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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,
Keshav Sharma, and Tacita A.O. Clarke

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5 The Developmental and HIV/AIDS-Fighting Roles of Traditional Rulers: Agency of Festivals

Wilhelmina J. Donkoh

INTRODUCTION

Traditional rulers in Ghana, usually known as “chiefs” and “queenmothers” or “natural rulers,” play an important role in the delivery of facilities for ensuring the material welfare of the people in their areas of jurisdiction, which could be a “traditional area,” “cluster of villages,” or a “village.” One of the principal agencies through which traditional rulers mobilize facilities for ensuring that certain aspects of material welfare are delivered to people within their polities is festivals. The issue of who should provide material welfare has become problematic as a result of the replacement of the traditional state with the modern centralized one.

COLONIAL RULE AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR TRADITIONAL INSTITUTIONS

The long-term impact of British colonial rule was the transfer of governance from the natural rulers in the traditional states to a centralized state, the Gold Coast, between 1874 and 1901. The process of colonial rule formally commenced in the areas that today constitute the Central, Eastern, Greater Accra, Southern Volta, and Western regions of modern Ghana in 1874. It was expanded to include the modern administrative regions of Ashanti, Brong-Ahafo, Upper-East, Upper-West, and parts of the Northern Region in 1901. The process was completed in 1918 with the addition of the Volta Region and the remnant parts of the present Northern Region. The colonial government adopted the system of indirect rule in which the traditional rulers functioned as adjuncts of local government to enforce its control within the Gold Coast Colony. The deep-seated implications of this process was the considerable loss of power by the traditional rulers to take and implement such decisions as the declaration of peace and war, and other regulatory laws governing the lives of their subjects.

The passage of the Native Administrative Ordinance in the Gold Coast in 1927, and its subsequent amendments, authorized the traditional rulers to make bylaws in political agglomerations that were characterized as the Native Authority Areas. However, such regulations were subject to approval by the Chief Commissioner of the particular territory or the Governor of the Gold Coast. This effectively turned the traditional rulers' councils into local government adjuncts of the colonial administration. In this capacity, the traditional councils became involved in such social welfare matters as the basic infrastructure for economic development, education, feeder roads, health, and markets, as well as maintenance of law and order within the community. To carry out this role effectively often required the traditional authorities sourcing and accessing funds. By 1950, the moral authority and the usefulness of traditional rulers was being questioned by elements within Gold Coast society, in particular, the literati, who perceived traditional rulers as being corrupt, extortionist, oppressive, and flouting the traditional moral order that regulated the exercise of power in the local communities (Busia 1951). The Independence Constitution of 6 March 1957, confined the traditional rulers

to the areas of informal leadership and mobilization of the community for the purposes of development. In the process, the central government machinery worked to undermine the financial backbone of traditional rulers. However, since the overthrow of the Nkrumah regime in 1966, the institution of traditional rule has revived and seems to have peaked under the 1992 Republican Constitution in which Article 272(c) authorized both the Regional and National Houses of Chiefs to undertake and evaluate traditional customs and usages in order to uproot outmoded and socially harmful ones. Today, traditional rulers act as a fulcrum, bringing together otherwise unrelated groups in their areas of jurisdiction for collective action, in particular, in the area of the delivery of social amenities. The following sections examine how traditional rulers deploy a traditional institution – festivals – as a means of attracting development projects into their respectful areas of jurisdiction.

HISTORICAL EVIDENCE ON FESTIVALS IN GHANA

What is the import of festivals in Ghana today? The vigorous and widespread performances of annual festivals centred on traditional rulers in the country constitute an indicator of the continued interest in the institution of chieftaincy in Ghana. In many parts of Ghana today traditional festivals continue to be observed with great care and ceremony. At the same time, while new festivals have been invented in certain areas, in other areas, almost extinct ones have been revived in more recent times as agencies of asserting distinct identity as well as for expressing and addressing local concerns. A typical example is the Asante *Odwira* festival celebrated in 1985 about which more is said elsewhere in this paper. The festival then celebrated for the first time after almost a century was to commemorate the golden jubilee celebration of the restoration of the *Asanteman* [Asante state], but it was also used as an occasion for the creation of new but important traditional offices – *Nkabom* (unity) and *Nkosoo* (development/progress) stools, – a commemoration of the two elements that constituted the theme of the anniversary. Today, the office of the *Nkosobene* (development chief) has become a very important position in traditional rule and is being deployed in improving the material well-being of communities.

Festivals have been celebrated throughout Ghana in both centralized and non-centralized societies dating back to the pre-colonial period. Among ancient festivals performed in the country are the *Akwasidae* and *Odwira* celebrated by the Asante, the *Apoo* of the Takyiman of Brong Ahafo, the *Bakatue* of the Edina (Elmina) in the Central Region, the *Boyaram* and *Da* performed by the Tallensi in the Upper East Region, *Homowo* of the Ga, *Hoghetsotso* of the Anlo in the Volta Region, as well as the *Kundum* celebration of the Nzema in the Western Region. The Dagomba of the Dagbon Traditional Area in the Northern Region celebrate five main festivals or *Chu Yu*. They are the *Kpini*, *Konyuri*, *Chimsi*, *Boim*, and *Damba*.

The antiquarian nature of festivals in Ghana is attested to by anthropological evidence collected by such commentators as William Bosman (1705, 158–59), the seventeenth-century Dutch trader who described “the annual ritual of driving out the devil” or the *Kundum* festival of the Nzema in Axim, and T.E. Bowdich (1819, 274), the English leader of an official British delegation to Asante in the early nineteenth century who observed and commented on *Akwasidae* and *Odwira* celebrations in Kumase. Towards the end of the same century, Ramseyer and Khune (1875), two Basel missionaries who had been taken captive by the Asante in 1869, also noted the celebration of these festivals during their four-year sojourn in the Asante capital. Similarly, R.S. Rattray (1927), the British ethnographer and administrator, collected and recorded information on such traditional festivals as the *Apoo*, which is celebrated by the Takyiman people in the Brong-Ahafo Region. In addition, Meyer Fortes (1940, 237–71; 1945; 1949), the British anthropologist studied the structure and functions of the *Boyaram* and *Da* festivals which are celebrated among the Tallensi in the Upper East Region.

