

Abstract

Kingship (chieftaincy) is an institution that has existed since ancient times in Africa (Kludze, 2000). It is an institution that has played a major role in many Ghanaian ethnic groups as the governor of customary law. Important to traditional authority is the Queen Mother. She is the biological mother or close relation to the chief and offers advice and counsel to him. Today they have many roles in their communities including being diplomats and mediators as well as overseeing the welfare of women and children in the community. Western style social work has been present in West Africa since the 1940's encouraged by the United Nations and the Association of Social Work Educators in Africa. Social workers have been trained in Ghana since 1946 and work in government and non-government agencies. The development of communities and the social welfare of children and women are of concern to social workers as well as to Queen Mothers. In 2002, a group of social work researchers met for ten months to look at the indigenisation of social work curriculum in Ghana with a Queen Mother as part of this group. This article describes the important dialogue between social workers and the Queen Mother concerning their roles in the community with potential future collaboration with each other that would enhance community development.

Queen Mothers and Social Workers: A Potential collaboration between traditional authority and social work in Ghana

I. Introduction

Kingship (chieftaincy) is an institution that has existed since ancient times in Africa (Kludze, 2000). It is an institution that has played a major role in many Ghanaian ethnic groups as the governor of customary law. Traditionally, the role of the king at the divisional level was to administer the Division, look after the spiritual, physical and emotional welfare of the people, to maintain law and order, consult with elders, lead the army into battle and act as mediator between ancestors and the clans (Busia, 1951). Today, they work with the government on national policies and are protectors of customary law. Within this traditional authority is a person of importance, particularly with the Astante, who is a Queen Mother. She is the biological mother or close relation to the chief and offers advice and counsel to him. Today they have many roles in their communities including being diplomats and mediators as well as overseeing the welfare of women and children in the community.

Western style social work has been present in West Africa since the 1940's and in the 1950's the United Nations encouraged the continual development of social work education through Schools of Social Work in all of Africa. The Association of Social Work Educators in Africa (ASWEA), along with the Ghana Association of Social Workers (GASOW), were active from the 1970's to the 1980's in promoting social work in West Africa. Through the years of independence these groups organized seminars to deal with issues surrounding independence and social development. Social workers have been trained in Ghana since 1946 and work in government departments of the

Department of Social Welfare and the Department of Community Development as well as international and indigenous non-government organizations.

The development of communities and the social welfare of children and women are of concern to social workers as well as to Queen Mothers. However little has been written concerning the relationship between traditional authority and social work practice in Ghana. In 2002, a group of social work researchers met for ten months to look at the indigenisation of social work curriculum in Ghana with a Queen Mother as part of this group. What emerged was an important dialogue between social workers and the Queen Mother concerning their roles in the community. The purpose of this article is to share this relationship between a group of social workers and a Queen Mother through a group process of Participatory Action Research (PAR). The interaction between these people shows similarities and differences in their roles, the importance of understanding each other's roles as well as the potential for collaboration in research and development in communities. In order to better understand the interaction of these roles it is first necessary to examine the office of the Queen Mother and the history of the profession of social work in Ghanaian society.

II. Background and role of Queen Mothers

“It is when the chief has good councilors that his reign becomes peaceful” (Ghanaian proverb, Gyekye, 1996, p. 119). In pre-colonial Ghana, the king had an advisor, the Queen Mother, who watched the king's behaviour, gave advice as to the candidates for a new king and was involved in marriage considerations (Obeng, 1988). Rattray (1929) describes the role of the Queen Mother as “the whisper behind the Stool” (p. 88). She was the next most important person in many pre-colonial states and other polities. In the eras

of the colonial and post-colonial states, these political systems became known as traditional authorities (Ray, 2003). Historically, the Asante Queen Mothers were very powerful; two good examples were Akyaawa Yikwan and Yaa Asantewaa. During the 1820's and 1830's, Akyaawa Yikwan "was a diplomat and negotiator in the Asante disputes with the British" (Brydon, 1996, p. 230). In 1900, Yaa Asantewaa led the Asante army against the British in the Kumasi Kingdom and elsewhere in the Asante Kingdom. However, this war was lost by the Asante Kingdom, and the British re-gained control over the Asante Kingdom (Brydon, 1996; Salm & Falola, 2002).

The Queen Mother is the biological mother or close relation to the chief (Nukunya, 1992). A summary of her role was given at the International Chieftaincy Conference in Accra, Ghana in January 2004 by Boateng (2003), who gives his understanding of what should be the role of the Queen Mother in society.

She is the number one royal in her lineage, can't be the chief's wife and she is the mother of the occupant of the stool, which means that in essence the stool belongs to her. She is a community social welfare officer. She makes sure everyone gets their resources fairly. She is a liaison officer between people and services. She is a role model for women and children and explains policies to them concerning their lives. She is involved in health education and keeps up with her own education in order to serve others. She encourages and helps women to be economically strong and gives advice as to how to raise children. She is a guidance counsellor to chiefs, parents and children. She supervises puberty rites or picks someone to supervise these rights.

She can be a member of the Queen Mother's Association who "lobbies traditional and political leaders in order to influence traditional and public policy in favour of women" (Fayorsey, 2003, p. 6). The court of the Queen Mother is a place in which social issues are brought to the attention of the court and sorted out there. "If you go and sit in the court of the Queen Mother, for example, a lot of the social issues will come up at that particular court. That is where you have the social issues coming up in an Akan set up. So

you sit there and just listen and you see how the matter is resolved, what mechanisms are being used and so on” (Sutherland Addy, 2003).

Today the Ashanti Region continues a strong line of Queen Mothers, mainly due to its matrilineal society. Other ethnic groups, like the Ga and Ewe, do not have this strong leadership (Kludze, 2000). Ray (2000) states some important issues concerning the role of Queen Mothers in today’s Ghanaian society. “ The question of whether women can be chiefs, and if so, what type of chief, including Queen Mothers, has been a hotly debated issue in Ghana for sometime” (p. 8). Former Ghanaian president, Flight Lieutenant J. J. Rawlings and his advisors “were pushing for paramount Queen Mothers to be made members of those Regional House of Chiefs where such offices existed in the Region” (p. 9). This has yet to be achieved. They are “excluded from participation in decision-making bodies, like the Houses of Chiefs and the National House of Chiefs on the basis of their gender” (p. 10). This situation needs to be addressed, as Queen Mothers are extraordinary diplomats, mediators and community social workers and are very aware that they have a role in modernizing the traditional institution and becoming part of the National House of Chiefs.

