a result of these concerns that the *Asantehene* with the support of the *Asanteman* sought to establish the *Otumfuo* Health Fund (OHF). The stated objectives of the OHF included the promotion of human development and the improvement of the health status of the people of *Asanteman* and Ghana. Another objective was to fight the menace of prevalent but preventable diseases and mortality exacerbated by endemic poverty and deteriorating facilities.

It was anticipated that the OHF would be deployed to mobilize resources that would in turn expand health infrastructure, upgrade facilities in existing health institutions, and improve the quality of health care for the people of Asante. In addition, the fund was expected to serve as a social reinsurance fund to support and promote the development of mutual health organizations in Asante.

In 1987, the Government of Ghana (GoG) replaced its hitherto free medical care system with a cost-recovery system or the payment of user charges, which is generally referred to as “cash and carry.” The policy change was necessitated by dwindling central government funds to the health sector as well as all other sectors within the national economy. Under-funding within the health sector by the government resulted in reduced ability to acquire drugs and other essential medical logistics for health care delivery. However, the introduction of the cost-recovery system, coupled with rising cost, made it increasingly difficult for many people to pay for health services. To ease the acute financial burden on the population, the government introduced a safety net in the form of exemption packages administered by the Ministry of Health for the most vulnerable groups within society. These included children under five years, pregnant

women, the aged (who are categorized as those over seventy years), and paupers, i.e., those who are unable to pay.

Despite the exemption packages, the cost-recovery arrangement within the health care delivery system is still regarded as being financially burdensome by a large number of the population. Thus many avoid seeking medical care in that sector and either resort to self-medication or traditional medicine. Among those who seek medical care, many who are unable to pay hospital services either abscond or are detained for longer periods due to inability to pay their medical debts. A health insurance scheme has been suggested as an alternative to the prevailing situation. The bleak picture of the health delivery situation in countries like Ghana was highlighted by Dr. Yaw Ofori Yeboah, municipal director of health of Cape Coast, when he opined, "With poverty, inadequate health facilities, coupled with the inability of most developing countries to control infectious diseases, the rising number of NCDs [non-communicable diseases e.g., cancer, diabetes, coronary heart diseases] could only spell doom."<sup>22</sup>

The strategy the *Asantehene* intended to employ in the sphere of health provision was the deployment of his influence and the popular support he enjoyed among his people. This was to be expressed through fund-raising projects, including the establishment of foundations, appeals to NGOs, external donor agencies, and governments in addition to mobilization of the people.<sup>23</sup> A stipulated percentage of revenues generated from the sale of all stool lands was to be lodged in the OHF. The OHF was also to establish linkages with overseas hospitals. It was also to fund postgraduate training of qualified medical personnel who are natives of the various paramountcies within Asante who would then return to work within their traditional areas. All traditional rulers within Asante (both males and females) were to be trained to acquire awareness of disease occurrence and outbreak to enable them report such incidents for prompt action to be taken to avoid catastrophe.

## COLLABORATION BETWEEN THE *OTUMFUO* HEALTH FUND AND THE ASHANTI REGIONAL HEALTH ADMINISTRATION

The Ashanti Regional Health Administration supervises a network of health care facilities funded by the Ghana government within the region. In addition, there are facilities run by missions and private individuals. Statistically, the region has some 425 health facilities.<sup>24</sup> They range from health centres to district hospitals and the Komfo Anokye Teaching Hospital (KATH), the second largest tertiary health institution in Ghana, at the apex. The region has 83 hospitals, made up of 25 government hospitals, three of which are quasi-government, 16 run by missions, and 42 owned by the private sector.<sup>25</sup> There are 87 health centres, comprising 81 owned and run by the government and 6 run by missions. Additionally, there are 836 clinics, 80 maternity homes, and another 139 outreach points, which are all privately owned.

The sources of funding for these facilities include central government grants, funds from donor agencies, and user payments or internally generated funds.

Despite the Ashanti region's seemingly high endowment in terms of health care establishments, it has been observed that they have been placed under severe strain because the expansion of health infrastructure has been unable to cope with the population growth. Thus the facilities in most of these establishments are inadequate to meet the standard of quality care required. The OHF was intended to serve as a reinsurance scheme for mutual health organizations (MHO) within the Ashanti region that operate on the principles of solidarity and insurance.