STRUCTURE AND FUNCTIONS OF FESTIVALS

Festivals are periodic celebrations by either sections or whole communities. Traditional festivals are a means for attempting to renew the community and to remember the ancestors. As part of most festivals, supplicatory rites are performed in such sacred places as shrines, stool rooms, mausoleums,

rivers, and the outskirts of the town. The rites are also intended to restate the origins of the community, the values and ideas underpinning the various ties and relations that weld them together, and strengthen them as an entity. During such celebrations, rites are performed to offer prayers for such matters that concerned the welfare of the entire community as fertility, good health, good harvest, and successful fishing. They also manifest beliefs and practices associated with the supernatural. Rattray's argument concerning the Asante worldview that acknowledges the universe as a living entity whose foundation and order was based on the twin pillars of religion and law that at once acknowledged a supreme god as well as sanctity and reverence for dead ancestors seems valid for most traditional communities in Ghana and is the major principle underpinning the celebration of festivals (Rattray 1929, ix; Nukunya 1992, 56).

Traditionally, festivals serve the same functions in the various societies and among the various ethnic groups in Ghana. They are usually celebrated during the harvest season, which usually coincides with the end of the old year and ushers in the new. They are also occasions for societal purification. Festivals were (and continue to be) occasions for offering thanks and supplications to the local deities and the spirit of the ancestors in appreciation for what the people perceived to be the means of good life, such as fertile soils, abundant yields, peace and harmony, as well as the absence of droughts and pestilence within the community. Festivals also provide occasions for paying homage to the highest office-holders, for remembering the heroic ancestors, and for rewarding the deserving and applying sanctions to the erring. Festivals are also occasions for renewing solidarity between the various sections of the community, as well as seeking strength and planning both for defensive and offensive strategies on behalf of the community. The office-holders also use the opportunity to display their regalia, which in the preliterate traditional society gave a visual account of the property entrusted to them on their accession to office and demonstrated the additions made to communal property.

Festivals are celebrated either annually or at specified periods. For example, while among the Akan the *Adae* is celebrated twice (*Akwasidae* [Sunday *Adae*] and *Wukudae* [Wednesday *Adae*]) every forty-two days, the *Odwira* of the Akan, the *Hogbetsotso* of the Anlo Ewe, and the *Homowo* of the Ga are celebrated annually. Festivals may be celebrated either by the whole community or by sections within the community. Among some

societies like the Anlo-Ewe and the Tallensi, the ancestral rites are organized within descent groups. The celebration of the *Boyaram* and the *Da* festivals by the Tallensi in the Upper East Region, for example, is organized within groups of people descended from a common ancestor. The ritual aspect of festivals serves as an important means of social control. The belief that the dead have the ability to punish wrong-doing and to reward good behaviour regulates social behaviour and also challenges people to behave well because it is usually the illustrious dead who are remembered and propitiated during festive occasions. The belief also buttresses the authority of traditional rulers and enhances their positions since they are believed to be the direct representatives of the ancestors and therefore flouting their authority amounts to disrespect of those that they represent. Festivals could be classified as one of the non-statutory functions of traditional rulers carried over from the past. In this case, the office-holder uses his political and social position to bring together groups who are ordinarily unrelated into a unified group for collective action periodically. While the public has access to aspects of periodic rites such as durbars, drumming, and dancing, other aspects such as rites performed in the stool houses tend to be private.¹ Annual festivals usually bring together members of the community who are resident both at home and abroad, members of the diplomatic corps, local and central government officials, as well as representatives of donor agencies.

While most festivals are rooted in traditional belief and lore, others are associated with world religions such as Christianity and Islam. Illustrative of the above are the Nkoransa *Munufie* and the *Kpini* festival in the Dagbon.

In the Nkoransa traditional area, for example, the central part of the *Munufie* festival is the re-purification of the stools and the shrines of the deities. This purificatory ceremony lasts one week. The blackened stools are taken to the stream and sprinkled with water. It is also an occasion for remembering the dead, offering thanks for the general well-being of the society and specifically for the harvest.² The Dagomba festivals, on the other hand, are intertwined with the Islamic religion. For example, the *Kpini* festival is based on the legend that the guinea fowl refused to provide water to the prophet Mohammed during his travels. The main focus of this annual festival is for each family to get a guinea fowl, pluck

its feathers, and whip it with *dawadawa* branches, and then slaughter it for a communal meal.

However, in all these festivals, the common functional and structural characteristic is the communal focus.

CREATION OF NEW FESTIVALS

Despite the existence of many ancient festivals in different parts of the country, there seems to be a clamour for new ones, particularly where none exists already. As late as October 2002, One Kwabena Osei Frempong, a citizen of Kwawu in the Eastern Region of Ghana, decried the traditional and cultural festival vacuum in the Kwawu State, which he described as a shameful and an ugly situation.³ This account is both insightful and instructive on why and how new festivals are created. Significantly, Frempong recounts succinctly the history of the Kwawu people and emphasizes their relationship with Asante. He identifies two events in the history of Kwawu around which a festival could be created. The first was the violent secession of Kwawu from Asante, which was climaxed by the beheading of Antwi Akomea, the Asante Resident in Kwawu at Abetifi by the Kwawu Asafo Group in 1874. The second was Kwawu's attempts in seeking British political protection in 1884, which was concluded with the Friendship and Protection Treaty of 5 May 1888. To him, the latter date was "a significant, momentous and memorable occasion in the history of the Kwawu" and should be recognized as such. Furthermore, he opined that it should be

... remembered and celebrated annually as an indigenous cultural and traditional festival in honour of God ... and the traditional leaders and the Okwawu generation of that period, who won for us this precious freedom to impart vision, inspiration and aspiration to the posterity of Okwawu State. As of now, Okwawus do not have a traditional and cultural festival as the Akims [Akyem] do have Ohum, and Akuapims [Akuapem], Odwira.