III. The Profession of social work

Western social work

Social work is a western-based profession that emerged from the United States and the United Kingdom at the end of the 1800’s. It is a profession that grew out of the need to offer assistance and support to a growing number of people who were not benefiting from the emerging capitalist society (Healy, 2001). Today, the international body of the social

work profession, the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW), describes the role of social work for the 21st century as follows.

The social work profession promotes social change, problem solving in human relationships and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance well-being. Utilising theories of human behaviour and social systems, social work intervenes at the points where people interact with their environments. Principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental to social work (IFSW, 2005, p. 2).

According to DuBois & Miley, (2005) social workers have four main goals: To “1) enhance social functioning of individual, families, groups, organizations and communities, 2) link client systems with needed resources, 3) improve the operation of the social service delivery network and 4) promote social justice through development of social policy” (p. 11). Social workers are involved in government and non-government organizations including social welfare, the health sector, the schools, the work place, corrections, housing, economics and community development. They work at the individual, group and community levels with all age groups.

Ghanaian social work.

Pre-colonial. The history of the profession of social work in Ghana coincides with the development of a social welfare system through the colonial administration. However, according to Apt & Blavo (1997) social work existed before colonialism.

Before colonialism, social problems were solved within the context of a traditional system, which had always been an integral part of social life of the indigenous people. This traditional system was a social institution of extended families characterized by strong family ties, which assured the security of its members. The system dictated its social norms, safeguarded its moral values and conserved its economic base (p. 320).

Different people in the community performed social work tasks in pre-colonial times.

Colonial period. During the early years of the white settlers “religious missions to the Gold Coast, working closely with ethnic societies, provided various charities for families in

need” (Apt & Blavo, 1997, p. 320). Eventually, the need for trained social workers began with the breakdown of the family institutions.

When Ghana was colonized our extended family system and the power of the chiefs broke down and this also came with its problems so the colonists brought in what they call “social work” to help solve the problems due to the capitalist economy and the broken down extended family (Blavo, 2003).

Two factors especially influenced the government to take action to help those in need. On June 22, 1939 an earthquake with a magnitude of 6.5 on the Richter scale struck the Gold Coast (Amponsah, 2003) and many people lost their homes as a result. Also, veterans from the Second World War returning to Ghana experienced family problems related to separation due to war. A social work faculty member explains.

In 1939 there was this earthquake and there was the destruction of houses. We had a transitional government and it was put upon the government to provide houses for those who lost their own homes. The earthquake, that was when social welfare started ... and you know we had our veterans coming back and during the absences so much went down the drain, the families were not together anymore, children were wayward, mothers and wives who were left behind married others so around this time social welfare took on other dimensions other than the housing issues (Mensah, 2003).

In 1929, the British government passed the first Colonial Development Act (Wicker, 1958). This led to the Colonial Development and Welfare Act of 1940. Development projects were requested that “maximized co-operation of the local peoples in the initiation and execution of projects” (p. 182). In 1946, the Department of Social Welfare and Housing was created. Other changes followed. “A social development branch of this department was set up in 1948, which has now become the Community Development Department. In 1951, social welfare separated from housing and a Ministry of Education and Social Welfare was created” (Apt & Blavo, 1997, p. 320). The Department of Social Welfare and Community Development was created in 1952. The first recruits in Ghana

for the profession were volunteers and experienced people “who had acquired some knowledge of human beings ... they recruited experienced and mature people to do the work, especially teachers and people who had worked in the villages ” (Blavo, 2003). The training was short because they had the background information concerning human behaviour and all they needed was the social work methods subjects.

In 1948, an indigenous development took place in Ghana that used the skills of social workers. This was the community development movement (Du Sautoy, 1958) and grew “during the 1950s as one of the most important factors in the social and economic development of the country” (Abloh & Ameyan, 1997). More importantly, community development depended upon inspired voluntary leaders (Du Sautoy, 1958) who were the educated in the villages including teachers, clerks and storekeepers. They were to act as volunteer teachers and needed to be able to read, write and do simple math. Traditional local leaders contributed through their expert knowledge and skills in the area of village development (Abloh & Ameyan, 1997). Work with village leaders was important at the beginning as “there was a need to help village leaders to a greater understanding of the many improvements advocated and to an appreciation of the part they can play in achieving such improvements in their village” (Du Sautoy, 1958, p. 51). Before any mass education campaign began “workers talked to the Chief, elders and literate leaders about the establishment of literacy classes” (p. 88).

The profession of social work in Ghana was influenced by both indigenous and western practices. Asamoah (1995) states, “African social work has historical roots which are value based, indigenous and imported” (p. 223). However, generally speaking, Asamoah & Beverly (1988) point out the short-sightedness of the colonial welfare policy

as “a) failure to take a holistic view of the human condition, (b) an overriding importance of political considerations, (c) minimization of the positive effects of traditional structures, and (d) emphasis on economic expediency or advantage for the colonial power instead of benefiting the colonies” (p. 178).

Post-colonial. According to Apt & Blavo (1997) “social work in Ghana is a social organization dedicated to the enhancement of the quality of life of Ghanaians, the strengthening of family life, and the control of adverse conditions which retard national progress” (p. 321). They work at the individual, group and community level with a strong leaning towards community development. Besides holding key administrative roles in the Departments of Social Welfare and Community Development, social workers have an important preventative role “to conscientize the public to environmental hazards and social stresses; inform it about resources available; interpret government social policy; and increase the government’s awareness of the needs of the nation” (p. 326). Social workers are involved in the following areas. They give

talks at public forums and durbars of traditional rulers; informal education features in the mass media; serve as resource persons at seminars, workshops and conferences; participate in activities of neighbourhood and community centres; provide leadership in welfare programs of children, youth, women, and the aged; and prepare material for adult functional literacy and adult education programs” (p. 326).