The MHOs are local initiatives within both the formal and informal sectors for financing health care. They are flexible self-accounting schemes with in-built mechanisms that adjust contributions and benefit packages as required. Examples of MHOs in Asante include the Aninwaa Medical Scheme, Edweso-Dwabben, New Edubiase, the Garages Association, the Manhyia Susu Scheme, and the Civil Servants Association Scheme.

## PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN THE *OTUMFUO* HEALTH FUND AND OTHER CENTRAL GOVERNMENT AGENTS

An attempt has been made to derive benefits from both the public and private sector personnel involved in the health delivery system. Senior personnel of the Ashanti region sector of the Ghana Health Service (GHS) were drafted into the *Otumfuo* Health Fund Working Committee.<sup>26</sup> Among them were Dr. Appiah Denkyira, regional director of the GHS and Dr. S. Kyei-Faried, regional senior medical officer in charge of public health. Dr. Chris Atim, regional advisor to PHRplus was employed as consultant. In this capacity, Dr. Atim has been instrumental in forming the ideas and shaping the concepts and principles underlying the OHF. Dr. Marty Makinen, PHRplus USAID consultant, also made very useful contributions towards developing the concepts that informed and shaped the OHF. The regional and all district directors of health were required to give periodic reports to the *Asantehene* to keep him informed about the specific problems that they face such as the buruli ulcer outbreak in parts of Asante.

The OHF also required that health education should be built into all development projects within Asante. This would entail publicizing any ongoing health campaign such as buruli ulcer, HIV/AIDS, polio, sexually transmitted infections, tuberculosis, and other forms of immunization. The health education program was to be carried out through collaboration between traditional rulers and development organizations. While a traditional leader will undertake to host the event in his area of jurisdiction, the development organization will sponsor the program.

## THE SERWAA AMPEM AIDS FOUNDATION FOR CHILDREN<sup>27</sup>

In 1998, it was reported that the HIV/AIDS scourge was increasing rapidly in Ghana and fastest within the Ashanti region where about 30 per cent of the 30,000 reported cases in Ghana could be found.<sup>28</sup> The report further added that most of those affected were aged between 15 and 49. The threat and scare raised by these statistics were the inspiration behind

the *Asantehene's* HIV/AIDS initiative to mobilize forces to deal with the HIV/AIDS menace. Under the slogan, "You develop for the people within the community and the people within the community are needed for development," the HIV/AIDS menace was made a developmental issue. With this view in mind, all developmental projects were required to have an HIV/AIDS component. This included providing billboards and posters and procurement of condoms for construction workers. In selecting companies to undertake development projects, commitment to HIV/AIDS prevention and awareness creation was highly rated. The scheme followed the traditional and historic pattern whereby the *Asantehene* had mobilized his people to fight any force that threatened their survival as a people.

The *Asanteman* HIV/AIDS Control Project reported that the high incidence of the menace in the Ashanti region could be attributed to its central location within the country and its position as an economic nerve centre.<sup>29</sup> This has resulted in the influx of people from all parts of the country into the region. In 2003, the *Asantehene*, with the support of the *Asanteman* decided to turn the HIV/AIDS Control Project, which initially was planned for three years into a foundation, registered as an NGO. It was renamed the Serwaa Ampem AIDS Foundation for Children in honour of the *Asantehemaa* [Queenmother of Asante], *Nana Afua Serwaa Kobi Ampem*. The wife of the *Asantehene*, Lady Julia Osei Tutu, is its executive director, supported by a five-member board and a secretariat.

The objective of the Serwaa Ampem AIDS Foundation for Children is to support children affected by or infected with HIV/AIDS. In this category are children whose parents are suffering from or have died from the menace. The foundation offers support to the identified children by providing for their health and educational needs. This includes payment of their health insurance premium and also soliciting for and providing such children with anti-retroviral drugs where possible. The foundation also pays the schools fees and procures textbooks and clothing in addition to paying other costs related to education. It also offers counselling and guidance as well as upholding their human rights. For example, in inheritance cases, they provide legal and other assistance to ensure that the children receive their fair share of the estate.