... Okwawu as a well-knit-together ethnic group should have her identity and dignity not only in trade and commerce, but also in education and particularly in our traditional and festival setting. Let us do away with flamboyant, prestigious, ostentatious, time-consuming, debt-burden generating funerals, which are being changed to festivals, and are gradually destroying the beautiful and refined natural values of Okwawus of our present generation. It is therefore humbly and strongly suggested that we Okwawus revisit, recognise, adopt and celebrate the cessation [*secession*] from the Ashanti Kingdom on May 5, 1888 as our indigenous traditional and cultural festival annually. The occasion could be a period of reflection, stock taking, family re-unions, social get togethers, festivities, the planning of local development projects for implementation programmes etc. to instil a sense of belonging and fellowship in the Okwawu citizens and hope for the future in the youth of Okwawu State. Let us build and bequeath to our posterity noble and undefiled heritage. This is food for thought for our traditional rulers and citizens of Okwawu State.

One of the significant aspects of ancient festivals in recent times is the addition of new elements to the celebration. Among them is the sponsorship by modern sector organizations such as breweries, the organization of dances with modern dance bands and music, beauty pageants and communal harvest celebrations. Both the print and electronic media are replete with festival sponsorship packages. In October 2002, for example, the Ghana Breweries Limited expressed practical support for the annual Hogbetsotso festival.⁴ Among other things, the company made cash donation towards development projects in the state, publicity in the print and electronic media, as well as branded festival T-shirts. Togbi Gbordzor III, *Dusifiga* of Anlo, who received the package, noted that, historically, the festival commemorates the migration of Ewes from Notse in the present-day Republic of Togo, thus highlighting the common origins of the people and the need to unite for the common good of their community. Furthermore, it is intended to create in all members of the community a keener appreciation of the cultural heritage and traditional values of the

Anlo in particular and Ghanaians in general. Thus an attempt is made to forge a union between traditional values and modern principles.

In addition to modern-type sponsorship of “traditional” festivals, other sectors of civil society are creating new festivals for purposes such as providing leisure opportunities to various sectors of the community or promoting tourism as an income-generation activity. Festivals in this category include the Festival of Art and Culture (FESTAC) and the self-explanatory KIDFEST that are celebrated respectively to promote general cultural awareness and to foster cultural consciousness in children. Both of these festivals are organized by the National Commission on Culture. Other new festivals include ECOFEST, which is geared towards promotion of eco-tourism and, more recently, METHOFEST organized by the Methodist Church of Ghana to promote religious tourism.

CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN FESTIVALS

The celebration of traditional festivals in Ghana dates back to antiquity. However, its form and expression has over time been strongly impacted by such modernizing agencies as British colonial rule and the European Christian missions. An example is the case of the annual *Odwira* or *Akwasidae Kɛse* festival of the Asante, the most formidable pre-colonial traditional state on the Gold Coast. The Asante *Odwira* festival marked the end of the old year and ushered in the new and was celebrated under the auspices of the *Asantehene*. It brought together all the Asante *amanhene* (paramount chiefs) to perform the common rites and to renew their allegiances to the *Asantehene*.

However, between 1896 and 1985, it was not celebrated. The British had abducted the *Asantehene* Nana Agyeman Prempe I (1888–1931) and sent him into exile while they imposed their hegemony over Asante. Thus, the festival could not be celebrated in the absence of the Asante monarch, who is traditionally the chief officiate at the function. Admittedly, Nana Agyeman Prempe was repatriated in 1924, but he came only as Mr. Edward Prempeh, a private citizen, while a non-traditional office, *Kumasebene* was created for him in 1926. Arguably, the *Asanteman* was restored in 1935 under his successor, *Otumfuo* Osei Agyeman Prempe II and the

restoration was celebrated in grand style. However, the celebration of the *Odwira* festival itself was discouraged because of its perceived association with human sacrifice or what the Asante themselves would classify as judicial execution. It was also feared that the celebration of the festival would revive traditional Asante nationalism, which would not augur well for the interest of the Gold Coast. The Nkrumah government that ushered the country into independence in 1957 followed the same line as the British colonial government for similar reasons. It was not until 1985 during the era of the Peoples National Defence Council (PNDC) that the *Asantehene Otumfuo* Opoku Ware II celebrated the *Akwasiadae Kese* as part of activities commemorating the Golden Jubilee of the restoration of the *Asanteman* (Rattray 1927).

However, in the colonial period, the celebration of other festivals continued. Among them were the *Adae* and *Odwira* by most Akan states, *Okyir* in Anomabo and Biriwa, *Mgmayem* of the Manya Krobo and the *Daa* among the Tallensi. *Odwira*, which is celebrated in Akuapem towns like Amanokrom and Larte and the *Kakobe* of the Nandom are among the old festivals whose celebration has been continuous over time. There seems to be a proliferation of festivals throughout the country. While some of these are old festivals whose celebration has been continuous, others have been revived while yet others have been invented in more recent times. Among the revived ones are the Mmoaninko in the Offinso traditional area and the *Homowo* of the Ga, which is celebrated in turns by the Ga towns between July and September to coincide with the height of the fishing season. New ones include the *AkwantukEse* in New Dwaben (Koforidua) to commemorate their journeys from Old Dwaben in Asante to Akyem in the Eastern Region first in the 1830s and again in the 1870s. There is also the *Akwanbo* (path-clearing festival) in Adwumako-Kyebi and Agona Nsaba, which signify spiritual and physical cleansing of the environment. The committee set up to plan the centenary anniversary of the Yaa Asantewaa War originally proposed the institution of a biannual festival to commemorate the deeds of the legendary female wartime leader as well as to deploy it as a measure to promote tourism and as a means for economic development in the Ashanti Region. Indeed, the second Yaa Asantewaa festival was celebrated in 2006.