Community development activities in which social workers are involved include “cooperation with local authorities and village development committees for raising rural standards of living” (p. 326).

Summary

The role of social workers in enhancing social functioning of all individual, groups and communities, linking resources for communities, developing service delivery and

involvement in development are activities that reflect some of the Queen Mother's activities in the community. Both are concerned with quality of life, strengthening of the family and working to offer guidance in conflict and mediation in disputes. The potential collaboration between social workers and Queen Mother's can be a way to strengthen the profession of social work as well as the Queen Mother's role in the community and in Ghana. What follows is an account of research facilitated in Ghana in 2003 and the emerging dialogue between social workers and a Queen Mother concerning each other's roles in society.

IV. Collaboration between Queen Mothers and social workers

Introduction

The relationship between traditional authority and social work has not been explored fully in Ghanaian academic literature and in the profession of social work. During the 1970's and 80's the Association of Social Work Educators in Africa (ASWEA) organized many seminars and there was no written dialogue concerning the role of traditional authority and social work in their twenty-one published documents. However, the Ghana Association of Social Workers (GASOW) also organized seminars during this time in which some papers highlighted the important role of traditional authority in development. The Seminar "Popular Participation and the New Local Government System" (GASOW, 1975) refers to the importance of social workers understanding traditional authority in the rural areas. "You as social workers whose work brings you into constant touch with the rural people do not need any arguments or examples to prove to you that the authority of these traditional rulers is very much alive indeed" (Boateng, 1975, p. 33). A paper was presented at the same seminar concerning the role of traditional authority in the

participation of local government. Ghanaian speaker and chief, Nii Anyetei Kwakwanya II from La Mantse, Labadi, stated the importance of collaboration with traditional authority.

The men and officers who bring news and programmes of ‘modernity’ are strangers who speak a different language and do not understand the ways of doing things in a particular community. They can only get through to the people if the people see the traditional authority in the vanguard of change...traditional authorities have been able to generate enthusiasm and support for development projects in all corners of the country (Kwakwanya II, 1975, p. 151-152).

In November 2002 a Participatory Action Research (PAR) project was facilitated in Accra, Ghana with the purpose of “providing a creative and empowering environment so that ordinary Ghanaians could explore social work education and practice through the historical factors affecting the exportation of western social work knowledge” (Kreitzer, 2004, p. 30). With a group of Ghanaian social workers, students and faculty the group had a ten-month dialogue concerning the social work curriculum being taught at the University of Ghana and how relevant it is to Ghanaian society. The group met twice a month for three hours and after the initial four or five workshops they agreed that in order to look at the indigenisation of social work curriculum in Ghana, it would be important to spend one workshop looking at social work in Ghana and the other looking at Ghanaian/African culture. All types of knowledge were used in the process including oral tradition (storytelling, art, drama, songs, poems proverbs), academic articles, reflections, guest speakers, document analysis and knowledge gained from the interaction at the group workshops.

Queen Mother in the midst

Important to the make-up of the group was a Queen Mother, Nana Boatema Afrikoma II, who was an advisor to the group concerning cultural issues. She is the Paramount

Queen Mother for Juansa, Asante Akyem North District in the Ashanti Region, a community leader, volunteer for women's affairs, church leader in her village and a retired teacher. She is currently a school proprietess for Siriboe Memorial School, Kaneshie and is a former president of the Ashanti Regional Queen Mother's Association. She represents the Queen mother's at conferences and workshops and represented them at the women's conference in Beijing. In Beijing she facilitated a workshop concerning the role of Ashanti Queen Mothers. The Queen Mother is not a trained social worker. The difficulties of finding a Queen Mother who had trained as a social worker was a reality we had to face. However, she had attended social policy conferences regularly at the university and was interested in social policy issues.

As facilitator of the project, I approached the Queen Mother at the First International Chieftaincy Conference in January 2003 in Accra, Ghana. I presented a letter to her concerning the project, spent time talking with her about the project and the purpose of the research. She expressed some reservation about joining, as she was not a trained social worker, but agreed to come and see if it was something she felt she could contribute to. Due to her position in society I was conscious that the PAR process, non-hierarchical in nature, would feel uncomfortable to her. I made it clear that it was a group process and during this time all group members were considered equal to each other.

The Queen Mother began attending the research group at the third workshop and attended them regularly throughout the ten months. It was clear that she was sacrificing her other duties as a Queen Mother in order to attend the workshops. She apologized at one workshop for being late.

I am very sorry I am late. I am from a wedding. As soon as the reverend minister finished with his part I had to leave. I didn't take part in the refreshment because that

would take another one hour. I asked for permission to and rushed to my son's house. I didn't want to come in my regalia. I had to leave everything. Change quickly and I am here.

I promised Linda that I would come here at 11:30. I left the house at ten. There is a funeral, my eldest sister lost her husband and he will be buried on the 12th. And the family meetings, I am leading everything. So, I told them today I would be late because I had to come here. Because I was worried about Linda's program and all that. I had wanted to come earlier, so I promise you that at our next meeting I will be the first to be here.

Throughout the research process she read all of the articles that were given to her and she took the opportunity to understand the role of social workers in Ghana and in other parts of Africa. At the end of the research project, we created a video concerning social work in Ghana. The Queen Mother was encouraged to take part. She organized herself to be filmed at a ceremony at her school and linked social workers with traditional authority in the video. She says in the video;

I have seen that the social workers need us, the Queen Mothers and we the Ahemaa need the social worker. Because they liase with the community. And when a social worker comes to my village the first thing he or she has to do is to see the traditional rulers, talk about the issues and explain the purpose of their presence in the village. And when they talk the community will understand and will know the help that they are going to get from the social worker.

The other group members appreciated her overall participation in the research project. One commented: "She can speak as our traditional leader".

Although not trained as a social worker but as an educationalist, throughout our discussions there were two clear observations: 1) her role as a Queen Mother in her community seemed similar to the role of a social worker in the community, and 2) the Queen Mothers, generally, and social workers in their training did not really understand each other's role in the community. Through this unique encounter with a group of social workers and a Queen Mother, each group member came to appreciate and understand

more fully the work that each did in society. The relationships that emerged from this research tell a story of how the two jobs can be similar and how, through cooperation with each other, the professions together can empower the community for effective change.