As part of the scheme to uphold the human rights of these children, the foundation is careful not to stigmatize them. Thus it carefully avoids the use of such words as "orphans." Also it avoids institutionalizing the



children and promotes support for them through the traditional kinship system. Thus, the children are cared for through support and assistance for their guardians, who are enabled to carry out viable economic activities. Besides, the identity of the children is protected by working through the traditional rulers and volunteers in the secretariats that had been formed in each of the eighteen political districts within the Ashanti region. After attaining the age of fifteen, such children are linked to the OEF for further educational support.

## ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE *OTUMFUO* HEALTH FUND

Many individuals and organizations have donated cash, equipment, drugs, and other facilities to the OHF. These include Ghana Brewery Limited, Guinness Ghana Limited, and Dr. Obeng, a Ghanaian medical doctor based in Germany. Through the reinsurance of mutual insurance schemes, funds have been generated for investment in the insurance funds of the various districts and traditional authorities. By the end of May 2004, the Serwaa Ampem AIDS Foundation for Children had raised 300 million cedis. Through the collaboration of the OHF with the Health Service, community registers termed “Road to Health Chart” for babies have been promoted. The scheme requires every child to be registered before attainment of school-going age. It also requires every child born within a traditional area to be presented to the traditional ruler, who should demand to inspect its weighing card and ensure that the parents will have the child immunized. With the support of the World Bank and through the PPTAP, it has been possible to build capacity for disease surveillance among traditional rulers.

## LIMITATIONS OF THE *OTUMFUO* HEALTH FUND

The OHF was not officially launched until 2004. It seems the *Otum-fuo* was more concerned with the actualization of development projects under the health fund than with the publicity aspect. Various components

within the ambit of the OHF were to be launched first. An example is the HIV Foundation that has been launched and is currently relatively more active. Part of the problem too seems to be that there has been little interaction within the seven-member board of the OHF since its formation in 1999. The members of the board are all distinguished professionals who hold very responsible and demanding positions. They include *Nana* Dr. Susubribi Krobea Asante, *Asokorebene* and chairman of the OHF, Justice Ms. Appau, a high court judge, Professor Agyeman Badu Akosa, director of the Ghana Health Service, Professor Kwadwo Asenso-Okyere, vice-chancellor of the University of Ghana, Legon, Professor Ernestine Addy, former head of department, Community Health at the KNUST School of Medical Sciences, Mr. Peter Osei Duah, managing director of State Insurance Company and Dr. Thomas Agyarko-Poku, coordinator/secretary.

## CONCLUSION

Traditional rulers are political and social leaders who derive their authority from the moral influence they exercise within their communities and often also from their pedigree. While originally they enjoyed very extensive control, over time, as the modern state had evolved, their authority has, on one hand, been circumscribed, but, on the other, their position has been recognized and enshrined in the national constitution. As their position has changed, traditional rulers have reinvented their role in society by emphasizing their function as development partners who act in various ways to bring projects into their areas of jurisdiction to improve the material welfare of their subjects.

The *Asantehene Otumfuo* Osei Tutu Ababio is a key example of traditional rulers who employ their influence to this effect. He has identified the two areas of education and health as strategic areas of development that require considerable attention. The *Asantehene* has used his extensive influence to mobilize funds and other resources into foundations that he had established with the support of the *Asanteman*.

Although the *Asantehene's* schemes had encountered problems and limitations, they have generally received popular support both from local and external sources and had formed the basis for many honours that have

been bestowed on him. In many ways, the schemes introduced under the *Asantehene's* foundations are novel in terms of scope and even the actual operation. Thus, for example, while the OEF seeks to operate beyond the confines of traditional Asante, the Serwaa Ampem AIDS Foundation for Children seek to operate through the traditional kinship system to protect the beneficiary children from becoming stigmatized. Undoubtedly, the *Asantehene* had demonstrated that traditional rulers can use their influence within and outside their communities to enhance the material welfare of their people.



DR. WILHEMINA DONKOH, GHANA.