Other examples where dormant traditional festivals have been revived as a means of economic development are the *Takpo Wiela* and the *Sankana*

Kalibe, which are two of the festivals that are celebrated in the Nadowli District in the Upper West Region of Ghana.⁵ They are harvest festivals organized in memoriam and honour of the local deities between January and February. The two festivals are believed to date back to antiquity. Their celebration was considered to be an occasion for propitiation respectively to Wiela and Kalibe, the local deities, for protection from their enemies and for peace as well as to express their gratitude for a good harvest during the year. The chief officiate at the festival was the *Tengdaana*, the traditional leader in charge of the land. However, as a result of misunderstandings and feudings between various sections of the community, the communal basis of the celebration broke down and the propitiation rites were performed individually. The communal celebration was revived in 1996 under Mr. K. Suglo after his appointment as district chief executive (DCE) of the Nadowli District in 1992. He convinced the people of Takpo and Sankana that the celebration of the festival was of crucial importance as an adjunct of development in that it acted as a unifying factor that attracted all members of the community, both at home and abroad, to return home to contribute towards the welfare of the area.

In their reincarnated forms, both festivals apart from their religious connotations, have been the occasion for planning development projects in the areas. All able-bodied members of the community are levied while local NGOs and other philanthropists either pledge or contribute funds towards development projects. Usually, too, government officials including the regional minister, DCE, the local member of parliament, as well as the minister of agriculture, who usually attends as the special guest of honour at the agricultural shows, which are featured as part of the celebration, are all invited to participate in the festival. These officials usually channel funds from central government sources towards identified development projects in the areas. As a result of funds generated through the celebration of the festivals, some development projects have been completed in the area. These include a dam and the Takpo Hospital with a nurses' quarters and a doctor's residence attached. In Sankana too, health care and educational facilities including the Sankana Clinic and the Sankana Day Care Centre for infants have been developed through the agency of the *Sankana Kalibe*.

FESTIVALS AS COMMUNITY FUNDRAISING INITIATIVES

As could be inferred from the discussion above, festivals have become important fundraising initiatives for development projects in communities in which they are held. Funds are generated from various sources, including direct government intervention, sponsorship from such development partners as diplomatic agencies, NGOs and private enterprises, in addition to levies raised from citizens. The emerging practice is that, as part of the festival planning exercise, key communal projects are identified and budgeted for. Subsequently sponsorship is solicited from the sources listed above or development partners and government agents who are specially invited for the occasion are informed of the needs of the community. The development partners respond by undertaking projects to solve the identified needs. In this regard, festivals have assumed the important function of being a fund-mobilization avenue for community development.

MUNUFIE KESE FESTIVAL OF NKORANSANSA

It is apt at this point to focus more closely on the *Munufie Kese* celebration of the Nkoransa people and how it is today appropriated as a vehicle for promoting development in the community. The celebration has been modified and innovations have been introduced into it. But first we need to briefly refer to the location of the Nkoransa traditional area and to explain the rationale for selecting it as the focus of this work.

The traditional area comprises the Nkoransa and the Kintampo administrative districts. Its location is between the rich forest lands to the south and the drier savannah lands to the north. While the *Nkoransahene* shares common borders with the *Mamponhene* and the *Ofinsobene* in the south, his domain extends to the southern boundaries of Buikpe along the banks of the Black Volta, where he shares boundaries in the north with the *Yagbonwura*, the ruler of Gonja. He also shares boundaries with Abaase, Atabubu, and Yegyí in the east and Takyiman, Wenkyi, and Mo in the west. The vegetation of the area consists of both savannah woodlands and forests. The strategic location of the Nkoransa traditional area coupled with its good and fertile soil makes it an important agricultural

area that specializes in various commercial and food crops such as ground-nuts, beans, cassava, cotton, tobacco, and cashew. It is also regarded as one of the leading producers of yams and maize in Ghana.

Besides, the Nkoransa traditional area has a rich and interesting history that dates back to the reign of the *Asantehene* Osei Tutu (ca. 1700–17)⁶ coupled with considerable natural resources that provides the area with immense tourism potential. The capacity of the area as a tourist destination has not yet been fully developed. Among the tourist attractions in the area is the Fiema-Buaben Monkey Sanctuary, where several varieties of monkeys co-habit with humans as neighbours. There are also the caves at Amoawi, Anyiman, Dandwa, Kokuman, and Yefri, which have been proven to be pre-historic human dwellings, in addition to the Kunso and Kintampo slave markets. Additionally, there are the Kintampo Waterfalls. Besides, there is traditional architecture, mainly the shrines of such local but historic deities as Nkoransa Dam, which according to oral traditions was carried from Amakom near Kumase by Bafo Pim, the first *Nkoransahene* and his retinue; *Seseman* Ntoa, who the Nkoransa believe led them to victory against the Banda; Adinkra Kusopre, which according to tradition was brought back from Gyaman after the Asante-Gyaman war in which the *Gyamanhene* Kwadwo Adinkra was beheaded; and Ekumsa, which according to Nkoransa accounts was captured from Kumasa Dumasa. It is anticipated that once this considerable tourist potential has been more fully developed, it would attract large numbers of people from outside the community, which has the benefit of broadening the revenue base of the area. At the same time, the development of the tourist capacity of the area carries the potential danger of exposing the people of the traditional area to various problems such as sexually transmitted health hazards like HIV/AIDS. Thus the traditional leadership decided to showcase the economic potential of the traditional, while at the same time generating awareness of the potential hazards associated with development by packaging the dual aspects within the ambit of the celebration of the traditional *Munufie* festival.