The PAR process involves knowledge generation at different levels. Park (2001) identifies three type of knowledge in PAR, that of representational (correlational, causal and interpretive) knowledge, reflective (critical thinking and action oriented) knowledge and relational (act of relating and expressing ones self in words, expressions, actions and doing) knowledge. The relational knowledge that is produced through a group research project of this nature is extremely important. Although all three types of knowledge were evident in the research the following describes the relational knowledge that centred on the Queen Mother: the Queen Mother's relationship to the PAR process (including myself as facilitator and the other group members) and the Queen Mother's relationship to society (community and social work).

V. The Queen Mother's relationship to the PAR process

Introduction

The first time the Queen Mother came to the workshop the group stood up and acknowledged her presence there. After that time we did not do so as she was often the first person to arrive. At the beginning it was unclear to everyone including the Queen Mother as to her role in the group. I write about this ambiguity.

What amazed me was her ability to summarize what we had been saying, share her wisdom and experience and bring such important knowledge to the group. I have spent time with her about her role in the group as I felt that was preventing her from coming. Once we clarified her role, she felt comfortable in coming along to the workshop.

On her first visit she states “I don’t know where I come in here, but if any, at any given time there is a point you want me to explain I am here to do that for you. Thank you very much (Group gives her a clap)”. Over time, the group saw her as a colleague and friend and felt comfortable with her there. She was able to adapt her role in the community in order to have an equal relationship with the members of the group. She obviously enjoyed coming as she continued attending throughout and found a niche for herself. She participated in the group dialogue and any other activities we did with enthusiasm. She gave of her wisdom and knowledge without too long of a dialogue (although I did ask her to shorten her examples if possible due to time) and only when she felt it was appropriate. She brought homemade food from her house to share with us all on occasions. I often asked her to end the workshop by summarizing what we had learned that day and she did this very efficiently. The following describes the relationships built with the Queen Mother by myself as facilitator and with other group members.

Relationship with facilitator

One of the nicest parts of the research project for me was getting to know the Queen Mother in her own home in Kaneshie. We would sit in her lovely garden and talk about the research, her role in the group and life generally. I write in my journal

I went to see the Queen Mother. We talked about the workshop and I told her that I was pleased people have taken her as their own. One of her purposes of being in the group is to establish links with traditional authority and social workers. We talked about the beads I bought, as she is an expert on Ghanaian beads.

She educated me in the ways of traditional leaders and told me stories about her own life and work. She was helpful in translating Twi and Ga proverbs used in the workshops and also helped me translate Ghanaian words that I could not understand from the tape. After each workshop I brought her a copy of the transcript and sitting under the large

tree, with the headphones on, she would listen to the tape from the workshop and interpret different words in Akan, Ga or Fante. Then, together we would write them out on the transcript and translate them into English. We would also sit and talk about culture, politics and the role of the Queen Mother in society. This gave me a chance to ask wider questions concerning issues in Ghana and in Africa.

The more I learned about Ghanaian society, the more I realized how little I knew about Ghanaian society. I would try to clarify things I did not understand with the group and at times I found that I had misinterpreted what people had said. On several occasions the Queen Mother would correct me on these misinterpretations and advise me on the appropriate interpretation of what was said. On other occasions she would let me know when my gestures were inappropriate, for example, using my left hand to give someone a gift.

Due to the uncertainty, at the beginning, of how her role in the group would evolve, I did talk with other group members about her importance to the research process throughout the project. Over time they seemed to accept that she was important to the process of looking at the indigenisation of social work curriculum. As speakers came and acknowledged her presence there, her advice and wisdom was appreciated much more and the group would sometimes clap at the end of her speaking. The greatest compliment she gave me near the end of our time together was that I was like a daughter to her.

Relationship with other group member

One of the most impressive qualities of the Queen Mother was her willingness to be an equal colleague in the group situation and to take the risk of joining despite the ambiguity of her role. She was also aware that group members were not used to being

around a Queen Mother. A question asked at the beginning was whether she should come every week or be more of a guest speaker? In understanding and being sensitive to her busy lifestyle, the group members offered her the option of coming only when she felt like it and as one group member said, “we had to make things a little bit flexible for her so she can make her contribution in so many ways”. She ended up participating in all of the workshops and most activities around the research project. She was a great mixer, related to everyone and respected everyone in the group. Age and status posed no barrier to her. One group member speaks of what she learned from the Queen Mother. “I learnt about humility. The Queen Mother was humble and it made and still makes me strive to be humbler”.

Generally speaking group members saw traditional authority as having influence at the local level. Several give their understanding of this role in society. One comments:

They are now more moving to development, mobilizing their community more than determining the kids...they are now coming up with an educational fund to help educate their people. They are the overseers of our festivals and traditions...they are role models.

The group members had their own ideas of what a Queen Mother represented and her role in the community. One group member writes the following.

The Queen Mother is a symbol of authority and power. She provides social services in the traditional setting. She ensures that there is peace and unity among her people. It is her responsibility as a leader to encourage her people to obey the laws of the country and carry out their civic responsibilities. She summons meetings with sub-chiefs and the elders to discuss the problems of the community. They also plan towards the development of the people, participate in communal labour and settles disputes and conflicts of members of the community through arbitration with her elders. They play a very important function as social workers in the traditional setting.

Another saw her role as particularly informed in traditional and customary information.

Another member states “it is her duty to bring development to her people and nation”. In

short, she represents traditional culture, is a provider of social services, a role model and leader and a future developer of her country.

One of the challenges of having the Queen Mother there was that at the beginning she had little idea of what social workers do. Therefore, some of her contributions had little bearing on the topics being discussed but this improved over time. No one challenged her on this as no one challenges traditional authority and the group accepted this as part of the Queen Mother. Although it is not common in Ghana to work in this capacity with a traditional authority figure, over time people felt more comfortable with her presence there.