## NOTES

- 1 The Regional House of Chiefs is a body made up of all the paramount and special category chiefs in a region and is headed by an elected president. Ashanti Region, where the *Asantehene* is the permanent head of body, is the only exception. The Houses of Chiefs constitute an exclusive male preserve that excludes the female. There are ten such bodies representing the ten regions into which Ghana is divided. In addition to the regional bodies is the National House of Chiefs made up of representatives from all ten regions and headed by an elected president.
- 2 Traditionally, many of the different ethnic groups in Ghana did not have female traditional leaders. The practice of having female leaders has been more fully developed and entrenched among the matrilineal Akan. In certain areas, as for example among the patrilineal Ga-Dangme, who inhabit the southeastern part of Ghana, though they have female leaders, they don't seem to acknowledge them as rulers. In an interaction with the president of the Greater Accra Regional House of Chiefs and his deputy in 2001, they both insisted that the position of the Ga-Dangme chief was traceable to his original function as a priest-king that required him to perform certain rituals. Significantly, the Greater Accra Regional House of Chiefs as well as the three northern houses, pointedly failed to send any female traditional leaders to the Chieftaincy conference held in June 2001.
- 3 The *Mampongbene* Osei Bonsu II, in his presentation at the conference on "The Role of the Traditional Ruler as a Development Officer," expressed this view, which was later unanimously endorsed by the other leaders assembled there. The symbol of the chord around the broom derives from the Ghanaian proverb about unity, which states that, while it is easy to break a single broom stick, it is virtually impossible to break many broomsticks when tied together with a chord or twine. Thus the traditional rulers see themselves as the unifying factor within their communities.
- 4 *Daily Graphic*, Accra, 18 February 2003.
- 5 *Daily Graphic*, Accra, 4 June 2004.
- 6 "Investment Opportunities in Ashanti Region." In *The Corporate Guardian* (Jan.-Feb. 2003): 13-15.
- 7 *Kumasi Mail*, 5-11 November 2001.
- 8 In *The Corporate Guardian* (Jan.-Feb. 2003): 13-15, 14.
- 9 Kapital Radio News Report, February 2000.
- 10 "Otumfuo Education Fund: Short Report on the Projects undertaken by Funds so far and the Needs of the Fund."
- 11 The Trust Deed for the Otumfuo Education.
- 12 Interview with *Nana* Abayie Boateng, executive secretary of the Otumfuo Education Fund, at his office in the National House of Chiefs, Manhyia, Kumase, 5 September 2003.

- 13 Interview with Nana Abayie Boateng, Executive Secretary of the Otumfuo Education Fund, at his office in the National House of Chiefs, Manhyia Kumase, 5<sup>th</sup> September 2003Ibid.
- 14 Interview with Nana Abayie Boateng, Executive Secretary of the Otumfuo Education Fund, at his office in the National House of Chiefs, Manhyia Kumase, 5 September 2003. Ibid.
- 15 *The Pioneer*, 27 February 2003.
- 16 *The Pioneer*, Kumasi, 2 April 2003.
- 17 *Ghanaian Chronicle*, Accra, 24 June 2004.
- 18 *Daily Graphic*, Accra, 4 June 2004.
- 19 *Otumfuo* Education Fund, entitled "Short Report on the Projects undertaken by Funds so far and the Needs of the Fund," 26 May 2003, 7.
- 20 *Asanteman* HIV/AIDS Control Project under the Aegis of His Majesty Otumfuo Osei Tutu II Asantehene, Kumasi, n.d., 1.
- 21 *Daily Graphic*, Accra, 28 February 2003.
- 22 *Daily Graphic*, Accra, 18 February 2003.
- 23 *High Street Journal*, November 1999.
- 24 "Investment Opportunities in Ashanti Region." In *The Corporate Guardian* (Jan.–Feb. 2003): 13–15.
- 25 *High Street Journal*, November 1999. "Investment Opportunities in Ashanti Region." In *The Corporate Guardian* (Jan.–Feb. 2003): 13–15.
- 26 *Asanteman* HIV/AIDS Control Project under the Aegis of His Majesty Otumfuo Osei Tutu II Asantehene, Kumasi, n.d., 3. The corporation was used to establish "The Otumfuo HIV/AIDS and Communicable Disease Control Committee."
- 27 Dr. Thomas Agyarko-Poku, medical director for Manhyia Palace and coordinator/secretary for the Otumfuo Health Fund was a very important source of information. Agyarko-Poku kindly granted an interview and also made available documents concerning the OHF.
- 28 *Asanteman* HIV/AIDS Control Project under the Aegis of His Majesty Otumfuo Osei Tutu II Asantehene, 3.
- 29 *Asanteman* HIV/AIDS Control Project, 8.