The Nkoransa *Munufie Kese* has been selected because the full ceremony is only celebrated once every three or four years due to modern contingencies. Besides, in the year 2001, the *Nkoransahene* and his elders decided to make awareness of the HIV/AIDS pandemic a close focus of the entire celebration. Other activities commemorating the festival included

the promotion of communal spiritedness and engaging the attention of the central government as a means to draw development projects into the Nkoransa traditional area to promote the material welfare of members of the community. These objectives coincided with those of the Traditional Authority Applied Research Network (TAARN) Project of which I am a team member. A decision was therefore taken to participate in the festival and to observe first-hand how traditional practices are being harnessed as agencies of development by traditional office-holders in modern times. Besides, the *Nkoransabene Okatakyie* Agyeman Kudom IV had participated in the June 2001 conference that TAARN held on the theme “The Role of Traditional Rulers as Development Officers.” On that occasion, he drew attention to the health insurance scheme that he had initiated in his traditional area, which has been adopted as a blueprint by other areas. The research was therefore prompted by a curiosity to find out more at first hand how he was playing out his role as an agent or partner in development within his community.

The activities constituting the festival commenced on Wednesday, 7 November 2001, and climaxed with a grand durbar in honour of the president, Mr. John Agyekum Kufuor, on Saturday, November 10. It was finally rounded off on Sunday, 11 November 2001, with a solemn remembrance (*Odwira*) ceremony in honour of the fallen heroes of Nkoransa in the various wars that led to the creation of the Nkoransa state.

The *Munufie* festival provides a good example of traditional rulers using the medium of a traditional institution to involve stakeholders in an attempt to improve the material well-being of members of the community. In this case, the *Munufie* festival was used as an avenue to bring together various organizations like the Planned Parenthood Association of Ghana (PPAG) and the GBL as sponsors for various activities. While GBL sponsorship was in the form of cash and drinks, PPAG supplied free samples of condoms and resource persons who demonstrated the use of these devices as well as giving advice and education on reproductive health issues and, more specifically, protection against the spread of HIV/AIDS. Personnel of central government agencies such as the regional AIDS co-ordinator of the Ministry of Health and local youth associations were brought in as resource persons. It was also an occasion that brought together most of the other traditional rulers who serve under the *Nkoransabene* and many

of the local residents, as well as citizens who reside abroad, to consider the general welfare of the traditional area.

In interviews with *Okatakylie* Agyeman Kudom, his elders and his queenmother, *Nana Yaa Duda* Kani, there was consensus that, traditionally, when there was an outbreak of disease, the festival was deployed as an agency to publicize it and to seek a cure or ways of preventing it. *Nana Agyeman Kudom*, for example, observed that, in the past, when there was an outbreak of disease, “*YEyi mmusuo bo ano ban*” [We perform rites to forestall evil], “*YEbo dawuro ma kuro mma ne Nananom nyinaa te sE yadeE bi aba*” [the gong is beaten to inform all citizens that there is an outbreak of an epidemic]. This traditional approach was adopted regarding AIDS because there is no known cure for it and also because of the considerable devastation that it brings in its trail. Admittedly, the HIV/AIDS virus can be transmitted in a number of ways such as blood transfusion and communal use of syringes and other sharp objects. However, one of the major and most likely means of transmission of the condition is through sexual relations. Significantly, too, it tends to affect the most economically productive section of the population who also tend to be the most sexually active. The youth do not seem to take seriously protective measures for the prevention of the disease. At the same time, places of entertainment/amusements tend to be the main venues and sources where promiscuous activities tend to thrive. Thus, it seems appropriate that, as part of the strategy to educate and to prevent the spread of the menace, all these factors are taken into consideration. The festival period was considered to be an opportune time for propagating such vital news and information because it provided an occasion for reaching a wider audience and also there was a greater possibility of capturing the targeted group in the right mood.

According to Nkoransa traditions, the celebration of this festival is intrinsically linked to the history and founding of the *Nkoransaman* under wartime conditions. Traditionally, the celebration of the *Munufie Kεse* is a commemoration of the day that the successor of *Nana Bafo Pim*, the first *Nkoransahene*, sat down to find some water to drink. Tradition recounts that *Nana Bafo Pim*, a member of the royal *Asene* lineage of Amakom,⁷ now a ward in Kumase, and the first-born son of the *Asantehene Opemsuo Osei Tutu I* (ca. 1700–17), was sent on a military expedition to the Bono area. *Nana Bafo Pim* and his retainers were able to gain control over the

surrounding lands through warfare. When peace eventually returned, *Nana* Bafo Pim decided that he would look for something to eat. This was accompanied by jubilation and merry-making. Traditionally the durbar was an annual affair. However, in recent times, this ceremony is celebrated every three or four years.

The appointed day for the first such Sabbath was a Friday that fell on a *Munufie*, which is part of the method of time-reckoning among the Akan. There are nine different *Munufie* in the Akan forty-day calendar, the last of which is celebrated as the *Munufie Kese* by the Nkoransa people.

The festival marks the occasion of the ritual consumption of the new yam (McCaskie 1995). The organization of the festival, among other things, is centred on blackened stools established for dead leaders and are regarded as the habitation of the spirit of the stool ancestors. *Nana* Agyeman Kudom, the *Nkoransabene*, functioned as the principal officiate at the 2001 festival. The festival was celebrated over a five-day period that commenced on a Wednesday and rounded off on a Sunday. Each day was characterized by specific activities.

Traditionally, there is presentation of such items as sheep, chicken, yams, cash, and gold dust and nuggets to the *Omanbene*. This usually commences on the Wednesday. The new yam is harvested in June but *Nana Nkoransabene* does not taste it until the *Munufie Kese* as a commemoration of the war period of the past. Between the harvest period and the celebration of the festival, the yams are put up on an *apa* (mat) to dry. Preparatory activities for the festival are commenced on Wednesday with the purification of black stools at the *Ahenfie* (palace), followed by traditional drumming and dancing as well as firing of musketry. Also well-wishers call at the *Ahenfie* to pay homage, to express New Year's greetings to the *Nkoransabene*, and to present him with gifts.