The group members saw the Queen Mother's role in the group as 1) an advocate to promote social work in Ghana through traditional authority; 2) a resource for sharing knowledge about Ghanaian culture and her role as Queen Mother in society; 3) a role model; 4) an opportunity for group members to work closely with traditional authority; 5) an interpreter of the motives behind traditional practices; 6) a contributor of knowledge from a non-social work perspective; and 7) an advisor to social workers of the importance of working with traditional authority in the social work practice. A group member speaks of her affect on the group. "As president of the Ashanti Queen Mothers Association, her ability to control situations was particularly useful to the group, she had an excellent sense of humour and she used it creatively". Several group members felt that the group had educated the Queen Mother as to 1) the role of a social worker; 2) a new way of group work that respected the authority of the traditional ruler but in a non-hierarchical way; and 3) respect and acceptance of divergent views and opinions. One group member

states, “She had a very cordial relationship with everyone.” This positive attitude came through at her first meeting, when she apologized for not being at the first two meetings.

I am a very busy body. I am sorry from the very beginning of your meetings I have not been able to be with you. Even today I should have traveled but I had to cancel ... because missing meetings I didn't like it that way. I am just one piece and I am glad today that I am here to meet all of you. I hope I am going to do my best to help in my small way, since I am not a social worker but a Queen Mother (laughter).

The group project highlighted the positive relationship that social workers can have with traditional authority and how interacting with Queen Mothers, in particular, can be of benefit to the social worker. One group member states,

her involvement enriched the group and the research project since the group realized the need to involve the traditional rulers in any social development program if it is to succeed. It also enabled the group to respect and accept divergent views and opinions.

Another states, “I saw her as our mother and her ability to sometimes integrate her experiences in whatever was discussed was great”. By the end of the research all members valued her contribution and could see the importance of such an influential traditional leader as part of the research. She could also advocate for social workers in Ghana. She says this herself.

Whenever the Queen Mothers meet, I will talk to them about the work of the social worker. Whenever they have a social worker in their community, they have to help, to accommodate that person, invite that person to talk to the community members and discuss about their issues ... so by inviting them and making them comfortable in our communities they will make the community's life more enjoyable...and we all now love and will work hard to help the social worker do his or her work in the village without tears.

Another group member stated, “Nana is the mother of all people in the community. One of the aspects of social workers is that we deal with people's problems. Nana is fortunately an educationalist too. She works in collaboration with social workers”.

Finally, she found the whole experience educational. She talks about her learning experience.

Linda was able to give us pieces of materials from other countries. I thought I would not be able to read, because of my schedule of work, but I made time and read all...now I know the work of a social worker...now I appreciate the work of the social worker in the community ... I am going to sing their song about them wherever I go.

The relationship that was built between group members and the Queen Mother was important to the group process and will be important to social work development in the future.

VI. The Queen Mother's relationship with society

Introduction

Cultural issues can be complex in Ghana. Relating them to social work education and practice is a challenge when living in a society that has so many different cultural influences. For example, western thinking and its emphasis on the nuclear family, in contrast to the indigenous African family that includes the extended family, has influenced the African family. This can be seen in relation to traditional property rights where Ghanaians now may give their property directly to their children. Another example of cultural influences concern ideas around misfortune. In the western world, when misfortune happens, it is considered bad luck. Ghanaian culture would say there was more to it than that. Something else is responsible for the misfortune. These different beliefs and knowledge bases are important to identify in social work education so that the development of practice acknowledges these differences. One speaker challenged us, as social workers, to think about changes in society.

You are all pioneers because the situation has changed. The ethnic group is no longer the only authority. The home, the family, the lineage is no longer the only authority.

People are out there with various options...the ground has shifted considerably. The things you hold on to have shifted...you and your husband are in a situation where abuse is much more possible than when you were living near extended family and you as a woman are abusing a situation because your mother's and aunties are not there. So what do we do under those conditions?

In coming to terms with these different influences the group members asked questions such as the following.

How do we deal with these beliefs and how do we decide what cultural practices are appropriate and what practices need changing through education? b) Should we even be changing these beliefs or create new social services systems that are more acceptable and conducive to these beliefs?; c) What harmful practices, like trokosi¹ and female genital mutilation,² could social workers change by creating alternatives that would address the issues behind these practices (adult initiation rights) in a more healthy and positive light?

Asking these questions created an opening to link the knowledge of the Queen Mother with the issues we raised concerning social work in Ghana. Her cultural knowledge proved important to the research in regards to social work and community.

Relationship to the community

The Queen Mother had much to say about the changing society of Ghana. She spoke of the children in the villages and how they consider people from the urban areas as role models. She also spoke of the dependency cycle that is very apparent in villages today and the importance of empowerment of people to be independent. She reminded us of the quote of "Give a man a fish and he eats for a day, teach him how to fish and you feed him for a lifetime". The dependency cycle was of concern to group members and the group spoke about the importance of strengthening and empowering individuals, groups and

¹ Trokosi – fetish slaves – is a form of ritual slavery, which has been practiced for several hundred years. It is a type of slavery where a family must offer a virgin daughter to the gods to atone for the "sins and crimes" of a relative who, in most cases, may be long dead...whatever the crimes, offending individuals and families have a duty to turn their young girls, between the ages of eight and fifteen over to serve as slaves to the gods via the priest for atonement (Owusu-Ansah, 2003).

² Female genital mutilation, also referred to as female circumcision, genital cutting or excisions, is a coming of age ritual that signifies a girl's entry in to womanhood (Pearson Education, 2005).

communities to seek alternatives to promised government support that continually gets cut back. She also spoke of the way it used to be concerning training children. Respect for elders, sanitation, keeping clean at home and etiquette at home were important values. However these seemed to have changed and kids appear to be less respectful these days.

She gave us insight as to her role as a Queen Mother and how frustrating protocol can be at times. For example, as Queen Mother, she works with NGO's to co-ordinate conferences and workshops when Queen Mothers are part of the program. Protocol demands that the Asantehemaa be informed of these conferences so she can give permission for this to take place. The personal example she gave of the frustrations concerning protocol educated the other group members as to her role as a Queen Mother. One of our speakers from the Institute of African Studies was able to give the group some insight into formal situations concerning the Queen Mother. "Right now Nana is a seminar participant but if we went to her formally, I could not speak to her like this. I would have to know that this is Nana's linguist". One speaker then connected the role of the Queen Mother to our activities as social workers. Concerning the profession's wish to change what seem to be harmful practices, she states,

We are talking about ways of doing things that are entrenched. That begins to be a problem in the first place ... you as social workers are confronted with centuries of history. Years and years of practice that you have to, you want to try and get people to break away. And they (community people) have to have a very good reason why they should not do it. So it is very important that you know what is traditionally done and what is the person's interpretation of that tradition...you have to know what certain philosophy or view of life people have.

What western and indigenous social systems are appropriate in Ghana? Who are the groups who decide what knowledge is or is not relevant and important? Who understands the underlying philosophies or views of Ghanaian people? How can indigenous social

work models be created when these questions are unanswered? The confusion of living in a mixed culture and the difficulty of knowing which cultural beliefs are appropriate and which are inappropriate challenged one group member to ask the following questions.

“How do we get to the source and who is the actual source that we should go to if we should have conflict in dealing with our culture. Who is really the authority, the pointer?

I know that Nana is there but sometimes the Nanas have their own entrenched positions so who then becomes my pointer?” One speaker suggested traditional authority.

We live in many different worlds at the same time and that is the challenge for anybody who is a social worker or who wants to deal with our society at this time. Because the person themselves who you are dealing with is trying to handle all of that. They are balancing a lot of things. And I think that we need to recognize that and see what to do in that situation and it is partly because “where are the points of reference?” Who is providing the points of reference? That is where the Queen Mother and the people who are the custodians of the culture become very very important.

The importance of traditional authority in relation to changing cultural issues was highlighted as an important resource for social workers in their jobs, particularly in the rural areas. Who is guiding Ghanaian culture and if it is the traditional authority then their understanding of cultural changes and the way in which people think about traditional ways is important for a social worker to know when working in a community. When addressing issues that may be deemed as inappropriate to Ghanaian society an understanding of how people think and see these traditional activities are enhanced through dialogue between traditional authority and social workers. One speaker challenged social workers on the issues of female genital mutilation (abolished in Ghana in 1994) and trosoki (abolished in Ghana in 1998) practices seen as harmful and outlawed in Ghana.

Unfortunately, what we see today is that people think the solution to all of our problems is by means of law. You just rush to Parliament and pass a law and that is it. Female genital mutilation, done. You can't do it but nobody understands why they can't do it so they still continue to do it. If you take the trouble to study our society and you know that there are opinion leaders, the Queen Mothers, there are chiefs, the headmen, there are ritual specialists. Perhaps if you can get these people together to dialogue about these things they may even find better ways, better strategies for putting a package together that at the end of the day will persuade people to shift from what they are doing.

The communication and collaboration with traditional authority to change or adapt practices that are deemed harmful in society is a positive way for traditional authority and social workers to work together for the betterment of society. One of the important aspects of collaboration between these two roles is the understanding of each other's roles in society.

Relationship to social work

As stated earlier, the Queen Mother was not very aware of the role of a social worker in society although she had attended social policy conferences at the university. As she continued to attend the workshops her understanding increased through listening and reading the articles given to her. She was then able to give examples through storytelling of the kinds of social work tasks she is involved in with her communities. A few examples will be highlighted here.

Examples of social work practice. Social workers are concerned with social justice and often take part in social action that helps their clients improve their situation. The Queen Mother spoke of an experience, during the time of Nkrumah, when as an educationalist, she was teaching in a school in which the students had no desks or books. The Minister of Education had visited the school and assured the teachers that education would be free with resources available and the teachers were to encourage their children

to come to school. Nothing happened for a couple of years and this was frustrating for teachers and students. Eventually the Head of all schools was coming around to visit so Nana and the other teachers told the children to sit on the floor with slates and pieces of chalk. When the head arrived, he was surprised to see no books and no furniture and told them the money had been sent and asked what they did with it? No one knew of this money, it obviously didn't get to the children. The books and furniture came soon after this display of social action. This type of creative protest is something that the Queen Mother, as a teacher, had seen fit to do to fight for the right of children to have books and furniture.

Another example concerned the Asantehene's Educational Fund in which the traditional authority is responsible. Every Paramountcy pays 200,000 cedis a year towards the fund for one boy and one girl for that year and the children receive this fund for three years. The children have to live in the Ashanti region but can be of any ethnic group and have to be attending school in the Ashanti region. Children are tested for the scholarship and priority is given to children from poor homes and those who are orphaned. The Queen Mother told us of a young orphan girl who did well in her exams and received a scholarship from this fund. Due to receiving this scholarship, there was family tension and the girl went to live with her grandmother who did not take good care of her. She became pregnant during her school days and the Queen Mother sent for her because she was responsible for her education through the Asantehene's Educational Fund. The girl missed her first exams but did well in the second exams. She delivered twins and the Queen Mother went to the Director of the secondary school to inform him that the girl would no longer be able to attend secondary school and would be placed in a vocational

school. The research group members were able to question the reason for the girl moving to the vocational school and offered some guidance. “If that girl did well in her exams, as you are saying, let’s give her the chance to continue to secondary school. She may be one of the greatest teachers this country has produced. Please let her go”. This challenged the Queen Mother to look at alternative ways to approach this child’s education instead of the normal route of vocational schooling. Not only did the Queen Mother have to sort out who would take care of the twins while she was in school but had to be a mediator between the family, extended family and the father of the twin’s family. She successfully negotiated the monthly payment for the twins by the family of the father and arranged the girls living situation, all of which are similar tasks of a social worker. She explained that they are funding eight girls through the Asantehene’s Educational Fund and are working with the parents, through group meetings, to accept some responsibility for their children’s food and clothing. Once the girls receive the scholarship often parents do not want to help any more and her task is to education parents as to their continual responsibilities to the child so that the fund could be successful. Individual and group work is what this Queen Mother was involved in concerning this case, much like that of a social worker. One group member summed up the above experience. “You are the liaison between the community and the social work agency. You identify problems within your community, liase with the social workers and then you try to help them solve the problems or do some referrals to appropriate agencies”.