During the celebration of the *Munufie Kese* in 2001 on a Friday, libation was poured in the stool house early in the morning. Around midday, *Nana Nkoransabene* dressed up in modest royal regalia and was carried in a palanquin in a procession accompanied by the great stool, which is believed to be Bafo Pim's own stool and is also known as the *abaandwa* (male stool), to the Arowa stream in Nkoransa for purification rites. Although I did not accompany the group to the stream, I was informed about what had happened there. Libation was also poured at the stream and then the stool was returned home. All celebrants at the stream were

purified by being sprinkled with “holy water” from the stream. Today, tourists and other visitors are admitted to the riverside ritual, which in the past was only limited to members of the community.

That same Friday, all chiefs under *Nana Nkoransahene* also performed similar purification ceremonies in their own towns and villages to signify that their own predecessors had also fought in the wars, and thus, they also remember the war times of the past. Back home, with the stool now purified, more libation was poured as a prayer for peace and for procreation so that many children would be born to replace those young men who have died in war. Prayers were said for wealth, prosperity, plentiful rainfall, and a good harvest, and propitiation was made against war and all manner of diseases. Then the *sodofo* (palace cooks) prepared white and red *et* (mashed yam). The stool was fed first by placing morsels of the prepared food on it. This was followed by sprinkling some of the food around for all spirits and elements to participate in the feast. *Nana Omanhene* then tasted the mashed yam, followed by all royals, children, and grandchildren of the stool who are present as well as *Akyeame* (linguists) and *nhenkwaa* (royal servants). Finally children and all celebrants present were given a portion of the food. I must add that the *Nkoranzahene* and his elders extended their benevolence to me by presenting me with thirty pieces of yams and a sheep as part of the good will that prevailed on this particular occasion. The Friday ceremony was concluded around 8 p.m.

On the Saturday, a grand durbar was held. All chiefs under the jurisdiction of the *Nkoransahene* travelled down to Nkoransa for the durbar. On this day, too, more presents were brought to *Nana*, who could elect to distribute some of the gifts to others. The presents varied according to the ability of each chief or donor. Participant chiefs started to arrive in Nkoransa from about 10 a.m. By 11 a.m., all were assembled on the durbar grounds. The seating arrangement at the durbar grounds was made according to the *fekuo* (administrative and military units through which office-holders are distributed) system. Then, the *Nkoransahene* with his retinue processed to the durbar grounds and commenced to greet all the chiefs present. The two major constituents of Nkoransa – the Kwaabre and Fiagya groups – each brought tributes to the *Nkoransahene*. The Kwaabre grouping is made up of the Akumsa, Dumase, Bonsu, Dotobaa, Nkwaben, Akuma, Brahoho, and Asuoso, while the Fiagya group consists of Busunya, Akrudwa, Buaben, Yɛfri, Buana, Baafi, and Sikaa. The chiefs in

each of these areas presented the *Nkoransahene* with a sheep that they had brought along. The rationale behind this tradition is that, in the past, the occupant of their respective stools might have committed an offence that would have required him to be beheaded but was reprieved. In mitigation, he was required to bring a sheep to the palace for the festival. There is one village, for example, where traditionally all the citizens, except one young male and female who would be spared as remnants to regenerate the population, were executed whenever an *Nkoransahene* or *Nkoransahemaa* died. Over time, such traditions have been modified and the punishment has been commuted to presents and tributes during festive occasions.

Other settlers also brought appropriate homage. An example is the Gurmakrom farmers' association, who are settler farmers and are required to bring a sheep and ₦20.00 cash in lieu of thirty pieces of yams. This presentation was in recognition of the *allogia* rights of the ruler to the land that they occupied and farmed.

THE GRAND DURBAR

For the purpose of this study, the most significant aspect of the 2001 *Munufie Kese* festival of the chiefs and people of the Nkoransa traditional area were the activities of Saturday, November 10. Although the theme for the entire celebration was "AIDS is real – our youth must be careful," most of the activities that commemorated the festival were of a traditional nature. It was the activities that took place on Saturday that clearly focused on the theme. As already noted, on one hand, the traditional durbar of the chiefs and people was on this occasion organized in honour of Mr. J.A. Kufuor in the anticipation that it would be the first time that a sitting president would have honoured an invitation to come to Nkoransa to see for himself the development needs of the area and the efforts being made by the people there to improve their standard of living. On the other, it was the main venue for highlighting the HIV/AIDS menace.

The objective of the focus on HIV/AIDS was to inform in particular the youth within the traditional area about the potential threat posed by the condition to economic and social development. At the same time, it was to provide an opportunity to draw attention to and to equip the youth

with such skills as HIV/AIDS prevention tools through counselling techniques, behavioural change, and group communication drama, as well as speeches. Although government and voluntary and quasi-governmental agencies have carried out extensive publicity campaigns on the problem, it seems to be a distant problem that affects other people elsewhere. Besides, the people tend to hold certain popular misconceptions about the condition, which is a novelty in the Nkoranza traditional area in the sense that it had been hitherto unknown in the area. Additionally, it is not yet prevalent in the area. Thus a prevention approach has been adopted as a strategy to forestall or, if necessary, to control the menace. The traditional leadership, after attending a series of workshops, seminars, and conferences has become more aware of the need to create awareness about the HIV/AIDS menace, as part of a prevention campaign; hence, the decision to highlight the fact that the menace exists is real and that it is a killer in the sense that there is as yet no known cure for it. Therefore, the *Omanbene* and his elders have decided to use their position and influence to spearhead a prevention campaign in the area. As part of the prevention strategy, the need to inculcate attitudinal change in the youth and to reinforce in them cultural values was taken into account by the traditional leadership in planning the activities for the festival.

Even before the festival, the traditional rulers in the area were making efforts to promote awareness of the new menace. It had been decided to employ both traditional and modern methods in the campaign. A religious approach has been adopted as a technique in raising awareness about the HIV/AIDS problem in the hope that a sound moral basis would be laid and that divine providence would cause a change of heart or conversion of those who would otherwise refuse to listen to advice and persist in indulging in activities that would expose them to the menace.