Social workers have always been advocates for good day care and nursery school and this was also true for the Queen Mother. She was the coordinator of the Commission on Children in 1984 and remembered that parents at that time, when their children entered

day care or nursery, wanted them to speak English and to forget their mother tongue and indigenous objects. Not only did she support a more indigenous education she also fought to keep day care and nursery schools open.

About ten years ago I argued about this when they started the JSS (Junior Secondary School) and they wanted to close almost all of the day care centres in the villages and in the districts. I said that if you want these children to be able to grow and behave well and to enter your JSS and go to your universities all of that, where are they to be trained? They have to start from, in their early days go to a day care centre or nursery school to be trained and to be helped to help the children to be independent. But nobody seemed to understand what I was trying to say.

Finally, the Queen Mother told us of her work with family laws, the registration of marriages and the intestate succession laws. The traditional rulers were trained to tell people in the villages about these rules and laws. This education prevents villagers from being cheated of their rights and shows them how to look after their children. Connecting this educational role to that of a social worker, a group dialogue follows.

Group member – So you are proactive like the social worker (Lots of discussion about this pursued but the point that was strongly made was that Queen Mothers often do social work tasks and are very important to social workers)

Queen Mother – We were asked to educate. You see we know these things but we haven't thought of it that it has something to do with social work.

Group member – You have the social work thing.

The Queen Mother was also involved with research. Not only was she involved with my own research but she also assisted a niece from America to come and interview women and children concerning malaria in her villages. She got all of the leaders together and organized the women and children who would be interviewed. She spoke to all of the teachers involved in the project to permit the researcher to go ahead with the interviews. It was clear that the Queen Mother paved the way for the researcher to enter a village and talk to the women without hostility. There were times in which the Queen Mother stated in the group that she was not part of the social welfare system but that she was our

traditional authority that helps us with culture. I think she felt more comfortable in that role. She states,

I am not in your system. I was able to read the history, how social work came into being and the people who have handled it so far. And the role and the activities they have to play. And I think this has given me insight of what I am to expect from a social worker in case somebody is posted to my village. Thank you very much.

These examples show similar roles between Queen Mother's and social workers and how they both engage in activities concerning social issues in the community. As the research drew to a close questions were asked by the social workers as to how traditional authority and social workers can work more collaborative together and what indigenous social mechanisms could social workers use in creating and developing social programs.

Indigenous social mechanisms. Guest speakers and the Queen Mother were able to share various indigenous social mechanisms that are used in society to relieve societal tensions, something social workers are involved in at the individual, group and community levels. For example, one speaker gave examples of ceremonies, practices and community building exercises to relieve societal tension. In particular, she spoke of the ceremony of Asafo, a day when all men in the community can forget "protocol, speak as you like however rude it is, dress any way you like and use a lot of very very profane languages" towards the chiefs and elders. This is usually done in a singsong fashion. Other examples she gave were of women forming a circle, usually pounding fufu (ground cassava); they "sing about life, about birth, about their lovers and husbands and so forth ... a space is created in which the release of tension through song or chants or through language is provided." Other parts of Africa were also used as examples and in particular one of the speakers told us about Nigeria where a virtual battle is played out.

The purpose is to displace your anger and displace what you anguish or whatever it is in the artistic realm ... they have a festival in which there is a battle between the two protagonists ... it is a mock battle and somehow they managed to conquer each other and then they eat together.

The Queen Mother gave an example of the time she and the Asantehemaa were at a funeral together. A group of youth came to the funeral at 2am with cutlasses and sticks, were dressed in black and they came and stood in front of the Asantehemaa. They started singing to the Asantehemaa. They sang “Asantehemaa, you are not boss over us. There were some people braver than you. We are not afraid of you”. The Queen Mother was quite frightened but the lesson for her was that during funerals people become brave to say what they want and they are to be left free to do whatever they want to do. She expresses her thoughts about this experience, “They were telling stories. Telling people that they have lost somebody...every community has their own ways of mourning and telling the story to the young ones”. What emerged from sharing these examples was the lack of awareness by social workers of these indigenous practices. Some group members seemed unaware of these particular ceremonies in relation to social work practice and interventions. One group member states, “The informative talk we had with (speaker) and the discussion on how indigenous systems are built into those systems and tension release mechanisms, I haven’t heard of it before”. The dialogue continued about how practitioners could build upon these mechanisms and develop programs within their own practice that incorporated these mechanisms. Another group member sees this potential for creative social work,

One thing that has registered is the fact that we are able to incorporate indigenous practices in what we consider to be the foreign things we do in Ghana ... if we want to make it more practical, we could create ceremonies, we could change some of the things that go with it to make it more acceptable.

When looking at indigenous art that portrays a view of the community, one group member found this idea useful when looking at social work practice.

The picture he (speaker) drew about the strength of women and the things that go on in the community unnoticed are worthwhile. I have been prompted to look at things, which people don't actually notice but are sources of inspiration so that maybe in the future if you are doing casework or community work that we need to build some empowerment in the people we work with.

These unnoticed community activities and social mechanisms could be identified through speaking with and listening to traditional authority. These examples triggered the group to ask if there are indigenous social mechanisms we can incorporate into social work practice today? One group member asked this question.

If colonialism had not taken place in our system, could we have strengthened our traditional institutions, taking into consideration advancement in technology, increased migration, economic independence. Now our people are kind of concentrating more on themselves and their immediate family. Could we have kind of had this by the old system back that we retain to cater for each and everyone in the community? Could we have succeeded in that particular practice in this very era?

Once these mechanisms have been identified, then can the western and traditional systems be integrated? "Where do we start from?" The aim of this bringing together of cultures is stated by a group member.

It means professional social work rules must be appropriate to the needs of different countries and social work education must be appropriate to the demands of social work practice...it is realizing the indigenization of social work by focusing on the practice of social work on the actual social problems of the developing countries, taking into consideration local values of these countries and choosing those ideas that can be adapted properly to the environment in which they were destined to be used.

One group member felt the need for social workers to become more involved in the alternative medical systems and in work with traditional healers concerning our clients and cultural practices, "It is time that we brought this program to bear on other alternative medical systems, that is our traditional system".

Another comments.

As social workers, we try as much as possible, even in conflict resolution and other interventions to respect traditions so that at the end of the day the people are going to live together so we don't create a lot of confusion...we try to use very indigenous practices so that people will be comfortable with the institutions and they see these things to be friendly.

Concerning fieldwork practica, an essential part of social work training, a group member found a South African article (Gray & Simpson, 1998) concerning a new way of approaching field practica to be very exciting and challenging. The community-based approach to fieldwork caught his imagination.

They (South Africa) moved away from the World Visions, Department of Social Welfare and Department of Community Development and decided to send students to Community's ... community based student units. So a group of four students go into a community with all the problems and the case example that they gave out were ideal situations for anywhere but yet the students were not deterred. They went there and they did much ... I think this is very inspiring. I don't know whether it would be made available to our department so that they can look at the articles and see whether we could bring some vibrancy and dynamism to our practices.

Building on from this discovery, the Queen Mother gave a good suggestion concerning social work exchange programs. She suggested that instead of social workers going to other countries in the western world, that they should "go to any of the West African countries; there could be an exchange so they could learn from the African point of view. And that would make their work easier and not in the western world".

All of the above reflections, dialogue, identification of social mechanisms and examples show the potential for a productive and collaborative partnership with social workers and traditional authority, particularly the Queen Mother.

VII. Conclusion

Social work has a rich history in Ghana and has been influenced by both colonial and indigenous processes. No doubt since the early days, social workers have worked closely

with traditional authority when working in villages to promote development and improvements in living conditions there. The role of the Queen Mother has been that of a mother to the community with a specific responsibility to women and children. Dialogue through the PAR research process has linked the role of the social worker and the role of the Queen Mother. More work needs to be completed concerning similarities between these roles and the benefits of this partnership to the institution of traditional authority and the profession of social work in Ghana.

The Queen Mother's role in the group was at first uncertain, but over time differences and similarities could be seen between her work in her villages and the work of the social worker. At times she was happy to be considered a social worker "(guest speaker), we are happy to have you here this afternoon. Although I am not a social worker during my stay here I have learned a lot. Now I can call myself a social worker" and at other times she distanced herself from the profession "No, I am not a social worker". That was understandable with her own various roles and responsibilities as educator and Queen Mother in society.

There are tremendous opportunities for social workers to learn from traditional authority concerning culture in countries such as Ghana that have differently-rooted legitimacies. This in turn will affect the type of curriculum taught at the University of Ghana and the new practice approaches that take into account indigenous social mechanisms in communities. How can our social work agencies and practice be more indigenous and thus responsive to the needs of Ghanaian society? Queen Mothers can learn from social workers on various ways to deal with individual, family, group and community issues in the community. The training of the social worker can influence

decisions made by the traditional authority that promotes the empowerment of people, sustainability and a community-centred approach to development. One speaker pointed out that indigenous writing and research kept at the Institute of African Studies and in Sociology could be used in practice development. Also, traditional leaders can actually guide us in our understanding or can direct us to the right person to go to for help.

Concerning the background to various practices, through collaboration with traditional authority, social work programs and interventions can start by looking at the indigenous social mechanisms already in place in society. One group member reflected, especially on using these social mechanisms, often portrayed in ceremonial form, in social work practice. “These examples of social mechanisms inspired me to think about developing indigenous practices that included these ceremonies”. The importance of a closer link between traditional authority, the Institute of African Studies and social work was suggested as a way forward with social work education. With such links in place, students would be challenged to relate their social work studies to the importance of knowing ones own cultural ideas and values. One of our recommended new courses was ‘Indigenous Mechanisms for Social Change’, to be co-taught with someone from the Institute of African Studies, a social work lecturer and which could include a traditional leader.

The Queen Mother encouraged the social workers to make themselves known to all of Ghana and supported us in making the video about social work in Ghana. She states,

As soon as you are able to do it...you blow your own horn so that people will know your existence. And when you ask people, professionals to talk to the audience so that we who are not in the system, if we see you on the T.V. or if we hear anything on the radio or something we will educate ourselves and we will feel your presence. Because Queen Mother's need the social workers around us. Thank you very much.

The impact of her involvement in the PAR group will continue to be felt by group members. Being involved in the group gave her a chance to share about her own work in the village and her concerns regarding families, women and children and to learn about social work.

I, being the Queen Mother, I have been learning. And for today I have seen that I have been doing certain things in my own small way that I didn't know I was doing part of your work. What I will advise is that all social workers, whenever you are sent to go to a village or somewhere to the people, the first people you are to meet to make your work easier is the chief and the Queen Mothers and the elders in the village. When you meet them and you tell them why you are there, they will welcome you and help you to make your work there with them easier. Thank you very much.

As a final gesture of good will that is so important to the role of the Queen Mother, she encouraged us in our work.

As outsiders in the past years we all felt the presence of social welfare. But for the past few years, we don't hear much in the villages, in the towns and in the cities. So with my stay here I now can say that after this research and with your work we will pray that social work will be known in all corners of Ghana...now I know the work of the social worker. I appreciate the work that they do. I am going to sing their song about them wherever I go and wherever I meet the community.

This collaboration between social workers and Queen Mothers is an important step in the continual indigenisation process of social work curriculum in Ghana. As knowledgeable people on culture and indigenous social mechanisms, both Queen Mothers and social workers need each other to continue the development of communities in Ghana.

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Linda Kreitzer



Nana Boatema Afrikoma II – Paramount Queen Mother for Juansa, Asante Akyem North District in the Ashanti Region.



Linda Kreitzer, Nana Boatema Afrikoma II, Comfort Sackey, and Mr. Abrefa at the research presentation day.



George Dah, Comfort Sackey, Nana Boatema Afrikoma II and Ziblim Abukari all part of the research group.



Linda Kreitzer speaking at the research presentation day



Nana Boatema Afrikoma II shaking hands with Prof. Apt, former Head of the Department of Social Work, University of Legon, Ghana. In the foreground is Kwaku Afram.