It has been generally observed that the most likely means for the transmission of the condition is through sexual contact rather than drug use. Thus, for instance, the queenmothers in the Nkoranza traditional area have reverted to traditional practices such as *bragro*, puberty rites for girls, as a deterrent from promiscuity and premarital sex among the youth. Among the Akan, including the Bono of whom the people of Nkoranza form a part, traditionally it was taboo for a girl to become pregnant without first going through puberty rites. The girl involved, together with the man responsible for her condition and her entire lineage, suffered dire

consequences. However, over time, the rites and taboos associated with them have been ignored, largely as a result of the influence of Christianity, western education, and other agencies of modernity. A strategy adopted in the traditional leadership in the Nkoranza area is to advise and discourage the people, including the youth, from having casual sexual relations in general and in particular with those already affected by the condition. Also, family members are encouraged to support relatives afflicted by the disease.

It was anticipated that the durbar would be a good forum to carry out the anti-AIDS campaign because there would be a large audience present who would in turn pass on the message. To this end, the traditional council had generated interest by involving various stakeholders. The regional and district medical officers of health were invited to participate in the durbar as speakers. In addition, the Academicians, a Sunyani-based youth drama group in the traditional area that learnt of the AIDS focus from the media, volunteered to participate by performing a play that highlighted the debilitating effects of the condition and the wisdom of acting in ways that would prevent contracting it. Also the Nkoranza Youth Association demonstrated its willingness to participate by printing, distributing, and wearing special T-shirts to promote greater awareness of the causes and debilitating consequences of the HIV/AIDS condition.

USES OF THE *MUNUFIE* FESTIVAL

Apart from its religious and festive and religious connotations, the *Munufie* festival of 2001 was deployed as an occasion to draw attention to the economic potential of the Nkoransa traditional area as part of the attempts to draw in resources to improve the material well-being of the members of the community. It also provided an opportunity to address health issues that were of major concern to the community. The strategy was to invite high-profile individuals, including the president, Mr. John Agyekum Kufuor, and ministers of state, the district chief executives of the two districts that constitute the traditional area, prominent citizens from the area who live outside, government officials, NGOs, and private businessmen. To ensure that the festival would be well-patronized and to

ensure that the message to be conveyed would be widely disseminated, an intense publicity campaign was launched in both the print and electronic media in addition to formal invitations that were sent out to individuals.

One of the important messages conveyed at the durbar was the fact that, although the people of the traditional area were predominantly hard-working agriculturists, they needed external assistance to ensure that they had a good standard of living. Besides, the durbar provided the platform to highlight the fact that the Nkoransa traditional area is essentially rural and that the majority of the population are peasant farmers who lack capital to purchase modern agricultural inputs. Also, the area suffers from poor road networks. Four of the important roads used in transporting agricultural commodities were cited as needing immediate attention to ensure that agricultural produce would reach its destination in good time to prevent post-harvest losses. These were the Jema-Nkwanta-Nkoransa-Edwera, Nkoransa-Sekyedomase-Ahenkro, Nkoransa-Busunya-Dromankɛse-Atabubu and the Kintampo-Pran roads that are considered to be of strategic socio-economic importance to the development of the traditional area in particular and the nation as a whole. Some of the roads become impassable during the rainy season and thus large population centres such as Apesika, Busunya, Dromankɛse, and Yɛfri are cut off.

The occasion was also used to draw attention to the need to provide adequate post-harvest arrangements, including the provision of storage facilities like silos and effective marketing arrangements to ensure food security and ultimately stable prices for the farmers. Attention was drawn to the need for credit facilities to relieve the farmers from harsh conditions of borrowing from moneylenders. Again, although farmers in the area have been encouraged to embrace the President's Special Initiative on Cassava Production (PSI) and some of the local farmers had already organized themselves to engage in large-scale production of the cassava, there was still a need for capital in-flows to ensure the production of the commodity on a commercial scale. The traditional council had already set aside four square miles of land and declared its preparedness to release portions of it to individuals, or to private, corporate, or government organizations interested in the production of cassava in commercial quantity.

PROFILE OF A MODERN TRADITIONAL RULER

It is relevant at this point to outline the profile of *Okatakyie* Agyeman Kudom IV, *Nkoranzabene*, as an exemplar of traditional rulers who use their position, influence, and traditional institutions as a platform to seek the material welfare of their people. Why should he be interested in the health needs and material conditions of his people? First, his traditional position requires him to. **It has been quite commonplace to find traditional rulers spearheading community development projects such as establishing schools, building police stations and health posts, together with residential quarters for the staff, and then handing it over to the government.** For example, the Senior Secondary School at Duayaw Nkwanta was built by the traditional council and later handed over to the central government.

However, in his case, it seems *Okatakyie* Agyeman Kudom's concern transcends simple traditional requirements. It appears his professional training and experience inclined him in that direction. *Okatakyie* is a trained nurse. For a period of thirteen years (1953–69), he worked as ward master at the 37 Military Hospital in Accra. Between 1962 and 1967, he was sponsored by the Ghana Army for further training and work experience in the United Kingdom. He went back to the UK in 1969 in search of more exposure and other opportunities. On this occasion, he worked as a charge nurse at the Chest Unit of Queens Hospital in Croydon, Surrey, and then as Nursing Officer Grade 7 at St. John's Hospital in Battersea, London. He later trained as a community nurse and was subsequently employed as senior residential social worker in the London borough of Lambeth. He went back into mainstream nursing and worked as a staff nurse in the Cardiac Recovery Ward at Papworth Hospital near Cambridge. In 1979, he enrolled in a diploma course in social studies at Ruskin College in Oxford University. As part of this program, he studied Political Ideas, Institutions and Activities; Economic Principles, Economic Development, and Labour Law. He was awarded a diploma in social studies in 1983, as well as being made fellow of Ruskin College between 1983 and 1985.

As a result of his training and experience, *Okatakyie* was already inclined towards a particular vision, which he worked out into a mission and objective for his area of jurisdiction when he was installed *Omanhene* in

1989. He had the view that a community or nation's level of development is assessed by the amount of goods and services at the disposal of its people to secure the means for obtaining a better life. This better life must, at least, have three cardinal objectives:

- Increasing the availability and widening the distribution of basic life-sustaining goods such as food, shelter, and protection;
- Raising levels of living, including higher incomes, the provision of more jobs, better education, and greater attention to cultural and humanistic values, all of which would serve, not only to enhance material well-being, but also to generate greater self-esteem; and
- Expanding the range of economic and social choices to individuals by freeing them from dependence, not only in relation to other people, but also to the forces of ignorance and human misery.

It was with these objectives in mind that he identified the health sector as one of the important areas that would actively engage his attention. In the field of health, his predecessor had initiated the construction of St. Theresa's Hospital through the provision of communal labour and a per capita levy on all citizens. Upon completion of construction work, the hospital was handed over to be administered by the local Catholic church, and there was still a need to maintain the physical structures, purchase medical supplies, and pay staff remunerations. Therefore, patients who used the services of the facility still had to pay. However, the community, being basically a rural one in which the majority of the population are peasants with limited access to cash, payments of medical bills often had serious financial implications for patients and their families. To assuage this situation, after he assumed office in 1989, *Okatakyie* Agyeman Kudom IV teamed up with Dr. Apeadu-Mensah, Dr. Bosman, and the Reverend Father Peter Kumor to facilitate the establishment of a health insurance scheme, which became operational in 1990 and continues to the present.

One of the fundamental principles regarding the operation of the scheme was to ensure that members would be able to pay their contributions

without much difficulty. Thus, initially, members contributed four hundred cedis (¢400.00) per person annually. By the year 2001, as a result of inflation, premiums had been raised to eleven thousand cedis (¢11,000.00). This was still considered cheap compared to twenty thousand cedis (¢20,000.00) being charged in similar schemes elsewhere. By 2003, the premium had been raised to twenty five thousand cedis (¢25,000.00) per contributor. Since it came into effect, it has not been uncommon for the scheme to underwrite hospital bills amounting to four million cedis for insured members. In its initial stages, *Okatakyie* and his elders had to use their influence and clout within the community to publicize the scheme and its benefits.

The Nkoransa example in community health insurance schemes is being emulated in the Brong-Ahafo Region, as well as other parts of the country. Indeed, such a scheme is being discussed at the national level for adoption as a policy in the central government's health delivery scheme. For instance, the Tano District has embarked on a similar scheme. The Jaman and the Asutifi districts are planning to follow soon. What is interesting is the involvement of the traditional rulers in these areas of welfare delivery. As a result of his keen interest in and concern for the success of the scheme, *Okatakyie* also became the chairman of the board of directors of the Nkoransa Community Health Insurance Scheme.

Considering his background and his particular concern for health issues, it is not surprising that a health problem was selected as the focus of the celebration of the 2001 annual festival.

IMPEDIMENTS

Although traditional rulers like *Okatakyie* Agyeman Kudom have good intentions to ensure that their subjects secure some of the comforts of life such as better health facilities and economic opportunities, often they are faced with real obstacles that sometimes frustrate their efforts. The major impediments are cash/resources and the activities of litigation contractors. Thus the *Munufie* festival was used as a means to bring together various development partners, including government representatives, government agents, foreign and local donor organizations, and NGOs,

as well as individual philanthropists. Also as part of the festival, many of the major disputes in the traditional area were resolved as part of the process of cleansing and renewing the state. This process also ensures that all members of the community play their parts effectively. For example, this author was present when friction emanating from the problem of who should control the local car park came to the fore on the first day of the festival. This economic problem had worked its way into the traditional politics of Nkoransa. Members of the local drivers union came to pay homage to *Okatakyie*. As part of their contribution towards the festival, they were instructed to provide vehicles to convey celebrants from the surrounding settlements into Nkoransa for the durbar. However, some of the traditional rulers who also operate as trade union officials of the drivers' union were found to be behind schemes to countermand the instruction due to competing interests. *Okatakyie* invited leaders of the various factions and resolved the dispute.

CONCLUSION

Festivals are social events that could be used as a platform by traditional rulers in their capacity as officers, agents, or partners in development with the central government to achieve the objectives of highlighting problems in their areas of jurisdiction and in a convivial atmosphere, to solicit assistance for improving the material welfare of people within their communities. In this regard, and also because festivals tend to bring together people from diverse backgrounds who otherwise would not meet to act in unison, it could be characterized as a public relations device. Prior to the establishment of the modern state, it was the responsibility of the traditional ruler to provide material welfare for the community, and festivals provided an important means for achieving this end. The transfer of governance from the traditional states to a centralized state tended to adversely affect the role of traditional rulers and such institutions as festivals. In recent times, as illustrated by the *Munufie Kese* festival, there has been a renewed effort in the celebration of traditional festivals as well as in the creation of new ones. This development is indicative of people's perception that traditional institutions could be deployed as platforms for modern development while

traditional rulers could function effectively as partners in this process. The traditional ruler is an important link between the community and the outside world, someone who could use his influence to generate awareness about matters that promote the best interests of the community.

NOTES

- 1 At Nkoranza, I was allowed limited access to some of the private performances because of the nature of my inquiry.
- 2 See also Warren (1970), 32, for further comments.
- 3 K.O. Frempong, "The Okwawu State," *Daily Graphic*, 23 October 2002.
- 4 *The Chronicle*, Accra, 22 October 2002; *Daily Graphic*, 23 October 2002.
- 5 Information provided by John Buro-Naa, a native of Takpo at his residence in Atonso, Kumase, 20 September 2002.
- 6 The *Nkoranzabene* is very proud of his association with Asante and asserts that he owes allegiance to the *Asantehene* but at the same time, is a member of the Brong Ahafo Regional House of Chiefs. His dual allegiance has sometimes been the subject of conflict with the Bron faction that would prefer not to be associated with Asante as it is reminiscent of defeat and disgrace.
- 7 Bafo Pim was also a grandnephew of the *Amakombene* who was also the father of the *Asantehene* Opoku Ware I (ca. 1720–1750).

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